

# My Little Enterprise

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# Episode 1

## Of First Contacts and Little Blue Boxes

A grey pony with a dusty brown mane and a dull red jacket sat musing in her ready room with stars whizzing by.

“Captain's Log Supplemental:” she said to her desk.

“In the later years of Canterlot, ponykind learned that they were not alone among the stars. We long thought that the nights were hoof-crafted by Luna and the days brought by Princess Celestia.” She paused for a moment, thinking about what had changed. “Then one day, they came from the stars.” She chuckled halfheartedly at this. “From the stars. We thought they were just beautiful lights put in our skies by the celestial sisters. How wrong we were.” She grimaced as she thought about Luna and Celestia, spending countless years masking the sky so it seemed as though they were responsible for creating the heavens.

The Captain took a deep breath and rested her head on her hoof before starting again. “That infernal Doctor. Why couldn't he have lived just a little bit longer?!” She caught herself losing her temper and calmed down. “It only took our unicorns a few years to reverse engineer his blue box, but by then, it was almost too late.” Lost in thought, she failed to notice a sound on the other side of her ready room.

A voice came from behind her, a colt's voice. “You know, I didn't really die. Regenerated is more like it.”

Captain Starway whipped around to see the dashing young colt standing before her, looking younger than ever and wearing a fez. “How in the hay did you get in my ready room?! We're-”

“At faster-than-light travel,” he interrupted. “Yes, very impressive. Love to see how you did that, but can't. No time. Got to be running, just thought you deserved a head's up. Hoof's up? Anyway! This one's not my fight.” He ducked back into the blue box which was parked in the center of her ready room and stuck his head out again, “You're in the most dangerous section

of the galaxy right now at a rather inconvenient time. I suggest you head to the coordinates I left with your ensign. Good ponies. People. People, not ponies. You're going to love them!" The Doctor darted into a slightly mangled TARDIS and it faded with the loveliest *vworp Vworp VWORP*.

Captain Starway pounded her hoof on the desk. She'd failed to enact the Horseshoe Directive. If the Doctor is found, capture on sight. Not that it mattered, not out here. Starway may have been an old-fashioned commander, but there wasn't much left to command. Not that many ponies alive who could court martial her at this point.

Suddenly, the red lights circling the ceiling lit up and began flashing. At same time, the ship rocked with a heavy impact.

Starway found herself rushing out to the bridge shouting "Shields UP!" as though it needed to be said. Three fillies were lying motionless on the floor, including her first officer. She looked to Lieutenant Commander Moonbuck and bellowed "REPORT!"

With a dangerous look in her fiery eyes, Moonbuck keyed in a sequence on the console and nodded at a nearby unicorn who began glowing. "The Borg are back-" was all she got out before the ship shook with another impact. The black-and-white spotted unicorn kept her balance as Starway stumbled over to her chair and brought up a tactical report.

The report was not what she'd hoped for. Somehow, they'd managed to fly into a nexus of some kind. This wasn't *just one ship*. It was an armada and there were strange hexagonal structures in the distance. It wasn't just cubes, either. There were pyramids, spheres, and space stations. Even a planet that looked entirely mechanical. It turned her stomach. "The cloak- Get the cloak up! Get us out of here!!!"

The male Pegasus at the helm nodded while the unicorn at the back of the bridge finally released a spell into the wires attached to her horn and hooves. The cloak shimmered across the ship, but not before one of the engines took a direct hit from a nearby Borg sphere.

"Moonbuck, head for those gates, let's see if we can use them!"

Moonbuck nodded and blew her striped mane out of her face. The sprinkler system began to douse fires starting all over the bridge. "Captain, I think they're some kind of teleport system. Who knows where we'll end up..."

She looked down her snout with the angriest eyes Moonbuck had ever seen and said quietly, "Does it look like we have a choice anymore?"

The cloaked ship bobbed and weaved through sickly neon green beams of light. Several phaser blasts came dangerously close to the ship and it was obvious the little unicorn keeping the cloak up couldn't hold it for much longer. Engineering reports were coming in with the possibility of a warp core breach.

The male Pegasus sitting at the com station, Starway never could seem to remember his name, was getting the ship ready to go to warp. Starway trotted over to him and put a hoof on his shoulder, "Be ready to fire on the gate when we go through it. We don't want them following us."

The nervous colt's voice squeaked back, "'Mam, if you buy me a little more time, Ah might be able to rig a chain reaction from engineering ta blow up the whole durn array."

"Do it!" Before she even finished, the mint-colored colt was galloping off the bridge.

A loud *zap* came from behind her as the unicorn in the cloaking apparatus screamed and was jolted out of her seat. In that moment, the cloak dropped and the other five engines took heavy hits. Designed to look like an old heroine in flight, the ship stopped moving.

With a ringing in her ears, Captain Starway could hear Moonbuck shouting "We've still got impulse!"

Starway shouted at the computers, "Engineering, I want options! NOW! We don't have any time left."

A timid, light purple filly at the science station spoke up, "C-captain... I think I can help. There's a secondary cloaking rig in the-" The ship shook with another impact aimed at the phaser banks. "In the stellar cartography lab. We might be able to use it to fool their sensors into thinking we're not a

threat.”

It dawned on Starway that the Borg never fired on anything they didn't consider to be a threat. It might or might not work, but it would buy them a precious few minutes while it clouded the enemies sensors. She looked to an older stallion with a white crew cut, brown fur, and a phaser for a cutie mark, “Zabe, escort Lieutenant Callahan to the cartography lab now! If you can, take Melody with you!” Starway nodded towards the poor unicorn panting on the floor.

The mane computer spoke, “All hands, intruder alert. Intruder alert.”

Starway couldn't help but let out a defeated groan. Not here, not now. They couldn't handle any more of this. As Zabe and the two fillies galloped off the bridge at full speed, a Borg materialized on the bridge. Starway just looked back at an expectant Zabe and shouted “GO!”

Starway and Moonbuck were the only two left awake on the bridge now and they were in shock. This Borg was not the menacing figure they'd seen before. In every encounter, Borg stood on two legs and had various facial features. This one was different. This Borg was an alicorn.

The fur was a strange, off-white and almost green color, but the flank was unmistakable. What was once a gorgeous sun had a cog-like metallic implant directly over it, giving the impression that the sun itself had been taken. It – she – spoke in a casual, monotone voice.

“Your lives, as they have been, are over. From this point forward, you will service us. Your technological and cultural knowledge will be added to our own. You will be assimilated. Free will is irrelevant. Friendship is irrelevant. Resistance is futile. Bow before your Princess.” Until this moment, Celestia had been staring off to the side. As she finished, she looked directly at Captain Starway with a red laser aimed directly at the Captain's forehead.

Starway's heart skipped a beat and she dove towards Celestia without even thinking.

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Zabe, Callahan, and Melody were losing steam. The ship only had a few

decks, but it was a loooooong ship. Panting, they arrived at the stellar cartography lab. The doors swooshed open to reveal a room with flickering lights and exposed wiring.

Callahan trotted in and sat down next to the spherical terminal and started crossing wires. Zabe stood guard while Melody recovered from the cloaking system's electric hug and Callahan began modifying the secondary cloaking system.

In a gravelly and impatient voice, Zabe commanded "Hurry up" as he started firing at incoming Borg. The firing stopped for just a moment as he struggled not to lose his lunch. Only a few meters away, a mare with wires going in and out of her cyborg body slowly got closer to him.

With a worried expression on her face, Melody whimpered, "Why did you stop firing? They're still coming!"

"Th- that's my wife."

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Ensign Sky Dancer made it to Engineering right before the Borg did and closed the bulkhead leading to the section. Even without proper authority, he ordered the unicorns in the section to throw up a force field around the section and began sharing his plan with the senior officers.

Only a few were still alive. Journeys like this tended to take their toll on a crew.

Ponies rushed around Engineering. Sky Dancer nodded and shook his head to countless requests and answered questions as quickly as possible. If this was going to work, it'd require split-second timing.

Short range warp jump to the gate.

Destabilize the dilithium matrix.

Teleport the dilithium to the gate's entrance just before a warp core breach.

Get through the gate while firing a photon torpedo at the core.

Fire on the gate.

Hope to Celestia they didn't die.

That was the plan. Sky Dancer secretly admitted to himself it wasn't a great one, but it was all they had right now. He didn't even notice as his flanks started faintly glowing. A wrench twisting a bolt on a cartoon representation of the warp core became his cutie mark.

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The alicorn stood triumphantly over the panting Captain Starway. Moonbuck was still frozen to her command console.

"Why, why are you doing this?" Starway pleaded.

"Reasons are irrelevant-

"Not to us they aren't!" Moonbuck's horn started glowing and shattered some of the implants on Princess Celestia's head.

Starway bucked Princess Celestia in the side and triggered a site-to-site teleporter and the Princess disappeared in a mist of glowing green sparkles.

"I've always wanted to do that," panted Starway. She flicked her mane aside. A coy smile came across Moonbuck's face, she just winked and motioned towards the com station. "Right," said Captain Starway as she sat down and tapped the touchscreen. "Engineering, report."

"Sky Dancer, here." The young colt sounded much more confident now. "We're almost ready Captain."

"Keep me updated, we don't have much time left." She closed the link and contacted stellar cartography as Moonbuck made the derelict ship rock to avoid enemy fire. "Callahan, Zabe, somepony, tell me you made it!"

"Callahan is busy, Captain," came Melody's quaking voice. "Zabe is frozen," she whimpered. "I- I don't know what to do."



“Calm down Melody, calm down. What's going on?”

“His, Zabe's wife... It's his wife. She's been assimilated.”

A look of horror appeared on Starway and Moonbuck's faces.

“Melody,” Starway commanded, “I need you to drag Zabe into the room. Close the doors and weld them shut. Buy Callahan as much time as she needs and then get the cloak up, that's an order!”

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Melody began crying as she tightly grabbed a hold of Zabe's tail in her teeth. He whinnied, but didn't fight back as she drug him into the dark lab. As soon as they were inside, she levitated Zabe's phaser out of his mouth, set it to kill, and began to weld the doors shut.

“Callahan, how much time do you need?” Melody asked.

“Al- Almost there. Just a little more,” she said with at least five wires hanging out of her mouth, her hooves moving quickly. “Got it! Melody, can you solder these last few wires together? Blue, then green, red, yellow, and black.”

Melody nodded and turned the phaser setting down. Zabe was sitting on his haunches in the corner, mumbling to himself. The power came back to the room and the stellar globe lit up with new information and a very different interface. Melody hurried to hook herself into the gear.

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Sky Dancer rushed up to the warp core and began furiously typing. He keyed in sequence after sequence of code and had one of the engineers start bucking the warp core. Sky Dancer winced at every clang, but kept going. The warp core started the change to a bright blue color as the code activated.

Other engineers rushed across the upper deck, shutting off valves and overriding safety protocols. Another two ensigns began plotting the warp

jump and the firing sequence. The unicorns got in position and began focusing all their magic around a single section of the inner warp core. Rank didn't matter anymore, it was only which pony could get the job done. And right now, there weren't a lot of options. Sky Dancer was just going to have to trust them.

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Another phaser blast grazed the ship and knocked out the view screen. Wires were hanging everywhere and there were small clouds of smoke coming out of almost every bridge terminal. The shields were completely down and the hull couldn't take any more hits.

"They did it!" shouted Moonbuck with instant relief. "The cloak is up, we've got impulse, and engineering is ready!" The Captain looked stunned. Moonbuck was not inspired by the fatalistic defeat she saw leaving Starway's eyes.

"Do it!" She shouted. "Get us cloaked and make a run for it!"

The Pegasus-shaped ship shimmered again and disappeared from view. On the Borg sensors, it looked like a small cube with no more than a few drones. Borg ships were going through almost every gate. No. Every gate but one. Moonbuck knew the Captain's order before she even pointed a hoof at the com panel and said, "That one."

As fast as the crew was acting, they were still almost a full parsec away from the nexus. At full impulse, the ship limped almost comically towards the gates. Everypony on-board held their breath as the clock ticked. At what point would the Borg realize their prey was hiding in plain sight?

It didn't take long to find out.

Right next to the gate, the largest structure they'd ever seen came into view from behind a large space station. It was unlike any they'd ever seen before. There was a sphere at the center and ominous black spires radiating out in every direction.

A familiar voice came through the damaged com system. "I am Celestia, Queen of Borg."

Without waiting another second, their ship made it to the gate just before the monstrosity opened fire. It all happened in an instant. The ship hit a short warp burst, jettisoned the unstable portion of the core, crossed the threshold of the gate, fired, set off a chain reaction in the nexus, and appeared in an entirely different part of space.

Starway blinked. "Where, where are we?"

Moonbuck shook her head. "Don't know. Stellar cartography's being used as a cloak right now, remember?"

"All hands," Starway said wearily over the com, "begin repairs. Zabe, Dent, Melody, Callahan, and any senior medical officer, report to the observation lounge."

Sky Dancer's quiet voice came over the com, "'Mam, Chief Engineer Dent died during the attack."

"Then, congratulations, you're part of engineering now, meet us in the observation lounge." She closed the com before Sky Dancer could protest. She looked at Moonbuck. Her mane was disheveled and her eyes tired. "Coming?" Starway asked quietly as she slowly left the bridge.

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Starway looked around the table. Half of these fillies and colts she hadn't even known were aboard her ship. Some looked familiar, others didn't. Besides Zabe, they were all so young. Zabe. Celestia- Best not to use that name anymore. God? Gods? Gods... he looked so tired. Even broken. Before she started the meeting, she took him aside. "Zabe, you're my head of security now. You don't have a choice. We'll find a way to get Appleena back, but right now I need you."

He nodded silently with a sad grimace on his face and took his seat.

"We don't know where we are. When we are." Starway began as she stared out into space. Facing the crew, "Many of you aren't ready for what I'm about to say, but I don't have a choice. You're promoted." Whispers and confused looks erupted in the room as she continued. "As far as we know, we're the only Equestrian ship left. Half of the bridge crew, of all of the

crew, is dead. There's no way to sugar cube it. We're out here, wherever here is. Maybe alone." Starway paused and looked at each of them, "You all performed admirably. I'm proud to serve with you and I need you. From this moment forward, each of you is a member of the senior staff. Sky Dancer, you're my new Chief Engineer, well done getting us out of there. Melody, you and Callahan will handle anything dealing with science and magic. Zabe is the new head of security."

She bit her lip and sat on her haunches. Her tail twitched. She didn't speak for another minute and the crew waited patiently. "I don't think Commander Cloudwing is going to live," she said looking at the floor. "Moonbuck has proved herself and will take Cloudwing's place if she doesn't survive." She nodded to Doctor Burns, a red-maned unicorn. Burns nodded and he rushed out of the lounge towards the bridge. Starway looked at the remaining ponies and sighed. "I need options. Anypony have ideas?"

Callahan cautiously raised her hoof, but Sky Dancer interrupted her, "We need to focus on repairs. Then we need to get moving, find a place to hide until we can figure things out. Get our bearings and decide if it's worth going home."

Starway looked at Callahan "I- I agree," the purple filly said sheepishly.

"Okay," Starway decided. "Let's get to it. The warp core is the priority right now, after that weapons. In the meantime, we'll treat the injured and try to keep the cloak online."

The minute the briefing was over, the cloak decided to fail. Everypony turned around and looked out of the windows. Off the starboard bow, a sleek green and almost bird-like ship uncloaked. An unfamiliar voice came crackling through the broken com, "You are trespassing in Romulan space. Leave immediately or face the full wrath of the Empire."

Captain Starway shut her eyes tightly and rubbed her temples with her hooves. "This is just not my day. I never could get the hang of Tuesdays."

# Episode 2

## Repairs and Drumbeats

The Doctor ducked inside the TARDIS and headed past Derp- er, Ditzzy to the main console. He lounged on a floor pillow and stared thoughtfully at the core. "Twelve hundred and forty nine," he frowned. "That's a lot of years to be alive. A lot of regenerations." He looked over to the grey Pegasus who was slowly walking towards him. "Do you think I did the right thing? Leaving them?"

Ditzzy gingerly grasped the fez in her mouth and took it off of his head. "Emma definition ponies right, two yes start away." She put the hat on the floor and moved closer. With sad eyes, she unfolded a wing, stroked his tussled mane. The Doctor looked more and more tired every day. While he wasn't paying attention, Ditzzy quietly kicked the fez under the grating. "Over the barrel next week."

He just nodded. The TARDIS translated a lot, but never that. He understood bits and pieces, but right now he was just glad she could be here. They would go back, they would have to go back, but when? He tried to think back. How had this all gotten so out of control? Instead of coming up with a plan, instead of parking the TARDIS, instead of running even more, he feel asleep with the comforting knowledge that Ditzzy Doo was nearby.

*I'm sure we did the right thing, the grey Pegasus thought. We have somewhere else to be and this isn't over yet.* In no time, the aging Time Lord was fast asleep and Ditzzy began quietly plotting a new trajectory. Having learned simply by watching him, she stabilized the core so she wouldn't wake him. She even turned off the parking break.

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"-and then Gummy ate a whole box of streamers and hiccuped confetti for a week!" Pinkie exclaimed with her head tilted and her eyes shining.

"Pinkie Pie," Twilight whispered harshly across the table, "this is a briefing. We need to be- briefed! I don't even know why Princess Celestia would call us to Canterlot with all of these serious-looking ponies." She gestured quietly to the room filled with old stallions. Every single one was wearing a creased red coat. Well, all except for a brown colt with a dark, spiky mane.

Looking around, Twilight noticed that each officer had either four dots or or several bars on their collar. The room bathed in the dim glow of a single light dangling overhead the great white table. A small, opaque cylinder sat in the middle of the table. It was obviously making Princess Luna uncomfortable. Twilight's felt she was focusing a little too hard on the tea she was sharing with Fluttershy. Rarity and Applejack looked bored.

The seat next to Twilight Sparkle was empty. Rainbow Dash still hadn't arrived. Ten seconds flat, she said. She always said that. *Pfft*, Twilight thought to herself, *she couldn't be on time if she wanted to*.

Suddenly, the two guard ponies at the door stood aside and extended their wings to announce Celestia's arrival. The Princess strode in gracefully and looked very worried. "One thousand years," she began. "My poor sister," Luna's eyes nearly filled with tears. "My beloved sister went away. Until recently, I thought her to be very much-" Celestia swallowed and decided not to say the word.

She looked away for away for a moment as she approached the table. Twilight noticed Celestia was holding her wings very close to her body and her hair was hardly moving. Celestia took a deep breath and pressed on. "At first there were updates as she moved deeper and deeper. And then they stopped coming. My captains told me she'd been lost." She struggled with the painful memory, trying not to upset her sister. Her tone lost all emotion. "We stopped the program and let time turn fact to legend, legend to myth. I named the face in the moon after her so I would never forget."

Twilight tried to interrupt to ask what program, but her friends were lost in the story. Pinkie Pie's eyes were wide and even Dash, who had miraculously sit down quietly, was on the edge of her seat. Princess Luna was the only one not looking at Celestia.

"Fillies and Gentlecolts, I would like to welcome back my sister." Celestia didn't seem as happy as Twilight Sparkle thought she should be. "I wish it

were under better circumstances, but we need to know what's going on.”

“So do we-” Applejack interrupted angrily. “Why in the hay are we even here?”

“As the Elements of Harmony, my dear, this concerns you. As it does you,” Celestia glared at the Doctor.

“In the jar,” Luna shut her eyes tightly to avoid looking at it, “is a parasite. We don't know what it is or where it came from...” She shook her head vigorously, unable to keep talking.

“That's only half true,” concluded Celestia. “It's from outside our star system. For years, and I realize you know this Doctor, we've been traveling beyond the stars. Every five hundred years, Luna and I trade positions after a few centuries of ruling together. We take our star treks to see if there are potential allies who need protecting-”

The brown colt spoke up. “Or threats that need assessing? Ever the diplomat, eh Celly? Remember when you came with me? Ah, what fun we had! You were more fun, anyways.”

Celestia raised an eyebrow at that and cleared her throat. “This parasite latched onto my sister,” Celestia said bluntly. “It warped her and it changed her. Without the Elements of Harmony, I would've lost her.” The Princess's eyes softened as she looked in turn at Applejack, Rainbow Dash, Rarity, Pinkie Pie, Twilight Sparkle, and Fluttershy. “Something is happening out there. Something is changing. I want to be ready for it.”

The stallions in red shifted uncomfortably in their seats. Whether it was the colt's outburst, the jar on the table, or Celestia's tone, Twilight couldn't tell.

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Sky Dancer took off at a full gallop.

Captain Starway and the other senior officers rushed off in the opposite direction. First Borg, then a new sector of space, then Ramoolans. Maybe some type of cow. An angry breed of cow. Lots of bulls. Did everypony out here want to kill them?!

Zabe went to the tactical station. Callahan started fiddling around with the cloaking interface while Melody rerouted the helm to a working panel. Moonbuck relieved Melody and shooed her over to help Callahan. Starway concealed a smile. They wouldn't have done a better job if she'd ordered them to do the exact same thing.

Sky Dancer's voice crackled over the comm, "There's no way we can get the shields or phasers up right now. That short-range jump just burnt out our whole durn system. Ah can get ya impulse, but Ah doubt that'll cut it."

"Do what you can," Starway ordered, getting more annoyed. "Get somepony up here to take care of the view screen, too."

"Won't do much good if'n we don't have tomorrow. No idea how much longer the auxiliary power's going to last." the colt mumbled to himself.

Moonbuck sat next to Captain Starway. "Ma'am, we need to respond."

Distracted, Starway noticed how Moonbuck's mane never seemed to be out of place. The Captain, on the other hand, looked like she'd just finished fighting an Ursa Major... and lost. She shook her snout and cleared her head. "Right. On screen. Comm, whatever we have right now." Moonbuck nodded. "Attention Romulan ship, this is Captain Starway of the Equestrian Stellar Vessel *Alicorn*. We have no wish to fight you, but if provoked we will defend our ship."

Nopony responded.

While Moonbuck and Starway whispered quietly, waiting, the other ponies began to repair the bridge. A young filly from engineering began working on the view screen. Callahan and Melody were flank-deep in wires from the cloaking system. Zabe was finally settling down and regaining his calm.

Another moment passed.

Finally, the extraequestrian vessel responded. "This is Commander Valdran of the Romulan Warbird *Zennar*." He sounded like a Pegasus. If Starway could see his face, she expected his wings would be twitching with hidden anger. "Upon considering the recommendations of an authority higher than my own, I have decided to grant you the opportunity to explain your



incursion into Romulan space.” After a few more moments. “Your atmosphere seems to be compatible. A delegation will be teleporting to your cargo bay in a few moments. *Zennar* out.”

Everypony on the bridge exchanged a look of shock. No training prepared a pony for this. This was truly first contact. The Borg hardly counted. Everypony was inexperienced and tired. They'd been flying at high warp and evading scout ships and cubes for weeks. The *Alicorn* was badly damaged. They hadn't seen a single habitable planet. Not a single alien race... other than the Borg. It was almost as if the Borg were all space had to offer. It took the luster and beauty out of Luna's sky.

Captain Starway realized everypony was looking at her. She snapped herself out of it and put on a forced smile. “All right, let's go. Moonbuck, the bridge is yours. Melody and Zabe, you're with me.” Her hooves clacked on some exposed deck plating as she looked over her shoulder at Moonbuck, “Make sure Sky Dancer has whatever he needs to get those repairs done.”

In the hall, the Captain halted Zabe with a hoof and pulled Melody aside. With a leg around the unicorn she whispered into Melody's ear, “Look at me. We're about to meet an alien race. I can't go looking like this. Do you,” she almost blushed. “Do you know anything to get the dust out of my coat and comb my hair.”

Creeping up behind her, Zabe rolled his eyes. “Ma'am, look at the ship,” he threw his front hooves up in the air. “They might take you more seriously if you show up looking like you just went through-”

“A battle?” She stared Zabe down until he broke eye contact. “Unfortunately, first appearances are about posturing and politics.” Starway sneered at the thought. “Still, maybe you're right.” She nodded in the direction of the cargo bay and trotted off. Melody and Zabe followed quietly.

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“You see, this is why they shouldn't let colts into engineering,” a black Pegasus stallion said under his breath to a light blue unicorn mare. “Always think parts are expendable, never think about how hard it is to replace them. Not out here.”

“Ve vere young once, too,” the mare smiled back. “Even if zere vas a better way zan destroying za core, ve didn't think of it in time.” Her eyes took on a mischievous glint, “Besides, I seem to remember you hiding behind a terminal until he told you you could start bucking the core.”

Sky Dancer walked up to them, still not used to his new authority. “How, eh, how're things goin' over here?”

“Well, our dilithium matrix is shot and the warp core is gone,” the stallion snorted.

“But,” the mare added, “Ve're not dead in za water. Ve've still got reserves. Za life support is online. Ve've got extra dilithium. Ve might, I stress here little one, *might* be able to get some unicorns to fabricate za parts zat got fried and replace za core.”

Little one? Sky Dancer's nose wrinkled at that. “Good. What about weapons and shields?”

The black stallion blew a wisp of his long, silver mane out of his eyes and checked the tool on his ankle. “Minor repairs. The Borg didn't hit them too hard.”

“And the engines?”

“Zat's a little more complicated,” the mare chimed in. “Plasma relays burned out in every section and za coils are fused. Za isolinear chips might as vell be quantum cupcakes,” she frowned. The mare pulled out a diagram and started pointing at each engine. “Za four wing engines took phaser hits. Zey can be repaired, but it's going to take time.” She didn't look like she wanted to talk about the aft engines, but Sky Dancer didn't move. “Za hoof engines- Zey're... barely hanging on. Zere's probably only a few vires keeping zem zere. Direct photon torpedo hits.”

“But those are our main engines, the main **warp** engines.”

She shook her head. “I know, sir, but ve can't do anything until ve get za shields up and re-pressurize zose decks. Zere are no unicorns on-board anymore who can walk outside the ship and za forcefield emitters in zose

sections are shot. We may even need to use shuttle crafts. Luna, I don't even know if we've got a scrap on-board to patch them up."

"Alright," Sky Dancer sounded disappointed. "Either way, Ah'd like to put you two in charge of the repair team, you're the most experienced and should know the ship inside and out by now. By the way, what are y'all's names? Ah'd like to get to know everypony in the section."

The stallion looked surprised, but the mare just smiled. "This old colt is Lieutenant Dusk," she winked at him. "And you can call me Torch."

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Captain Starway tried to comb her hair with her hooves as a glowing green light appeared. Zabe and Melody were speechless. Starway froze in horror for a moment as her fear of the Borg nearly overwhelmed her. She bit her lip and drove away the thoughts. They stood on two legs like the Borg, but had no wires. One was wearing robes and the other a uniform of some kind. No black metal unitards. They were pink and nearly hairless, but had pointy ears similar to a pony's. Not Borg, but like nopony they'd ever seen.

Captain Starway moved closer and looked at each of them before speaking. "I'm Captain Starway. Welcome aboard my ship, this is the *ESV Alicorn*," Starway offered, motioning around the room with her hoof.

The one wearing the jacket with padded shoulders and spiky bandolier let his mouth hang open.

The creature on the left seemed to be in much better control of its emotions. Maybe it was their captain. He only raised an eyebrow. "Fascinating. Typically, we only encounter humanoid lifeforms. Bipedal beings like ourselves." He raised his hoof... not a hoof. It had weird indents in it. They could move independently of each other. He raised his leg and opened his hoof-thing and spread the digits evenly. "Live long and prosper. I am Ambassador Spock."

"If you don't mind," Starway raised an eyebrow. "Ambassador to what? From what?"

“Ambassador from Vulcan to Romulus,” the alien replied coolly. “They are two planets in this part of the galaxy.” He looked to Commander Valdran. “Please forgive the Commander's behavior earlier. He was raised in an age of war. He has no taste for peace. When a Borg ship appeared on our sensors-”

“The Borg!” Melody blurted. “You know the Borg?!”

“Quite. My superiors are most interested to find out why your ship appeared through a spatial distortion and displayed as a Borg vessel on our sensors.”

The Commander, who had been silent until now, almost shouted. “Talking horses!” He looked frantically at the other alien with pleading eyes. “It must be some kind of deception. Advanced holographics. I refuse to accept these equines are what they appear to be.”

“Ponies...” Zabe's fur prickled as he growled at Commander Valdran.

For an instant, the faintest glimmer of a smile touched the Ambassador's lips. “Try to remain calm, Commander. This may be of great importance. Please,” he looked back at Starway, “tell me as much as you can.”

“All right,” Starway agreed, “but not here. Zabe, have Moonbuck meet us in the observation lounge. Melody, see if Sky Dancer needs any help and then send him up. Commander, will you be staying?”

“Hardly, Miss. I have ship to run and I need to alert the High Command *not* to send the fleet out yet. Ambassador will you be secure among these... ponies?” He almost spat the last word. Ambassador Spock bowed quickly to Commander Valdran. The Commander spoke directly to his ship and dematerialized an instant later.

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“You have an interesting ship, Captain. I have never seen another like it.”

“I'll take that as a compliment.” Starway looked out the windows of the observation at the Romulan Warbird looming off their starboard side. “I'm afraid I can't offer you much to eat or drink,” she said quietly.

“Your ship has sustained heavy damage. The weapons signatures appeared to be Borg. Is that an accurate assessment?”

“Yes,” Moonbuck agreed and moved from the door to sit down.

Spock offered Moonbuck a tasseled floor pillow before continuing. “Many years have gone by since we last encountered the Borg,” Spock said sadly. “We had a long time to prepare, but it did little good. They destroyed a large portion of our fleet, but our strategies prevailed. We assessed, or naively hoped, they would never return.”

Unable to stand anymore, Starway moved towards the table and put her fore hooves together. “It sounds a lot like our story,” Starway smiled weakly. “They had to go somewhere,” she shrugged.

“Or they had to come from somewhere. Would you allow me to access your ship's star charts?”

“Will it help?” Moonbuck frowned.

“I believe so.” Spock put a hand on her shoulder. “While there are warlike races in this part of the galaxy, you may also find friends. If you are willing to be open about your culture and your past, the Federation will always be willing to assist you. I myself am on my way home to Vulcan, a planet within the Federation. Commander Valdran was escorting me there.”

At that moment, Sky Dancer entered the room. “Captain- oh, Ah'm sorry. Ah didn't realize we had guests.”

Starway rubbed her eyes and sighed. “Please, come in. This is Ambassador Spock.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance.” The green colt grabbed Spock's hand in between his hooves and shook it violently. “Ah'm Sky Dancer, the new chief engineer of what's left of this ship.”

Spock nodded politely, noticing a familiar accent, and then something caught his eye. “It seems you all have marks on your flanks. Yours,” he looked at Sky Dancer, “looks remarkably similar to a warp core.”

“Well, yeah. 's that what y'all use, too?”

Spock turned to Captain Starway. “If our technologies work on a similar theoretical framework, I may be able to aid your crew in repairing this vessel. In fact, I have no doubt Commander Valdran would be... very pleased to be done with his escort mission.” Starway was starting to notice Spock only seemed to show emotion by raising his eyebrows. “Would you mind escorting me to Federation space? If I recall correctly, the *Titan* should be waiting near the neutral zone.”

“No, but I want to make a couple of things clear. First, this is my ship. I won't put these ponies in any unnecessary danger. Second, if we find a way to get back to Equestria, we have to take it. We have no idea how many ships are left and they need everypony they can get. And last, I want any help you can give us with the Borg.”

“Understood, Captain. In return, I will ask that you give me full access to the ship's databases and tell me more about your planet's history and culture in the coming days.”

\*\*\*

Several days went by and the *Zennar* left the *Alicorn* to limp towards the Federation at impulse. Spock familiarized himself with the crew and spent most of his time in Engineering. The cloak and weapons systems were back online, but the shields and engines were taking much longer.

Moonbuck found Sky Dancer and Spock in the observation lounge.

“So then, we combine the matter anti-matter mixture in the core and have the unicorns focus on a mental image of a sonic rainboom.”

Undeterred by technical descriptions bordering on religious rites, Spock pressed on. “So, without the unicorns, it would be impossible to fly this vessel?”

“Well, at anythin' higher than impulse, anyway.”

“Let me be clear, you have an engine system that works perfectly well without... *magic*, but your warp drive cannot function without it?”

Fascinating. Given the opportunity, I would welcome the chance to study your magic in greater detail.”

“Well, not my magic, theirs,” he shook his head.

“Hr-hrm,” Moonbuck politely cleared her throat. Both turned around suddenly. “Boys and their engines,” she snickered. “Sky Dancer, the ship's locked in on coordinates you set while we were still in Borg space,” she levitated a pad to him and continued, “it's a lot closer now.”

Spock looked genuinely surprised. “Where did you receive these coordinates?”

“Some brown colt came out of the Captain's ready room and dropped them off, said-” Sky Dancer's eyes got wider as he shoved a hoof in his face. “The Doctor, it was the Doctor!”

Moonbuck scowled. “I know. He told Captain Starway there were people there who might be able to help us and that this wasn't his fight. Yet.” She turned to face Spock, “Where is this?”

“Those coordinates lead directly to the planet Earth, one of the original founding members of the Federation. If I read these coordinates correctly, you came from somewhere deep in the Delta Quadrant. If you will excuse me, I have something I must attend to,” Spock gave a shallow bow and quietly left the room.

“Speaking of doctors...” Moonbuck's voice became so distant Sky Dancer wasn't even sure she was still talking to him. “Cloudwing didn't make it- She was halfway through surgery last night... Doctor Burns,” she looked away and closed her eyes.

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Metal hooves clanged on black deck plating. A Borg wandered through the quiet hallways past countless species. Her eyes were lifeless and unblinking. The pink Earth pony held a gem in her mouth. Small and clear. No matter how many drones were sacrificed, this filly must deliver this gem to the Queen.

Celestia caressed the pony with a half-metal wing. "Excellent. Return to your station." Celestia didn't notice the pink pony's tail go rigid or her mane wobble. All she could do was stare into the eye of the gem. Soon, she would have everything. The Borg only added to what was already inside her. A desire to spread throughout the galaxy. Throughout time. An everlasting empire of the sun and moon.

*Ba-da-da-dump*

*Ba-da-da-dump*

*Ba-da-da-dump*



# Episode 3

## Equestria Girls

The battered ESV *Harmony* drifted aimlessly in the nebula, only its sensors and life support online. The plasma storms outside obscured scanners. The magnetically-charged gasses whipped around the ship so fast that it was almost invisible. Only a dull magic field and protective hull covering gave the ship a bubble of clear space amidst the chaos.

"See, I *told* you they couldn't assimilate me!" Pinkie giggled.

Applejack shook her head. "Ah still don't understand, sugarcube."

Twilight agreed, "Please, just go over it one more time."

After having explained four times now, Pinkie Pie was getting a little anxious to move on. "Weeeell-" she took in a deep breath, "Of course, there's this really important thing and the plot can't move forward without it, but there wasn't a good way to fit it in because the writer had an idea, but then he wrote this chapter and wrote it again and again and again, but finally he decided that it would be a good idea to have the Borg assimilate me, but of course we can't have that because everypony loves Pinkie Pie and my parties just wouldn't be the same if I were all metal metalson McMetally mare, so it was just easier to have me drop off a present for Celestia and how else were we going to get it to her? Hm, maybe Spike I guess, can you assimilate something with scales? I guess there's the Gorn, but they're not really dragons are they? Aaaanyhow, the Doctor's important and we need him to come back because he's more concerned about why he's in this time line and how it's different from his, but he's more focused on a planet called Earth right now because the fillies he used to hang out with aren't there anymore, but they should be and they aren't. So, to get the Doctor to come back, we had to make it dangerous here and make it interesting specifically to him and how else would we do that without starting an inter-dimensional PARTY?!"

Everypony on the bridge looked dumbfounded. Incapable of explaining the situation any more simply than that, Pinkie bounced off the bridge to have

Doctor Redheart remove the Borg nanoprobes from her system. While they really didn't bother her, Twilight had insisted. Something about fearing a second Borg genesis with a uniquely Pinkie Pie outlook on life.

For a moment, nopony spoke.

The tactical station broke the silence with a blip. And another. And another.

Borg cubes were dropping out of warp all around them. The area was suddenly crawling with ships. Some looked damaged. Many of the hulls had deep scores from phaser impacts, but the vessels were quickly regenerating.

Less than three months ago, the *Harmony* had abandoned Equestria. There was nothing left. The entire planet, griffons, dragons, and ponies alike, had been assimilated. No more than a few thousand ponies remained. Seeing the end of their world, they fled to the stars.

The *Harmony* hadn't seen another Equestrian ship in 29 days and counting.

~~~

"Well, yes, it is a beautiful ship, Princess, but I still don't understand why you want *me* to command it. Surely, there are other fine ponies who you could have chosen." Twilight ignored the icy glares from several older stallions in red coats.

"None would do the job as well as I am sure you can, Twilight Sparkle. I have complete faith in you," Celestia smiled, staring up at the ship.

The Equestrian Stellar Vessel Mark I hadn't even received a name yet. It hung in low orbit around the planet as pegasi worked around the clock to add parts and ferry unicorns and earth ponies to the site. Day and night, the pegasi would take workers to the site where they would weld and solder, manufacture and place, quibble over schematic details, and test newly installed components. It soon became clear that there needed to be a much easier way to take workers to the site. Soon, the ship had shuttle crafts.

The planet began total war before an enemy even arrived. Every facet of existence was being dropped to accommodate ship building. The unnamed ship was made of special metals from deep within the griffin lands, toughened by dragon's fire, and tempered by pony magic. The engine core ran on a relatively new discipline; science.

After nearly a year researching the Doctor's TARDIS, Twilight and her team had finally been able to create a simplified version of its engine. Simplified being a relative term, the ship was still able to run on almost no magic, stop incoming energy projectiles, and bend space to allow the ship to travel faster than the speed of light.

Theoretically, the ship itself ran on a few different principles. At its heart, the engine had several separate chambers. The magic was fed in by unicorns to create an unstable area of space that tore a small hole in the fabric of reality; the heart of the engine. Coursing around it were thousands of minute matter-anti-matter explosions funneled through little blue crystals, found by Twilight to have just the right properties to act as focal points. The explosions created a protective bubble around the schism and, at just the right mixture, would start feeding the vortex to give the unicorns a break. Now that research was being put into a ship, a ship to sail in the vast ocean that only Luna and Celestia had seen.

“Well, I dunno about you girls,” Dash grinned, “but I’m ready to get flyin’!”

~~~

“You’re positive the coordinates are Earth?” came a voice from the panel in Spock’s personal quarters.

“While the coordinates do not account for the Earth’s position relative to orbital period,” Spock stated, “They are indeed within the Sol System. This information is delicate and should be passed on to Starfleet Command immediately.”

The voice sounded huffed. “I’ll see what I can do. How long do we have? Should I be setting a course for Earth?”

"I believe it would be wise to wait and consult Starfleet. However, under the circumstances, I have already advised our own ships to remain on alert and set a course for Vulcan. I would also recommend notifying the *Enterprise* and the Klingon High Council of this information, especially since we will be crossing into Klingon space shortly."

"I'll let Worf know. I think he resumed his duties as Chancellor of the High Council when General Martok died."

"Excellent. Please keep me informed."

The bearded man nodded. "*Titan* out."

Captain Starway cleared her throat.

"I apologize if you believe that I have offended you in some way or taken advantage of your trust and generosity." As he spoke, Spock slowly turned to face the earth pony.

"Not at all, but I wouldn't mind knowing what's going on."

"As I have noted in the past, the Borg have been a serious threat, not just to the Federation, but to the galaxy as a whole. Your coordinates, given by a mysterious doctor whom we know nothing about, match the very heart of our Federation. Our governments should be keep notified."

"And the *Enterprise*? The *Titan*? Klingons?"

Spock nodded and spoke quietly, "I suppose, if you have the time Captain, we ought to begin a history lesson, on both our worlds."

As the ESV *Alicorn* limped towards the Romulan-Klingon neutral zone, Spock covered the foundations of the Federation. Earth's third worldwide war, its first contact with Vulcan, the formation of the United Federation of Planets, conflicts with the Klingons. He covered the Time of Awakening and the schism which lead to the Romulan Star Empire, Captain Kirk and Captain Picard, his time among the stars, and acting as ambassador to many worlds. He also hinted at a ship which was stranded in the Delta Quadrant and traveled back to give the Federation an edge when dealing

with the Borg. He covered the Borg conflicts, the Dominion Wars, and the recent near miss with Shinzon of Remus.

Although she didn't have a firm grasp on the races, Starway absorbed as much about the local politics as she could. When he was finished, she began her own tale. She mentioned the creation myth of Equestria, Princess Luna's presumed banishment to the moon, centuries of peace, the war with the Stallionists, Nightmare Moon. All of that was brief, though. Captain Starway had been inducted into the Equestrian Stellar Alliance earlier than most captains. She knew what few others did.

Princess Luna had been attacked by Borg drones in deep space while exploring for the good of Equestria. When she returned, she'd been transformed and had meant to plunge the populous into darkness so the ensuing cold would make it easier to assimilate the planet. She'd been cured and they had time to prepare. Then invasions started. At first, it wasn't even the Borg. There were fully metal creatures that stood on two legs, then things that looked like giant trash buckets with plungers attached. A lone colt had saved them and Celestia spoke of him fondly, at first.

Even he couldn't stop what came next. Doom never came from the sky. Not in the beginning. Princess Celestia and Luna had ruled as a diarchy for millenia, but only thanks to their magical prowess and ability to spread completely enthralling propaganda. Neither could raise their star or satellite. Only immortality, large illusion spells, showmareship, and phenomenal control over a finely crafted government gave them the authority to rule.

Somehow, this lone colt had saved Equestria. Overnight, he became a national hero. Starway continued on, explaining his rise in popularity, preference for democratic elections, Princess Luna stepping down from the government, a quelled rebellion, Celestia instituting marshal law, and a weakened monarchy grasping at straws to form a cohesive force for the coming Borg. But they came too soon, and the Doctor was nowhere to be found. He left bits and pieces of technology behind, but the blue box, the screwdriver, and the Equestrian national hero had vanished when the country needed him most.

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Captain Twilight Sparkle had modified the cloaking device installed on the bridge of the ESV *Harmony*. It now fit two unicorns, or more accurately, a unicorn and an alicorn, and rerouted primary warp drive control from engineering.

“This... is not my day.”

“Never is anymore, sugarcube.” Applejack sighed.

Luna nodded from under her metal headgear and Twilight hooked herself into the other set of cables. There was an army of Borg ships outside the nebula, but they weren't coming in. Fierce electrical storms raged around the ship, making it unlikely any ship would be hiding there. Still, the ship wasn't capable of warp and the Borg knew it wasn't showing up on long-range sensors.

Rarity had been working with Dash and Pinkie for weeks to develop a fabric that could be put on the outside of the ship and would absorb harmful radiation and electrical discharges. It had been a godsend when the shields failed.

Twilight knew they didn't have much time left, though. The Borg were already reconfiguring ships to enter the nebula and recover Luna. She was convinced Luna was the only reason they hadn't fired yet. Luna had been a welcome asset to the crew and kept things almost as lively as Pinkie, even if she insisted on sock puppet theater a little too often. Now, she was keeping them alive, but not for long.

“We've got to move Twilight, like, three minutes ago.” Dash pressed, looking over from the helm.

Snapping back into the moment, Twilight put the last wires on and looked at Luna. Their horns started glowing, slowly at first. Then, they grew and grew until both their bodies started expanding magical fields throughout the ship.

“Where're we goin', Twi?” Applejack asked.

“Anywhere but here!”

An aura filled the causeways and coated the hull. A healing blue light protected everypony from being singed. A dark purple bolt of lightning crackled off of the hull, distorting space around it. Slowly, the lightning began to form a bubble around the ship.

*Anywhere but here, anywhere but here*, Twilight thought to herself, eyes clenched shut. Images of far-away lands raced into her mind. She tried to keep her mind focused, but too many sleepless nights of dragon-sized cups of coffee were making it hard. A star system, no. Another. Dead worlds, gas giants, eerie stars, dangerously empty space.

And then- a golden hall.

The ship continued to draw power from Twilight as the massive spell formed. Luna's magic soothed the crew and kept them safe, but Twilight was rapidly reaching her limits.

In the golden hall, she saw thousands upon thousands of floating disk-shaped podiums made from beautifully crafted wood and ceramics. A grand hall. Tens of thousands of hairless creatures in flowing robes. A single one in plain tattered clothing lay shackled on the floor. The focus of the entire building on him. His body was weak and tired, but a smirk danced across his lips. As her mind's eye stared at the bipedal creatures, she heard the faint whispers of drums.

Sneaking its way into her thoughts came another voice. Sickly sweet, familiar, crushing. *Ah, my faithful student*, it rang melodiously, *you can see*.

Instantly filling her vision was a brown colt, far too close to her face, peeling her eyes open with his hooves, shouting "NO!" At that very moment, Twilight released her spell. The purple lightning arced over the hull and reacted with gasses in the nebula. The power coursed around the ship and set the nebula ablaze, blinding sensors and creating a massive subspace shock wave.

The jets of plasma and weaves of magnetic gas expanded away from the ship. Left behind was clear, inky space. Suddenly, the lightning ceased as the ship popped out of existence and reappeared halfway across the galaxy.

# Episode 4

## The Dead of Sto 'Vo 'Kor

The ESV *Alicorn* hung in orbit above a rogue planet. A passing planetoid had long since flung the planet off on an interstellar journey. Countless years later, any and all moisture had evaporated and the surface was dark and cold, though some force maintained the slightest hint of an atmosphere. The sensors had picked up deposits of iron, copper, gold, and even trace amounts of dilithium.

Most of the repairs to the *Alicorn* had been completed, even the nacelles had been reattached thanks to Dusk and Sky Dancer. Still, there just wasn't enough raw material to make a new warp core. Luckily, this dark red planet in the middle of nowhere just happened to have what the *Alicorn* desperately needed. With a little bit of luck, the unicorns would be able to use draconic magic to reorganize the metals lattice structure into an alloy which could cope with magical and matter anti-matter reactions.

"I don't know Captain," Moonbuck fidgeted next to the captain. "This place, something about it just doesn't feel right."

Melody said nothing, but she'd felt there was something off about this planet since they'd seen it in the stellar cartography lab almost two days ago. No pony else seemed to notice, though.

Captain Starway frowned and looked at Moonbuck. "Does it look like we have a choice?"

Moonbuck shook her head. She was about to speak, but felt a pang in her horn as a blip sounded from Zabe's console. "Captain, we've got incoming."

"Oh Luna, no," she groaned. "Not here, not now."

"Captain, it's gone," he said, eying his sensors suspiciously.

She turned around stomping a hoof on the floor. "Well, what was it?"



Zabe was quiet, but everypony heard a small whimper from Melody. The captain's tone softened. "Melody, did you see something?"

She nodded slowly with her fore-hooves on her temples. "Mmhm, it was like there was a ship there for half a second."

Moonbuck continued for her, "It was really old, I felt it, too. Then there was something on the surface."

"It was like they were there, but they weren't." Melody finished.

"They?" Ambassador Spock strolled onto the bridge, ducking under the low pony-height doors. "I am inclined to agree with your crew mates, Captain Starway. I came to the bridge because I too felt something I could not explain. I believe it would be wise to scan for structures on the planet's surface and proceed with caution."

Captain Starway couldn't believe her ears. In the two weeks since they'd left Romulan space, Ambassador Spock had never spoken about anything involving feelings and intuition. It was almost as if logic were his religion. She hadn't known him long, but she liked to think she'd gotten to know him well.

"Spock, would you care to enlighten us?" Starway ventured.

"I would not. As I have stated in the past, I seek to examine existence in all its forms and speculate only about things which can be explained through observation. Intuition," he paused, "is not a valid form of scientific observation."

Starway chuckled at this. "Some ponies might be inclined to disagree."

"Still," Spock chose his words carefully. "I believe this merits further investigation. I spent a great deal of time as the chief science officer aboard the *Enterprise* and taught many students at Starfleet Academy. If you require assistance, I would be happy to offer my services."

"Captain," Zabe interjected. "It doesn't matter what's down there, we need to build a new warp core. We can't throw away an opportunity like this."

"I'm inclined to agree," Starway frowned.

Lieutenant Callahan piped up, "Um, Captain Starway, you might want to see this." She brought the scans up on the main view screen. At first, there was nothing there, just lifeless rocks and mountain ranges. The young pegasus nodded at the screen and slowed down the footage. For a single frame, it showed a few pillars next to a cave and a metallic outline in the dusty red valley below. The very next frame, they were gone.

"All right, I'm interested." Starway smiled. "We'll get an away team together and head down. Two teams, one to start mining in the cave and another to investigate these echoes or sensor glitches or whatever they are. Zabe, I want you to take Sky Dancer, Torch, and Dusk. Callahan, you and Spock are with me."

"Captain," Moonbuck coughed, "do I need to remind you that the captain-"

"Gets to override the first officer when it comes to away missions?" Starway finished playfully. "Either way," she regained her somber tone, "I want you and Melody up here to supervise repairs and command the ship in case anything happens while we're on the surface." She met Moonbuck's concerned glare. "Fine," she sighed, "Your objections are noted."

~~~

An hour later, two away teams stood on the surface of the planet. The air wasn't exactly breathable, but the temperature was somehow bearable and the winds weren't kicking up too much dust at the moment; mouth filters and jackets seemed to be enough. In the sky, blood-red clouds hung low, small jolts of electricity lighting up the barren landscape. Even so, a small amount of light came from somewhere other than the cosmic expanse above.

Even so, Sky Dancer and Callahan took off almost immediately, glad for a chance to stretch their wings. Dusk simply scoffed at the juvenile ponies, but Torch glared at him until he couldn't fight it anymore and took off, too. They bobbed and weaved, disappeared over the clouds, and bolted back and forth until they'd surveyed the area.

When they landed, Lieutenant Callahan motioned to Spock and Starway. "I think I found where something might be buried."

Sky Dancer looked at his team, "And Ah can see where the nearest cavern entrance is. If we start now, it shouldn't take too long to get down there and pull out enough metal to make a new warp core. We might even have a little left over."

"Sounds good," Captain Starway added. "Let's plan to be back here in no more than three hours."

"A wise precaution, Captain." Spock added after looking at a hand-held device produced from inside his the sleeves of his robes. "It appears that ion storms off to the North will interfere with communications as they close in on our position. If we stay any longer than three hours, we may well be unable to contact the *Alicorn*." With that, the teams split up.

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A dull green light danced on the walls deep within the planet's caves. Torch had managed to enchant some of the mineral veins lining the cavern's walls to provide a steady glow while the team began to extract the metals they needed.

With only a couple hours of work, the team would be able extract enough metals to completely fix the ship. The extra dilithium in the caves would be more than enough to keep them at high warp for weeks. In no time, they'd be back on their way.

"It'll be nice to get moving again." Sky Dancer broke the silence.

"Yeah," Zabe agreed, holding a hoof-held laser drill in front of the cave walls. "We're still a bit too close to that transwarp drop point, if you ask me."

"True," Dusk nodded, flying up to some dilithium deposits on the roof. "We have no idea how long it will take them to repair it. What do you think, Torch?"

Torch said nothing, instead focusing on lighting up pockets in the walls where the metal largest deposits were. Out of the corner of her eye, she thought she saw a few black and green silhouettes moving around. She knew there were no life signs, so she shook her head and told herself it

was simply her imagination. Torch let a smile creep onto her face, it was nice to know the Borg hadn't taken everything from her.

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The ion storms were already drawing closer, lightning occasionally blasting off the spires of the distant mountain range. The dark red clouds at the forefront of the storm were blocking out any starlight. Just reaching the valley floor, Starway's team only had flashlights and the flicker of the coming storm to light their way.

During the hour-long journey into the valley, the team began to see traces of what lay below the sand. The storm's winds had uncovered some of the massive structure below centuries of the fine red sand. Whatever it was, it was clearly pony made, or man made Starway reminded herself. It was metallic and about half the length of the *Alicorn*.

"Captain Starway," Spock offered, "I believe the structure may be hollow."

"A ship?"

Callahan banged a hoof on an exposed piece of metal. "Seems that way, Captain. Should we go in?"

"Hold on a second," Starway motioned Spock over with a hoof. "Is there any chance we can find what we need from this ship? Would it be possible to find out what happened to it?"

"I believe so. This does appear to be a ship, though I am unfamiliar with its design. If we go on board, we may be able to salvage the materials your ship requires and reactivate the computer systems to ascertain the fate of its crew." Spock began circling the structure and scanning its hull, looking for any possible way inside. Eventually, he managed to find a small opening, mostly filled with sand.

After ten minutes of digging, the two ponies and Vulcan managed to wriggle inside the wreckage of an extremely old ship. Not much other than the hallways and a few terminals were intact. Outside, the lightning struck a distant purple mountaintop and arced to several other mountains, briefly

forming a circle of light in the sky. A panel in the ancient hulk flickered to life for half a second and a dark shadow stood in front of it.

“Eek!” Callahan screamed, recoiling onto her hind legs.

“Calm down, Lieutenant. What is it?” Starway whipped around to soothe the frightened pony.

“I-I-I” she stammered. “There was a thing, like Spock, but not, st-s-standing at that panel!”

Spock cautiously walked over to the panel on the wall. Brushing away years of dust and erosion, he carefully examined the panel. Although it was no longer lit up, it bore a distinctive crest, the earliest symbol of the Klingon Empire.

He paused before speaking. “Captain, this vessel may be over a thousand years old. Although I do not know the position of the planet when it crash landed, I doubt I would be wrong in assuming it had been traveling several years without repair before coming to rest on this planet.”

“Really now?” Starway perked up. “Do you recognize the vessel now, Spock?”

“I cannot be sure, but I believe this may be one of the Klingon Empire's earliest attempts at faster-than-light travel, long before the Empire ever perfected warp drive.”

At this, Spock began to take off a panel under the terminal and started fidgeting with the wiring. Starway watched intently, trying to get a handle on non-Equestrian technology, outdated or not. Callahan shifted nervously on her hooves, wings plastered against her coat.

While the other two were focusing on coaxing new life into the panel, another lit up far down the hallway. As it turned on, its light cast shadows on the things roaming around the ship. Callahan whimpered inaudibly, tension building in her shoulders. A small explosion sounded behind her causing her to fly directly straight into a bulkhead. The last thing she saw was an armored figure with a ridged forehead staring down at her, cold fury in its eyes.

~~~

Zabe wheeled around, instincts taking hold. In the past hour of mining, Torch and Sky Dancer had begun to see figures just out of the corner of their eyes running towards the surface. The team had to haul the metals up to the cave's entrance anyway, so he and Lieutenant Dusk began moving their new supplies.

"You really think they see anything?" Dusk scoffed.

"Torch seems to have a good, solid grasp on the world, any world," Zabe shook his head. "Sky Dancer may be out in the clouds, but I think he's pretty focused when it comes to his work."

The black pegasus wrinkled his nose and snorted. "I guess. It just seems... Unlikely. No life signs, no wiring down here, nothing."

Zabe was about to agree when a misty figure ran silently in between the two ponies. Like many of the other life forms in this part of the galaxy, it ran on two legs. As it got closer to the entrance, more shadowy figures seemed to coalesce behind it. Each one was carrying a large, curved blade and coated in layers of armor.

The ponies unhitched their loads and broke into a dead gallop toward the entrance. As they came out of the caves, a bolt of lightning passed overhead and blinded the two colts. When their eyes opened, none of the figures remained.

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"Come on, Melody, there has to be something we can do!" Commander Moonbuck rubbed her face with a hoof.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but there's not much we *can* do other than go down ourselves."

It had been nearly two hours since the away teams made contact. Commander Moonbuck's first time as acting Captain and she had no idea what protocols to follow. Half of the senior engineers were on the planet.

Their guide to this part of the galaxy was down there. Ion storms were drawing closer and closer. Not to mention the sensor glitches were getting worse. Once, she and Melody had even seen the outline of an unfamiliar ship breaking atmosphere before disappearing entirely.

The two unicorn's horns began to tingle and buzz slightly.

Commander Moonbuck shifted uncomfortably on her hooves. The *Alicorn* was nearing the place in the orbit where the sensor glitch kept appearing. As the Equestrian vessel rounded the curvature of the planet, a ghastly sight came into view. An ancient barge, clearly not space-worthy, hung above the planet, flickering in and out of view.

Unlike the previous ship, this new vessel didn't even register on the sensors. In fact, it seemed to be made out of dark wood and- were those sails? It also had chains everywhere, holes in its hull, grim spires extending out, and griffin-like statues perched on its bow. Passengers materialized on the far side of the hull and boarded the craft. After a few moments, it went towards the planet's surface, disappearing in the storm clouds.

"C-commander?" Melody stuttered.

"Yes, I saw it, too, Melody." After a moment, Moonbuck took a deep breath and tried to regain her composure. "We need to take some kind of action," she resolved. "Engineering, we need to find a way to cut through the interference. If we can't teleport the away teams back, then we need other options."

A strong voice came through, "Aye, Commander, but there's nae much we can do from here. Part o the reason we sent Sky Dancer down there was to get enough metals to repair our shuttle crafts. If ya like," the stallion continued, "we could probably channel the last bits reserve power into the deflector array and use a resonance pulse disrupt the storm system long enough to give the Captain a shot home-"

"Thank you, Ensign-" Moonbuck interrupted.

"That's Lieutenant Commander," he grumbled, "Aberdeen. But, we'll only be able to do it once. It'll burn out the array and we won't be able to move if they don't find enough to fabricate a new core."

Moonbuck blushed and tried to hide the embarrassment in her voice, "And you think this is our only option, Lieutenant Commander Aberdeen?" The unicorn made a point to get to know the rest of the crew better. After all, they may be the only ponies she'd ever see again.

"Aye, I do, Commander."

"All right," she said firmly. "Make it so."

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Only after Lieutenant Callahan had lost consciousness did Starway think to check in with the *Alicorn*. Soon, it became obvious the storm was interfering with communications. Starway could barely make out Zabe's report, but it was obvious they were beginning to see things, too. Thankfully, the pegasus regained consciousness without any extra help.

"Ca-captain?" the purple pony said woozily.

"It's okay, you just bumped your head a bit." Starway stated gently.

"Captain," Spock interrupted quickly, "I appear to be experiencing the same... visions as your lieutenant. It may also be worth noting that our exit is no longer present."

"What are you-" Starway collapsed onto her haunches as she saw where the doorway ought to have been. "I see."

Their sandy entrance was gone. In its place, a door had closed and a barbed portcullis fell in front of it. Behind them, shadowy figures roamed the halls. Some fought. Others were executed. Some just vanished.

Starway closed her eyes and shook her head. "Okay," she said, standing up. "We need to get moving. If we can't go back, we'll have to go forward." Ignoring Melody's whimper, she continued, "These... things haven't hurt us yet."

"Agreed," Spock offered. "If we can find the main computer core, we may be able to determine what is causing these figures to appear."



To get to the bridge, the group had to cross through rows of spiked cages. Electromagnetic interference from the storm was shorting out the team's electronics.

The flashlights flickered and at times they could only see by the lightning shinning in through the cracked hull. Whenever there was lightning, the figures appeared, disappearing just before the light faded. None made a single sound. The only thing that could be heard was hooves and shoes on metal echoing throughout the ship.

By the time they reached the bridge, the lightning was almost constant. Looking out onto the planet's bleak landscape, Starway and Callahan were mesmerized by the scene of a growing battle. There seemed to be no order. Each figure wore a different sort of armor. When one fell, the victor chose another target. Within moments, the fallen would rise again.

Not looking up from a corroded set of wires, Spock spoke. "Sto 'Vo 'Kor. The Klingon afterlife. A plain of endless battle, the ultimate achievement for a warrior. In their mythology, when an honored Klingon dies, he comes to this place. Here, he will fight forever, never tiring, always in search of further glory."

~~~

"So Ah ain't crazy?" Sky Dancer smirked.

"Oh, you've got a few isolinear chips missing from your computer," Dusk responded snidely, "but it doesn't change the fact that something's going on here."

"It seems," Zabe said, interrupting the two pegasi, "that there are dilithium pillars on top of these mountains that attract the ion storms. When the lightning strikes them, it does, erhm, something."

"Very astute," Torch chuckled. "Ve ought to examine it. Ve're almost done down here. Ve might as vell haul up ze extra metals and zen have a look while ve wait for za *Alicorn* and Captain Starvay."

“Sounds good,” Zabe nodded, loading up another hover sled of metals and attaching the harness to his shoulders.

When they got to the planet's surface, they saw a vicious conflict unfolding in the valley below. The figures rushing from the caves were now heading toward the battlefield. The storm couldn't be more than twenty minutes away, now, and the sky was ablaze with lightning. The figures almost seemed solid and the mountain tops were connected by a blue beam of light, circling around the range. The winds raged and dust buffeted the team from all sides.

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The minute Spock reconnected the wires, the nearest panel came to life. On the screen, a message played out. Directly in front of it stood a holographic Klingon. The Vulcan looked surprised. He had never seen armor like this outside of the only museum on Qo'noS.

At first, the speech came out with hard consonants, a lot of spitting, and angry gestures. Spock managed to halt the recording and translate it into a more understandable form. The imposing figure stood before them and began to speak again.

“I am Kahless the Iron fist, Son of Kahless the Unforgettable, captain of the Imperial Klingon Dynasty Cruiser Suvwl. Welcome weary traveler, to the war-torn world of Sto 'Vo 'Kor.” At this, the figure gave a mirthful laugh. “When my father took control of the Klingon people, I never expected him to shift focus to the stars, but the people needed to fight. To continue fighting and yet maintain order on our home world, there had to be new arenas. New battles and more glory to find. Better enemies. But all of these battles breed angrier, more hardy Klingons,” he continued, “and veterans always feel well-deserved sense of entitlement. When their days of glory pass, some descend into madness and others turn to crime. In an effort to allow our heroes of yesteryear reclaim a place of honor in the afterlife, we bring them here. A harsh deserted planet with no valuable material and outside all shipping routes.”

The figure paused for a moment and turned to look out the window, hands clasped behind his back. The screen went blank, but the figure remained. “The years passed and I was convinced we were doing the right thing. My

father died, his last words being that he would await us all in Sto 'Vo 'Kor. Weeks later, here I stand, lightyears from home with a broken ship and no communications system. It has become... obvious that our passengers are nothing more than prisoners. My crew is dead and I stand alone on this world. Now it is quite true that Kahless awaits the dead in Sto 'Vo 'Kor."

Starway, Spock, and Callahan stood silently, taking in every word. Kahless the Iron Fist turned to face them, looking directly into Starway's eyes. "Interesting. I always thought the first to find me would be a Klingon, but you have a warrior's eyes."

Spock raised an eyebrow and Callahan backpedaled, but Starway didn't budge. "You can see us?" she said skeptically.

"In a manner of speaking. This form has been preserved for over 1,500 years, though that which created me is far older. I am Kahless and I am not. Before this planet left its parent star nearly 300 million years ago, its inhabitants compiled a massive archive to store their species memories. Interstellar travel has not been," he searched for the right words, "kind to the planet's surface. Initially, the ion storms powered a holographic array which would play any time a new race visited the planet and atmospheric stabilizers maintained a healthy atmosphere. Occasionally, a race would offer new material and the archive would update."

Spock offered a hypothesis, "But over time, technology degrades, as man-made equipment always does. I presume that by the time the Klingons found your world, there was almost nothing left."

"Quite the contrary," the holographic being answered. "No, the archives were intact, but the power source was damaged."

"The storms," Callahan squeaked.

Kahless nodded. "And the Klingons had no interest in our technology. Instead of asking, they visited our world over and over again to drop prisoners. Their officers tried to brute force their way into our system. Over time, little remained other than Klingon mythology and prisoner rosters. And with the damaged power systems, the holographic emitters began to solidify the constructs and turn off any safety mechanisms." In an effort to prove his point, Kahless gently stroked Starway's mane for a moment,

causing her to shiver. "Battles played out on the surface, imitating the Klingon afterlife. Each being that died gained a representation in the mainframe, doomed to fight forever."

~~~

Dusk and Sky Dancer had flown up and surveyed the top of their mountain. It had a dilithium spire like all the others. When they returned, they found Torch and Zabe cornered by some of the shadowy figures. The ion storms were drawing closer and it appeared that acid rain was washing away the closest mountainsides. Zabe already had a few scratches. Every time they struck down a figure, it would rise again moments later.

Dusk wrapped his fore-hooves around Zabe and grunted as he picked up the bulky pony. Sky Dancer grabbed Torch and the two pegasi began to fly their crew mates towards the top of the mountain, Klingons chasing after them. The figures seemed to have trouble climbing the cracked slopes, which didn't bother the ponies one bit.

As soon as they reached the summit, Sky Dancer pulled out a scanner and Torch started examining the dilithium spire with her magic. Zabe circled it, looking for weak spots, while Dusk kept an eye on the climbing Klingons. After a few moments, Torch shrugged. Sky Dancer nodded and Zabe ducked under the bright blue beam. With no other options, the two stood on opposite sides and started bucking the crystal as hard as they could.

As they hit the pillar, the circuit was interrupted. For a moment, the Klingon warriors lost cohesion and fell through the mountainside into the caverns below. Zabe and Sky Dancer looked at each other and bucked even harder. After a few minutes, the crystal cracked at the base and toppled over. Without a solid circle, the warriors disappeared along with the blue beam.

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It was clear Starway and the others didn't have much time left. The storm was getting closer and their informant had just vanished along with several shadowy figures who had been creeping up behind them. In a few minutes, they were back where they started.

With Spock's help, the mares managed to lift the portcullis and force open the spiked door. Outside, the winds had to be at least 40 miles an hour. Sand was everywhere, rain fell in the distance, and multicolored lightning shone through the reddish purple clouds. The three stood on the surface, unsure what to do, knowing there was no way they could make it back to the transport site before the storm hit.

~~~

"Et could kill them, Commander!" Aberdeen shouted over the com.

"And so could the storm," she pounded her hooves on the ground. "We don't have a choice, do it!"

In an instant, the front of the ship lit up. Its deflector array shot a pulse of energy at the ion storm and cut through the cloud cover. It burned out half of the circuits on the bridge and presumably in engineering, but for a few seconds, there was an eye in the storm.

"Is it over?" Melody asked.

"I don't know. Aberdeen, Lieutenant Commander, did we get them?" Moonbuck prodded.

"Aye, Commander, we got them, metals and all."

"If it's all right," Starway's voice came over the coms, "I think I'll let you take the next one."

~~~

The senior staff of the *Alicorn* sat together in the observation deck. Aberdeen briefed the Captain and Sky Dancer on what had been done with the deflector array and what repairs would need to be completed. Sky Dancer briefed the others on his team's progress and Starway relayed the tale of Kahless the Iron Fist and the 300 million year old technology.

When all was said and done, they all had a little more breathing room. The Borg hadn't reappeared yet and it looked like the warp core was finally going to get fixed. Spock even seemed to think this historical knowledge

might grant them a place of honor with the Klingons. All in all, the trip seemed to have been a success.

Captain Starway adjourned the meeting and everypony got up to leave. Dusk and Torch chatted in the corner and Spock left to catch up on his meditation. Starway stared out into the black, wondering what else it had in store. In that moment, the ship rocked back and forth with a heavy impact and the sound of metal shearing other metal.

“Horse apples!” Starway screamed. “What in the hay was that?!”

A large panel drifted past the window, through the scorch marks and deep gouges, only a single word could be made out: *Harmony*.

# Episode 5

## The Walls of Space and Time

“Smoking is not good. Smoking is never good,” he explained to the wall-eyed mare. “Smoking is never not ungood in even the most remote of parallel universes, do you understand?” The Doctor raced between consoles, pulling levers and trying to get the exhaust fans on as the TARDIS hurtled towards a familiar moon. “When the TARDIS flies instead of materializing, there's a one to one ratio of CRASHING, and I don't like those odds!”

After a few tense seconds, the blue box imbedded itself in a crater full of moon dust. Quietly cursing to himself, the Doctor extended a protective shell around the TARDIS to give him the chance to survey the damage. Ditzzy frowned, but continued to stay silent and out of the way.

The poor police call box had been damaged during their last vacation. After seeing how life unfolded for many unfortunate ponies on Equestria, both had needed a chance to recover and get a hold of themselves before returning to determine what was in fact happening. Unsurprisingly, the trip had ended with an awful lot of running and more than a few pan-dimensional beings upset about their lot in life and how they wouldn't be learning the secrets of time travel. For the Doctor and Ditzzy, this meant a fuming TARDIS.

The Doctor slowly stalked around the outside of the box, getting a good look at the damage. Unable to help, Ditzzy stared up at the night sky. A blue-green crescent hung not too far away with a glowing star rising all by itself. There was a flurry of activity around the planet, ponies living their lives, ships coming and going, and a few repair stations. The planet reminded Ditzzy of home and of her little muffin, before she'd been taken.

Realizing how quiet his favorite derpy-eyed girl was, the Doctor took a deep breath and stopped himself from bucking the TARDIS. He caught a tear from her eye, gave her a small nuzzle, and sat down next to her.

The silence couldn't last, though. “Wait a minute... That's not right. This isn't

right at all!”

“Wa-What's – W-wr-wrong – D-d-doctor?” Ditzzy asked slowly, her eyes entirely focused on her nose.

“This is Earth. This is where I was bringing you, but it's not right. Oh god, it's never right when you need it to be.” He shook his head. “So, there's a certain continuity to all of history. It unfolds like it's supposed to, always has, and always will, under certain restrictions with the chance for small omissions or changes so long as it doesn't cross paths with other time streams or fundamentally alter the nature of the universe,” he said, staring directly at the repair station Earth's orbit. “But sometimes, bad stuff happens and changes this, and this is all wrong. There's not supposed to be travel like this for centuries and it doesn't work like that. These are a lot closer to the TARDIS. I knew something was weird the minute I regenerated as a pony. Oh, this is bad. This planet isn't how or when it's supposed to be which means,” he paused for effect. “We've got to fix it.”

“Ice cream sundaes!” Ditzzy happily nodded in agreement.

~~~

Using anything as nature intended, even nature, was truly droll. All the television, smellivision, plays, libraries, and galaxies in the world couldn't compare with the simple pleasure of breaking something, or rather, breaking everything.

Being turned to stone was an undeniably unpleasant experience, even if it was simply a ruse. Being blasted with some sort of demonic friendship laser, the statue pondered, was somewhat worse. In the months following the first invasions, the topiary accessory had found itself acutely aware of its surroundings.

DisQord loved being the center of attention, but orchestrating such a convoluted scheme took time. Barely an instant after recovering from the Elements of Harmony for the fifth time in his exceedingly long memory, the creature had awoken one morning hearing tales of a doctor. The Doctor traveled through time, correcting errors and attempting to outrun his past. A very different universe indeed. DisQord had found it odd to see Borg in this time stream.



It was so very rare for alternate realities to meet at a nexus point like this, and the Continuum did like to keep a tight grip on anyQ who might want to have a little fun. Without the slightest trace of movement, the statue cackled silently to itself, a plan formulating.

The Federation. The Borg. Time Travelers in a locked arena, waiting to be set free. Ponies. And another set of humans rather further back in time. Four universes intersecting where none should touch. Somehow re-writing history. What a ball. If he'd thought of this himself, he'd be overcome with giddy excitement.

He had somepony to talk to.

~~~

Patrick glanced at his cell phone.

Five hours.

Five hours of signing autographs already and three days left. He shut his eyes and rubbed a hand on his aching forehead. Trekkies, trekkers, whatever they were calling themselves these days, were the worst. Or the comic book nerds. Maybe they were the worst. He'd trained at the Royal Shakespeare Academy, for God's sake. Giving back to the fans was something, but he'd rather be giving a guest lecture to the young students in Oxford. At least most of them hadn't watched Star Trek.

A sick feeling wormed its way into his consciousness. Normally, that only happened when some rabid fan who hadn't bathed in a week approached the convention table. Before he opened his eyes, he steeled his resolve and dredged up the most compelling false smile he could muster.

He looked up. This was not Pasadena, whether or not that was a good thing remained to be seen. Patrick noticed his chair was more comfortable and made out of leather now. As he scanned the room, he saw clean beige walls with black paneling, a dull white glow lighting the room. He felt, for lack of a better word, scratchy. It was a familiar kind of scratchy. Too Familiar.

"Oh, God, no," Patrick heaved an angry sigh as he looked down, a Starfleet

uniform replacing his shirt, blazer, and khaki pants.

"Oh, I'm afraid so, Jean-Luc," said a crafty voice from all around him.

"John? John, is that you? What's going on here?"

"It's true I like to play myself, but come on, tic-tock, Admiral Picard. Time to figure out what's going on." An old friend's voice echoed throughout the room.

Panic crept its way into Patrick Stewart's voice, "Do you mean to tell me-

"Yeeeeees?" The voice prodded.

"This is absurd," he rationalized. "Either I've finally found hell in Pasadena, something Nichelle talked about for years," Patrick muttered to himself, "I'm asleep, or I've been drugged and thrown onto a set. I think I prefer asleep." He pinched himself experimentally and recoiled a bit at the sting.

"So much for that theory, hmmm?" A shadow weaved its way into Patrick's vision, gradually taking shape. "Rather hard for this to happen under the physical laws in your universe, but it works rather well here."

Patrick was an intelligent man. Like all intelligent men, he quickly determined what was going on and subsequently buried the idea in favor of one that was less upsetting to the human psyche.

"Oh Jean-Luc, we're going to have such fun, you and I. Even more now that I've finally pulled you into your nightmare. The John version of me has been waiting years to try this."

Patrick face-palmed, "I have no idea what's going on and no intention to stay here."

Q stood in front of his desk, but the shadow he cast was of a much different creature, "Ah, but where's the fun in that? You don't get to leave before you figure out what's going on. That's where all the fun is!" He tapped a finger on the grandfather clock affixed to his wrist, "Time to go. Wouldn't want you to be late for your next appointment."

Before Patrick could say anything, the figure was gone. For the briefest instant, it looked more like a chimera than a man. Patrick was left with only a few moments to process just how possible a disappearing beast was before a blue box began to materialize in his office.

A small brown horse poked its head from inside the police box and started speaking in an accent very similar to his own, "Now, I know you're not going to believe me, but something is very wrong with time. You're one of the highest ranking admirals and we need to talk. Don't bother calling security, or do, it really doesn't matter. Anyway-

"Stop!" Patrick shouted, taking in a deep breath. "I've had quite a day and I don't belong here. I think you'll find I believe you more than I ought to. I want answers." He wagged a finger at the TARDIS, "And I'm guessing you'll want to know how I know your box is bigger on the inside even though I can't see it from here."

~~~

He'd had so many names. So many faces. It was hard to keep track. Flying about the universe, always outrunning something, or chasing something, or fighting, or dying. Such an interesting life. The only constant was the thump in his head.

That was, of course, until he returned home.

Oh, what a trip that had been. First he was the ultimate ruler of the Earth with countless future humans in small, spinny spheres terrorizing the present population. He'd had the Doctor locked in a cage and the entire human race under his heel. What a feeling- until that wretch Martha Jones had ruined it all with her prayers, he sneered to himself. Jesus Doctor. Doctor Jesus. It didn't matter. The whole world restored the Doctor's youth and power just by thinking about it. Harold got shot and allowed himself to die. Why bother living any longer? It was satisfying enough to watch the Doctor unable to rescue him.

Several years and a botched resurrection thanks to his ex-wife later, Harold Saxon found himself walking the Earth once more. This time, though, he couldn't stop eating. A real buzz kill. Made it very hard to take over

anything. Made it hard to remember he wasn't Harold Saxon. The drumbeats kept getting louder, he kept eating, and, finally, he reproduced. Not in the traditional way, mind you, that was far too simple. He made more of him. All of the Earth, him. He missed it. A whole planet who could understand and obey him. Me. All of us. Them.

He shook his head, wincing in pain. That's how he'd ended up here. That abhorrent drum beat. That was always how he ended up 'here,' no matter where 'here' was. Once he knew the truth, knew Rassillon had implanted the drumbeat in his mind when he looked upon the Untempered Schism, he was free. Not of the drumbeat, but he was free to ignore it.

It had driven him crazy. Driven him to seek retribution against those he hated, just for the chance to get back at the Doctor. Then he'd saved him. Keeping track of his life made his head spin. What was worse was that he was pulled into the time locked stasis field surrounding his home planet of Gallifrey.

Rassillon had failed and that was enough to make any Time Lord cranky, he mused. Harold's snide grins and sarcastic remarks had earned him quite the punishment. His head throbbed for weeks. The pounding had died down one day, though. It was on that day he became Harold Saxon.

How could he be the Master when he was trapped on Gallifrey? How could he be master of anything when he'd acted without a carefully constructed plan? How could he be the Master - the one and only - when he no longer heard the drumbeat? On that day, his hearts stopped. On that day, he began losing touch with reality, hearing a distant voice and seeing pastel equines trotting about his cell.

Harold was no longer sure what was keeping him alive. He no longer harbored any ill towards the Doctor. He spoke with a voice, it reminded him of himself. Then he watched as a periwinkle pony cantered about, another like-minded creature.

These days, the guards had simply learned to ignore his conversations, so he allowed himself to speak freely.

"Master," the pony began, "Why do you allow yourself to be trapped here?"

"I'm not the Time Lord I once was," he grumbled and rolled over on his mattress.

The pony pressed on, "Well, this show mare can certainly show you a thing or two," she grinned. She was barely the size of his hand and partially transparent, but that didn't stop him from believing she was actually in the marble cell.

She slowly began performing, showing him visions of his past defeats in crude neon displays, her images gradually getting more and more realistic, coming closer and closer to the present moment. As soon as the pony got to the confrontation with Rassillon, Harold's blood boiled and his left eye began to twitch.

"How's that?" She grinned. "Not quite done yet, are you?"

thump thump thump thump

A searing pain worked its way through his body and he screamed. "Aaahhk!" Suddenly, the Master bolted up, a contorted smile working its way across his face as he rocked back and forth. He shook his head violently. "Hah!" he snorted, stretched out his arms, and cracked every joint in his body. "I'd forgotten," he smirked. "How it feels, I mean."

thump thump thump thump  
thump thump thump thump

"To be great and powerful?" She mused.

"Exactly. Would you care to travel with me?" The Master said with a coy smile, shaking off the years and reacquainting himself with the sound of his own heartbeats.

"Trixie would not have it any other way."

"Then," the Master offered, "I'll meet you on the other side."

Quietly, carefully, his mind began to work. The fog of the past several years faded away and his distracting sanity subsided making way for the comforting rhythm of a broken mind. Cogs fell into place. The guard shifts

turned into a string of numbers before him, each one associated with probabilities for psychological manipulation. A lens, fork, pieces from the toilet, and bed spring enough to craft a makeshift laser screwdriver.

With his mind occupied, the Master could no longer hear the first voice that began talking to him so long ago. DisQord chuckled gleefully as he violated the time lock and left the Master, slithering next to Rassillon's ear. There would be only one shot. Well, technically, he could have as many 'shots' as he wanted, but that would make the game no fun. It would also violate the terms. One chessboard, one move per turn, no more than five sectors of the multiverse, and minimal interference, if he felt so inclined.

~~~

Queen Celestia remembered nothing of her first children. Aboard Sphere 4238, the white alicorn held a regal pose and closed her eyes, feeling the perfection of the Borg surging through her. She was connected. She was the ruler she had always been. Only an unnoticed tear said otherwise.

She opened her eyes and looked out into the frenzy of activity. Over the past few months, Celestia had researched plans and strategies, diagnosed errors, conquered worlds, and assimilated new knowledge. She alone was fit to command the legion. Her passionate brand of fanatical friendship being spread throughout all of creation. If the Sun was hers, if Equestria was hers, then the heavens were her late night dreams. Always an extension of herself. She had the right to rule, and all her children should be united.

All her children.

Everywhere.

Everywhen.

Not so long ago, a mare had gifted her the next stage in evolution. Time. Somepony had assimilated the thought 'Time Lord' and with it came a flood of possibilities. The Doctor was nearly impossible to catch, but he was neither alone nor the last of his kind.

The sound of the white point star, drumbeats and all, drilled into the back of

her mind. The cadence turning into a clockwork rhythm for every drone in the quadrant. Purpose. Duty. Unity. The drones worked tirelessly for days setting up relay stations to create a tachyon transponder array the size of a gas giant around her sphere.

Instead of continuing to pursue the Harmony or the Alicorn, Queen Celestia began preparations to release and assimilate the Time Lords. Every last one. Technology far more refined than what the Borg currently possessed. The laws of time bowing before her as another one of her subjects. Just like they did for mother.

~~~

Ditzy's eyes wobbled back and forth in the TARDIS between the hairless, bipedal, pink thing and the Doctor. They had been going back and forth for nearly an hour, the TARDIS floating off into some uncharted section of creation.

"-timey wimey-" the Doctor tried to finish.

"Wibbly wobbly. Yes, so I've heard," Patrick grinned.

"How did you know I was going to say that?" The stallion huffed, "I suppose it could've been a coincidence or an instance of telepathy or maybe you're-

"Doctor Who," the actor interrupted.

"Doctor, what now?" The Doctor asked.

"Television show. On Earth, my Earth. Though, unless I've missed my mark, you aren't really supposed to be in this universe. Or," Patrick chose his word carefully, "a horse."

"Pony, equine, doesn't matter," the Doctor corrected and shook his head. After a time, he continued, "Well, this is a new experience, I've absolutely no idea what's going on."

All his years in the Royal Shakespeare Company and teaching students came back to him at once. Patrick did his best to explain without sounding patronizing. "Doctor Who is a British science fiction television series. It has



quite a few seasons; though they've never asked me to go on, I would have. It's a show about a Time Lord who can regenerate twelve times before he dies, goes on numerous adventures throughout the whole of history, and frequently has an attractive companion." Patrick smiled and nodded at the grey pegasus, who blushed. At least, he assumed she was attractive to the Doctor. Hard to tell since she was a horse.

"My life," the Doctor said slowly, "in your universe. Is. Entertainment?"

"Essentially," the old actor shrugged.

"Fantastic!" The pony shouted, catching Ditzzy and Patrick off guard. Instantly back at his regular speed, "So that means that there are multiple universes, as in, more than just the two we've come across already. Always so hard to break through the barrier, though. What does that mean for time, though? Why is it such an issue to change history if there are so many histories? So many adventures I could've been having. Will have to have had soon. Wait," his train of thought hit a brick wall and the Doctor looked the man up and down, "Does that mean you're not Admiral Picard?"

Patrick sighed, "Heavens no. I'm an actor. I played that character on another television series, Star Trek, for nearly a decade. There were even several movies, but the fan base is absolutely insane. It's the main reason I moved back to England, to continue pursuing theater while limiting exposure to my American fans."

"So then," the Doctor getting a little too close to Patrick's face, one eye growing much bigger than the other. "How did you get here?"

From behind him, the pegasus spoke, "Go, Medical Professional. A series of unlikely quantum fluctuations in the substructure of the underlying fabric of causality has allowed deified disharmony to reposition nodes within the temporal paradigm. Originally disparate identities now coincide in accordance with the probabilities associated with the uncertainty principle; however, this may indicate a rupture in the walls of time and space."

"What now?" Patrick stared blankly at the grinning grey mare.

"Muffins!" She smiled genuinely, looking to the Doctor.



The brown stallion tapped his hoof against his chin for a moment before his face lit up. "Ah HA!" He shouted. "Essentially, there's this big thing, really bad, seen it before and don't want to see it again, embodies the spirit of chaos. And it's called-"

"Q!" "Discord," the two said simultaneously.

The Doctor cleared his throat, "Whatever we call it, simply a mess. If my friend here is right," he declared, "there's some sort of thing with godlike powers hiding in the ether, no not ether, that's a terrible word, space, void, no... There!" He pointed a hoof at a nebula on the other side of the TARDIS door, "and it's gotten the bright idea to bend bubble universes closer together to overlap certain beings where they've never supposed to have been been."

"Like a giant, cosmic Venn Diagram?" Patrick asked.

"Schrender Spheres, but yes," The Doctor added. A look of horror spread across his face, "Which means that regardless of why ever you're here, I need to get you back to the office as quickly as possible."

"Oh no," Patrick laughed, "I've been Jean-Luc Picard long enough. I'm coming with you."

"Sorry, nope, can't." The stallion threw several levers and turned a nob or two. Within moments, the TARDIS was back in Admiral Picard's office. "Don't know what's going on, but it's dangerous stuff. Need to figure things out and get moving. We'll be back when we can. Hopefully," he grinned like a young school colt, "you can figure out what you need to be doing by then. Hope your training's paid off, Mr. Picard."

Patrick stumbled out backwards through the TARDIS doors. As the blue police box began to disappear, he muttered to himself, "I always did like the older Doctors better, even if David was fun to work with in Hamlet."

Refusing to admit defeat, the man skulked back to his desk and crossed his arms. What to do now? How long before somebody came looking for Admiral Picard and he had to make a life-or-death decision? As much as he hated to admit it, this world was no longer fictional. Hell or another universe, he couldn't escape it, and the real Jean-Luc Picard was nowhere

to be found. Or was he?

"Computer," he ventured to the empty room, "Where is Admiral Picard?"

A monotone woman's voice responded, "Admiral Jean-Luc Picard is currently in his office on Earth, the third planet in the Sol System."

"Are you absolutely certain about that? There is nowhere else he could be?"

"Probability rating: 100 percent," it offered shamelessly. "Admiral Jean-Luc Picard is in his office."

Patrick rubbed a hand over his forehead. "Fine, so be it," he said. "It's a challenge, I'll just have to read up on military tactics, Federation history, current relations, technology and fleet briefings and," he let out a long breath, "hope that this Picard is the way I portrayed him."

The computer chirped at him. Almost instinctively, he waved a hand and demanded, "On screen."

"Priority one transmission coming from Captain William Riker of the Federation Starship Titan on a secure channel," the computer woman informed him.

Patrick wracked his brain to try and remember even one of the transmission codes he'd used on Star Trek. Every single one had been ad-libbed. After a few moments, he gave up and began speaking slowly to the large screen mounted on the wall, "Computer, key access four one two mark eight zero, Picard, Jean-Luc, Starfleet priority code gamma, decode."

Apparently satisfied with this answer, the computer rewarded him with a decrypted transmission. Soon, a familiar face with a very different past showed up on the screen. Jonathan Frakes, or here, Commander- Captain William Riker.

"Admiral," he said curtly. There were bags permanently cut under his eyes and a lot of grey hair. Command, or marriage, or both, had certainly taken their toll on him.

“Drop the formalities, Will. What's going on?” Yes, Patrick thought to himself. Maybe this wouldn't be as hard as he thought, so long as he remembered to write down that command code.

# Episode 6

## Out in the Black

“What in the hay was that?” Starway screamed, turning on her hind quarters to face Zabe.

“The ship just materialized out of nowhere, Mam,” he said gruffly.

“It's-” Melody squeaked, “It's the Harmony.”

“Everypony, get to your stations, now,” Moonbuck ordered.

A few ponies looked stunned for just a moment, then galloped out of the observation lounge. Sky Dancer and his team headed straight for Engineering while the bridge crew took their stations. Callahan started scanning the vessel.

“Mams,” Callahan tried to get their attention. “There are weak life signs, but no life support aboard that ship.”

“Do I need to tell you what to do?” Starway snorted. “Get them over here. Medical and Engineering, prepare away teams, we've got a broken ship out there and her crew that needs us.” She turned to face Zabe. “If they got here the same way we did, then there could be Borg aboard that ship. Take as many ponies as you need. Moonbuck, I want you with him.” The unicorn nodded and cantered off the bridge with Zabe. “Callahan, keep monitoring their ship. I don't care if it's just using the phasers to warm the inside of the ship. If they charge, you fire.”

“Mam?” The light purple filly asked quietly. “Even if our own ponies are still on board?”

“Yes,” Starway ordered without hesitation. “What do their internal systems look like?”

“They're badly damaged. Something overloaded them worse than I've ever seen, but their anti-matter containment field is still up,” Melody said quietly,

ears laid flat and tail twitching with a hint of anxiety.

“Good. Melody, as soon as our away teams make it over, get a tractor beam on that ship. We're leaving, continue on our original heading. Sky Dancer,” she said to the com, “My ready room, now. Dusk and Torch can handle the Harmony without you for a few minutes.”

~~~

Captain Riker coughed into his hand.

“Do you have something you'd like to say, number one?” Patrick quickly corrected himself, “Sorry, old habits.”

“It's just, well, has it been a late night?” Riker danced around the issue.

“Come out with it, I haven't got all day. You wouldn't contact me on a priority channel unless it was important.” The old actor tapped his foot impatiently. Secretly, Patrick was just interested in ending the conversation before Captain Riker noticed anything out of the ordinary. He needed time to figure out exactly when in the time line he was and what his avatar had been doing since Star Trek: Nemesis.

Riker shook his head and simply decided ignore the Admiral's stubble and outdated uniform. Only after one rather traumatic incident with the Cardassians had the Admiral ever had facial hair, and that was swiftly removed upon his return. “Right. I've already contacted Worf about this and, from what I can tell, Ambassador Spock has spoken with the Vulcans.”

Patrick looked stunned for a moment before regaining his countenance, “They're both involved already? When were planning on telling Starfleet, Will?” Patrick smiled inwardly, decades of acting training keeping him from being anyone except Jean-Luc Picard.

“Well, we received word from the Ambassador that they've made first contact with a race of horses.”

“We hardly ever see any non-humanoid lifeforms,” Patrick interrupted. “But what has that got to do with the Ambassador?”

"They're from the Delta Quadrant, sir," Will said quietly. "They've had contact with the Borg and they were picked up from a trans-warp terminus point in Romulan space."

Patrick cursed quietly to himself. Of course today couldn't be easy. First it began with signing autographs for five hours, then it turned out John de Lancie actually was a bored Q, and now the Romulans and Borg were involved as he was stuck in an alternate universe. He silently condemned whatever force had brought him here. This was worse than anything any fan could ever possibly write and he hated this world's god or gods, and Q, for it. "You're certain?" He finally asked.

"Absolutely, sir," Will nodded.

Suddenly something clicked in Patrick's memory. "Hold on, a race of horses. Could be they be ponies?"

"I- I don't see what that has to do with anything." He ran a hand through his greying beard.

"Have you spoken with them, Will?! Do they have tattoos on their bums?"

"Well, I believe so, but-"

"Listen to me very carefully, Will," Patrick pleaded, "This is far more complicated than you think it is. We need to talk, in person. I don't want to risk this getting out. I'll inform Starfleet, but we need to talk, soon. Where's the Titan?"

"Well, the Enterprise is in dry-dock. If you requisitioned it, I'm sure I could meet you by this time tomorrow at Vulcan," his old first officer offered.

"God, this is turning into The Search for Spock," Patrick muttered as he rubbed his forehead. After a moment, he realized he hadn't ended the conversation. "Will, I'll see you tomorrow. I don't have any orders for you right now, just get here."

"Can do, sir. Riker out."

~~~

The doors swooshed closed behind the light green pegasus. "You asked to see me, Captain?"

"Yes, Sky Dancer, have a seat." Starway waved a hoof at a pile of red and gold pillows close to the door. She was laying down, looking out the window with a hoof propping her head up. She took a deep breath.

"Mam?"

"Sky Dancer, have you had a chance to look over some of the Federation's technology with Ambassador Spock?" She asked without turning around.

"Yes, Mam, they function on entirely different principles than our engine core does, but they work in roughly the same way." He wasn't quite sure why she was asking or why she was keeping him from getting to the Harmony with the rest of Engineering.

"And do you think," Starway began, brushing her mane to one side, "in less than a month we'd be able to adapt their technology to our systems, even with a full research facility?"

"I highly doubt it," Sky Dancer admitted, a frown on his face and wings flat against his body.

"And do you think the Harmony will be repairable? How many crew members have we lost," she mused rhetorically. "How likely is it these ponies, people," she quickly corrected, "how likely is it that these people will give us a ship?"

Sky Dancer didn't answer.

"How long before we can make the new warp core from scrap metal and wishes?" She said quietly through pursed lips.

Now Sky Dancer understood why she'd brought him here before sending him to the Harmony. "You want to salvage their core..."

"Yes."

"The Harmony is the pride of the fleet. It's commanded by the Elements of Harmony and Princess Luna, herself. Captain, that's-" Sky Dancer was shaking his head.

"An order." She bit her lip. "We don't have a choice."

Sky Dancer snorted. "I suppose there's not much chance of making a new core with what we've got."

"Bring aboard anypony who's alive. We've got more than enough quarters for them now. I doubt their whole crew made it. Make sure Doctor Burns gets as much from their medical bay as possible. And Sky Dancer," she stopped. She wanted to ask him if he thought she was doing the right thing. "The Alicorn is several years newer than the Harmony, will our girl be able to use it?"

"There might be some older circuitry and parts necessary, but after that planet, I think we can probably spare it," Sky Dancer shrugged. He didn't sound too sure of himself.

"Dismissed," she motioned at the door with her tail.

Sky Dancer quietly got to his hooves and went to leave. The doors opened, but before he left, "Off the record, I think you're making the right choice. This is all we can do."

Starway chuckled dryly to herself. Another young colt turned into a bitter old stallion before his time. Long live the Equestrian Stellar Alliance. She wished she had the energy to be angry anymore, to keep fighting, to go after the Borg. She was just so tired.

~~~

Ba-da-da-dump  
Ba-da-da-dump

The drumbeat was infectious. Everything smelled new again. Even the nauseous feeling given off by the hermetically clean, white hallways in Gallifrey's prisons couldn't do anything to darken the Master's mood. Something told him he was going to be free. Something told him this was



going to be fun.

He whistled to himself, skipping around corners, lasering any guards he saw. He loved it when they screamed. It sounded like laughter to him. They were clearly enjoying themselves, why shouldn't they be? Their dreary lives guarding a prison in a time-locked bubble were over. They could float in the ethereal clouds of time and space, now, just like they were meant to.

Psychotic, came Trixie's voice from beside him. She was still invisible to everyone else, but now she was a lot closer to his size. He wondered if he could ride her into Rassillon's office. What fun that would be! That's hardly the man I remember. Weren't you supposed to be good at crafting plans? The periwinkle mare chided.

He stopped skipping for a moment and tapped a finger on his chin.

Tap-tap-tap-tap, tap-tap-tap-tap.

"You know, I think you're right," he wagged a finger towards her. "Though I prefer 'high-functioning sociopath.'"

Of course Trixie is right. The Great and Powerful Trixie is always right, she beamed.

The Master had to consider getting himself a title like that. He shook his head. There weren't any alarms going off, thankfully. Why should there be? He'd disabled all of them nearly an hour ago. Still, they were bound to notice that sooner or later. Still, it would be best to make it to Rassillon's office before they did notice.

He began to pass the last cell on the left, oh so close to the guard's break room, when he heard a whinny. He tip-toed over to the cell, face pressed against the wall and slowly inched his wide eyes closer to the door.

"It's about time you showed up. Care to rescue a mare in distress," she pouted in a sweet voice.

"Anything for m'lady," he took a deep, grand bow. The Master flicked the screwdriver up in the air where it twirled for a moment. As it dropped back into his hand, he took up a fencing stance and blasted the door from its

hinges. While the smoke billowed, his equine friend emerged from the smoldering prison cell.

“Trixie could not care less how much she hates Rassillon, you will not be riding her into his office,” she glared at him. How did she even know he'd been thinking that?

She trotted next to him, chest puffed out and head held high. The Master noticed that she was missing the starry cape and hat he'd been used to seeing.

“I don't recall ever having talking ponies on Gallifrey,” the Master began cautiously. “Is that a new development or-”

“Trixie,” she grumbled, “Was trapped here when trying to escape with a TARDIS. Trixie's magic was far too grand for its humble systems.”

The Master chuckled to himself. “You tried to feed a singularity an unrecognized energy source and managed to rip a hole in the time lock-”

“Where Trixie got pulled in,” she finished for him. “As an outsider suddenly on a planet entirely made of pink time monkeys who had been trapped for eons, Trixie turned a few too many heads. Especially when she read A Brief History of Time Lords and began performing in local venues,” her tone threatened if he mocked her, he would be swiftly bitten. “Given that the Great and Powerful Trixie had managed to violate the time lock, she was sentenced to life in prison if unable to reproduce the results. She was not.” Trixie focused angrily at a spot on the wall ahead of them, her face turning the slightest shade of crimson.

~~~

Luna woke up in what at first glance appeared to be the Harmony's sick bay. She couldn't remember quite what had happened. There was a flash of light and she was lying on the floor near her sister. No, not that. They'd fought off the Daleks and the Cybermen, then the Doctor had vanished. No, still too far back.

She groaned.

Every inch from her mane to her tail ached.

She tried harder to remember. Celestia refused to allow her to go back into space alone, but insisted that the Alliance needed a space program to fight off the hordes of aliens bent on conquest. Only Twilight had believed there still might be those among the stars who could offer their friendship. Twilight. Without needing to run through the apocalyptic events of the past few months, it all came rushing back. Twilight had channeled every inch of her magic into the Harmony.

“Looks like somepony's finally awake,” came the gravelly voice of an old stallion, interrupting her thoughts. “I'm Doctor Burns, Princess Luna, and you're in my sick bay.” He didn't look as old as he sounded. In fact, he practically looked like a colt. “Well, you and about thirty of your crew members, though the bay won't hold that many. Thankfully, I can handle more than just Burns, if you'll excuse the humor,” he joked sarcastically.

“Wha-what happened?” She choked out.

“We don't know yet, there's no way to access the logs. Your computer system is fried and you're the first to wake up. Now, Princess or not, you're still an officer. That means I can keep you confined here if I need to, and you need your rest.” The tone in his voice betrayed that he wasn't sure she'd listen, but he meant every word. “When you're feeling up to it, the Captain would like a word. Until then, you need to sleep.”

Luna tried to get to her hooves, but collapsed back on the bed. Everything around her was spinning and, at the risk of vomiting, she allowed herself to fall back into a deep slumber. Anypony who needed her could wait a few more hours, or days, or weeks.

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In only a few hours, the Engineering team had managed to salvage the engine core and get it installed. Captain Starway had been clear. They didn't need to be gentle, they needed to be fast. This was their one shot at a relatively new warp core and they didn't need Captain Sparkle or Princess Luna waking up before they were done. If the Alicorn was underway before they woke up, they might never have to know what happened to their ship.

Sky Dancer finally understood where Torch's name came from and why she and Lieutenant Dusk were so close. Aboard the Harmony, Torch had produced a thin line of blueish-white fire magic and swiftly severed the warp core from every attachment, including the ejection system which had fused the core to the floor and ceiling. As it was falling, Dusk caught the entire massive pylon on his back and spun the core around until its edges cooled. Miraculously, none of the circuitry was damaged.

Well, none of the circuitry in the engine core was worse for wear. The same couldn't be said for the rest of the ship. Whatever spell was performed had flooded the computer core, electrical systems, life support systems, and shield emitters with something akin to an EMP. Sky Dancer concluded it was not an EMP based solely on the way the spell seemed to light the wiring on fire like a candle wick, turning many of the ship's systems into a fine, black powder.

If he had to guess, he would've said absolutely nothing.

If he'd been in Ten Forward with a few too many sips of the Romulan Ale Spock had brought with him, he might've drunkenly ranted about the remote possibility of supercharging a computer system designed to bend the fabric of reality in small ways and instead forcing it to latch on to the quantum signature of a single electron in a very different part of space. After this, he would continue, the crew would have needed to be in extreme danger so as to not be able to thoroughly focus on said electron. Finally, after ceasing to exist in the previous part of space, the law of conservation of mass and energy would dictate that the ship could not stop existing and therefore force the ship to reappear in another location entirely.

As they worked, the medical teams ferried ponies back to the Alicorn and made sure they received the appropriate treatment. It seemed as though they'd all been protected by another mysterious spell which had left them alive, but in a deep sleep. Unfortunately, as the Harmony began occupying the same space as the Alicorn, the damaged ship simply couldn't handle the extra stress and the life support systems finally failed. When that happened, it made it unlikely anypony would regain consciousness long enough to fix the shape and awaken the others.

In the meantime, Zabe, Moonbuck, and anypony they could find began

sweeping the ship. While there were some rather innovative engineering fixes, there was no Borg technology rooted in its systems. There were several drones aboard the ship, but whatever had affected the crew had put them to sleep as well and they were easy to take care of. Only one was a pony, and he wasn't wearing a com badge or pips. In all likelihood, it was a pony assimilated before she ever made it out of Equestria.

So far, nothing Doctor Redheart or Burns had tried could remove Borg technology. Although Ambassador Spock had spoken of recovered humans, the same theories were years away from being adaptable to ponies. The main problem seemed to be that as soon as Borg nanoprobes were introduced into the bloodstream, they drained a pony of its innate magical abilities, unicorn or not. The first few attempted rescues had meant severe brain damage or death.

In one case, the probes manage to code a single cell into turning cancerous and reassimilating a rescued pony. While waiting on a decision from the Captain, the Borg had killed half of the security team and assimilated everypony in the medical bay. Until there was a way to reverse the magical drain, a Borg drone was simply too dangerous to allow aboard the Alicorn.

Everypony supported the Captain and they were well acquainted with the motto she'd acquired over the past several months: As long as there's an airlock, this ship isn't a democracy. At first, she'd said it jokingly, but the more times Borg infected their crew members, the more of her friends she'd had to confine, phaser, or shove out the nearest airlock.

Still, the new information from Ambassador Spock proved they might be able to practice recovering humanoid life forms. Once Doctor Burns had enough experience, there might be a way to determine exactly what the difference was between ponies and people. After that, maybe they could finally work towards recovering some of the ponies that had been lost when Equestria was first invaded.

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Suddenly, the Master's idea didn't seem as appealing as it had a few moments ago. Initially, he'd bribed Trixie by telling her she would be even more great and powerful and that she would have far more energy,

understand the whole of time and space, and accomplish the most fantastical things. Now, though, she was strapped to a table in the guard's break room. There were two unconscious Time Lords on the floor, a strange and quickly-crafted device, and belts affixing her legs to the cold metal table.

She wriggled and tried to worm her way off the table, too scared to think of using her magic.

"Now, this will only hurt for just a second," the Master cooed.

"I- Trixie does not wish to hurt-"

He glanced over his shoulder with his head cocked and a mad smile, "Oh, no, not you. You may lose a little sanity, but this shouldn't hurt at all." With that, he snapped one of the guard's necks and shoved the conical transmitter into the poor fellow's mouth. The guard began to regenerate with brilliant sparks and orange white flames. Before he could, the body fell to the floor and regeneration energy began flowing into the Master. "Mmm, yes, feels good." He cracked his neck.

Trixie watched in horror. "Wha- what are you doing?"

"Taking his lives. Cats can live forever if they steal the lives of other cats, you know," he grinned maniacally.

Before the process was over, he turned the cone on Trixie and adjusted some of the settings. The light took on a sickly, pale green aura and pulsed through her body. Before her eyes, the man withered away and turned to dust on the floor. As he did, the Master lasered the other guard and shoved the funnel into his mouth. Trixie's heart beat faster and faster and her pupils constricted. The energy was new and vibrant, but untamed and frightening. It threatened to burn away her personality, leaving only a shell.

The Master didn't let that happen, though. Instead, he was frantically adjusting the settings on his laser screwdriver and punching in a code on the funnel. She did not hear it beep. A hole opened in the pit of Trixie's stomach, a gaping maw of untold destructive force. In the next moment, it wobbled, stabilizing. She swallowed hard as the new energy fed into the pit in her stomach. Now, the energy circled around it, coming out new and

clean, feeding back in, and repeating the process. She was sweating and breathing heavily, but it seemed to be over.

“What did you do to me?” She asked weakly, not even bothering to refer to herself in the third person.

“Haven't you always wondered what it'd be like to be a TARDIS? We were so close to imbuing them with consciousness; I thought I'd try it with you. The dullards in the labs never had anything on me,” he simply smiled, setting down his tools. “Now, if you'll excuse me.” He suddenly started bouncing on the tips of his toes a bit and looked like he was preparing for a marathon. Then, he took his hands to his throat and twisted hard, crumpling to the floor. Energy started pouring out of him and he took on a new form. He stood up shakily, on all fours.

Finally recovering some, Trixie managed a snide chuckle. “The Time and Relative Dimensions in Space Trixie approves.” The light blue pony wondered where that name had come from, but was focused more on the blonde furred, blue-eyed, brown maned, goateed stallion in front of her. His cutie mark glowing as several green concentric circles of different shapes with other patterns in-between them took form on his flanks.

“Interesting,” was all he could manage.

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Things were not going how Queen Celestia had calculated. The white point star had done exactly none of what the simulations said it should. When she was finally about to give up, she decided to use the same magic she used on her sun. In desperation, she created a tiny flame within it and willed it to rise.

It hovered slightly, but began reaching across the cosmic void to some unknown location. Celestia left the object floating and teleported her entire sphere outside the massive array. Soon, the array began focusing energy on the white point star. A large orange and red planet began to phase in and out of view.

Gallifrey is coming.



The drumbeat that Celestia heard finally ended.

She did not notice two ponies in a bubble blast past every Borg defense in the quadrant. They were too fast and she was too focused. All her efforts were about to be rewarded. Everything she'd ever wanted. The Borg had given her new life. With her immortality and the whole of time and space, nopony would ever elude her grasp again.

As soon as it began, it was over.

A cacophony of questions from every Borg present drilled into Celestia's mind as the planet disappeared from view.

It had failed.

But, one frozen life sign remained. Instantly, her regal voice penetrated the barrage of questions and silenced a trillion Borg. Cubes descended on the point where the white point star had been. Drones swarmed in deep space, searching for its remains. In the span of a breath, the Borg found and teleported the frozen body, materializing in a green haze at her feet. A lone Time Lord. It was neither the planet nor their technology, but it would serve for now.

Celestia raised a hoof towards the frozen being and plunged a pair of tubules into its cracked neck.

The pinkish tint drained from its skin and it became grey as the body thawed. Drones rushed in with implants and hooked them into his flesh as the nanoprobes coursed through his bloodstream. His two hearts twitched and then slowly began to beat back into life and the Borg Collective pulsed with the new knowledge being assimilated.

With a burning will comparable only to Celestia's, the Time Lord rose and spoke to his Queen, "Behold, Rassillon, King of Borg."



# Episode 7

## Deals With a Devil

"You have entered Klingon territory without express permission of the empire, lower your shields," an old veteran with large forehead ridges spat venomously at Captain Starway over the communications channel.

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"We can't let this go, sir, we have to bring it up with the council," Captain Riker shook his head from the other side of the force field.

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"Ofillya!" the Doctor shouted to the grey mare, compelled by both script and concern.

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"I can't believe how insufferable this whole thing is," the Master ground his teeth.

"Trixie is thoroughly enjoying the process. You play a remarkable Clopdus, darling."

"Yes, my dear, but much like the Doctor, I'm well aware of how this particular play ends. It doesn't help that we can only speak to each other when we're offstage."

"And even then, Trixie can't move." She smiled to him, "If only you could."

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Even with the ability to toy with the gravitational constant of the universe, things rarely went according to plan. Putting all the pieces on the board was the simplest part. Getting the board to function in three dimensional space, that was a bit different, especially when several pieces could move

around in the fourth.

DisQord lurked in the shadows aboard Queen Celestia's flagship.

The Borg vessel had been traveling for days at high warp since it exited the trans-warp conduit. Even at such high speeds, the sphere was drifting almost lazily through the cosmos. It had only to get to its destination and then the fun could begin. DisQord only had to keep the other game pieces busy until Celestia was in position.

Admittedly, she had already done quite a lot. With Rassillon's knowledge and guidance, she had already sent one probe back in time and completed a rather vague prophecy by going back herself. It wasn't interfering with her own time line if there was no record of what had happened, it had happened, and it was already supposed to have happened. From her point of view, which was influenced by Rassillon's temporal perspective, there was nothing wrong with assimilating her sister and turning her into Nightmare Moon several years ago.

In fact, only DisQord knew why a temporal being might be afraid of interfering with time, but it flowed differently here than it did in the Time Lord's universe. There were no mythic monsters to attack intruders when something broke time. After all, malleable time was fun time.

Speaking of fun time, it was time to check in on some of the other contestants and make sure they were all playing fair, not that he was. DisQord slithered out from behind Celestia's throne and vanished in a small flash of light with a click of his talons. Even if the plan was in motion, that didn't mean it had already been started. Several key people and ponies needed a push in the right direction.

\*\*\*Several Years Earlier\*\*\*

It was a late night in the city. Very little of the city ever really closed. You could never be sure just when people were going to bed, or filming, for that matter. Neon signs lit up half the walkways and trees lined the sidewalks. Dusk would soon be giving way to a long night, but the oppressive clouds and heavy rain made it dark hours early.

In a shoddy corner of a basement bar near the lot, two men sat on stools

after work.

"Y-you know what, John?" He slurred to an old friend, his accent heavier with every drink. "I'd never tell them, the fans, I mean, but it might be kind of fun, just once. I bet you'd like it, too," he lightly punched his friend's shoulder and nearly fell off his seat in the process.

"It would certainly be a good time," John took a shot of tequila and shook his head violently to chase off the burn.

"Entertaining, at the very least," Patrick nodded solemnly.

John looked at his colleague and tried to judge just how many more drinks it would be before Patrick forgot the conversation, two, maybe three. Too many cast parties could build up a tolerance to liquor.

After another hour or so, the two paid their tabs and stumbled out of the bar, one feigning his missteps. "Patrick, would you like to be him someday? I'm sure we could work out a deal of some kind."

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Seeing the strands come together had been maddening. Then again, if you were mad before and mad after, what was to say you'd changed at all? Nothing really and of course that was all the more maddening.

Life had progressed in rather interesting stages.

Wake up, you're 8. Time to go see time.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

Lots of adventures.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

Fight the Doctor.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

Become Prime Minister, take over a backwater world, get banished, die.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

Come back to life.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

Eat-eat-eat-eat.

Try to take over the world again. Find the source of the tapping. End up in a physical prison in a temporal prison.

Tapping stops, go more insane.

By this point, there was so much insanity coursing through the Master's body, it was probably hidden within each and every one of his cells like a squiggly strand of misplaced DNA. So, when nonsense people and pastel ponies had begun talking to him, it wasn't out of the ordinary at all. In fact, it had been tame compared to some of his delusions, or memories; he could never be sure which.

Then a delusion offered him something he wanted with all his hearts and soul, a relief from boredom.

~~~

This was by far the strangest thing that had happened since Luna returned.

Celestia stood in front of herself. Not a reflection, though she wished it were. With the Doctor's help, she and Luna had vanquished enemy after enemy from the stars. This time, she was locked horn to horn with herself. It was a grim reflection of the qualities she despised and it even had a sickly tint to its coat. A psychologist pony would certainly have a field day with this one, she smirked. A millennium of boring days and now you could hardly sit down for tea without being interrupted by a catastrophe.

Celestia flew straight towards Celestia and shot out mechanical tendrils from her front legs. Celestia countered with eldritch bolts of arcane energy. The Princess' cruel reflection dodged in the Castle's gardens, weaving in-between hedges, trees, and statues. The ground shook and cracked as the

two did battle.

Twilight Sparkle and her friends were beginning preparations for a counter-offensive elsewhere and her sister had taken to the skies to search for the ship the cyborg had cryptically referred to. Princess Celestia was thankful to be surrounded by so many capable ponies. Without them, there would be a lot more innocent lives at risk, much more collateral damage.

The greyish-green mare snapped Celestia from her thoughts as she pinned the alicorn on the ground, a hoof pressing down on her throat. From behind a tree, Celestia could hear slow clapping. She struggled to see where it was coming from, but coughed as the hoof on her throat pressed down harder.

A single claw gingerly traced its way from her cheek to her snout and tapped playfully on it. "Now, now my dear, you didn't think you'd be rid of me for long, did you?"

"Discord," she spat venomously. "Is-" \*hack\* "Is this one of your tricks?"

"Oh far from it. How dull would that be? Well, I suppose I do have a talon in-" he paused for a moment, "Maybe more than that, but I think I'll let you take it from here, just for now." He winked at her and backed off.

The other her spoke coldly, "We are Celestia, Queen of Borg. We have seen perfection and vowed to spread friendship throughout the cosmos and across time."

"I- I don't understand," Celestia rasped.

"Allow me," DisQord stroked Queen Celestia's pale pink mane with the back of his paw. "You see, she and I, well you and I in a few minutes, have a deal, as do a lot of other people." He didn't pause long enough for Celestia to ask what people were. "A long time ago in a universe far away, there was a man named Gene Roddenberry. In that same universe lived a woman named Lauren Faust-" He caught himself. "That reveals too much too early, I'm afraid. Suffice it to say it was an incredibly dull place to live. Positively, obscenely dull. So dull in fact that the principle form of entertainment is telling stories. I mean, nopony even goes to the stars. For a being like me," he paused to file his claws with a lobster pulled from

behind his back, "it's an eternity of torture. Far worse than being a statue here." He tossed the lobster away which obediently turned into a bucket of flaming toast upon reaching the ground.

"Wh-why?" Celestia tried to get out.

"Why am I here? I'm here to offer you a deal. There's a rather dangerous rip in the space time continuum right now and it puts your little Equestria in a far worse place than you'd like it to be. Ponies parading about naked with no armor – metal or mental – never wise to how dangerous the universe really is. Wouldn't you like them to keep living?"

The other Celestia allowed the Princess to struggle to her feet. Dizzy little multicolored dots clouded her vision, but at least she was free to breathe. Even though she was a bit further from dying right now, she got the distinct impression she was being threatened. As this thought came to her, she felt a cold pressure in the back of her neck. A pair of tubules speared through her alabaster hide and into the blood vessels beneath, flooding her body with nanoprobes.

Celestia's magic was powerful, maybe even strong enough to fight the nanoprobes. The queen had no need to be present anymore, though, and stepped a few hooves back. When she had enough room, the cyborg queen's horn began to glow, giving just the slightest hint of life back to her mane and activating a transponder in her implants. She slowly faded from view in a way that reminded Celestia quite a lot of the Doctor's TARDIS.

"Here's the deal, little Celly," Discord used a pet name that only he and Luna remembered, "I'm bored and I want to leave Equestria for good, but you're just too much fun. If you-" he began to whisper in her ear.

The thought made her sick, sicker than the alien machines as they drained her magical reserves, but it might be the only way. It was worth it. She believed in her little ponies; she had to. Protecting them was worth any cost. The good of the many outweighed the needs of the few.

"Wh-what if you win?" she stammered quietly.

DisQord only offered a sly smile.

~~~

Following the instructions she'd been given, Celestia did her best to fly towards Ponyville. No pony seemed to notice the Sun was going down too early, they'd all just ended their work day a little faster than usual. One mare had yet to finish her sworn duty and was still out taking packages and postage to their appointed destinations.

Celestia landed outside the mare's house and hacked up a couple of strange devices made of the same dark metal that covered her nightmarish counterpart. They looked like brittle stars with far too many legs. Grimacing, she crushed them underhoof and weakly knocked on the colorful door. A little unicorn answered and became ecstatic when she realized the Princess was at her house. The little filly turned in circles without noticing the Princess' pupils grow and her expression deaden. Gone was the pain and nausea that had wracked her body moments before. Implants burst through her skin. Celestia's horn glowed a pastel green as it ripped metals from surrounding houses and manufactured a laser-targeting system which slotted into an implant over her left eye. Her wings became more machine than pony and the siren song of the Collective pulsed in her mind.

Ditzy Doo was just arriving home, happy to finally be done and to get the chance to spend a bit of time with her little muffin. She hummed happily to herself as she approached her home, but noticed several lights on and the door swinging back and forth in a gentle breeze. Looking up to the sky, Ditzy saw an excited filly riding on the back of an incredibly large pegasus. For a moment, her heart skipped a beat, no pony was supposed to see Dinky today. Certainly no pony was supposed to fly off with her.

The grey mailmare shook the sleepiness from her body and readied herself to take flight. She gave chase as fast as she possibly could. Tears flying back into her blonde mane, Ditzy flew as fast as she could, quickly passing even the tallest clouds. The giant pegasus was so far ahead, though. It was fast, but Ditzy was faster; she was no Rainbow Dash, but years of hauling heavy packages through the sky on a tight schedule had made her one of the strongest fliers in Equestria, enough that she could ignore the lack of oxygen and the ice crystals forming on her coat. As she began to close the gap, there was a sickly green flash and the pegasus – no the alicorn gained an impossible burst of speed and flew straight out of the atmosphere towards the dark side of the moon. That was the last thing Ditzy could



remember before she lost consciousness.

\*\*\*A Few Hours Ago\*\*\*

The poor grey mailmare was far from home, far from her daughter, and not feeling like a terribly clever pony. Since her exeunt from the stage, the Doctor had no way of knowing that she was not, in fact, dead. Ofillya was supposed to die and DisQord hadn't given them a choice. They could only talk to each other when neither was onstage.

Now, Ditzzy was waiting in the TARDIS with far too much time to think. She'd seen the Doctor operate the time machine before and wondered if she could, too. In fact, it seemed like he didn't actually know which levers did what, so she occasionally corrected the course for him when he wasn't paying much attention.

Outside the box was a country called London, or maybe Denmark, but the TARDIS kept displaying them somewhere in space traveling very fast. Ditzzy blew a few strands of straw-colored mane out of her eyes as she focused on the displays. Something felt off, wrong. The past few moments, it had been very hard to walk straight.

Her legs kept going in straight lines under her rather than bowing out like they usually did. Even the TARDIS seemed to have more straight lines. Everything sounded right, or as right as anything did these days. The metallic tang in the air smelled right, she noted. Her hooves made the right clicking on the floor. What was it?

She huffed, upset to have to leave this mystery unsolved, but there were more pressing concerns. Something unusual was going on and maybe the TARDIS could tell her what it was if she asked nicely enough.

She stumbled over to the central pillar of the room, thinking the last time she'd see the world this straight, she'd had far too much cider at one of Pinkie Pie's parties. Pinkie Pie. Equestria. Dink- She shook her head. No, she had to stay focused. There was at least one stallion in danger right now, maybe more. Without him...

Again, she shook the dizziness away. Her head swam, but she did her best to bring up the interface that allowed her to speak directly to the TARDIS.



The image of a hairless female monkey appeared behind her. It had on an elegant blue dress.

"Hello, Se- Oh, it's just you," the holographic woman frowned.

"He hasn't figured out how to call you yet," Ditzzy shook her head.

"You seem different," the TARDIS noted.

"Something's wrong." The mailmare shifted her wings uncomfortably as she tried to trace the source of the wrong feeling. Her eyes grew wide as comprehension dawned on her. "My voice, my- my eyes," she cried happily. "I can see clearly, I- I can talk to ponies," Ditzzy croaked.

"I've had the sensors on you since the Doctor asked," the TARDIS said quickly. "You're nearing an extremely important event that ripples across time, possibly even across dimensional boundaries."

The TARDIS' nonsense seemed to be even less coherent than usual. Normally, Ditzzy would have understood exactly what it meant. They spent a lot of late nights talking while the Doctor slept. Sleep only brought the pain of things she couldn't quite remember, so it was only when exhaustion overtook her that the little mare found sleep.

In this moment, Ditzzy was too happy to think about anything else. She could go home now, she could see her little daughter. They could live a normal life together. Ponies would stop making fun of her and Dinky would have a normal mommy. Maybe they could even go on a few adventures with the Doctor. Oh what fun they would have. A smile broke across Ditzzy's face as she closed her eyes tight and imagined the life she'd always wanted, now finally within reach.

Then, an atomic rainboom hit her psyche. Everything that had been repressed came back to her. The loss of her daughter, the play DisQord had trapped the Doctor in, the events of the next few moments. It flooded her consciousness. Tears streamed down her face for the daughter she had just lost a second time. She would have cried for herself for what she was about to do, but her little muffin mattered more than anything else.

"Take me there," she growled at the TARDIS.

The TARDIS escaped wherever it had been before and rematerialized on another side of the universe. It was, in fact, a bridge that connected many universes. The grey mailmare knew what even the Time Lords did not.

Being so close to this pivotal point in her reality, her eyes and brain had fixed themselves. Here she was at the most important point in her own personal history, and she had the chance to change everything. Resolve steeled by the loss of her filly, Ditzzy bucked open the doors and stared directly into the untempered schism, a break in the walls of the multiverse. As her eyes crossed and the network of neurons in her brain rearranged itself, she grinned wildly, knowing how difficult life would be for her past self. At least this way, there was a chance to save Dinky.

As soon as it was done, she trotted back into the center console and began inputting the coordinates of the Enterprise. Specifically, she calculated for a vessel traveling at Warp 9 with an out-of-control, Q-locked holodeck. Like he could stop her, she giggled. The TARDIS lady folded her arms with a satisfied grin on her face and disappeared, closing the doors as Ditzzy furiously hammered out thousands of lines of code with her hooves.

~~~

As the shuttle craft neared the Enterprise, Patrick Stewart reflected on just how he'd ended up here. A long night of studying personal logs and history textbooks gave him something to go on for the future, but what about the past? He'd always liked John and never said anything bad about him. In fact, they'd gone out for drinks more than once. Nothing was making any sense these days, though it wouldn't surprise him if he woke up in an asylum with somebody trying to convince him he'd never been an actor and there was no Enterprise or even Star Trek.

While the conventions were occasionally difficult, Star Trek was one of the best times of his life. He loved teaching and being in productions of Shakespeare, but there was something to be said for being Captain Jean-Luc Picard and working with so many talented actors. Only here, they weren't actors, he reminded himself.

In just a few minutes, he would be meeting the current captain and trying to convince them that there was a dire need to get to Vulcan to meet up with

the Titan. While the ship had teleporters, he'd elected to take the scenic route as he told the ensign. In reality, he just wasn't sure he was ready to be scattered into billions of atoms. Besides, this gave him the chance to think.

The craft landed without incident and Patrick stood up and straightened his uniform. After putting on a clean uniform and getting a shave, he was far less uncomfortable than he'd been yesterday. He was also getting more accustomed to being Jean-Luc again. Patrick stepped out of the shuttle to a cargo bay with nearly the entire ship's staff lined in rows, leading to the captain.

"Data," he rolled his eyes as the android strode towards him.

"Actually, sir, B4. Though if you would prefer, you may call me Data. Since I graduated from the Academy, even more of his memories have begun to resurface. Naturally, once I reached a certain point, the Federation reinstated my rank. Because I have created very few memories of my own, you might say that I am more Data than before."

"A terrible pun," he smiled, "and you know I hate all this pomp and circumstance."

"Tradition, sir. Shall we head to my ready room?"

"Please." Patrick kept his tone calm, but his eyes pleaded to be away from the watchful gaze of all these young officers. He wondered whether Data would make getting to Riker easier or harder.

A few minutes later, they were in Captain Data's ready room. As it turned out, Data had actually chosen to resume his previous life without exploring who he had been as B4. Patrick listened as closely as he could while trying not to be shocked at the massive amount of new technology around him. He was grateful that the android was the Data he'd acted with and not some new iteration. At least he could speak plainly.

"Data, I need to talk to you. If I give you an order, right now, what would allow you to break it?" Patrick asked cautiously.

After all these years, the android was still trying to emulate human

behavior. He looked up at the ceiling and swiveled a bit in his chair, tapping a finger on the desk in a precise rhythm. "I suppose, Admiral, you would need to be retroactively removed from duty, with all permissions of command revoked."

"And if that were to happen, but I was acting to save not only my life, but the lives of many others, in the Federation and elsewhere, could I count on you?"

Data's lips pursed for a moment while he calculated. "Sir, I believe that our prior history shows you to be a good friend. I will try to do the same, if you will excuse the language, orders be damned."

Patrick sighed happily and let his shoulders drop a little. "Good, because we have somewhere to be. We need to get to the Titan, they're going to meet us at Vulcan. Time is of the essence, Captain Data."

Data pressed a button on his desk and addressed the bridge. He spoke quickly to an ensign at the helm and told them to set coordinates for Vulcan at Warp 9. Data closed the com looked back to Admiral Picard, "What is your order, sir?"

"I have to order you not to divulge anything I'm about to tell you. I need your advice, Data. There is something very wrong going on and I think it may be even more dangerous than it seems." The actor tried to stay in character for the last precious few moments.

"Go on," Data said patiently.

Relieved, Patrick finally broke character. "Data, I need you to believe me, I'm not from this universe. I'm not even Captain Picard. On my world, the Enterprise is part of a television drama. I'm an actor who played the role of Jean-Luc Picard. I don't know how I got here, other than it involves Q somehow. Beyond that, the Borg are coming for us and I'm supposed to be the Federation's expert on them and a seasoned starship Captain."

"And-"

"I'm not done yet. I'm not sure how, but something is wrong with the barriers between worlds. I don't know where Captain Picard is, but he isn't

here and we need him. We need to figure out what Q wants and we need to stop the Borg. Do you believe me?"

"I have been analyzing your speech patterns since you came on-board and taking scans of your facial tics and pulse, you are telling the truth."

"And do you believe I've lost my mind?" Patrick asked expectantly.

"There is a great deal we do not yet understand about this universe and my most recent time at Starfleet focused heavily on temporal mechanics after Admiral Janeway's logs were released. I do believe you and, if what you say is true, we do indeed need to find Captain Riker."

Patrick clapped his hands together and smiled. "Thank you, Data. You are truly a friend, in this and any other universe."

"In the interest of keeping up appearances," Data offered, "It may be prudent to feed you ideas and have you give orders occasionally."

"Very true, in the meantime, however, I think I might like to go see a play."

"The holodeck awaits, what shall I call you?"

"Patrick, Sir Patrick Stewart."

"The holodeck awaits, Sir." Data smiled.

~~~

"You told me there was a cliff face where the gods left their final message to creation," the Master glowered.

"Actually, Colty, Trixie said Goddesses and she never promised it was worth seeing," Trixie smiled and playfully batted at his mane.

After quite a few adventures here and there, the Master had managed to convince Trixie to give up her hat and cape, settling for a rather stylish ring around her horn into which he had set sun sapphires and carved with Time Lord designs resembling a TARDIS schematic. Their most recent destination had been quite a disappointment. As it turned out, it wasn't

even a message about friendship. Hundreds of years before the present moment, Luna had found a remote corner on the dark side of Equestria's moon to carve:

To All Ye Who Would Come Here

We Leave a Final Message for Our Children

The Only Question That Matters:

Why?

as it is, Neither Good nor Evil,

"Either way, we've come up here and you see she was telling the truth, batty as your princess was," the Master stuck out his tongue and twirled his hoof in circles near his temple.

Trixie just smiled. "Then where would you have us go, dearheart?"

"Somewhere interesting, somewhere with other life-forms, somewhere random, somewhere," he paused as a grin went from ear to ear, "fun."

"Oh, Trixie can do random, let's find the most improbable place we can possibly be!"

"That's more like it! Now! Where do you want to go?"

The Master came closer to Trixie as she began to glow. Her coat stood on end, her mane pulsed with magical energy, and her eyes went to pinpricks. Slowly, a gold mist flowed from her body, engulfing the two ponies as she hummed a slow melody.

~~~

"MELODY!" Captain Starway shouted, "Get those cloaks up, filly!"

Melody wormed her way into the apparatus, fiddling with wires and trying to hook her hooves into the array. Lieutenant Callahan had not remembered

to clear passage into Klingon space as Spock had recommended days before. Instead of a party, the Alicorn's first warp jump in weeks was met with heavy disruptor fire.

Moonbuck growled under her breath, "We really can't catch a break out here, can we?"

Starway clearly heard her as she shot the younger mare a disapproving glance.

"Captain," Spock began.

"Cloak's up!" Melody heaved a sigh of relief.

"May I suggest-"

"Buck it!" Starway shouted the order to Engineering.

"We slow down-"

"H-heading, Captain?" Callahan squeaked.

"And explain to the Klingons-"

"Anywhere!"

With that, the Alicorn showed the approaching Bird of Prey just what the fusion of science and magic could accomplish. The Harmony's old warp drive hummed and rang, but created a perfectly stable bubble of contracted space at the head of the vessel and expanding space behind it. At the same time, a spell based on pegasus flight was fed into the rear engine coils and the ship created an enormous, rainbow-colored trail of propellant behind it, magnified in strength by the aft warp fields. While the sensors almost immediately lost track of the Klingon ship, it was hard to believe they survived the initial burst ring the engines fired off.

~~~

Patrick decided not to interrupt whoever had started the holodeck program. Instead of finding another room - the Enterprise had to have more than



one, right? - He chose to join the production already in progress. It was the greatest thing he'd ever seen; a fully functional replica of the Globe. The only inaccurate detail were the numerous alien species wandering around old London. He could even get mutton on a stick. Well, maybe not everything was accurate.

Still, the majesty of it all left him awestruck. After he'd had time to adjust to the sights, sounds, and unfortunately, smells of old London, he found some free standing room near the stage. Hamlet, or rather, Hooflet was already several scenes into the final act. Patrick didn't recall there being horses in Star Trek, but he didn't know everything about this universe.

Wait.

Horses?

Hamlet looked awfully familiar.

"Shite," Patrick whispered to himself. Several of the presumably holographic patrons shushed him.

The brown colt playing the titular character was none other than the Doctor and he didn't look like he was having fun, here. In fact, Laertes seemed to actually have nicked his flank with the foil in his mouth. While a grin was plastered on King Clodius' face, his eyes told a very different story. There were no wrinkles around the eyes, a sign no true actor would forget, and the pupils were dilated in panic. The Queen, who should have been cheering on her son, regarded the colt with a rather snide expression.

"I dare not drink yet, madam, by and by," the Doctor bowed.

"Come, let the Gre-," She tried to get out, "me wipe thy face," Trixie forced out with a strange expression.

Oh, no, Patrick thought. This can't be good. He wandered to the back of the theater and quietly addressed the computer. "Computer, are the safety protocols engaged?"

"Saftey protocols are disengaged," the computer responded.



"Computer, please turn the safety protocols back on."

"Oh, now what fun would that be?" A voice came from behind him.

"Q," Patrick said through clenched teeth. "What do you want from us?" He said as he turned to face the deity.

DisQord was wearing a pair of purple pantaloons, frilly white shirt, and ridiculous black hat with a red feather. "That's not part of the game, Jean-Luc, or should I call you Patrick? I suppose I should," he mused. "Either way, it's all a game, it's always been a game, just like everything else in this dreadfully dull life. I'm just trying to liven things up a bit."

"For who? You?"

"Well, of course. I'm not altruistic, Patrick. Still, there's no game unless there's more than one player." He smirked and then disappeared, leaving Jean-Luc to watch as the Doctor shoved his foil into a brown earth pony with a blonde beard.

"Medical, get to the holodeck immediately!" Patrick shouted to the computer.

"Treason, treason!!" The audience shouted as Patrick pushed through the crowd.

"O, yet defend me, friends," the Master cried onstage. "I am but hurt," he whimpered to the audience.

That brown earth pony was beginning to really look sick. The Doctor's hooves were dragging as he forced himself closer and closer to the Master. He almost looked like he was trying to- to save him. His eyes told a different story than the script, "Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane, drink off this potion. Is thy union here? Follow my mother!" He spat.

Beverly rushed in the door and saw Patrick. She looked shocked and a little worried.

"What's wrong, Jean-Luc? Why are you here? Wha-"

"We don't have time," he commanded. "I'll explain later, right now, there're patients who need your help. Onstage, I don't think they're here on purpose and the safeties have been deactivated." He looked at her for a moment. "It's Hamlet," he pressed, "the play's almost over. They're poisoning each other."

As Doctor Crusher rushed towards the stage, a light began to fade into view. Once it became completely solid, it started pulsing with a gentle light. The door opened and a goofy looking grey pegasus poked her head out of the door, smiling and munching on a muffin. She clapped her hooves together and the TARDIS sent out a shock wave that completely fried the holodeck's optronic matrix and emitter array.

Doctor Crusher examined the Doctor and the other two poisoned ponies. They seemed to be no worse for wear. She breathed a sigh of relief and glanced back at the Admiral with a look that said: we're talking, now. Although two of the ponies had two hearts and were giving bizarre readings on the tricorder, Beverly was satisfied and grabbed Admiral Picard by the arm and dragged him out into the hallway.

~~~

"I never thought I'd be so glad to be naked," the Master let out a heavy sigh.

"Who are you, now," the Doctor demanded.

"Noticed my flank mark? I'm touched, maybe we should go out for a drink first, though Trixie might mind," the Master grinned.

"You escaped-"

"The time lock, yes, and now I'm a horse."

"Pony."

"If you say so."

Trixie had decided to remain completely quiet, content to watch the boys bicker. The Doctor safe, Ditzzy just sat happily and polished off another few

trays of muffins. Where they went, or for that matter came from, nopony could say.

"Do you realize just what those runes say?" the Doctor pressed.

"Of course I do, I'm a Time Lord. Horse. Time Horse. Or perhaps, Equine Lord."

"Ooo! Trixie would also like to be called a Time Horse," the mare chimed in, "It sounds mysterious and powerful."

"Of course, dearheart, it's more accurate for you, anyhow," the Master smiled coyly. Turning his attention back to the Doctor, "Listen, pull that chip off your shoulders and that stick out of your rump. You steal mares from all over time and space as you gallop away from your problems. We stopped Rassillon together, doesn't that count for something? We're not that different, are we? We both did those things, we both served in the Time War, fought an army of Nightmares and Never Weres, we killed the Could've Been King together. Honestly, we even choose screwdrivers over guns."

"Villainous monologues always were your specialty," the brown colt scowled.

"Hardly," the Master rolled his eyes and snorted.

"Looking to turn over a new leaf with your new hooves?" the Doctor hissed.

The Master actually laughed at this. "My dear Doctor, when will you learn that not everypony out there is your enemy? Maybe if you stopped galloping, you could actually take the time to make some friends." Ditzzy stopped eating for a moment, almost looking hurt. Even Trixie seemed to know this may have gone a bit too far.

The Doctor took a step back and looked at his hooves. "So, then... What now?" He murmured without looking up.

The Master came over and put a leg around his shoulder, lifting his chin to look at Trixie and Ditzzy. "We're a couple of strapping young lads with fast cars and beautiful women. Let's race," he grinned slyly.

"We did just survive a deadly play on a mysterious star ship in a universe that isn't ours, didn't we?" he began smiling, too. "I'm game. The terms? Oh- but I get-"

Before he could finish, the poison hit his second heart. Something about the shock wave seemed to have cured the other two, but the Doctor had been too close to the blast. His mane shivered and his tail twitched. He began to glow from every limb. He collapsed to the ground and shot jets of brilliant orange light out of every hoof. Ditzzy rushed towards him, but the Master held her back. Trixie just looked on in awe. After a few moments, she produced a quill and paper from her mane and started jotting down notes.

As the transformation ended, he stood up. He brought his hooves to his muzzle, "Augh! I'm a horse!" He shouted in a younger voice. "Wait, no," he looked into the distance for half a beat, "it was like that before. Right," he pawed at his mane for a moment and snorted. "Still. Not! GINGER! Why? Why is that so much to ask? I love being ginger, it's all I really want out of a regeneration, is that so much to ask? Can be turned into a horse, twice, can't be a ginger, no. Pears!" He looked at Ditzzy with an incredibly serious expression, "Yes, I believe I still hate pears. Hmm," he turned around to get a look at his flank, "Cutie mark's still the same, WHOA!" He smiled as he got sight of his new set of appendages, wings. Calming down and regaining his composure, the Doctor extended his wings, and shook out his fur. "As I was saying, I'll be needing a bow-tie."

Ditzzy just shook her head, it was always something. First the jackets, then the fez, now a bow-tie. At least he was happy, she thought happily to herself. He could wait a little longer to be told what was about to happen.

~~~

The orange light coming from the holodeck worried Patrick as he and Doctor Crusher ran back into the room. He knew from a couple of episodes what that meant, but there was no way she did. She looked lost.

He put a hand on her shoulder, "It will be over in a minute. He'll be fine," Patrick assured her.

"How do you know? What's going on, Jean-Luc?"

"Beverly, there's something we need to talk about. I've already told Data and I think those two," he pointed at the Doctor and Ditzzy Doo, "are very important. We shouldn't let them get away."

"Get- away? Where would they go?!"

He let out a low chuckle, "You'd be surprised."

"Doctor," he said as they walked up to the now-standing pegasus. "I'd like to introduce you to the Doctor."

"Doctor who?" Beverly frowned.

"Precisely!" Ditzzy beamed.

"He never gets tired of that," the Master shook his head.

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After about twenty minutes of explanation, Doctor Crusher understood who the Doctor and Ditzzy were, where Patrick came from, and what seemed to be happening. Even Trixie and the Master had stayed to tell their story. All in all, Beverly seemed to be taking it well. Well, until she fainted.

Patrick turned to the Doctor, "Is she going to be all right?"

"With enough time," the colt smiled.

"Speaking of which, have you had enough time to find out what's going on?" Patrick queried.

"Not yet," the Doctor admitted, "but I think we're getting closer. Seems like-

"A game of chess?" Data asked as he stepped onto the black and yellow grid of the holodeck.

Ditzzy's eyes lit up as she rushed over to him and sat on her haunches.

"Chemical in one, positronic in the other. Two machines, equally complex,

one acting, the other imitating." Her wings seemed to flutter in excitement. She turned to the Doctor, "Positronic unlocks the gate of knowledge, Valhalla rising, twist the cube so all the colors align!"

"Fascinating," Captain Data offered. He looked to the Doctor, "If I may, I believe she is saying that in one universe, I'm an actor, while here, I act to be more human through imitation. Intriguing."

"Data," Patrick looked into his yellow eyes. "Why are you here?"

"Doctor Crusher failed to report on the status of her patients and the nature of the emergency on the holodeck. I came to be sure everything was running smoothly. I can see it is not."

"Nanomachines acting as an emissary for an emissary where the stolen muffin lies." Ditzzy interrupted, clearly with something very important to say. She flailed her hooves in wild gestures, trying to explain better. "A match of go stops the flow, to end, we must know."

Even the Doctor looked puzzled by this, but Data's mind was fast. It dawned on him. "The Borg have assimilated someone close to you as well as your leader, acting on behalf of another to play out a- Q."

"Q!" Ditzzy twirled in circles with a smile on her face.

"Data," Patrick marveled, "How did you do that?"

"Darmok and Jalad, at Tenagra," Data grinned warmly.

Patrick just shook his head and laughed.

~~~

"Why is every bucking pony out here trying to bucking kill us?!" Starway screamed as the Alicorn dropped out of warp near Qo'noS, the Klingon homeworld.

"Captain Starway," Spock growled sternly, "I must insist that you trust my judgment in this matter."

Moonbuck looked relieved as Starway sighed and let her shoulders drop in defeat. "What do we do?"

"Hail them," was his only response as he tried to regain his composure.

"You have entered Klingon territory without express permission of the empire, lower your shields," an old veteran with large forehead ridges spat venomously at Captain Starway over the communications channel.

Spock opened his eyes and put a hand on Starway's shoulder, "General Martok, a pleasure to see your rank has been reinstated."

"Spock," he raised the eyebrow above his one good eye.

"I take it Chancellor Worf has been doing well," Spock smiled.

"What is your business within the Empire, Vulcan?" Martok licked his teeth. "Especially without proper clearance."

"A mission of the utmost importance to the Federation, and with a bit of news for the Empire. These young ponies have stumbled across Sto 'Vo 'Kor." Spock's lips almost twitched towards a smile.

More than a few of the bridge crew on the Klingon ship burst into laughter. Martok turned and shouted, "Silence! I will have order on my ship! This is not a pleasure cruise, you petaQs!"

"This could be going better," Moonbuck whispered to Starway.

"Transmit the coordinates and prepare to receive us. That puny ship is no threat to the Empire, though it remains to be seen just how important your mission is. Perhaps the High Council would also like to take action."

~~~

The meeting had not gone as planned. Data was willing to believe just about anything and Beverly had simply fainted. Unfortunately, Captain Riker was even more bound by duty than a programmed android. He had insisted on throwing Patrick in the brig.

"We can't let this go, sir, we have to bring it up with the council," Captain Riker shook his head from the other side of the force field.

"Will, will you just listen to me? Something is very wrong and you're going to need my help!" The older man argued.

"Sir- Patrick, you impersonated a Starfleet officer, an admiral, and you used his privileges to get in a room alone with me and saw technology that violates the Prime Directive. If the Federation still had capital punishment," Riker ran a hand through his beard.

"Will, this is bigger than all that! You've got to listen to me." This wasn't working.

Lucky for him, it didn't have to. Deanna Troi, the ship's counselor, Captain Riker's wife, and resident telepath, stepped in the room. "If you let me talk to him, Will, I can determine whether or not he's mentally stable."

"What do you mean," he rubbed his forehead.

"Well, no matter what the truth is, he believes what he's already told us. We can only assume Admiral Picard is in his universe."

Data was standing in the corner, awkwardly leaning against the doorway with his arms crossed, "Stranger things have happened."

\*\*\*Several Years Ago\*\*\*

"So- so here's my idea-" John began, arm around Patrick and stuttering as though he were actually drunk. "Here's the game. I talk to somebody and we- we make a, a thing happen." He faked a giggle, "Th-then, we make you Captain Picard! You can even fight the Borg!"

"B-bu- wai, wai, wait." Patrick chuckled. "What's the c- \*hiccup\* catch?"

"O-oh," John pouted for a second. "Got it! It'll be like Milton's Paradise Lost, we'll make a deal. Y-you be-believe in the best of humanity, right?"

Patrick nodded sagely.



"Okay, so, once we do the thing, there's a rip in space-time. You get to be Picard. Then, you can fight against the Borg! If you can prove our nature is good enough, then, Q will close it for you, sound good?"

~~~

"So, little Celestia," DisQord whispered into her ear, "Here's the deal: You give up everything, become far worse than your sister and torture everypony in existence. If you and Patrick win the bet, then, and only then, I'll fix it all. Not only that, I'll let anypony stay in whichever universe they prefer and you'll go into a pocket universe where only friendly creatures exist. No wars, no famine, plenty of love and friendship."

"Wh-what if you win?" she stammered quietly.

DisQord only offered a sly smile, "I'm already getting what I want, little Celly; entertainment. But it takes a lot of energy to fix the problem. I need time to build it up and I'm oh so whimsical. I need convincing that you pathetic little life-forms are worth my effort." He winked at her and then he was gone.

# Episode 8

## Staring Contest With The Moon

"Additionally," Martok continued from across the table, "after our last encounter, Outpost 3 managed to recover your derelict vessel." For some reason, Starway felt more comfortable dealing with the Klingons than anypony else in this quadrant of the galaxy. They seemed honest, if nothing else. "So, at the moment, I believe you are somewhat indebted to the Empire. The Klingon High Council will want to speak to you."

"Fine," the mare snorted, "though I see things differently. We've brought you reports on the Borg and priceless cultural heirlooms. Spock, are we in any danger here?"

"No more than you were leaving your home world or traveling here, Captain, but, to assuage your fears, I believe the Alicorn and your crew are safe, for the moment."

The old General pulled out a bottle from the bag at his side. It was grey and covered in strange markings. "This may not be an alliance, Captain," Martok addressed Starway, "but it is progress. You should be prepared to share your findings on your so-called Sto 'Vo 'Kor and," he gestured to the bottle, "to be aware of certain cultural expectations. Would you care to sample bloodwine?"

Spock and Moonbuck eyed the bottle warily.

Sky Dancer looked confused.

Starway shrugged and went to retrieve glasses.

Zabe only grinned.

~ ~ ~

Luna drifted in and out of consciousness. She'd done her best to force her

hooves to the deck, but most of her didn't agree with that decision. Her brain kept shouting It's time to get up, there are things to do, but her body would respond with the warm pleasure of sleeping in. In time, her brain began to believe this was a fine idea and simply gave up on getting up for the time being.

Slowly, the world whirled away and was replaced with memories and dreams.

~ ~ ~

Council meetings.

Luna abhorred council meetings.

In fact, she had occasionally acted somewhat immaturely to get out of them. Once, she'd pretended to speak to her abacus until the Economic Council had slowly backed out of the room. Another time, she'd conducted the entire meeting in the Royal Canterlot Voice. It hadn't lasted long; the ponies made their arguments quickly and effectively and that was that. It was a wonder she didn't do that more often.

Still, Celestia had tried to give her more say in the government. Luna had been gone a thousand years and had drifted out of the memories of the common ponies. Few knew the good she'd done in the early days of the Equestrian government. No pony knew her role in the first DisQord incident. Or the Griffin Tribal Disputes. Or the Draconic Cleansings. Statesmare or not, Luna did have a talent for politics. Still, all anypony seemed to know of her was the part she played in the old Mare in the Moon legend and the Nightmare moon follies now a few short years distant. In time, though, all would know her as the leader she once was; a true equal to her sister..

You really ought to get out of the library. Luna scoffed at her elder sister's playfully nagging voice.

The longer Luna had been back, the more responsibilities she seemed to accrue. Worse, was the ever-growing collection of assorted sycophants and hangers-on she had amassed as ponies got to know her. Some of these insufferable nobles and politicians could put up with anything. Buck the stallion or mare that invented fillybustering.

Luna blew her mane out of her eyes. As it lazily listed away, she looked down, trying to get a handle on the daily docket.

Sunset, raise the moon, then meet with the Internal Cabinet.

Midnight, first meeting with the newly-formed Equestrian Stellar Alliance.

Dawn, technological progress meeting with Twilight Sparkle.

On the plus side, she thought to herself, pursing her lips, there are all sorts of ways things could go wrong without my intervention. And at least Twilight and her friends are tolerable. Plus, things have been easier since we've seen neither hide nor hair of the Daleks, Cybermen, or any other outrageous creature for the past few months.

As she sat on the overly lavish, dusk-colored bed in her chamber, Luna cast a wistful look out the window to the setting sun. It may have been the only star in the sky during the day, but there didn't need to be any others.

Still, I have always preferred impressionism, she thought as she willed the first tiny dots into the sky. As the stars winked into being, Luna felt a sudden urge to join them. Fly off and wander through the stars. How she longed to leave her meetings behind and be free.

~ ~ ~

An hour later, her head was screaming as she tried to keep the dragons from eating the griffins, the griffins from clawing the ponies, and the ponies from bucking the dragons back to the Sierra Tantalus Mountains. The chamber was more than big enough to accommodate some rather claustrophobic griffins and titanic dragons, but Luna was beginning to think there was no space in the cosmos big enough to hold their egos.

The ponies and zebras were currently doing all of the work.

The griffins were demanding immediate access to all research without collaboration.

The dragons refused to assist the Alliance without a guaranteed

percentage of any colonized planets or looted technology.

A single buffalo sat silently in protest, making it known his race had no interest in any species leaving the planet.

The din was rising to intolerable levels.

Luna's head throbbed.

She could hear the blood rushing in her ears.

She ground her teeth together.

"ENOUGH!" She boomed. "WE HAVE HAD QUITE ENOUGH OF ALL THIS. IT IS BY OUR WILL THAT THIS ALLIANCE WAS FORMED. OUR SWEAT AND OUR BODIES HAVE BEEN SACRIFICED TIME AND TIME AGAIN FOR THE SAKE OF ALL YOUR LANDS. GRAVE THREATS APPROACH OUR HOME AND BICKERING LIKE SCHOOL FILLIES WILL NOT SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS."

Everypony sat stunned for a moment. Good, let them, she smiled. Even the dragon envoys didn't seem too keen on speaking at this particular moment. She waited a few moments to let reality sink in before continuing.

"In the history of our world, we have had no threats larger than a rogue dragon or," she suddenly got slightly more quiet, "princess. In the past year, we have seen enemies we could not possibly imagine. Cosmic parasites. Bipedal metal monstrosities. Powerful xenocidal robots. Temporal distortions. This universe is no longer a safe place and we cannot continue to ignore that fact. It will kill us," Luna concluded dryly.

~ ~ ~

As Luna's moon slowly traced across the sky, the Alliance made progress. The demands each nation had been making were tabled until more reasonable matters had been discussed. From inception to conclusion, this had been a meeting 'Tia should've taken care of, but she had insisted it was necessary for Luna to foster her diplomatic role in international affairs.

The dragons agreed to help the mining effort, the griffins to send their top

scientists to the Manehattan Research Facility, the ponies to share the workload, information, and technology. And trinkets. And baubles. Oh, and the gems. Always the gems. Even with their nearly immortal well-being on the line, the gargantuan creatures were compelled to hoard. Still, it was progress.

Finally, Luna could put those meetings behind her, she thought as she flew at a breakneck pace to the outskirts of Manehattan. The research facility resembled a large beaker. It had been reinforced with every containment spell imaginable and three-hoof thick walls of concrete and steel. Specially trained security forces patrolled leagues out from the facility. Newly designed machines lined the inner walls and spit out data every second of the night and day. They monitored the facility's prized experiment, but also watched every corner of the skies and took readings from Equestria itself.

Luna worked her way deep into the heart of the complex. She always held her breath as she passed through the second set of containment spells. They made her mane tingle and her tail twitch. These spells were the most powerful of their kind ever cast; the thick walls of the facility were so many layers of tissue paper in comparison to their integrity. Still, she couldn't suppress the whisper of a smile as she went through them. These titanic bulwarks of thrumming eldritch power smelled rather like cotton candy.

At the center of the MRF stood a giant, open space. White tiling on the floor, ample lighting, more containment spells, more heavy walls and vaulted ceilings, but that was it. Huge cables and wires snaked across the floor to the center of the room.

Into the TARDIS.

With a weak and weary smile, Twilight peeked her head out of the box and waved Luna in. The mare barely slept anymore, Luna noted. In all likelihood, she doubted any of them did. Only three years since the Nightmare Moon incident and Twilight looked like she'd aged decades. Even Pinkie Pie's mane was starting to show a few streaks of grey.

Luna cantered across the room and entered the blue box. There was no explanation why the Doctor had suddenly vanished and no clue to where he had gone. All he left behind was a seemingly-dead time machine. Twilight stood with her hair pulled back, levitating a clipboard at the

mechanical pillar in the center of the entrance room. She wore silver-framed half-moon spectacles that Luna hadn't recalled her ever needing before.

"Princess," Twilight greeted with a yawn. "It's good to see you. What can we help you with?"

"Silly," Pinkie bounced up from the nautilus staircase, "Today's the weekly progress meeting for the Princess!"

Twilight's magic faltered and she nearly dropped her clipboard, "I- ah, I-I," she stammered, "I completely forgot that was today. Time, there's so much time, in this place," she said waving a hoof around. "I can get lost in the work for days at a time." Twilight offered a sheepish grin.

"Old habits die hard, I suppose?" Luna asked playfully.

"Can take the pony outta the library, but not the library outta the pony," Applejack shouted up from beneath the center console where she was on her back fiddling with circuits, covered in grease, and surrounded by various tools.

Twilight blushed and then cleared her throat. "Well, as you know, we finally managed to get into the TARDIS about a month ago. Since we did, we've been able to figure out a couple of things. First, there's no way we can replicate its power source. I don't know what kind of unobtainium this ship runs on, but we can't find it in Equestria. Even if we could, there's no facility with containment oversight robust enough to safely test it. Second, the engine operates on a principle similar to a large mass forced into a point particle."

Luna shuddered at that, "Like a dying star," the Princess said quietly, remembering her mother's death. The ravenous little puncture in space-time was all that was left, but she and Celestia were forced to seal it. For the good of Equestria, she thought sullenly.

Twilight nodded and continued, "Exactly. Now, I need to ask you a question, Princess, because this is important to what else we've discovered. Have you or Princess Celestia added any new stars to the night sky?"

Luna looked puzzled by this. "No, I have not. Though I can't speak for Celestia," She paused and shook her head. This wasn't the season, her sister tended to save slow-burning pranks like sky-tampering for the long winter nights. "Why do you ask?"

Twilight's shoulders dropped a little. "I've been down here, it was actually Rarity that noticed it."

"Darling," Rarity began, popping in from yet another tunnel in this too-big box, and unlike the rest of them, seeming none the worse for her time spent here. "Because of all the, er, events that have been taking place of late, I began watching the sky. Some nights, I count the red stars, my grandmother used to call them omens. Last week, three new red stars were simply there when the sun set."

Luna did not look happy about this.

Twilight nodded to Rarity who disappeared back into her tunnel and turned to Luna. "Princess, after running some tests and comparing old star charts, I believe that we may have accidentally entered some other part of space. Unless there are classified files detailing how you and Princess Celestia repeatedly protected the planet without anypony knowing, it seems a bit unlikely that, even with the Doctor here, all of these things would just start attacking." Twilight frowned. "It's my opinion that we may be looking at some kind of alternate or parallel space that Equestria simply isn't supposed to be in."

"There... there are no classified files, Twilight. Beyond Nightmare Moon, Discord, brief border disputes, and a very few wars, this has been a calm and peaceful planet," Luna assured weakly. "Until recently, that is."

Twilight frowned, "That's what I was afraid of. If you'll all step outside with me, there's some data I'd like to go over." The mare shook her head, "I'm not sure what we're going to do, but there's a few projections I can offer and we have a simulation set up for how we may be able to-" the looks her friends gave her told her to skip the technobabble for a minute, "use the TARDIS' engine with magic, at least, something like it."

Twilight and her friends, Princess Luna, and several technicians exited the



TARDIS. The lavender unicorn began lecturing on space's natural properties, the possibility of alternate universes, and how certain events could cause intersections in these bubbles of space-time. She then launched into a near-dissertation on wormholes, black holes, and using massive quantities of energy to distort space-time. As soon as her audience looked lost, she explained how a combination of materials native to Equestria, science, and unicorn magic could be used to create enough energy to start a temporary reaction similar to the black hole that functioned as TARDIS' engines.

The difference would be in how the ship moved.

While the TARDIS was essentially creating a bubble of minute space ahead of it and expanded space behind it, time was what was doing the real distorting. In fact, the ship itself barely moved. In Twilight's version, only space would be distorted, and to a much greater extent, moving the universe around the ship.

Engineer or not, Applejack had long since exhausted her attention span and was staring at the ceiling. Rarity and Pinkie whispered about how much Twilight needed a break. Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy were trying to work out some of the ship design details. Luna was listening intently, doing her best to keep up with Twilight.

No pony heard whispering near the TARDIS, "Who'd've thought it would be a pear to wake me up?" A brown stallion stuck his tongue out to the grey pegasus who was trying to stifle a giggle. "Shh! Shh!"

The stallion and mare snuck into the TARDIS, quietly unhooking wires while Twilight lectured. Lost in her data, the only mare that could've seen them was otherwise occupied. Wires got tossed, cable after cable was disconnected. Projections, charts, and datapads were carefully laid to the side. All too late, the ponies heard the characteristic vworp, vworp, vworp of the TARDIS leaving.

A note flitted out of nowhere:

So long, and thanks taking care of her. I'll be in touch.

-The Doctor

"No!" Twilight shrieked as her papers flew everywhere and the subject of her research began to vanish.

~ ~ ~

"So, tell me about th' Harmony," Sky Dancer said from his seat in the officers' lounge. He considered himself extremely lucky right now. Even if none of them really seemed all that interested in him, he was spending time with three pretty mares. All of them had served with Princess Luna and the Twilight Sparkle, mother of warp drive.

"Well, it was a prototype," a mint-green unicorn offered.

The cream-colored filly nodded, moving a bit closer to her friend, "There were a lot kinks to work out."

It just occurred to Sky Dancer that all of these mares wore their full uniforms. He wondered who kept that going. There were barely enough coats to go around for officers with more than two pips on the Alicorn, let alone the pants and communicator all of these mares seemed to have.

The grey earth pony smiled, "Absolutely. It was a wonder we managed to get the engines working at all."

"Yer in Engineering?" Sky Dancer asked expectantly.

"I am, it's not always unicorns, you know," Octavia grinned.

Sky Dancer nodded to the warp drive on his flank, "Ah may've noticed."

The earth pony smiled after taking a quick look at his flank. "Oh? Tell me, what kind of sound does your engine make?"

Sky Dancer wrinkled his muzzle in confusion, "Whaddya mean?"

"Well, when Bon and I changed the intermix ratio and let 'Tavi reroute the coolant and venting lines – it did make it more efficient, mind you, maybe twenty percent? – it started to sound-"

"Like a symphony," Octavia's voice was full of pride.

"Hmpf," Sky Dancer snorted, rubbing a hoof under his chin, "We might need ta get Torch and Dusk in here. Ah think we've got some notes ta go over." He smiled at the mares. "Ah'd love ta get our engines working that well. The Alicorn just sorta hums."

"And we'll grab Applejack and Dash," Lyra agreed. "Two crews on one ship? I bet we can get this thing running faster than any ship in the fleet."

"More like a full crew at this point," Sky Dancer shook his head. No pony spoke for a few tense moments as they reflected on the planet, family members, and crewmates they'd lost. Still, Sky Dancer forced a smile and tried to lighten the mood, "Absolutely. Fastest ship in th' fleet."

~ ~ ~

Luna groaned and tried to get to her hooves. She quickly concluded that this was not one of her better thought-out plans as she found herself on her back in the medical bay. What happened?

"P-princess!" Luna heard from her side.

When Luna opened her eyes, she saw Fluttershy sitting by her bed with a datapad. Behind her lay another bed with Captain Sparkle. The stallion Luna had seen when she first woke up was tending to some of her other crewmates. From the looks of it, he and Fluttershy had been working for hours – days? – to heal them. They both badly needed sleep.

Luna gently laid a hoof on Fluttershy's shoulder, both to calm her and get her attention, "Status?"

Fluttershy tried to look disapproving, but couldn't hold back a tremulous grin, "W-we took a lot of damage, we were adrift and unconscious when they found us." She pawed lightly at the ground with a hoof, "When you're ready, we can have somepony brief you, if that's okay, I mean."

Luna closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Please. And Our," she mentally kicked herself for slipping back into the Royal We and for thinking how her ponies were also her sister's. She fought the nauseous feelings

the image of her elder sister brought to her mind and finished the thought, "-my little ponies?"

"Right," she straightened up and tried to blow the frazzled pink mane out of her eyes. "Well," she glanced at her friends, "Rarity and Twilight still haven't woken up. We're doing everything we can, b-bu-" She held back tears, but couldn't continue.

"We're not sure they will," came the stallion's voice from the other side of the office. Not the best bedside manner, but he'd obviously learned how to deliver bad news; short and sour. Luna didn't envy anypony who had to learn that trick. "Rarity wasn't doing much with the spell you all cast, but Twilight..." he shrugged. "Never seen anything like it, magical burnout worse than I've ever seen. Her brain scans are abnormal; her heartbeat's erratic; she's in a coma, but it looks like she's running a marathon; her magic regenerates and then immediately dissipates to only Celestia knows where." He caught himself, he didn't have to see the pained look in Luna's eyes. "Forgive me, I... I just don't know," he huffed angrily, frustrated he couldn't be more useful.

"B-but we're still going to figure it out!" Fluttershy said resolutely. She looked to Twilight and muttered to herself, "We have to."

"In the meantime," the other doctor continued trotting up to her, "that makes you both our Princess and the acting Captain." Though he quickly amended, "Of your crew, that is."

A cyan pegasus with a short-cropped and greying rainbow mane walked in, smiled, and saluted, "Glad to see you're awake, Commander."

"Ya've been out of it a couple days," came a thick accent from behind her. "If ya'll don't know, we managed to find ourselves some more ponies. 's another ship," Applejack was beaming.

"So I see," Luna darkly noted.

~ ~ ~

To say that alcohol has interesting effects on ponies is like saying that Celestia enjoys a good prank or Luna thinks the night sky was a neat idea.

That is to say, a complete understatement. Worse still is the fact that somepony has a sixth sense when it comes to parties, and Klingon bloodwine is exceedingly strong.

Sky Dancer left the observation lounge almost immediately after taking a wiff.

Moonbuck took Spock's advice and avoided the drink. The two were now sitting in the corner trying to talk about the philosophy of command, inter-species relations, and how to prevent diplomatic incidents.

Zabe and Starway were still drinking heavily with General Martok.

Pinkie Pie made a mockery of the Alicorn's state of the art distributed gravitometric generator array by somehow managing to do the moontrot upside-down on the ceiling. She smiled wickedly and looked through an invisible thing at you – that's right, you – and quietly squee'd, "Things are about to heat up!"

Martok could no longer contain his riotous laughter, "You can not be serious!"

"N-no," Zabe slurred. "Fought metal things, seen family members assimilated, traveled half-way across the galaxy and she gets spooked by a hologram."

"Bwahahaha, Kahless, a hologram, impossible."

"Wh-why is it so impossible," Starway pointed a hoof at him, "There's all sorts of stuff out here. Wu've, erhm, we've got proof! Don't we, Spock?" She craned her neck towards the Vulcan and nearly fell over.

Spock just shook his head, "Captain, I believe it would be wise to retire for the evening."

Before she could argue, an imposing shadow blocked the light in the lounge's archway as the doors swooshed open. "I've dealt with others," she recalled several rather graphic memories of garden parties with 'Tia, "in situations like this, and I need to speak with your Captain, Moonbuck." The Princess walked in with a somber expression on her face and nodded,

"With me. Now."

Zabe rocked back and forth, trying to get a little closer to Martok. In a rather loud whisper, he whinnied, "Looks like- like somepony's in trouble."  
\*hiccup!\*

"Apologies," Spock calmly interrupted with a raised hand. "It would appear you have something important to talk to the Captain about. Would it not be prudent to wait until she has regained enough of her," he chose his words carefully, "mental faculties to appropriately assist you?"

"We can fix that," Luna smirked.

~ ~ ~

"No! NO! I haven't had fun in months!" Starway screamed as Doctor Burns strapped her legs to the table. "It's not fair!"

After dodging no less than three poorly-aimed bucks to his face, the doctor had lost any sympathy he might have had for the mare. "Hold still, you'll only make it worse."

"D-don't you think we should give her a choice?" Fluttershy murmured.

"Chief medical officer's prerogative. Captains don't get to have fun." He had followed Luna's formula exactly. After being briefed on the current situation, she had insisted it be ready by the time she returned. Burns wanted so badly to use a needle, but after narrowly avoiding the inebriated captain's flailing hooves, he decided the reduced accuracy and contact time needed for a hypospray made it the better option. He brushed aside her mane and injected the concoction. Quickly, the blush drained from Starway's face before returning with flickers of embarrassment.

"Restraints and an audience, Doctor? Interesting taste," she remarked snidely. Her face fell as she noticed who else was in the room.

Doctor Burns rolled his eyes and went back to tending his other patients.

"Wha'appened?" Zabe wondered outloud.

"More than a few important ponies have had reputations for enjoying her spirits," Luna said dryly. "With the advent of new technology and quite a few additional adversaries, the collegiate decided it would be prudent to develop an... antidote. Needless to say, I may have decided it was advantageous to commit it to memory." Now instead of garden parties, hundreds of galas, functions, harem visits, and other images flooded her mind. She blushed violently, but quickly regained her composure.

During the outburst, Doctor Burns managed to get about half a dosage back into the hypospray and sneak up behind the grizzled stallion.

"Augh, my bucking head," Zabe grumbled, coming down a little harder than the captain.

"You're all better, good as new," Burns grunted, "Out of my sick bay, there's other ponies who need it more right now."

"I like him," Martok grinned, having followed the ponies.

"You won't if you get hurt," the doctor smiled back.

Martok grinned wider. "You do not know Klingons."

"Sounds like a challenge," Zabe started smiling now, too.

"Bucks," Applejack rolled her eyes.

"Psht, suit yourself Applejack," Dash said with a twinkle in her eyes.

Luna's magic undid Starway's straps. She turned to leave the room and glanced back to Starway and Moonbuck, "Please take care of our guests, Commander Moonbuck. Captain Starway, if you would, please."

It was not a request.

~ ~ ~

Zabe had been part of the second wave of graduates from the Equestrian Stellar Alliance Academy. During his time there, the teachers knew almost nothing about the stars, the officers could barely teach him how to fight,

and the mares spearheading the Academy's programs were on their maiden voyage to collect data and learn how to better train recruits.

This was not going well for him.

Applejack had propped herself up in the corner of the holodeck and scoffed as the grizzled stallion nursed no less than a chipped hoof, two cracked ribs, and several cuts on his face. The program had run its course and Dash was no worse for wear. In fact, she hadn't seemed this lively in years.

Martok had recovered from the blood wine in no time. He had provided the simulation and sat back watching until Dash had found a way to bestow flight on the Klingon warrior holograms. Soon, the flailing fighters were soaring towards Martok and involving him in the brawl.

Zabe had learned a lot since he'd left the academy.

This wasn't anything like what he'd learned.

This was poetry. Of some kind.

He was stupefied.

Back to back under the red sky of an alien world, Rainbow Dash and Martok fought off a horde of the most bloodthirsty war criminals and degenerates Klingon history had to offer atop a mountain of skulls. Zabe was out of the fight. It was just as well, he'd rather watch these two as they spun around each other, disarming attacker after attacker, spearing enemies and hurling them off the cliff face.

Rainbow Dash was barely breaking a sweat and Martok was grinning wildly.

From nowhere, the computer's voice boomed, "First stage completed, begin level 2. Remaining safety protocols now disengaged."

"Oh buck no," Applejack shouted as more Klingons began climbing the rock pillar she was standing on top of. "Dash, ain'tcha had yer fun yet?"

"Course not, AJ, don't ya wanna play?" Dash said pleasantly.



"Ah seen ya rip Borg implants out with yer bare teeth and buck Cybermen halfway ta th' moon, this can't be that much fun."

"Says you, spoilsport. This is awesome!"

"What about Twilight? Y'know, yer friend," Applejack gazed sternly at her while nonchalantly kicking several Klingons off her rock tower.

Dash rolled her eyes, "Computer, simulation off. Martok," she turned to face the General as the holographic images disappeared, "It was an honor to fight beside you, we'll have to do this again sometime."

"I look forward to it," he bowed his head.

"As for you," Dash looked to Lieutenant Zabe, "Get fixed up. Training, tomorrow, with me. I'll know if you don't. I'll make sure your doctor tells me if you don't see him."

"Shall we?" Applejack was all smiles again.

"Onward and outward," Dash rolled her eyes again as the mares left the holodeck.

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Starway expected yelling.

This was not yelling.

This was like a parent trying to lecture their child as to why you needed to consider other ponies' feelings. It was patronizing, condescending, childish, and unbearable. She would've preferred yelling. The Princess was currently standing at her full height with her wings stretched out.

"So, you disobeyed ESA protocol, scrapped a ship that had its crew and captain intact, gutted it to retrofit your own, weaker ship with better technology, and left the remains behind in unfamiliar space." Luna tapped a hoof expectantly.

The two stood in silence in Starway's office for a moment.

"Under normal circumstances, you would be brought up on charges for treason and allowed limited legal counsel while being held in the brig."

"These are hardly normal circumstances," Starway met her gaze and refused to blink. Back in training, Starway remembered just how often you had to stare down another officer. It was almost as if rank meant nothing and the first pony who blinked lost. Near sunset, she'd often stare directly into the sun until it retreated behind the hills.

Luna folded her wings in and gave her a cold, mirthless smile. "True enough. Besides, I doubt we can find you a lawyer out here."

Starway smiled and offered the Princess the datapad from her mouth. "When we found your ship, there was no way it was going to fly again. We didn't have the reserves or the time to haul it with us. We're flying blind as it is. Besides," she continued as Luna examined the numbers on the small screen, "we've lost nearly two thirds of our crew. We can barely keep the ship running."

"The Harmony was a prototype," Luna muttered sullenly.

"And the Alicorn was the flagship. Regardless of what was in the Harmony when it was built, the Alicorn was built more recently. I had to think of my ship, my crew, and our race. Two ships are only better than one if they both work."

Luna closed her eyes and took a deep breath like she was about to explain something to a foal, "The Elements of Harmony were on that ship."

"And now they're here, all of your friends are alive."

"The Elements weren't just the ponies, Captain. They were artifacts built right into the ship. There were dozens of battles where the Harmony would've been star dust but for those gems."

Before she could say anything else, Spock's voice came over the com, "Captain, the Klingon High Council has convened out-of-session and agreed to give you an immediate audience. You would do well not to delay

them."

"Buck me, I bucking love this day," Starway growled and caught herself,  
"Forgive me, Princess."