

Time and Time Again

Lieutenant Lucia Quintollez knew that a career in Starfleet would take her to unusual places and she would meet unusual people and races. She had been told that by those she knew who had preceded her into Starfleet and she heard it again when she was in Starfleet Academy. Now she was on board the *Athena*, and the ship and crew were a great distance from home and she was experiencing one of those moments. She was the ship's protocol officer and also its counsellor, and right now, she was in essence fulfilling both roles. The person in her office was somewhat unusual, and different, because of what he *was*.

The being that sat in the chair on the other side of the desk was short and slender, and he looked rather pale and even emaciated. He was not attractive even by alien standards, with awkward and stiff tufts of hair on the top of his head, and the facial features were not symmetrical, but a little lopsided. In virtually all the alien species that Quintollez had met or were aware of, symmetry in facial features was considered a standard, if not a necessity, of attractiveness, and a slight variation from symmetry rendered the individual as unattractive. That was likely true in this individual's species, because the counsellor had seen a couple of other individuals from that species, and they lacked the pale appearance or the awkward tufts of hair and most of all, they had symmetrical facial features.

But of course, the being in front of her was not a biological entity. He was in fact a hologram, generated by a self-contained holographic emitter that had a zero-point energy module within it, basically giving it uninterrupted and endless energy. The being was Bojek, and by some definitions, he was the last of his kind, the last of the Reioshekians, at least among those who were nothing more than stored data on alien computer systems.

Now, Bojek was talking to Quintollez, and doing so in perfect Federation Standard. Afterall, he was a hologram that also had access to powerful computational abilities. One of those allowed him to link his language through the Pre-server code to the language spoken on the ship, and then he was able to speak directly in the Federation language, and understand it perfectly. Such was the advantage of having a high-powered and advanced computer as a brain. "I still find it hard to get used to the reality of what I am."

"I can understand that," Quintollez replied. "You are something that is

rather unique, as I have no experience in interacting with people in your situation.”

“So you know of no artificial life forms?”

“Actually, I am aware of androids, beings that have mechanical or machine bodies, but you are basically a computer lifeform able to project a body. In addition, the androids that I am familiar with have always existed as androids, whereas you had a flesh-and-blood body once.”

“And I miss that.”

“Why?” asked the counsellor.

“Because I miss the ability to eat food and to drink beverages. I do not feel tired and have no need to sleep, and yet my mind tells me I must, and then if I shut off the holographic image and revert to being this machine inside me, I fear someone would come along and turn the emitter off, since I am not really alive.”

“Under Federation law, you are alive and we respect that. Life can take many forms, biological life and machine life and holographic life, even non-corporeal life. Nobody has the right to take that life away from any of those forms of life.”

“But what if I malfunction?”

“We all can malfunction. That’s what doctors are for, although in your case, I suspect an engineer would be the one to help you.”

“But most of all, I miss the ability to love. What I feel, the emotions and memories and everything else, is based on the programming and the data that was saved, and so I am constrained by the programming, in what I can feel and experience and do.”

“You are capable of expanding beyond your programming. Essentially, that’s true of all of us, even biological forms such as myself.”

“And yet,” Bojek continued, “what I think about is what I was before my essence was transferred to the probe ship and I was sentenced to serving on that ship and being that ship. That’s what I keep wanting to return to, more than anything else.”

“That is impossible for many reasons.”

“I know,” the Reioshekian said after a slight pause. “My world no longer exists. I jumped fifty thousand years into the future, and even if my world exists, it would not have been the same place. Most of all, I miss the capacity to love, and I think that removing that from my memories when I was transferred was intentional.”

“You are probably right,” Quintollez agreed.

“But the memories are there. I think of Injae, and what was and what could never be.”

“She was the woman, of higher standing, that you loved?”

“Yes,” Bojek admitted.

Now Quintollez asked the question that had been foremost on her mind, and which she knew others on the ship were wondering too. “Did she love you back?”

“I think so.”

“You think so?”

“I have memories of the time we spent together, but I still feel that the authorities that punished me tampered with those memories. They told me that Injae could not have loved me, that she was of higher standing and so could never be a suitable mate, that she would form a partnership with someone of similar standing. But I’m so sure that was not true, and that we spent time together and that it was an enjoyable time and that she felt the same for me as I felt for her. Yet, the memories have been tampered with. I am sure of it. They wanted to make me remember that she did not have the feelings for me, and that it was infatuation on my part, nothing more.”

Quintollez did have the feeling that perhaps Bojek was infatuated with Injae and that she did not respond in kind, but given his nature, he might not be able to distinguish between memories that had created or even imagined, and what had actually happened. She did ask, “And you can distinguish between what you know to be actual memories and ones those authorities had tampered with?”

“I think so... but I’m not sure. What I would really like would be to go back in time and meet with Injae, to learn the truth.”

“That is impossible, you know,” Quintollez replied, and though she knew that time travel in various forms was possible, and she was aware of slingshot effects at warp and even the Guardian of Forever, she also knew that messing with the timeline was always a bad thing and actively discouraged.

“I have been told otherwise, but at the same time, I know that there are strong laws prohibiting time travel. Even so, given what I am now, Injae would never accept me in this form. I would need to go back in time and somehow return to my biological body, and that is even more impossible than simply going back in time. Yet, that is what I think about, constantly.”

“I see...”

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The *Athena* was heading back to Federation space, after having gone to the former location of the Arosian Empire and dealing with other matters over the past months. Captain Leonard Thorpe and the other senior officers were beginning to wonder what was next when they got back home, as the *Athena* had no specific assignment. “Something will come up,” first officer Julia Bayanhong did tell him as she and the senior officers had their breakfast at the senior officers’ table in the Acropolis. “It always does.”

“In a sense,” security chief Sal Hakamura added, “There is unfinished business, that Arosian star-destroyer ship. It’s out there. Who has it and what is their purpose?”

Thorpe answered, “I get the feeling we’re going to learn the hard way what the Remans want to do with it, but unless we stumble upon it, it might not

be our mission anyway.”

“Of course.”

Then the captain heard his commbadge chirp. He tapped it and said, “Thorpe here.”

“TKor,” came the response, from the Vulcan intelligence officer on board the *Athena*, and the individual who often commanded the third shift. “Sir, we are receiving a signal of an incoming message, and it’s from Commander Alito Ngezhavara.”

“Of the Arosian Battlesphere?”

“Yes,” TKor replied, although everyone within earshot knew that. “It’s a one-way message because of the distance.”

“Understood. I’m on my way.”

“What is that about?” Bayanhong asked.

“I guess we’ll find out soon enough,” but Thorpe had an idea, and he suspected the others had the same one.

Shortly thereafter, the senior officers gathered in the conference lounge on deck one, behind the bridge. The signal that the message was incoming had been transmitted ahead of the actual message, to make the receiver aware that it was coming. Because of the distance the *Athena* was from the Odonan Empire, the message would be a one-way communication, and a response from the ship was probably not expected. Thorpe had the feeling that the only reason that this message was coming was because the Battlesphere had detected a signal from the missing third Arosian star-destroyer ship and the *Athena* was likely not that far away. The idea did make him feel nervous. The viewscreen in the room turned on and TKor appeared on it, saying, “Receiving the message now.”

“Transfer it here,” Thorpe replied.

“Right away.”

The image of the Vulcan officer was replaced by some communications coding parameters, which appeared in the Odonan alphabet and numerical systems. That was quickly replaced by an image of Commander Alito Ngezhavara, but based on the background, it did not look like she was on the Battlesphere, unless that massive Arosian vessel had display screens for windows, and those screens were showing a sunny outdoor scene. The dark-skinned Odonan woman started to speak, “This message is for the Federation starship *Athena* and its captain, Leonard Thorpe, and the crew of the ship. We had, approximately... seventeen point six hours ago, taking into account transmission time, received the telemetry signal from the missing Arosian star-destroyer. It lasted... twenty-two point three six minutes.” Thorpe and the others were assuming that somehow, through the translator, as Ngezhavara’s lip movements were not matching the words, the Odonan measurement units were being converted to conventional Earth-based units. “We are not sure why the telemetry signal activated now, but it was present long enough that we were able to get a location. Those coordinates are transmitted now.” On the screen appeared a string of symbols, which were actually Odonan numerical notation likely using the

Odonan reference grid for galactic coordinates. Those were easy enough to convert to the Federation notation and reference grid. “The signal was steady in location, indicating that the ship was stopped. Unfortunately, it was not long enough for us to attempt to seize control of the ship using the equivalent of prefix codes. Nevertheless, the coordinates are close to your estimated course back to Federation space.”

Thorpe did freeze the message, and asked, “How close is it?”

The helmsman, Sanjay Indesakar, was already working on it. He converted the Odonan symbols into more conventional ones and translated the coordinate system to the Federation one, and so had a location. “It’s eighty-two point three light years from our current position.”

“A day’s journey,” Bayanhong suggested.

“Yes, I see that. Is there anything there?”

Grace Brigson, the chief science officer, called up some information, and replied, “It’s very close to a class G1 star, stable, Earth-sized planet in the inhabitable zone, no non-natural subetheromagnetic signals, no probe has been close enough to examine the system and no known ship has ever gone there.”

Henrietta Vorwoorts, the tactical officer, asked, “Could it be this mysterious Janna that the commander had talked about, where Arosian refugees had gone to avoid the destruction of their realm?”

“It’s possible.”

Security chief Sal Hakamura asked, “Why would the star-destroyer ship go there?”

Brigson replied, “It’s possible that the Remans might’ve found out about the planet and surmised that there could be maintenance facilities there, to help them keep that ship operational.”

“Worth a look,” Thorpe added, “but carefully.”

The captain did let the message play out. Ngezhavara remarked, “We do not know why the star-destroyer visited that particular location, as it is a star system with unknown inhabitable planets. However, there is the possibility that it might be Janna, the alleged destination of Arosian refugees attempting to flee the destruction of the Arosian Empire. At the current time, the Battlesphere is not capable of making the mission, and there is always the risk that our presence could expose the refugees to *overhimpennyon*. That risk is much reduced if a Federation starship visits the system—and your Odonan chief engineer avoids contact. It should be noted, captain, that our medical officers had been working on what could be essentially considered a vaccine that would neutralize the *overhimpennyon* prions and cells so that the Arosians would not succumb to the disease. If this planet is indeed Janna, we can prepare to help them. Finding the missing star-destroyer ship would also be a welcome development. This concludes my message.”

As the image on the screen disappeared, Thorpe asked, “Opinions?”

“We need to take a look,” Bayanhong remarked.

Brigson added, “The likelihood that it is Janna is pretty slim, as the

survivors would like to hide their presence and not draw attention to them.”

“Perhaps the Remans on board have learned to decipher more of the technology and information on board.”

“That’s not a good thing.”

Bayanhong added, “And if this planet turns out to be Janna, should there be contact?”

Thorpe answered, “That’s perhaps a decision to be made once we get there and learn more about the situation. I believe that it is important that we find the star-destroyer ship, as we have no idea what the Remans plan to do with it. It may not be a good thing. If the Odonans received a signal that the ship was at those coordinates, we need to take a closer look.”

“But carefully.”

“As always,” the captain replied. “We’ll set course for... H1532-33622-15534.” He was reading the catalogue number for the star off of display in front of him. “For lack of a better name.”

“Call it Janna, just in case,” Bayanhong replied.

“Very well.” The captain tapped his commbadge and said, “TKor.”

“Yes, sir?”

“Have the helm set course for... H1532-33622-15534, best speed.”

“Right away, captain...”

A day later, the *Athena* arrived at the star system that was unofficially named Janna, though Captain Thorpe was pretty sure that this was not the location of a hidden planet of Arosian survivors, simply because of its distance from known Arosian space. They did review the data from the mapping probe that travelled through this section of space well over a hundred years earlier, and that probe recorded a stable G1-class star with six planets, three outer gas giants, an ice ball planet far from the star, and two rocky inner worlds, one of which was ninety-four percent of the diameter of Earth and located within the inhabitable zone of that star. There was likely life on that planet, but as they approached, they did not detect any non-natural subetheromagnetic signals.

However, they did detect something else. Brigson reported, “We are picking up weak electromagnetic signals, radio-band transmissions, very weak.”

Thorpe remarked, “Like old broadcast signals from Earth in the earliest days of radio and television.”

“Like that, weak and fragmented signals that tell us little more than that they were broadcast and are non-natural.”

“But nothing subetheromagnetic?”

“Nothing.”

“So,” Bayanhong remarked, “prewarp but sentient, and more than likely not Janna, unless the Arosians are living among an indigenous population.”

“That’s unlikely, given the nature of the Arosians. Even the ones who wanted to avoid the imperial self-destruct system would still likely be xenophobic and would not share a planet with non-Arosians. It’s also unlikely that they

would've destroyed the native population and taken the planet, since it seems that Janna existed as an unofficial vacation planet before the fall of the empire."

"Agreed, but why would the Remans take the star-destroyer there?"

Hakamura then asked, "That star still exists? Maybe it was another test."

"The star exists," Brigson replied. "Natural subetheromagnetic signals from the star are still being detected."

As they got closer to the star system—which they realized now needed another name, so "Japhia" was suggested—they detected something else. "Captain," the science officer spoke up, "I'm detecting something unexpected, an artificial structure close to the outermost planet in the system."

"What exactly?"

"At this distance, I can't tell, beyond the fact that the surface at least is made of refined metal and that it is about six kilometres in diameter."

"Could a possible society here build that?"

"Unknown."

"Helm," the captain ordered, "get the coordinates for that unknown object and adjust course to it. Commander Brigson, maintain sensor sweeps and see if there are any ships in the vicinity. That does seem like something that would attract the Remans and the star-destroyer. If they learned about it from the ship's database, it's possibly Arosian."

"What would its purpose be?" Bayanhong asked.

"No idea yet. Would something like that show up to the mapping probes?"

"More than likely," Brigson replied, "but there's no data for it at Japhia."

"Understood."

A short time later, the *Athena* arrived at the anomalous structure. As they approached, they did not detect any ships in the vicinity, and despite the distance from the primary—which was little more than a very bright star at this distance—the solar wind would have effectively removed any warp signatures from the vicinity. As they approached, they could see that the structure as it appeared on the viewscreen was rather simple, a sphere about six kilometres in diameter, covered in a metal alloy with a matte finish so that in natural light it appeared very dark, while on the enhanced image, it appeared a dull gray and it was featureless, just the sphere and nothing more, no obvious ports or antennae or even hull plating of a slightly different colour.

"What is it?" Bayanhong asked.

Thorpe replied, "More importantly, what is it about it that drew the star-destroyer here?"

Dewuchun said, "Perhaps we should've sent back to Alito a request for any information that the Battlesphere has on this star system."

"I'm sure that if they had information, they would've included it in the initial transmission."

"Perhaps."

Indesakar added, “Now approaching the artifact and coming to a relative stop.”

“Brigson?”

“No ships detected. The structure appears unpowered and there are no life forms on board.”

“Life support?”

“There is some internal structure, but a great deal of machinery too, and though there is an atmosphere, the temperature is low. It looks like it was meant to be occupied, but it is not currently in use.”

“Any indication that this could be Arosian?”

“There are no design similarities with anything known to be Arosian,” Brigson started, “but at the same time, there is no real design elements seen here. This is simply a sphere with no real external features.”

“And it’s highly unlikely that the structure could have been built by the... Japhites?”

“Presumably,” the science officer replied.

Bayanhong spoke up, “Perhaps we need to take a closer look at the system here and see if there is the possibility that the society here built this, but for whatever reason is not generating subetheromagnetic radiation.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” the captain replied. “However, we should send the cloaked probe, in case the Japhites—if we’re calling them that—are more advanced than we anticipated.”

“If they are, then they are probably already aware of our presence.”

“Nevertheless, prepare and launch the probe. Our continued investigation of this structure will wait until we learn more about the inhabitants of this system.”

Bojek was in the Acropolis lounge, with Lieutenant Quintollez, and he was simply observing the crew as they came and went. He saw them approach the replicators and select dishes, mostly human ones, but some alien ones that had been adjusted so that they were compatible with the human digestive system. Through the windows in the lounge, Bojek could see the primary that Japhia orbited, but the mysterious sphere was too dark and there was little light this far out so the sphere was essentially invisible.

“The crew seems busy,” Bojek remarked.

“There’s a lot to do on a starship,” Quintollez explained.

“Now we were in this star system... they named it Japhia. That’s not what the inhabitants call it, is it?”

“No, but we like to give things names, instead of referring to places with awkward catalogue designations. If we learn the name that the natives give to their system, then we could adapt that name, but until then, ‘Japhia’ will do.” And sometimes, Quintollez knew, even after they learned what the natives called themselves, the term ‘Japhia’ might stick because it would be easier to pronounce than the native term.

Bojek continued, "And there is something here, something not natural."

"Correct."

"Are we investigating it?"

"Perhaps."

"Why are we investigating it?"

"What do you mean?"

"It was built by someone for some purpose. Maybe the people of Japhia built it, which means, who are we to investigate it? Would your people appreciate it if some unknown race were to approach some installation that you have built and start to examine it?"

Quintollez answered, "That's what we would call a first contact situation. I'm sure that Captain Thorpe would not have minded at all if upon our approach, we were contacted by those who built and operate the structure. We welcome any chance to meet with a new species. However, the star-destroyer ship operated by the Remans came here, and so we seek to learn why they came here, and perhaps there are clues here on what they plan to do with the ship."

"That seems like a low-probability situation."

"I know, but sometimes you have to pursue low-probability situations in order to get a greater understanding of what is happening, the overall situation that we're trying to understand. That's especially true if there are no high-probability situations to investigate."

"Even so," the Reioshekian remarked. He was again noticing a couple members of the crew getting something from the replicator.

Quintollez noticed what he was doing too, and asked, "You seem unusually interested in what those crewmembers are doing, and why is that?"

"They are selecting food and drink. I would imagine that they are selecting items that they enjoy the taste of."

"More than likely."

"That's one of the things that I miss now that I am in this form, and my actual body has decayed to dust on Reioshek. No matter what the programming is, there's no way to simulate the sensation of taste, of the sorts of foods and drinks I enjoyed before this happened to me. I do miss that."

"I can understand that. The very few examples of holographic lifeforms like you were generally programmed that way and so they were not programmed to think about activities and the like that they could never experience."

"Do you think... it's possible that I could be transferred into an android body... or even a biological one?"

"The latter is unlikely because that would require you taking over some other body."

"No, not that, but a purpose-generated biological body. Perhaps there is some of my original DNA back on Reioshek and that could be used, somehow, to reproduce my original body."

"I'm not aware of any species that has technology like that, and the odds of finding any of your original DNA, and even identifying it as such, would be

virtually impossible.”

“But I can dream...”

The first-shift officers were at their posts on the bridge, even though the first shift was approaching its end. The warp-capable probe the *Athena* carried, which was equipped with a cloaking device, was launched, and through a sub-space link, Vorwoorts was able to control it from the bridge. It transmitted information back to the ship at subetheromagnetic frequencies, and so was likely undetectable by the Japhites, who even if they had advanced technology did not have the ability to detect subetheromagnetic radiation—or so it was assumed. Long-range sensors had picked up the destination planet, which was pretty close to the diameter of Earth, and which two small moons, each about two-thirds the diameter of the Earth’s moon, orbited at about a half-million kilometres distant. As the probe closed in, the sensors on board detected that it had an oxygen and nitrogen atmosphere, with lower levels of carbon dioxide and water vapour. Brigson did say, “Highly likely there is life on that planet.”

“Advanced life?” asked the captain.

“We are detecting electromagnetic signals, weak but clearly broadcast signals,” Vorwoorts remarked. Soon, the planet came into view. They were approaching it so that the planet was mostly on the night side, and they could see on the screen some of the land mass outlines from night illumination of buildings and so on. The probe entered the orbit around the planet, and as it came into the day side, they could see the typical class-M planet, with the continental land masses in green and gray and brown, and the oceans between them in shades of dark blue, with the clouds swirled through the colours. “Sensor sweeps now,” the tactical officer continued. “Getting data... no reaction. I’m getting what looks like population centres, large populations, and I’m assuming a particular lifeform clustering with the non-natural infrastructure is the sentient species. There is an estimated... three point three billion of them, distributed over all the land masses, even some small settlements in the polar regions.”

“A lot like Earth,” Brigson remarked.

“Yeah, and the pollution levels in the atmosphere and the sort of structures I’m detecting suggest that Japhia is at the technological equivalent of mid- to late-twentieth century Earth, but without the satellites. There’s absolutely nothing in orbit, as if this place has not had its ‘Sputnik moment’ yet.”

“In other words,” Bayanhong started, “it’s highly unlikely that the Japhites built the sphere out here in space?”

“Highly unlikely,” Vorwoorts agreed.

“So the question remains... who built this and why?” To the captain, she added, “We might have to send an away team.”

“That seems like the best possible next step.”

Brigson then remarked, “The probe has picked up what looks like a more sustained sample of a broadcast, and I believe it’s an analogue transmission involving video and audio.”

“Old-style television,” Vorwoorts added.

“More than likely. We’re receiving it now. We might get our first look at the Japhites.”

Thorpe ordered, “Put it on the screen when you get it.”

Moments later, the probe had transmitted the broadcast signal it had picked up, and the computers on the starship had processed and interpreted the analogue signal and pulled out the video and audio streams, as the signals were not that different from similar over-the-air television broadcasts from the twentieth century on Earth. That was not surprising, since there were only so many ways that electromagnetic signals could be manipulated to carry information. Brigson did say, “Resolution is not the best, and the dialogue cannot be translated, but here’s what we got.”

The attention of those on the bridge turned to the screen. The resolution was not the best, though the computer processing routines had cleaned up and enhanced the images as much as possible. The probe had picked up perhaps ten seconds of the broadcast, with some gaps at the start and end, but in the middle, they did get a clear picture of what the Japhites looked like. They were basically humanoid, with the usual body plan, but their skin tones were various shades of brown. They had large and rather circular heads, with round eyes in the middle, and a small mouth low on the face and no obvious nose. They did have some small spike-like antennae above and to the sides of the eyes, but the most noticeable thing about them was that they had these flaps of skin that extended perpendicular for a short distance above and around the head. These flaps of skin framed the face, and were in various sizes—and in various colours too. They moved slightly with the movement of the Japhites themselves.

Brigson had an immediate reaction. “Flowers, they look like flowers.”

Vorwoorts replied, “But I doubt that they are in any way connected to plant life. The flaps of skin resembling petals is just a coincidence.”

“Of course.”

“You can’t expect every race in the galaxy to look even vaguely like us, you know, even with the influence of the ancient progenitors.”

They did look at the small segment of video several times. The words that were spoken were completely uninterpretable, and what they saw were two individuals exchanging words, and several more of the Japhites were in the background. They also saw some samples of the writing system used for this particular language, both in the background and what looked like graphics that were added to the video image. Naturally, the databases on the *Athena* had nothing related to that particular writing system.

Thorpe did say, “It might be time to take a look at that alien structure out there...”

* * *

The away team rematerialized inside the unknown alien structure

located on the fringes of the Japhite star system. The atmosphere was breathable, with a standard composition of oxygen and nitrogen, but very little in the way of water vapour. Thus, environmental suits were not needed, but the temperature was minus forty, so they beamed in wearing heavy winter field jackets, gloves and toques. It was also dark, so they were equipped with flashlights, and accompanying them were stands with powerful light systems that could be used to illuminate their surroundings. They had scanned the interior of the structure from the *Athena*, and selected one of the larger open areas to beam into.

The four individuals rematerialized. Bayanhong led the team, with Brigson and Lieutenant Erik Skolgaad, the ship expert in alien technology, accompanying her, along with a security officer, Ensign William Drell. Skolgaad and Drell set up the light stands and turned them on, providing more illumination. Brigson had her tricorder out and was scanning. When the lights came on, she could confirm with her eyes what the tricorder was telling her. "This does appear to be the control centre." It looked pretty conventional, a circular room with assorted control panels, some with physical switches and buttons and knobs, and others with touchscreens. There were viewscreens part of the way around the outer walls, along with several doorways that provided exits from the room. In the centre of the room was a raised dais with only a few controls and a few small display screens, but there were some seams in the structure which suggested that this was a way to access... something.

As the lights came on and they could see their surroundings more closely, they all noticed something immediately. Bayanhong said, "The labelling here, on these panels and the like, the writing system is..."

Brigson provided the obvious, "the same as we saw on the video image, a Japhite writing system."

"Which means?"

Skolgaad answered, "My guess is that this might well be from the future, and the future Japhites have come back in time to study their history. Perhaps something momentous is occurring or is about to occur."

"Which does not answer the question on what brought the Remans and their stolen Arosian star-destroyer ship here."

Brigson did add, "The tricorder is picking up some evidence of a Reman presence, a few flakes of skin that read as Reman."

"So they were here. What did they do?"

"I don't think they did anything. I doubt any of these controls are operable, and even if they were, we would have no idea what they did, and neither would the Remans."

Skolgaad was monitoring his engineering tricorder, and noticed a change in the readings. "Commander," he called out, getting Bayanhong's attention. "I'm now detecting a power source coming on, rising."

"Where?"

"There," he replied, pointing to the central dais. "Power building up inside that, non-chaotic, some system is coming on... getting odd readings."

“Any danger to us?”

‘I’d recommend turning on the forcefield belts.’ All four of the away-team members had the forcefield belts, and so they tapped at the belt-buckle controls to turn them on, and they moved away from the dais. The power build-up was “non-chaotic,” according to the engineer, which implied that it was not about to explode. “Something here detected our presence.”

“More than likely.”

As they stood back, there was a change in the central dais. The displays came on, and then the assorted panels and flaps rose and opened. The top of the dais started to rise, revealing something lifting up from the level below. Once the structure had fully opened, they were seeing a ring structure with a somewhat oval shape with a flat base and an interior dimension of about three metres, and the structure was fairly thick as well. At first they could see through the ring to the opposite side of the room, but the ring started to glow, and as it did, the interior was obscured by some sort of white light. That did not last long, and when the light faded, two beings stood there.

They were Japhites, looking a lot like those they had seen on the broadcast signal. They were humanoid, standing about a metre and a half in height. They had two legs and two arms, and the arms ended in hands that looked more reptilian than mammalian in that fingers came straight out of the arms without any obvious palms. The flaps of colourful skin around the faces, which reminded the *Athena* officers of flowers, were present. The beings were wearing heavy clothing, anticipating the same cold that Bayanhong and the other three had anticipated. Neither of the two Japhites were visibly armed, but that did not mean that they were unarmed.

“This is interesting,” Bayanhong said.

“Unexpected,” Brigson added.

The two Japhites talked to each other, though it was not immediately clear if they were speaking the same language as on that broadcast fragment the *Athena* officers had seen. One of them stepped off of the ring and out of the dais structure and approached the four officers. He—or she or whatever, as there was no indication of gender—removed something from the pocket of his jacket and held it in his hand. That did cause the four humans to tense up somewhat, though they had the comfort of knowing that the forcefield belts were working and they could beam out on an instant’s notice. Back on the *Athena*, they were monitoring the away team and had to be aware of this development.

The Japhite standing off of the dais spoke, and his words were translated into Federation Standard. “I am Rekhael Defakwa, and you have been identified as Terrans. Why are you here?”

Brigson said, “They know about us, and have translation abilities?”

Skolgaad added, “They’re from the future.”

“But where did these two come from?”

Bayanhong stopped forward. “I’m Commander Julia Bayanhong, first officer of the United Federation of Planets starship *Athena*.” She introduced the

others in the away team, and added, "We mean no harm in coming on board this facility."

Defakwa said, "The Federation?"

"You are aware of it? It is a fair distance from this location. How do you have translation ability from your language to ours?"

"Japhia was once a member of the Federation."

Brigson remarked, softly, "There's no way we guessed the name of the planet correctly."

Bayanhong then stated the obvious, "You are from the future."

"That is correct. We are from approximately... eight hundred and twenty-three point one years in the future."

"Thirty-second century," Brigson added, "Wow."

Bayanhong continued, "You were once members of the Federation, but no longer?"

"The Federation no longer exists," Defakwa replied. "After the Burn, it no longer exists."

"The Burn?"

"We are not allowed to discuss that."

Bayanhong assumed that "the Burn" was something that happened and probably devastated the Federation, perhaps some war or transgression or something. Whatever it was would occur in the next eight hundred years. Was it a good idea to learn what that was? She was curious, as was Brigson and the others. She then answered the second part of the original question. "We came here because we are attempting to locate a stolen vessel with powerful abilities, crewed by the Remans, and we have information that they came here. We are seeking to find out why and what their intentions are."

Defakwa continued, "You are correct. You are the second vessel to approach the Aelimosor. The previous vessel was crewed by an unknown race, and once we could communicate with them, using the Preserver language as an intermediary, we told them to leave, and that they had no business here."

"Wait," Bayanhong remarked, "You know of us and have our linguistic database, and you know of the Federation and were once members, but you have no knowledge of the Remans?"

"We do not have accessible information on them."

Brigson suggested to the first officer, "Perhaps the Remans don't exist eight hundred years from now."

"A consequence of the star-destroyer?"

"Who knows. We need more information from the Japhites."

"But they might not share it."

Skolgaad asked, "What is this 'Burn,' though?"

"I don't know," Bayanhong answered. "It might have been some devastating war. We had the Dominion and there's the Borg, and who knows what could follow. The possibility is there that we could lose the next major conflict."

“And when does it happen?”

“I doubt that they will tell us, because they are from the future and people from the future generally do not want to provide information on what is to come, because we could use that information to change the timeline.”

Brigson then said, “Which begs the question, if these Japhites are from the future, what are *they* doing here?”

“Somehow, I doubt that they would share that information with us as well.”

Defakwa and the other Japhite stood there and let the *Athena* officers talk among themselves. She did get the feeling that the Japhites were worried that this technology, whatever technology was in this structure, was vulnerable. It seemed curious that they left it seemingly without defenses. Bayanhong decided not to pursue that line of argument just yet, but did ask, “Are you from the future and somehow detected our presence here eight hundred years ago as you see it, or were you in this time period?”

“In this time period,” Defakwa answered.

“Where were you?”

“On Japhia.”

“And what were you doing there?” the first officer asked, but even as she asked the question, she had the feeling that the Japhites were going to say that was none of the concern of the Federation officers. More than likely, she thought, they were conducting research on their past and the two standing before her were historians or perhaps support staff. What they were doing was not completely unknown, she knew, as there had been examples of clandestine historical research in the Federation, and of course, there were some missions where anthropologists were studying prewarp civilizations while wearing personal cloaking devices.

But Defakwa answered, “We are on a mission to guide our society in the desired direction.”

The other Japhite spoke up, saying, “These are matters that we should perhaps not discuss.” Its voice was coming through the translator and the *Athena* officers could understand them.

“It is acceptable, Kikoyo. They have no need to interfere. This is all has been prophesized and planned.”

Brigson spoke up, “Prophesized and planned?”

Defakwa explained, “When we were a primitive society, when we were just starting agriculture and building our first cities, separate civilizations appearing on different continents at roughly different times, a religion appeared. Two gods arrived on our world and demonstrated miracles, and developed a code of law and a code of worship that the people accepted, and the same code and the same laws, and the worship of the same gods, appeared independently in these separate civilizations. As our abilities expanded and these cultures came in contact with each other, they discovered that they had the same gods and the same beliefs, which suggested to the people that this religion was true and the

gods were real, and so the beliefs and laws should be followed because of destiny.”

“So,” Bayanhong suggested, “you believe some alien race might have been interfering with your society and bringing this religion to them?”

“No, we know it’s not aliens. We know who created this religion. It was us, from our future.”

“So your society existed with this religion, and at some point, you decided that it was not natural, and that it was your future selves that did it, and you proceeded to go into the past and perhaps use the technology you had to convince your more primitive ancestors that you were gods and you were going to show them the preferred way to live?”

“There were passages written in the religious texts that when combined and compared to our history that followed informed us that that was what we had to do. The texts were not prophecies, but generally sayings that might have required a different interpretation in more ancient times, but became more clearly understandable as key events in our history occurred. The messages contained within those texts basically stated what had to be done and what we needed to do. The Burn was a key moment. It told us clearly what we needed to do.”

“The Burn again,” Brigson said.

Defakwa said, “The Burn clarified some confusing passages in the text. Within the context of the Burn, the passages made sense, and we realized that the change in physics made our method of time travel possible and we could go into the past and make sure that our society followed the path we had set out for it.”

Brigson caught onto one part of what was said, “The change in physics?”

“Something happened to alter the property of hypermatter. The hyper-particles that made up hypermatter lost their connection to subspace, and no longer could separate the motions of order higher than the zero-order level.”

“So warp travel became impossible? *How* can physics change in that manner?”

“We do not know. All we know is that dilithium became lithium again. Antimatter annihilation in the vicinity of this altered hypermatter no longer produced higher-order motions, no potons and no notons, just zero-order motions, normal photons. It was believed that this was an event that somehow occurred and damaged all hypermatter in existence, and so there was an attempt to go into the past to find replacement hypermatter such as dilithium and bring it to the future, but this was not easy.”

“I would say,” Bayanhong replied, thinking of a time between now and eight hundred years in the future when these incursions into the past to acquire hypermatter would start. The existence of this structure indicated that the time travel technology that the Japhites had developed still worked. “If what you say is true, then there would be no subetheromagnetic radiation, no subspace access, and so no faster-than-light travel or communications.” She was not sure if the chronometric displacement drive would still work. “I could see why the Federa-

tion would collapse in that scenario. All the star systems would be out of contact with each other, and travel between them would be almost impossible.”

“That is what happened. We understand that some hypermatter did survive, on ships that were a distance away, suggesting that the event was not universe-wide or galaxy-wide, but more local.”

“A weapon?”

“Or perhaps an experiment that went wrong. Such a weapon would destroy the user as much as the target.”

“Understood,” Bayanhong remarked. “I know that you said you were not supposed to tell us this, but you did. However, there is still the situation with the Reman ship. Surely this facility has sensors and various means to record data and so on. You were somehow alerted to the presence of this ship and responded. We would like to see what data you have on it.”

“Very well,” Defakwa replied. “We can provide that.” He then switched off the translation device, and started talking to the other Japhite. Bayanhong and the others could not understand what was being said, but the second alien seemed angry, if she could interpret alien words and tone and gestures in that manner. The two did approach some of the control panels and activated them. Data started flowing over the screens, but the alien script did not mean much to the *Athena* officers. However, they soon saw schematics of what the Japhites had encountered, and it clearly was the missing Arosian star-destroyer ship. Given the size of the vessel, that must have been intimidating to them. They also saw some visual images of the Remans beaming into this same location, and looking around. Turning the translation device back on, Defakwa asked, “Is this the ship that you are interested in?”

“Yes,” Bayanhong answered.

Brigson then asked, “Does that ship, or something like that, figure in any way to the so-called Burn?”

“No,” the Japhite responded, looking back at the visitors. “We have the recordings of what the aliens were saying when they beamed onto the station and before we intercepted them. We do not have the information necessary to translate what they said, but you can record it with your instruments and if you have the information, you can translate it and determine if it is important or useful to you.”

“Very well,” Bayanhong replied, and then she gestured for Brigson to start recording the visual images and the accompanying audio as Defakwa played it.

A short time later, the away team was back on the *Athena*. Vorwoorts had seen on the sensors the arrival of the Japhites and the sensors had recorded various things about the process. However, the decision had been made not to interfere with the contact unless Bayanhong requested a beam-out or they could detect that something was developing in a less-than-desirable manner. Nothing like that had occurred, so Thorpe did not interfere with what the away team was

doing. Once the four were back on the starship, they quickly reviewed the information that had been recorded.

"It's not much," Thorpe answered, after he and the senior officers had reviewed the recordings and the translations in the deck one conference lounge.

"Admittedly," Bayanhong said. "The Remans had no idea what they were dealing with, and from what we saw, they had no idea what the structure was or its purpose."

"Unfortunately," Hakamura continued, "the Remans did not tell the Japhites why they had come to this structure, or how they learned of its existence, whether they were travelling through the region and detected it or if something in the database on the Arosian ship directed them there."

"That's unlikely," Dewuchun added. "I'm sure that if there was information on the star-destroyer ship, it would also be in the databases on the Battlesphere, and we would've heard about it."

"So," Thorpe added, "it's more than likely that the ship was passing through that region of space and so detected it and investigated it."

"Which begs the question," Bayanhong continued, "if they stopped there, where else did they stop, and why wasn't that information passed to us? What was it about this location that allowed the Battlesphere to detect a signal that the star-destroyer somehow sent. They must've done *something* different at this location than elsewhere."

Brigson added, "Unfortunately, the Remans who beamed onto this so-called Aeliomosor, did not tell the Japhites why they had come." The exchange was basically that the Japhites had no idea who the Remans were, and the Remans did not find that particularly surprising, and the Japhites did not know who the Arosians were either, which was somewhat more surprising. "Perhaps those two Japhites were not up on the history of their people and the Federation. Given the state of the planet now, it could be centuries before Japhia is warp-capable and the Federation has expanded in this direction, and so the Arosian war might be an historic curiosity that historians might know, but these Japhites were not historians."

Thorpe spoke up, "And I'm still thinking about this whole 'Burn' thing. What is that?"

"No idea," Brigson remarked. "Based on what Defakwa said, it sounded like hypermatter such as dilithium suddenly lost its hypermatter properties and could no longer be used to draw out higher-order motions in the warp drive, making faster-than-light travel virtually impossible."

"And is that any way possible?"

"No, not that I'm aware of. I can't think of anything in physics that could change the nature of matter like that."

Thorpe asked, "What about the Odonans' so-called Project Two, which created hypermatter? Could that imply that there is some sort of process that could undo it?"

The Odonan engineer answered, "I'm not sure. Some of the aspects of

Project Two are classified and I do not have the details, but it does not seem possible, but I guess, anything is possible. The implication is that virtually all hypermatter is artificially created.”

Brigson said, “That is an assumption that many believe is highly likely, although that might be more true for materials higher on the scale than dilithium. Again, the mechanism by which this can be done is largely unknown, but maybe there is some way that hypermatter could be, for lack of a better term, undone.”

“So the question is,” Bayanhong started, “is the star-destroyer ship somehow associated with this ‘Burn’?”

“Maybe, but it would be in the long run, since it seems like the Burn is centuries away. Somehow, between now and the thirty-second century, it will occur, and I think it’ll be closer to that end than our end, which makes the star-destroyer ship unlikely to be a part of that. What we know is that the time of the Burn, Japhia was a Federation member world, and that is likely centuries from now.”

“And another question is, what do we do with this information?” Thorpe continued. “We have learned something about the future, and so from our perspective, we can change the future by making the powers that be aware of this Burn, and perhaps they can prevent it, by which time we will be long gone.” He did glance at Dewuchun when he said that, aware that Odonans are much longer-lived than most other species, but he had his doubts that the Odonan engineer would live for another eight hundred years.

Brigson said, looking at the others, “I was thinking of one other thing. The Japhites were interfering with their own planet, and they built a time-travelling structure that allowed them to go to the past when their planet was pretechnological and all of that, and they created a religion that appeared independently in all sections of the planet. Thus, given the conventional rules about time-travelling, this structure should’ve been here for an extended period of time. If so, why did our mapping probes not pick it up?”

“Perhaps,” Dewuchun said, “it is more of a ship than a base for time-travelling, and it could come and go as needed. Maybe it is the appearance of the structure that the Remans detected and so they brought the ship there.”

“We never detected it,” Vorwoorts remarked, “which implies that the Remans were closer, and that the ship has been relatively close to us at least some of the time, despite the obvious time differences in the known appearances of it.”

“Or else they have instruments capable of detecting something we do not have.”

“That’s possible.”

Bayanhong said, “If that’s the case, then what is it about this period in the history of Japhia that would bring the religion-creators to it?”

Thorpe answered, “That could be outside of our concern. We have a policy of not interfering with prewarp cultures, but the Japhites might not have

any hesitation in interfering with their own culture. It's not our place to tell them that what they are doing—or had done—was clearly wrong.”

* * *

Quintollez was again with Bojek in the Acropolis, though she was not sure why he wanted to be in this particular part of the ship, since it was used mostly by crewmembers taking a break from their duties or who wanted to eat in a communal setting, or who wanted to be in a social meeting place. Maybe it was the idea of eating more than socializing that attracted his attention, since he was basically a holographic lifeform and so had no need to eat—and no opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of taste and of eating.

Bojek did say, “I understand that the alien sphere that is out there is a time travel machine.” He gestured towards the windows at the front of the room, and out there in space was what the Japhites called the Aeliomisor, but it was too far away and too dark to be seen.

“Yes, that’s my understanding too,” the counsellor answered.

“I wonder if it is possible to ask the aliens who are on board it if they could send me to the past so that I can go back to Reioshek when I was alive and continue my life there.”

“That is neither possible nor desirable.”

“Why is it not desirable?”

“Time travel inevitably leads to bad outcomes. Your appearance on Reioshek at the same time you are in the cryochamber would cause problems. What would the authorities on the planet say, or how would they deal with that? They would not likely set you free. You might not even be believed, and you would be a holographic lifeform too.”

“But at least I could have a chance to speak to Injae again, to somehow get a message to her and hear from her. Did she love me like I loved her? I know what you said earlier about her being of a higher standing and so she could never have me as a partner, and that my memories might’ve been tampered with, but if they tampered with my memories, why would they have done it in that manner? If they tampered with memories, why not make me forget about Injae, that I had never heard of her or met her or anything?”

Quintollez could think of a reason, or even several of them. She did answer, “It’s possible they might have left those memories with you when you were on the probe ship so that you would be willing to complete the mission and serve your sentence so that when you returned to Reioshek, you could be reunited with her.”

“I do not think that is how those with the power did such things,” Bojek said after a slight pause. “Maybe they left those memories there to torment me, to make me think that Injae would love me and accept me as a partner, when in fact she did not. Maybe at some point, they might’ve revealed the truth—but even that could be an invention as well. The only way to know for sure is to see her, to

talk to her without outside influences. Then I would know the truth, and the only way I can do that would be to use the time travelling device that is there.”

“But if you went back in time, you would face another problem.”

“What?”

“How would you get from Japhia to Reioshek?”

Bojek sat there and contemplated what he had been thinking, and realized there was no easy solution to the problem. He wondered if the Japhites had a ship on board the structure that could take him to Reioshek, and if they were really willing to help him for what to them might be a trivial and irrelevant concern. That was asking for a lot. He might have to settle to just sending a message.

As he was sitting there and Quintollez was waiting for an answer, the ship suddenly shock, almost as if it had been attacked and photon torpedoes had been detonated against the shields. The others in the room looked around at the sudden disruption, as the yellow alert signals came on.

Those on the bridge felt it too. Captain Thorpe was there, walking from the ready room to the captain’s chair when the jolting started, and he almost fell over. He had to grab onto a console to keep himself on his feet, as the yellow alert signals came on. The jolting only lasted a few seconds. “What was that?” he asked. “Are we under attack?”

“No,” Vorwoorts remarked, “the shields were not raised, no damage.”

Brigson added, “Analyzing now. It’s looking like some sort of temporal disruption, originating with the Japhites’ Aeliomosor.”

“Have we been displaced in time?”

“I don’t believe so, but if it was, the displacement was not large. The stars are where they are supposed to be... scanning now, the planets in the Japhia system are where they are supposed to be.”

“And the alien sphere?”

“It’s still there.”

Looking at the viewscreen, Thorpe asked, “Then what just happened?”

“My best guess,” the science officer started, “is that the Japhites activated the time travelling system on board, and those aliens we met on board might’ve gone back to the thirty-second century.”

“Can you detect any changes on the alien sphere?”

“We were not getting very much useful information on the sensors, but a review of the sensor logs shows nothing suspicious before the temporal disruption. We might have to ask them what caused what we just felt.”

Vorwoorts then spoke up, “Captain, I’ve lost contact with the probe.” Their cloaked probe was still in orbit around Japhia itself, as they were continuing to gather information. They had been trying to see if there was a way to acquire a copy of the religious text that the Japhites had referred to, to see if they could deduce anything about the Burn from it, and they were also searching for the Preserver monument in the system to see if they could somehow acquire the

data to translate the Japhite language that might be stored there and which might have been the same as the language in the text. It was a longshot, though Bayanhong had suggested that they simply ask for a copy. Perhaps the Japhites would give them one, and in Federation Standard as well.

“Attempt to re-establish communications,” Thorpe asked. “We can’t leave the probe in this system.”

“Understood. Somehow, the temporal disruption severed the link. I’m attempting to re-establish it now... but it’s not working. It’s as if the probe lost power or something.”

“How widespread was this disruption?”

“I don’t know,” Brigson answered.

“Could they have felt it at the planet?”

“I’m not sure. It’s possible that the size of the planet, and its gravitational field, might have dampened it out enough that those on the surface likely felt nothing. If the Aeliomosor is the source of the disruption, we might have felt it because we’re close to it, but the effect surely would’ve fallen off according to the inverse square law.”

“But still enough to somehow disable or damage the probe?”

“I can’t say for sure.”

Looking back at the viewscreen, Thorpe said, “We’ll have to send the *Styx* to Japhia and attempt to find the probe and re-establish control of it. Commander Bayanhong will command that mission. Heni, transfer the last known coordinates of the probe and its course information to the runabout...”

The *Styx* was the *Danube*-class runabout assigned to the *Athena*, and like the ship itself, it had a cloaking device that would allow it to approach Japhia, with its preswarp culture that had telescopes, without being detected, hopefully. Bayanhong commanded the mission and would work the sensors, while assistant chief engineer Mark DeWillis was on board to assist with the recovery effort, to re-establish command and control of the probe. Lieutenant Sandra Ochi was piloting the small ship. The three entered the shuttlebay deck, with the *Styx* sitting in the launch position, the engineers preparing it for flight. The crew boarded the ship and ran through the prelaunch checklist and sequences, and once they were ready, Ochi said over the comm system, “*Styx* to shuttlebay control, we’re ready for departure.”

“You’re cleared for departure,” came the response.

Ochi could see that the main doors, on the roof of the shuttlebay, were opening and that the barrier field was on. She used the controls to lift the *Styx* off of the deck and towards the opening, and soon was guiding it through the barrier field. Once clear of the field and the *Athena* itself, she brought up the gravitonic induction drive to give them some distance from the ship before activating the impulse engines. Something did not seem right, although she could not immediately tell what was wrong. She used the throttle, and was expecting more response from the runabout. Then again, it had been awhile since she had piloted

this ship. Once they were sufficiently clear of the *Athena*, she activated the impulse engines and accelerated the ship and prepared it for the transition to warp. Now it was increasingly obvious that something was wrong.

Bayanhong noticed it too, and said, "Why are we not accelerating?"

"Impulse is at full thrust," Ochi replied, "but we're not accelerating that quickly."

Then DeWillis said, "Subspace factorization is not working. We can't hook into subspace and hide some of our mass there and use momentum to accelerate the rest."

"A consequence of the temporal disruption?"

"It's possible. Without subspace factorization, we're not going to be able to go very fast, and we can't go to warp."

"And that applies to the *Athena* too?"

"Yes," DeWillis replied, glumly.

"We're trapped here?"

"Assuming that the disruption caused this, yes, although it might be a temporary effect. It could also account for why we lost contact with the probe."

"Yet subetheromagnetic radiation is still detectable."

"It does not rely on subspace for transmission."

The first officer opened a link to the ship, and said, "Bayanhong to the *Athena*."

Thorpe answered, "You're not moving very quickly. Are you experiencing technical problems?"

"The problem is that the temporal disruption has disrupted subspace as well, and we can't use subspace factorization to pick up speed."

"Oh," Thorpe remarked, fully understanding what that meant. Bayanhong and the other two on the *Styx* understood that too. Those on the *Athena* had not noticed the loss of subspace access because the ship had been moving on inertia, matching the course of the Aeliomodor, and so there had been no need to accelerate or move the ship since they had arrived at the Japhia system. Without subspace factorization, a ship as large as the *Athena* was going nowhere. The captain ordered, "Return to the *Athena*."

"Right away..."

Once the runabout was back on the *Athena*, Indesakar tried to move the ship using the impulse engines, but even bringing up the thrust to maximum, the ship was not moving very fast, simply because the ship was massive and required subspace factorization to move without consuming vast quantities of fuel. Without this ability, of course, interstellar travel at faster-than-light speeds was impossible, and even moving within a star system could take months, if not years, if the engines had to accelerate their full mass.

Bayanhong asked, "Will this disruption of access to subspace fade with time?"

Dewuchun answered, "I don't know, because I'm not fully sure why this

happened, but the thing is that subspace factorization is either there or it's not. It's not as if we can partly access it or get increased access with time. It's possible that the disruption is an ongoing thing with the Japhite structure, and is perhaps related to how they do their time travelling."

"Could it also be a weapon of some sort?" Vorwoorts asked, "perhaps a way to prevent access to the structure by ships?"

"Possibly."

"Scans don't show any unusual activity from the structure," Brigson added.

Bayanhong, sitting in the first officer's seat to the right of the captain, said, "Perhaps we should return and see if we can draw out the Japhites and seek an explanation."

Thorpe had been thinking about that, and realized that could be their only alternative, beyond simply turning the ship around and heading out of the system, very slowly, until they reached the edge of the disruption, however far out that was. "Very well. Julia, lead the mission and take with you the same three people who beamed over the first time."

"Right away..."

A short time later, the away team rematerialized in the same location on the Aeliomosor that they had beamed into the first time. Bayanhong was accompanied by Brigson, Skolgaad and Drell, the same three who had made the trip the first time. Bayanhong felt a little tense as they rematerialized, thinking that the Japhites could be on board working to solve the problem that they had caused, if they in fact considered it to be a problem and not their normal operating procedure. However, when they arrived, the area was deserted and the displays all dark and inert, just like the last time. They had to set up and turn on the portable lights, just as they had done the previous time.

Brigson, standing beside the first officer, asked, "Now what?"

"We wait," Bayanhong replied, "and hopefully Defakwa and his partner, or somebody, will show up and inform us what is happening."

Skolgaad asked, "Assuming that this is something under their control."

"Of course."

However, nothing happened. The dais remained closed and there was no repeat of the power flows that marked the arrival of the Japhites. Soon, Bayanhong realized, if the aliens were coming, they should have been here by now, unless their transporter method relied on subspace, which seemed possible given the distance from this structure to the planet.

"They're not coming," Brigson said.

"I'm reaching the same conclusion," Bayanhong replied.

"Now what?"

Skolgaad added, "Perhaps we try to figure out how this thing works and fix the problem ourselves."

"A tall order."

“And we have a long time to figure this out because if we can’t solve the problem or it does not solve itself or the Japhites don’t solve it, we’re going nowhere.”

After some more time passed and still no Japhites were appearing, Bayanhong had the away team spread out and try to learn more about the structure and the technology within it. Skolgaad tried to study the engineering, but his eyes and his engineering tricorder and his experience with alien technology was not revealing much useful information. Brigson did look at some of the other rooms and spaces in this level of the structure, which was the only level that had life support, at least with oxygen and gravity, although not much in the way of heat. However, she did find an access to the computer core, and her scans revealed something about it. Tapping her commbadge, she said, “Brigson to Bayanhong.”

“Go ahead,” replied the first officer.

“I’ve accessed the computer core, and... it’s Federation technology.”

“Are you sure?”

“The materials, the nature of the elemental memory, it’s all to Federation standards.”

“Even after all of these years? This place was built perhaps hundreds of years in the future.”

“If a technology works as well as can be expected, that there’s no improvement physically possible, why change what you already know?”

Bayanhong pondered that thought for a moment, and then said, “Perhaps you’re right.” Then she added, “Can you hack into it?”

“That I don’t know,” the science officer replied. “Perhaps Marlina can.”

A short time later, Marlina Tsonga, the chief of the computer systems on the *Athena*, beamed over and met with Brigson in what they deemed was the computer access centre. “It’s pretty cold in there,” remarked the tall, dark-skinned woman.

“Yeah, I know, the heat was turned off,” Brigson replied, “but you get used to it.”

“I don’t think I’d ever get used to temperatures like this.” Tsonga had with her a specialized padd that she could use to access the computer, although when she got the order to come to the Aeliomosor and the reason why, she had her doubts that she would be able to do much. Now, though, as she scanned the hardware with her specialized tricorder, she was surprised at what she was seeing. “This is like an off-the-shelf Federation computer system. The Japhites must’ve simply acquired it as-is and used it without any significant modifications.”

“Peculiar.”

“I’d say, and I’d suspect that there’s a reason behind this beyond the Japhites trying to guide their more primitive selves through religion.”

“But can you access it?”

“I can try, but even if the hardware is obviously Federation standard,

that does not mean that the software is.” Nevertheless, Tsonga found a seat, and managed to locate access ports which would be used to download code and data, and she found that the cables she had with her fitted properly. She connected her padd and accessed the computer at the command-code level. “I’m in,” she said, after not too much work.

“That was fast.”

“Completely open system, no security protocols at all. It’s as if the Japhites got a hold of this technology and were not fully versed on all the features and aspects of it.”

Bayanhong entered the computer access room and asked the science officer, “Can she do it?”

“She’s already done it,” Brigson replied. “It’s like the Japhites acquired it from the Federation and did not modify it.”

“I see.”

“Still no Japhites appearing?”

“No.”

Tsonga then said, “I’ve accessed quite a bit of data. I’ve located the Preserver database for the primary Japhite language, so we don’t have to go looking for the Preserver monument in this system, and that would allow us to translate the texts here. I’ve found the religious text that the Japhties used to guide their society to the outcome that they wanted.”

“That should make interesting reading, at least for anthropologists and those who study such things,” Bayanhong replied, “but the question is, what about the technology that is in use here, the time-travelling aspect, the suppression of subspace?”

“That I’m still working on... wait, I think I have a map of the Aeliomisor now, and what is where.”

“That we need to transfer to the *Athena*, and let the engineers study it, and whatever information that they and the science staff can distill of the technology. Until we can get subspace accessible again, we could be trapped here.”

Brigson remarked, “That depends on how far the suppression extends.”

“Let’s hope it is not too extensive, or we caused this ‘Burn’ the Japhites mentioned.”

“I doubt that since our dilithium and the *tam-ulh-yr* in the warp core retain their properties. At worst, we can use more conventional approaches to get out of this zone of dead space. We know that the ship has the resources to sustain us for an extended period.”

“Of course,” sighed Bayanhong.

Tsonga was able to copy a large amount of data from the computer banks on the Aeliomisor to the *Athena*, and through the Preserver data from the Japhite language, they were able to translate the texts into English, so that they could be read, though it took more of an effort to decode the Japhite measuring units for distance and time into units the crew was more familiar with. The

technical details were a bit more difficult to work out. Once the science and engineering staffs studied the data and reported back to the department heads, the senior officers met again in the deck one conference lounge.

As Bayanhong and Thorpe entered the room, the captain asked, "Still no signs of the Japhites?"

"No," the first officer replied. "We have a rotating crew of security officers staying in the Aeliomosor in case they return, but nothing yet."

"Very well, though I wonder why."

"It's possible that whatever technology they use to travel from the planet to this outpost might not work with subspace suppressed. Rodall was saying that they likely use subspace transporters from Japhia to this facility, and they would not work, just as the Odonan subspace transporters are not working, but the regular ones are."

The two senior officers took their seats, and as Thorpe looked over the others, he started, "No doubt, there is a lot that we have learned, but the most important question is, how extensive is this suppressed subspace and did this structure cause it and can we undo it?"

Brigson reported, "There's nothing in the data we have accessed that suggests that this subspace suppression can happen, and so no idea on how widespread it is."

Dewuchun spoke up, "The one impression that I have gotten is that the structure is underpowered. The technology that I have seen suggests that it needs more dilithium and hypermatter than it has. What it has is fragmentary and below what the facility is designed for. Now, we know about this 'Burn,' and it is possible that the Aeliomosor had a proper complement of dilithium until then, and afterwards, it lost the dilithium and had to make due with scraps, essentially."

"So," Thorpe remarked, "the Japhites built and used the Aeliomosor before the Burn, and have moved it through time... how?"

"It's possible that that they towed it through a slingshot manoeuvre around their sun. The structure does not have any propulsion systems beyond manoeuvring thrusters, and nothing that suggests a warp frame could be added to it."

Vorwoorts spoke up, "Captain, my guess is that the Japhites had this structure before the Burn, and used it to go back in time to influence their culture in pre-technological times, which would have been thousands of years ago. They had it in the past only for a certain period of time, which would explain why our mapping probes did not detect it when it moved through this region of space a couple of centuries ago. Now, they have come back into the past perhaps to acquire dilithium."

"How? If a ship made the slingshot manoeuvre, why drag this thing along with it? It cannot go and find dilithium on its own."

"Just a guess, captain."

Dewuchun used the controls to operate the viewscreen in the room. He

explained, “A lot of the technology involved here we can figure out, as it involves primarily advanced sensor systems, life support and the transporter system itself, which I strongly suspect uses subspace technology, not unlike the Odonan subspace transporters. However, a lot of the power leads and computing power and more seemed devoted to this device here, and I don’t think that’s a subspace transporter.” A schematic appeared on the screen, and it showed a ring-like structure, with a thick ring that was slightly oval, but large enough and open enough that several people could walk through it together. There was a lot of processing hardware and power leads around it, focusing on a rather simple and small control panel. “This, if anything is seemingly the heart and the centre of this structure.”

Thorpe had a good idea what that resembled, but it seemed impossible. Others in the room recognized the basic shape, but it still seemed impossible, except that they knew what the purpose of the Aeliomosor was. “That can’t be.”

“It does resemble the shape,” the Odonan engineer remarked.

One of the newer members of the crew was in attendance as well, Lieutenant Ethan Wojeck, the anthropologist who joined the ship just before it left on its mission to find the *Clements*. He was in his twenties, not that far removed from Starfleet Academy, a tall and slender man with shoulder-length light brown hair described as “perpetually slightly messy.” He asked, “What are you talking about? You recognize what that is?”

Thorpe started, “There is an artifact located on an unnamed planet, an artifact that is basically classified and so its knowledge is not generally well-known. The senior officers of this ship have learned of what it is. It’s called the Guardian of Forever, a powerful time- and space portal that seemingly can take you anywhere, to any planet, to any time. You can sense the obvious danger and why knowledge of this device is restricted.”

“Have you ever seen that device?” Wojeck asked.

“No, but we have seen images of it, and that does look a lot like it.”

Dewuchun continued, “I find it extremely unlikely that the actual, original Guardian of Forever is on that structure, but it is possible that in eight hundred years, someone might’ve figured out how it worked. They could have reverse-engineered it. I know some people think it is sentient somehow, but it is really just technology, perhaps with a strong artificial-intelligence component, but still just technology. It is possible that the Japhites got a hold of a copy of the Guardian, which could explain the use of Federation computer technology and so on.”

“And another possible reason why the structure was not detected by the mapping probes,” Vorwoorts added. “They built it some time between now and eight hundred years in the future, and kept it in the future and used the Guardian technology to go back in time to influence their past. Now they brought it to the past for their search for dilithium.”

“Why bring it to the past? Why not just use it in their time period to go on that search?”

Brigson answered, "Maybe there is something in the Burn that prevents the Guardian technology from accessing the past through it."

Thorpe said, "Despite that, that does not answer the question on the subspace suppression and how to reverse that. There's nothing in the structure that suggests that."

"It's possible that it is somehow associated with their duplicate Guardian. We are not familiar with the technology behind that device. Our descendants might've figured it out, but we have not."

"Does it work?"

"We don't know," Dewuchun answered. "It's in a part of the structure that does not have life support and access to it is blocked, though we likely could beam in, wearing environmental suits. I'm not sure if it can be powered using the dilithium that they have."

"We have reserves," Bayanhong started, looking over the others at the meeting. "Could we use that to bring up the structure of operational status?"

"Is that a wise idea?"

"I don't mean to actually use the Guardian, but it might draw out the Japhites. They might not be able to access the Aeliomossor now because they made two trips to it and power levels are low. What we need is for them to appear and hopefully they have the knowledge to undo the subspace suppression."

Thorpe started to think about it, but he did not immediately provide an answer. He was extremely unsure of the wisdom of making operational something with the power of the Guardian of Forever. He was thinking of a certain holographic Reioshekian with a desire to go home, though he never could again. He was aware of the others looking at him. "That is a decision that requires some thought."

"Of course," Bayanhong replied.

While Thorpe pondered the decision on possibly reactivating a duplicate Guardian of Forever, the others did discuss other things that they had learned. Wojeck did give a summary on what the Japhites did to create a religion that "spontaneously" appeared in different parts of the planet at different times, all with the same message and basically the same religious text, which was termed "Aelio." As Wojeck said, "It's like that old quote, 'technology sufficiently advanced is indistinguishable from magic,' or in this case, miracles." That was how those who went back in time, and presented themselves as the equivalent of archangels, and not gods, convinced the inhabitants that they were more than mere mortals and less than gods, just agents of the gods. "As far as I can tell from reading the texts, they had a duotheistic religion, a god and a goddess, though they never appeared, just their archangels did. They performed miracles like healing the sick, producing food when there was a famine, predicting the weather and natural disasters like earthquakes and volcanoes, and the like. They also did resurrections."

"Resurrections?" Bayanhong asked.

"Supplemental texts showed how they did it. Basically, they developed

the technology to clone individuals. They would take a cell from the deceased and convert it into a stem cell and use that to rapidly clone an individual. They had the technology to transfer the memories and essences of a person into the new body, even from a dead body. The cloned body was youthful and in perfect condition and health, which they explained to the locals as a resurrection to the peak of existence.”

“And do the Japhites in the thirty-second century use this technology themselves?”

“I don’t know, but the indications are that the technology to do this is on the Aeliomossor.”

“That’s scary,” the first officer replied.

“I know, but we’re talking technology that has advanced a lot in eight hundred years. After all, think back eight hundred years, the sixteenth century, and compare it to now. How far have we advanced since then? How far can we advance in another eight hundred years?”

“Of course,” Ger Psakolaps, the chief medical officer, added, “because the Japhites have such technology, and even if it was developed with Federation technology, that doesn’t mean that other races, including humans and Kentyans and the rest, use it.”

“I know,” Bayanhong said with a sigh, and she was thinking of one individual on the *Athena* who probably would like to experiment with the resurrection technology, although there was no actual cells that could be cloned.

* * *

Captain Thorpe did have a difficult decision to make. A short time after the meeting, he met with his chief engineer, asking him, “Do you think that if we provide the dilithium, we can activate the Aeliomossor to full power, or to a more operational state?”

“Yes, I believe we can,” Dewuchun replied.

“And you can do it?”

“Using the information that Marlina has downloaded, we have analyzed the composition of the power generating and distribution system, and there are clear Federation aspects to the technology, almost as if in the future, Japhia was a part of the Federation and had access to our technology.”

“They have said as much already.”

“Should we do this?” the Odonan asked.

“We do have some issues here. The Japhites have not appeared since the subspace disruption, and it’s possible that they cannot appear, so perhaps powering up the alien structure could help them, get them here and hopefully fix the problem, if they are, in fact, the cause of it.”

“Are you concerned about how the Japhites have been interfering with their past?”

“It’s not something that I would approve of, because I can think of many

ways that it can go wrong, but obviously the interference has been in place for centuries, if not millennia, and so as far as they are concerned, that's the normal development of their culture."

"I see. I'll see what I can do about adapting some dilithium to work in the Japhite sphere..."

A short time later, Dewuchun and some other engineers, wearing environmental suits, beamed into the part of the Aeliomisor that had been identified, both through scans and the downloaded information, as the central engineering hub on the station. They located the dilithium chambers, and had with them padds that contained instructions on how to access the necessary equipment. Once they beamed in, they turned on the lights that had also been beamed over, because this particular part of the structure had no life support, no heat and no breathable atmosphere and no gravity either, as well as no light. The engineers had to move around stiffly in their magnetic boots, and none of them liked that. "Just imagine if they built this place with floors that were not responsive to magnets," DeWillis had said.

"Then," Dewuchun replied, "we would be in trouble."

DeWillis had the cases that contained the dilithium crystals, which had been cut and faceted according to the information that had been downloaded. Dewuchun accessed the controls that lifted the chambers that housed the dilithium. They rose out of the machinery, four chambers in all, and then the outer casing lifted to. What they saw were pieces of dilithium that had been somehow fused together into approximately the required shape, but the fused interfaces were cracked and chipped, and particles of dilithium lined the bottom of the chamber, and some fluttered out and floated about in the zero gravity. DeWillis, looking what he was seeing, said, "It's surprising that this would even work at all."

Lieutenant Zack Kap was also on the team, and he was the one who specialized in handling the drive crystals on the *Athena* and related technology. He said, "Dilithium can be fairly resilient and even in a degraded state can still pull out the first-order and some of the second-order motons, but if it is in less-than-optimum condition, it would degrade. Perhaps this was all the dilithium they had access to and had to make the best of a bad situation. It's hard to imagine interstellar society after this 'Burn' if so much of the dilithium was destroyed or degraded."

"I know," Dewuchun answered.

It did not take long for the engineers to replace the original dilithium with the replacements. The old material seemingly fell apart in their hands, leaving shards and dust of dilithium floating in the air. It was distracting, but they had to move it aside carefully to avoid any of it getting into the machinery. Once all four replacements were installed, Dewuchun tapped the icons on the panel that lowered the chambers back into the machinery. As he did, DeWillis said, "Lets hope that this was not a trap, a lure, to get us to give them some good

dilithium, and then this whole structure disappears into the future.”

“That would be unfortunate,” Dewuchun remarked, “because then we would be trapped in the future and could not come back to the past because we would know too much of the future.”

“This ‘Burn’ thing is almost too much to know about the future already.”

Kap activated the connections to the dilithium chambers, and almost immediately, systems started to come on. Lights came on in the room they were in, and they felt the gravity plates start up and hold them down, so that they did not need the magnetic boots. “It’s working,” he remarked. “Power levels are coming up now.”

The chief engineer tapped a button on the arm-mounted panel on his suit, and said, “Dewuchun to *Athena*.”

“*Athena* here,” came the response from Bayanhong.

“We have successfully installed the replacement dilithium, and it appears to be working.”

“We have noticed, as we’re picking up rising power levels throughout the Aeliomodor.”

“But is the suppression of subspace still there?”

“As far as we can tell,” the first officer said. “However, perhaps now we can draw out the Japhites, once they realize that the structure has power now.”

“Assuming that they know.”

“My guess is that they should be aware. They were aware when the Remans came and on our first visit to the structure, so there must be some means that informs them of this, and surely that must be working now.”

“Of course...”

Quintollez was again meeting with Bojek, a man whom she was getting the impression was feeling depressed. Originally, he had been satisfied that he had this holographic form because the alternative was to be in suspended animation in some sort of computer memory bank. Now, though, he was feeling depressed because being a hologram was somewhat limiting. He spoke with the counsellor, saying, “I hear that there is something on the Japhite structure, something called the ‘Guardian of Forever.’”

“We don’t know that,” Quintollez replied. “At most, it’s a copy of the technology.”

“But it can connect to Reioshek in the past?”

“We have gone over that before.”

Bojek still said, “And I heard that the Japhites have cloning technology, that they can use for resurrections, which I assume is bringing a dead person alive and infusing his memories and so on.”

“We have been over that before as well. The captain would never approve of the idea of allowing you to return to Reioshek and retrieving some cells from you at some point in your life. Such a mission would be extremely complicated and difficult with low probability of success.”

“Why?”

“If this structure works like the Guardian of Forever that actually exists, it is not very precise in where you would end up. If you say ‘Reioshek forty-six thousand, seven hundred years ago,’ you could end up anywhere on the planet plus or minus a thousand years.”

“But I would not need to actually meet my former self on the planet. All I would need were a few cells from any Reioshekian.”

“Such a clone would not be you,” Quintollez replied, but she in a sense could understand what the man was getting at since any biological Reioshekian could have his memories integrated with the body, despite the difference in physical appearance.

“But it would be. Part of the programming, part of the data I have, is my genetic code, molecule by molecule of my DNA. That could be replicated and put into the cell and that would start the cloning process.”

“Still, I doubt that the captain would approve such a mission.”

“But could I at least use this structure to find out what happened to my planet, why it became a dead world? Why did it end, and when did it end?”

“I don’t know,” Quintollez replied, thinking that Bojek would still have ulterior motives for making such a request.

A day passed, and there was no apparent change in the disruption of subspace. They attempted to move the *Athena*, but without subspace factorization, the impulse engines could barely move the ship. A rotating crew of officers remained on the control deck of the Aeliomosor, hoping that their presence would draw out the Japhites who had come earlier and perhaps help them resolve the situation. However, they were still not appearing. “The problems are related,” Bayanhong told the captain. “Without subspace, their transporters from Japhia are not operational, even if they are aware of our presence on the station.”

“I understand that, but would it not be possible to transmit a message to them? We have the linguistic database, so even if we have to use electromagnetic signals with the long lag times, we should still be able to communicate with them.”

“Except that such signals could be intercepted by the planet itself, which as far as we know, is still in a prewarp state. A subetheromagnetic signal might work, assuming that they have some sort of receiver at the planet. However, that requires coding, and we have no idea what kind of coding the Japhites used.”

“Well, we have seen significant elements of Federation technology in this structure, so perhaps they understand our coding parameters. It is worth a try.”

“Understood.”

On the Aeliomosor, life support was coming on to more and more of the station, as the dilithium that had been installed allowed the station to gradually go to full power. That included the location where the replica of the Guardian of Forever had been installed. Brigson and the ship archaeologist, Lieutenant Tom Morrow, beamed onto the alien structure and made their way to what they con-

sidered the heart of the Aeliomosor. As they approached the room where it was located, Brigson asked the younger man, "You are familiar with the Guardian of Forever?"

"I have heard of it, but I have never been there," Morrow answered. "I would like to see it, but the planet it is located on is restricted. I understand the danger of the technology."

"And we have no idea of the culture that built it?"

"Nothing that I am aware of, but a lot of what is known about the artifact is classified, although I do not know why."

"The dangers it represents?"

"But what kind of danger is there in knowing about the society that built it, the beings that came up with technology that we don't really understand?"

"Well," Brigson said with a sigh, "in the next eight hundred years, they will come to understand the technology, and duplicate it."

"And perhaps by manipulating technology that they did not fully understand, they caused this 'Burn' that I have been hearing so much about."

"Maybe."

They arrived at the central room in the Aeliomosor, where the technology was located. The doors opened for the two, and they entered a room that was somewhat of a sphere shape, with a dome above and a bowl below. The whole room was perhaps a hundred metres in diameter, and the dome above and the bowl below had lights built into it that caused the room to glow with eerie and peculiar shadows. There was a metal grated floor that led into the room, and which surrounded the actual device. The replica was mounted on a thick column that extended upward from the deepest part of the bowl below. The structure was a reddish colour, made of metal or crystal or something with the composition of both. It was a hollow oval, with steps leading up to it from both sides, and it was large enough that three or four people, side-by-side, could walk through it easily. A small panel was located nearby, but it was inert, a simple panel in a black, reflective, glass-like material that showed nothing at all.

"So that's it?" Morrow remarked.

"Yes, it certainly looks like a replica of the Guardian, though we can't be actually sure that's what it is. It could be related to the subspace transporter that we saw on the control deck, through which the Japhites appeared."

"But how do you control it?" He did look at the panel, and even touched it, but nothing happened. He walked around the structure, but if it was capable of responding to his presence, it was not doing so. He walked up the steps and through it, from one side to the other, but nothing happened. "It's not responding to our presence. Now, I'm not familiar enough with the real one to understand how to operate it, even if they do."

"It's possible that they might control it somehow, to see historical events, but with a strict rule of just observing and not going through."

"Yeah, messing with the timeline is never a good idea."

The two did look around the room and the oval-shaped structure, and

they used their tricorders to analyze it and to try to learn more of the technology behind it, but the readings made little sense to them. Eventually, they decided that they had learned enough about what was in the room, so the left and returned to the ship.

On the bridge, Vorwoorts reported, "Captain, good news and bad news."

"What's the good news?" he asked, deciding that would be better to hear first.

"I have managed to re-establish contact with our probe at Japhia. Somehow, it had picked up our signal and had readjusted its power distribution so that it can communicate with us, but that does lead to the bad news, two, actually."

"That figured, bad news outnumbering good news."

"The bad news is that the cloaking device has stopped working, and the probe is now visible. Fortunately, it is small and dark and unless one of the telescopes happens to focus on it, it's not likely that the planet's inhabitants are aware that it's there. The second piece of bad news is that the subspace disruption extends that far into the system. The probe is unable to move."

"I see," the captain answered.

"And still no response to our communication hails. The Japhites who know about the station, the ones we met earlier, are not responding. Of course, they might be choosing not to respond, or they are not aware of our signals."

A short time later, Quintollez came onto the bridge, and said, "Captain, can I speak to you in private?"

He had a suspicion that what the counsellor wanted to talk about was Bojek, so he said, "My ready room." The two entered the ready room, and as the door closed, Thorpe faced the woman and asked, "What is this about, Lucia, Bojek?"

"It is," Quintollez admitted.

"It is not desirable for him to travel through the Guardian replica to the past—if that is even possible and we can figure out how to operate it—and live out his life there."

"He understands that, and knows he can't go back. He even understands that he can't go back to the past to get some Reioshekian stem cells in which he could insert his DNA, as he apparently has his DNA coding sequence among the data, and use the Japhite cloning technology. However, he does wonder what happened to his society, and why it ended up the way it did. What destroyed it, and when? He would do what other archaeologists and anthropologists have done with the original Guardian, and merely observe history. This is history that already happened, so it would be safe to learn what caused the Reioshekian society to collapse."

"We don't know how to operate it."

"I understand that you merely ask it a question and it answers."

"That's the original, and we cannot assume that the replica will respond the same way."

“But we can try.”

Thorpe answered, “I’ll give it some thought.”

Later, Bojek asked the counsellor, “What did the captain say? Did he agree to the idea?”

“He said that he would give it some thought.”

“That usually means that he will not agree to the idea.”

“Yeah,” Quintollez said with a sigh. “It seems in that respect, our cultures are in agreement. I also think that he suspects that you might attempt to pass through the Guardian replica and return to the planet in the past. The scheme that you propose is rather extreme and with a very low probability of success, and in many ways, it is considered unethical.”

“Why?”

“Sometimes, we just think certain things are unethical, that they are wrong by definition. This idea of replicating DNA based on the coding that you have and then implanting that in a cell and using Japhite technology to create a new biological body just goes against some of our most fundamental beliefs.”

“Why?”

Quintollez had to think about it, and she did find it hard to come up with a convincing reason, but there were several less-convincing ones that were possible. “I think that there is the fear that if this approach proves to work, and that you can create a new biological body and transfer your memories and the rest to it—and that could be the tricky part—this technology would be abused. People who have lived long lives and whose bodies are starting to show signs of wear could use the technology to create new, younger bodies, their own bodies with their own DNA, and basically relive their lives again, with their memories and knowledge intact.”

“And that is wrong?”

“It is wrong because there would be powerful people that would want to keep the technology to themselves.”

“Then *that* is wrong,” Bojek remarked, “and not the technology itself. An elite, the powerful, should not reserve such technology for themselves. I understand that through your history, you have developed a lot of medical technology and procedures and treatments with the aim of curing illness and repairing injuries and avoiding death. This so-called resurrection technology is really nothing more than an extension of such concepts, perhaps the ultimate realization of it.”

“I understand that, but sometimes, in a society, there is this innate belief, deep within you, that something is simply wrong, or simply unethical. I understand your point of view, but the captain does not.” Quintollez looked at the hologram, and then asked, “Are you implying that you are saying you want to merely observe what happened to Rieoshek, or are you planning to jump through?”

Bojek was not immediate with his answer, so Quintollez added, “Unfortunately, we do not know how to operate the device, and apparently there is no way

to control exactly when and where the portal will open. In addition, we cannot operate the Japhites' cloning and resurrection technology, and the Japhites themselves are not returning."

"I see... so there's no way for us to go over there anyway, and do this, if only to observe history, even without the approval of the captain?"

"Only if those who assist you are willing to face a court-martial..."

A short time after his brief meeting with Quintollez, Thorpe met with his first officer in his ready room. There, he repeated the request that the counsellor had made on behalf of Bojek. Thorpe asked, "What is your impression of that?"

Bayanhong answered, "I think that the idea that Bojek can resurrect his body using Japhite technology to be rather implausible. First of all, he would have to get access to Reioshekian cells, preferably egg cells, and how can he do that? Then we would need the Japhites to actually work the technology, if they would even approve."

"Those are my feelings exactly, but if he merely wants to learn why and how his society died, would that be desirable?"

"Well, there's no harm in learning what happened, although I'm not sure that this replica Guardian can do that. From what I understood from the original is that it automatically will open portals to key moments in planetary history, by its calculations, and to get something else, you have to ask it complicated and precise questions, carefully phrased. We don't know about the replica."

"I see."

Bayanhong continued, "It's this resurrection technology, for lack of a better word, the ability to create a younger version of your body and transfer your essence, your memories and everything that makes *you* into the new body; it's that technology that I have been thinking about."

"Why?" Thorpe asked.

"Where did it come from?"

"The implication is that the Japhites developed it."

"Perhaps, but that technology is in the future, and at some future time, Japhia is apparently a member of the Federation, before this so-called 'Burn.' Did they share the technology, or adapt it from an outside source? Does the Federation have access to the technology, and how would that shape society, alter society even?"

"Maybe not as much as you might think. We are aware of other species that have longer lifespans than humans, and we know how their societies adapt and adjust to that, so this would basically be giving humans like us similar lifespans."

"The big difference is that I doubt all humans have access to that technology."

"We don't know about that, and it would perhaps be in our best interest if we did not know about that, because that is something that is in the future, and the less we know about the future, the better. Learning about this 'Burn' that

seems to have impaired faster-than-light travel is bad enough.”

“Perhaps you’re right.”

“So,” Thorpe continued, “we should allow what Bojek suggests, to view Reioshekian history, and nothing more. You and Quintollez will accompany him over there, and your mission will be to make sure that he does exactly what he suggested he wanted to do and nothing more.”

“Understood.”

“And in the meantime, I have to think about this disruption of subspace and what it means for us. At least we have received word that it does not extend all the way to the Federation, but without subspace factorization, it could still take us a long time—emphasis on *long*—to clear it.”

“Perhaps it might be wise to head to Japhia itself, and see if we can somehow meet with the Japhites who know about the Aeliomosor.”

“That too could take a lot of time, even using a shuttle. We’d have to rig it with extra fuel tanks and whatever. A solar sail might help us get back to the ship, but it won’t take us there.”

“I know...”

* * *

Three individuals rematerialized outside of the chamber that contained the replica Guardian of Forever. Bayanhong and Quintollez entered the chamber, with Bojek, his holographic form restored after the transporter process was done, following. They again looked at the massive structure that dominated the room, and Bayanhong had to assume that it looked similar to the original version. She had to wonder if it operated the same way. She also had to wonder about the science behind it and how those who had decoded how the device worked actually did it. What other fantastic scientific and technological had been developed in the next eight hundred years by her descendants—though, Bayanhong did realize, none of those descendants would have actually come from her.

“That is it?” Bojek asked, as he joined the two *Athena* officers and looked at the structure. “It does not look like much.”

“Sometimes,” Bayanhong replied, “the most wonderful, most complex technology, does not always look that impressive. It is impressive in what it does.”

“And it allows anyone to travel through that ring and go into the past, and that past could be any time and any place?”

“If it functions like the original, then more than likely yes,” Bayanhong started, “but remember what we agreed on. You want to merely observe what happened to your planet, and not to go through it.”

“I know that,” Bojek replied, and he knew that in this initial use of the structure, that would be all that he would accomplish. He had been instructed that the structure presented its history at a rapid pace and that it was almost impossible to pick a precise time and location to appear, at least on the first use.

What his holographic emitter would allow was for it to gather a great deal of data as it was presented, and he could analyze it later. As long as the subspace disruption continued, the starship he was on was going nowhere, and he would have time to prepare his next move. "As I had been told, I can't choose exactly when and where I would appear, and given my holographic form, there are many periods in our society where I could not adequately exist. It would not be a good idea to appear in one of them."

"Agreed."

"So how does this work?"

"That's the problem," Quintollez added. "I'm not seeing any way to actually use this small control panel here."

The first officer answered, "The original was activated by asking it questions. Naturally, I was not there and have not seen personally the details of what happened when the Guardian was first encountered, but that is the gist of it."

"So... what question do you ask?"

Bayanhong stepped forward and had to assume that since the Aeliomosor had resumed full functionality with the installation of dilithium from the *Athena*, it was monitoring the presence of life forms near it and their conversations. It was perhaps waiting for it to be directly addressed, so Bayanhong was doing that now. She stood close to it, and asked, "Are you the Guardian of Forever?"

Bojek, standing near Quintollez, did ask, "It can understand your language?"

Before the counsellor could reply, the device provided the answer, "I am a construction based on what you term the Guardian of Forever." Quintollez would have speculated that since this was perhaps built with assistance from the Federation, it likely did understand the human language.

"And you operate in the same manner?"

"To the best of my knowledge, I can."

Bayanhong gestured for Bojek to approach, and he came up beside her. "Present to us, then, the history of the planet Reioshek."

But the Guardian did not respond. Bayanhong found that puzzling. She repeated the command, and still the device did not respond. Quintollez suggested, "Perhaps the Guardian does not know about Reioshek. Would that planet be known in the thirty-second century?"

"It's known now," the first officer replied. "It's part of our mission logs and there's no reason to hide the existence of the planet from any official records."

"Even so, maybe this replica does not have access to all of that data."

Bayanhong decided to test that idea, and so faced the replica again and made another request. "Present to us, the history of the planet Japhia."

Again, nothing happened.

Quintollez remarked, "Well, it's certainly possible that the Japhites don't actually call their planet that."

"But if it responds in English, then perhaps it would also know that in

English, the planet is named Japhia. Even the Japhites, when speaking through the translator, referred to their planet as Japhia.”

Bejek had another idea. He took a step forward—which did concern Bayanhong—and he started to speak, “*A’an va’adamaduk Reioshek ba’aqalani.*”

Lights flashed around the ring structure and the interior space grew misty. The device responded in kind, “*Vu’ur shabalanguk va’adamaduk Reioshek!*”

And then the mistiness in the centre of the ring disappeared, and images started to appear.

Bayanhong said, “So the secret is to make the request for a particular planet’s history in a language from that planet...”

On the *Athena*, the first-shift officers were at their positions on the bridge, or at least Vorwoorts, Brigson and Indesakar were at their consoles, and the other consoles were manned by lower-ranked officers. Vorwoorts was the conn officer as the captain and first officer were not on the bridge, and neither was the security chief, Sal Hakamura. When an alert tone sounded on the science console, Vorwoorts looked in that direction but did not even get the question started when Brigson provided the answer, “Massive power buildup in the Aeliomosor!”

Her first instinct was to raise the shields, but she did remember that they had away teams on the Japhite structure. Before she could react to that, the ship picked up an incoming message, a text message in the primary Japhite language, which they could translate. “Time travel function is being activated on the Aeliomosor.”

“We’d better get our people off of it,” Brigson suggested.

Vorwoorts was already activating a general communications, saying, “All personnel on the Aeliomosor, prepare for immediate transport.” Her fingers were moving swiftly over her console, as she quickly added, “Transporter room, prepare to beam everybody back.”

“How long do we have?” Brigson asked.

“No idea.”

But they had no time at all. The Aeliomosor simply disappeared.

Vorwoorts was still in contact with the transporter room, and so asked, “Did we beam anybody back?”

“Negative,” replied transporter chief Megan Wilder. “There was no time.”

“Damn.”

Brigson asked, “Where did it go?”

“More than likely, what time did it go to? Those on board could be seeing the thirty-second century now.”

Those on the Aeliomosor, especially Bayanhong, Quintollez and Bojek, heard the general broadcast from the ship over their commbadges. “What’s happening?” the first officer asked.

"Maybe something has changed," Quintollez remarked.

"Ready for transport, then. Bojek, shut off the holography."

The Reioshekian complied, as the holographic image of his body seemingly folded and mutated into the shape of the mobile emitter device, but even so, it continued to record what the Guardian was showing him. Bayanhong and Quintollez assumed a position for transport, but nothing happened. They stood there for thirty seconds, and still no transport. Quintollez said, "It should not take that long."

"Maybe they can't transport us from in here," the first officer replied. Then she tapped her commbadge and said, "Bayanhong to *Athena*." There was no response. "Bayanhong to *Athena*," she repeated, but she got only silence. Quintollez tried her commbadge and had a similar lack of response. "What happened?"

"I don't know. Was it something we did?"

Now Bayanhong remarked, "I don't know. Maybe activating this Guardian somehow activated some temporal aspect. Perhaps that's how the Japhites were able to get the Aeliomosor to travel through time."

"So what time did we end up in?"

"No idea, but maybe the thirty-second century."

The *Athena* had been keeping at least two officers, usually security officers, on the Aeliomosor in case the Japhites that they had encountered originally returned, and Bayanhong had kept herself informed on who the officers were, especially when she was on the alien structure. The two currently assigned were Lieutenant Edward Chan and Ensign Zuridah Allende. She tapped her commbadge and said, "Bayanhong to Chan."

"Chan here," came the response from the security officer. "We received the message from the *Athena*, but something happened and we did not beam out."

"Neither did we. Did anything change where you are?" She knew that the two were in the main control room, the one that had the arch and the sub-space transporter the Japhites used to contact them initially.

"Nothing on any console, but we don't understand those. However, we could see visually that the starscape completely changed, like we ended up somewhere else. I don't think that we travelled in time, but we travelled to another location."

"Great," sighed the first officer. "We could be at any time or any where."

Quintollez was paying more attention to the rapidly-changing images of the Reioshekian history that was playing out through this Guardian replica, and she got glimpses of a society that became rather technologically advanced and sophisticated, and then it seemed to destroy itself and leave the planet in the destroyed form, in much the same manner that the *Athena* found it in when they visited that world. Bojek was still there, inside the mobile emitter but with his holographic appearance shut off. Quintollez was also paying some attention to what the first officer was saying, and the implication of what had happened, but she had an idea. She did speak up, "Commander, if the Aeliomosor ended up

somewhere else, my first guess would be the Reioshek system, if this Guardian controls the structure.”

“But when?” Bayanhong asked. “Is it our time period, or some time in the past or the future? Would Captain Thorpe and those on the *Athena* know that, or infer that?”

“Well, they would know why we are here, but to them, the sphere simply disappeared and they would have no idea why.”

By this time, the history of Reioshek came to an end, and the last images were of the planet as a wasteland. With the history complete, the Guardian shut off and became inert again. Bojek also resumed his holographic form, and once he was capable of communicating in a way that the other two could understand him, he said simply, “Now I know.”

On the *Athena*, Thorpe asked, “That warning message, where did it come from? Did it come from the Aeliomosor?”

Vorwoorts answered, “It was too brief to triangulate, and since it was text only, it’s hard to say if it was automatically generated or the Japhites sent it themselves, but I suspect the former.”

“Why have we not heard from the Japhites since that initial contact?”

“I don’t know,” Brigson replied. “I was under the impression that it was the suppression of subspace that prevented them from contacting us.”

“Now that the structure is gone... Sanjay, see if you can move the ship.”

The pilot activated the flight controls and just picked a random course, accelerating the ship as he normally would to a higher sublight speed—and it was working as it should. “Captain, the subspace suppression has ended. Subspace factorization is functional again.”

“Henri, use the same frequency and the same coding system that the text message was sent in and ask the Japhites what is going on and where the Aeliomosor could have gone.”

“Of course.”

“What did you learn?” Quintollez asked.

Bojek took a few moments to put the ideas together, and then he started, “Reioshek became quite advanced, but one thing that they never did was to settle on any other planets. They had warp capability, but they did not colonize other worlds. The reason was that as their technology advanced and their society became wealthy in the sense that the population could live comfortably, they did not reproduce at a replacement rate. That meant that over time, the population of the planet decreased. The caste system had something to do with that as well, and the genetic variations were reduced due to limited mating options. With a decreasing population, they had no need to settle on other worlds. At the same time, they relied more and more on technology, and this led to an increasing reliance on artificial intelligence, which on Reioshek became quite advanced. Then, the AI decided they had no need for the biological Reioshekians, and so

worked to eradicate them.”

“That’s always the fear of a society that is using and relying on artificial intelligence.”

“But that never happened on your world?”

“Actually, there was a brief moment when it could’ve happened, in the middle of the twenty-first century when we had the last of our planet-wide wars. Some of the factions, feeling that they did not have enough soldiers to fight their battles, started to relay on artificial intelligence systems to do the fighting. At first, they were war machines operating remotely, but when the other side started to jam signals, the machines were made more independent and with more self-control and perhaps even self-awareness. Some of these war machines decided that they did not have to risk their existence to the biological population, and rebelled, and attacked the people. Thus, at the tail end of the Eugenics War, we had the AI War, and somehow, we managed to defeat the artificial entities, and since that time, we had the feeling that machines should not develop advanced intellectual capabilities. It’s just too dangerous.”

Bojek continued, “My people had the same fear, the same opinion, so when the power of the artificial lifeforms was starting to become worrisome, they secretly added a separate system, a separate command-and-control network outside of the control, and knowledge, of the AI. It was triggered to go off when the system could no longer detect biological Reioshekians. Thus, when the last of my people died, this ‘kill code,’ this system-wide self destruct was set off. Code was activated that basically had the AI units turning on each other, and that effectively destroyed the machines.”

Bayanhong, now listening in to this conversation, said, “System-wide self-destruct, where I have heard that before?”

Quintollez replied, “Maybe the Arosians got the idea from the Reioshekians.”

Bojek added, “About the only thing that would survive were those AI units that were somehow suspended.”

“Like the ones that we encountered when we beamed down to the planet,” Bayanhong said. “They did not seem affected by this ‘kill code.’”

“Probably because it was no longer transmitting. I’m not sure of the details of the code, but it probably was more pronounced in the machines that were capable of destroying things. A simple hologram like I have become or what Tolbak was might not be vulnerable to this because as holograms, we are no more capable of destruction than a biological Reioshekian.”

“I see,” Bayanhong remarked, “but that does not solve our current problem.”

“But,” Quintollez said, “if we shifted in space because the Guardian was activated, then the most likely place we ended up was at Reioshek, probably in the outer reaches of the system, like at Japhia. We don’t have the information with us that would allow us to confirm that the starfield outside this structure matches what would be seen from Reioshek. On the other hand, if that is what

happened, then we can get the Guardian to simply display the history of Japhia, and that should return us to Japhia, and hopefully in the same time period.”

“But we would have to do it in the native language of the Japhites.”

“Which we have through the translator routines that we programmed into our tricorders, and can use in case we encounter any Japhites while we are here.”

“Very well,” the first officer remarked. “We have nothing to lose. The ship doesn’t know when we are and we cannot survive too long in the Aeliomosor because we have no food and the other essential items we need for living, and we certainly can’t go to the surface of Reioshek, or even head there. Our searches did not uncover any small ships that we could operate—if we know how. Go ahead and try to get the Guardian to show the history of Japhia.”

“Of course, commander,” Quintollez said, as she started to work on the tricorder, to form the message she wanted to send and then translate it into what they presumed was the primary language used among the Japhites, at least those from the thirty-second century.

While she did that, Bayanhong wanted to ask more questions from Bojek, to learn more about what had happened to his planet, but when she looked at him, she noticed that something was not quite right about him. He was wavering, seemingly distant and detached. She asked, “Is something wrong?”

“I... think there is.”

“What?”

“The AI kill code. When the Guardian was showing me what was happening on my world, that code was somehow transmitted, and since I was in a data-absorbing mode because there was so much data to take in, I took in the code too, and now it is seemingly attacking me.”

“Can you purge it?”

“I can’t even recognize it, but it is not affecting my memories and the like, but it is... affecting the software and the hardware of the mobile emitter, and seemingly... wants to purge the memory of me... and to make the emitter... inert.” Now the holographic image was starting to waver, and Bayanhong could sense some fear in the entity.

“We’re losing him,” Bayanhong remarked.

Quintollez said, “Damn, I’m not an engineer. I don’t know what to do.”

To the Reioshekian, Bayanhong asked, “Can you shut down the emitter function, and somehow preserve your memories and the like? Perhaps on the ship we can purge the kill code.”

“I have... seemingly lost control of the emitter... it’s like a person who cannot... control his own body, who becomes... increasingly paralyzed and soon can... only speak... and then he cannot... even do... that.” Bojek had become increasingly motionless, and was standing there, and the holographic image began to waver and even fade in places, and then the whole image seized and then disappeared. The mobile emitter simply fell to the deck with a deep, clanging sound.

“Damn,” Quintollez remarked. “It’s like... he died.”

“Perhaps, but I’m sure that his memories and the like are still intact inside that device.”

“But he’s not, for lack of a better term, backed up back on the *Athena*. When we had the mobile emitter, we moved all of his data from our system to it, and did not keep a copy on the ship, because it just does not seem right to keep a copy of a person behind in case something went wrong.”

“Ironically, a lesson we learned during our own AI wars over three centuries ago.”

“Yeah,” the counsellor said with a sigh. “Anyway, I got the translation ready. Lets see if this can get the Guardian to show us the history of Japhia, and send us back home...”

“Captain,” Vorwoorts reported, “no response to our hails.”

“I wonder why,” Thorpe replied. “Do they think we did something with the Aeliomodor, something that they would not approve of?”

Looking up from his console, Mark DeWillis, the assistant chief engineer and the one manning the console on this shift, added, “Captain, with subspace suppression gone, I have regained control of the probe and it appears to be fully functional.”

“Activate its cloak and then recall it.”

After a few taps on the console, DeWillis said, “Done. The probe is on its way back.”

Indesar suggested, “Now that we have full flight capability back, perhaps we should head to Japhia and see if we can figure out what is going on, to figure out how we can identify those who know about the Aeliomodor and who can access it.”

“We’d need to do that under cloak, and we would have to make sure that the inhabitants of the planet cannot detect us or be influenced by us.”

A warning tone sounded on the sensor console, with Brigson responding, “Subetheromagnetic surge detected... about one point eight billion kilometres at two hundred and fifteen degrees, inclination seven point two.”

“What is it?” Thorpe asked.

“I believe... it is the Aeliomodor. It has returned.”

“Helm, take us there.” Thorpe said those words, wondering in what condition he would find the four individuals who had been on it. One part of him was thinking that perhaps many years had passed and he would be looking at four crewmembers who had aged considerably—but then realized that was not possible because they had brought no food with them and had no means to replicate any, and even if they found a replicator, he doubted that they would have been able to replicate food that would satisfy the nutritional requirements of the natives from Earth—but then again, the Japhites who had built the Aeliomodor were members of the Federation, and who knows what data they might have retained.

Bayanhong and Quintollez, carrying the inert mobile emitter that had once been the essence of Bojek, had returned to the main control centre and joined Chan and Allende. When they arrived, Chan reported, “We shifted again, and the starfield changed again.”

“Back to where we started from?” Bayanhong asked.

“I don’t know. It’s not like I can memorize a starfield pattern, and we did not keep any records of it because we were not anticipating that this would happen.”

“Of course.” The first officer did tap her commbadge and said, “Bayanhong to *Athena*. Are you there? Can you read?” There was no response, as she said softly, “That’s not a good sign.”

A sound distracted them, and that sound was coming from the central dais. It was closed now, but like it had done the first time they had been here, the top was rising and was exposing the ring-like structure that in a sense reminded Bayanhong of the Guardian replica they had seen in the other part of this structure. The centre of the arch became misty, and then stepping out of the arch was Defakwa and another of the Japhites, their curious flower-like appearance quite noticeable.

Defakwa was the one who spoke, “You have brought the Aeliomosor back.”

“Now you contact us,” Bayanhong started.

“When the subspace disruption started, we were unable to access this subspace transporter, but you have somehow made the disruption disappear.”

“And you do not know why it happened or how?”

“We are historians, not engineers and technicians. It is not our job to understand the technology or to fully operate it or repair it when something does not work. We do understand that the dilithium we had was of poor quality and might have caused the disruption. We also detect that you provided dilithium from this time period and that has allowed the Aeliomosor to resume full functions. We were optimistic that the subspace disruption would end—but then the Aeliomosor disappeared and we feared that you had stolen it, although I am sure you would understand that technology from eight hundred years in the future should not be in your possession now.”

“We know that.”

Defakwa continued, “And we also understand that you accessed the Guide Arch that is the fundamental centre of this structure.”

“Guide Arch?”

“I think that’s what they call their Guardian of Forever replica,” Quintollez suggested.

“I do not understand the reference,” the Japhite remarked.

Bayanhong explained, “This holographic emitter contains the essence and memories of a person from Reioshek. He wanted to know why his planet now is a dead world, and since we saw the... Guide Arch, we gave him the opportunity to learn what had happened. Unfortunately, what he learned about the demise of

his planet appeared to lead to his own demise too.” Then the first officer heard her commbadge chirp, so she tapped it, saying, “Bayanhong here.”

“Thorpe,” came the response. “What’s your status?”

“We’re okay. I’m of the assumption that there was no temporal shift and that for us, as much time passed as for you. We were, probably, at Reioshek, and Bojek learned of the fate of his planet and what happened, and that knowledge had consequences. In addition, the Japhites are back.”

“Sensors are showing that.”

Now Defakwa spoke up, asking, “Would it be possible to keep the dilithium that you have provided us? In this time period, you have it in abundance. Having proper dilithium would allow us to keep the Aeliomoso in its optimal operational condition and complete our missions more satisfactorily.”

Thorpe did give it some thought, and then replied, “You can keep the dilithium, but with one condition.”

“And that is?” Defakwa asked.

“That you keep the Aeliomoso in the Japhia system and do not allow others to access it. We will keep confidential what little we have learned of the thirty-second century, but there could be others who might want to exploit your technology, so you must do what you can to keep your structure hidden and so that others do not stumble upon it.”

“We will endeavor to do so...”

The *Athena* was again resuming its journey home, having left the Japhia system. Thorpe and Bayanhong were in one of the computer labs with Tsonga, and they were looking at the Reioshekian mobile emitter that was sitting on a table in the middle of the lab. Nothing connected it to any system on the *Athena*. The head of the computer systems said, “I do not recommend connecting this mobile emitter to any system on the ship. The zero-point energy module is still functional, and there could be residual activity that can detect something and respond to it, in a manner similar to what happened with our first transport at Reioshek. If we attempt to reactivate this mobile emitter, we could introduce the Reioshekian AI ‘kill code’ into our computer systems, without any idea what the effects would be. I have no familiarity with Reioshekian code, and so could not distinguish the kill code from anything else. I recommend keeping this device and taking it, eventually, to one of the advanced computer applications centres once we get back to the Federation.”

“So,” Bayanhong said, “Bojek is effectively dead.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Tsonga replied, as she looked at the two senior officers. “His memories, even those he made after being reactivated on the probe ship, are there, stored in an inert state.”

“So,” Thorpe added, “he’s back in suspended animation, like he was when he was on the probe ship after it ran out of power?”

“Basically, yes, except he’s in this emitter now.”

“Sometimes, things have a way of ending up where they started.”

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“Yeah,” Bayanhong said with a sigh. “just like time and time again, we sometimes end up where we started and get no further ahead, which is kind of like our situation with that missing Arosian star-destroyer ship. That’s what brought us here, and we got no real answers here...”