



HERE THERE BE DRAGONS

By Mark Daley© 2025

It was a pleasant surprise to have days where the only thing he had to think about was what he was going to have for lunch. Extended medical leave was exactly what he needed. No meetings, no presentations, and no training. Pity there was the occasional medical treatment to endure.

Rem woke at dawn just as the sun was peeping over the edge of the world. He had made his way down the well-worn path to the beach. He could hear the wind rustling the branches of the trees as he walked, the smell of the pines and cypress was crisp and fresh.

The path he walked was rough with stones and tree branches and he was careful where he walked as his eyesight was not yet fully restored, the burns he had suffered on the *USS Demeter* were still healing. He could get by but had some blurriness and needed to be more careful where he walked. This morning, he planned to swim out to the reef and back to help with his fitness. He also needed to clear his head. Bad dreams still plagued him. Despite earlier missions that had sorely tested his mind and body, the more recent events had left him with PTSD. Exercise and seclusion were his way of coping.

Normally Rem would not need goggles as he could see perfectly well underwater. Today however, he had goggles; his doctors had told him to wear them when swimming. Saltwater would affect the healing process he was told. The sand was cool and damp under his bare feet. He stopped to survey the ocean before him, his hand absently tracing the raised scar tissue on his chest and neck, he paused for a moment in thought before adjusting the goggles on his head.

The water took a moment to adjust to as it was cold, but he waded in up to his hips and then plunged in.

In a few minutes of submerged swimming, he was at the reef and a depth of five meters or so. The slight webbing on his hands and feet made his swimming fast and powerful. His ancestors had enjoyed an aquatic phase in their evolution.

Rem spent an hour swimming circuits of the small reef and was panting heavily at the end of his swim. The weeks of medically imposed

seclusion had taken the edge off his fitness. An hour's swimming was enough for now.

He swam slowly to shore to collect his towel and return to the lonely old wooden house. Both of his brothers were out tending the fish farm, so he had the house to himself. Perhaps a quick shower and a Ktarian egg for breakfast, after that it was time to pack, today would be his last day on Baatix. He was returning to duty, or at least a semblance of duty before he could join his old ship the *USS Canterbury*. His last week of leave would be on Earth at a regional Starfleet facility for a psychological assessment. His ability to return to full-time duty depended on his assessment being successful., Dr Camus was to make the decision.

The *USS Canterbury* was already on its way to Earth for a crew rotation, it was there that he would hopefully rejoin the ship.

Looking around his old family home for the last time was tinged with sadness. He could almost hear his father's voice admonishing him for not doing his share of the work around the house or the farm or daydreaming about space.

The old wooden door to the house banged shut behind him and he trudged up the slope to the shuttle that was waiting for him in a little clearing in amongst the trees.

He took a moment to look around before hoisting his bag up on his shoulder and ascending the shuttle's well-worn ramp. The rear door rose and thumped shut. The only sounds now were the comms traffic on the pilot's radio and the hum of the gravity thrusters as the craft rose slowly into the air. He would not return for another six months at least, maybe longer. He took a random seat in the empty craft. The only other passenger was a fat, older Baatixian that Rem recognized, but couldn't place. They nodded a wordless greeting to each other as the craft made its way to orbit. Rem settled down for the short flight to the waiting ship high above.

The *USS Bellerophon* was a *Miranda*-class ship. It was named after the *HMS Bellerophon*, a British Royal Navy ship that had entered service in 1786 on Earth. The original ship had been called the 'Billy Ruffian' by its crew, and that nickname was still used in Starfleet over 500 years later. Rem thought that the modern incarnation of the 'Billy Ruffian' was about as old

as the original when he first saw it, this craft had been in service for an incredible 80 years. Rem's shuttle had approached from the rear in a graceful intersecting orbit; it afforded a good look at his home for the next week.

The craft had been stripped of all armaments, the rear photon torpedo launchers were blanked off and the phaser banks, the ones he could see, were also blanked off. There were actual dents and patched areas on the hull. It looked as though it had been pulled out of a scrapyards, painted, and put into service. Even in this less-than-glorious state, it was still an impressively big ship, easily dwarfing anything in the Baatixian fleet.

He was later to find out that the ship had been loaned to his people after it had been stripped of anything useful. A gift as it were to the Baatixian people who lacked anything big enough for the return trip to Earth for mixed freight and personnel transport. It was earmarked for conversion for sole freight use at some point, but for now, it was running passengers and freight between the Sol system and Baatix.

The shuttle clunked onto the deck of the shuttle bay and waited for the all-clear for the ramp to lower. The ramp suddenly started to lower, shuddering as it did. Rem collected his bag and walked down the ramp and up to the waiting ensign. "Good morning, Ensign, Lieutenant Rem reporting for duty."

In return, the ensign looked down at his PADD and said "Welcome aboard, sir. Your accommodation is on C deck, section three, cabin 23.

"Thanks," said Rem and wandered off to try and find his cabin.

The cabin allocated, once he had found it, had noisy air conditioning and a replicator that didn't work.

The bed had a distinct concave appearance, hundreds of people had slept in that bed, which made Rem shudder a little. He threw his bag on the bed and prepared for his first meeting of the trip with the ship's doctor.

The week went by seamlessly enough even though the mismatched warp fields made everyone nauseous. Warp six was possible at a push but it was soon decided to drop to Warp four to ease the effects of a mismatched warp bubble on crew and passengers. The starboard warp nacelle was damaged and could only manage eighty-five percent of the field strength of the port nacelle. The mess hall was simply disgusting and that only added to

the whole air of dilapidation and neglect the ship had. None of the replicators on board the ship worked. Food was cooked, if you could call it that, by a bored human with eruptive skin problems that someone behind Rem in the queue had said was 'pizza face'. Rem had no clue what that was.

A bored and seemingly disinterested doctor was the principal medic on this ship; it was he who had tended to Rem's remaining physical treatment. Starfleet would not provide a doctor for shuttle runs between systems, and Baatixian doctors were not interested either. A seemingly bored and brusque retired civilian doctor had been 'pressganged' into permanent duty instead. Wanting in bedside manner aside, the Doctor had restored Rem's 20/20 vision, and the burn scars were still vivid but fading along with the self-induced muscle pain from his weight training. Rem had thrown himself into high-G training to try and get fit and to relieve the boredom on the ship. The training helped him sleep, if he didn't train to exhaustion the bad dreams plagued him.

Rem was up early and making his way to the transporter room, noticing on the way how the gravity varied between decks; this ship was junk. He was however more than happy to get off the ship. It had been a very boring journey.

Rem stepped on the transporter pad and clutched his shoulder bag tighter to him. He was the only transport today. The other passengers and most of the cargo had already disembarked en route at the Utopia Planitia shipyards.

His uniforms and personal effects had already been sent on ahead on a shuttle as the transporter had been offline until yesterday. Yet something else hadn't worked properly, he had spoken to the transporter chief briefly and had been assured that everything was working properly.

For the week he was to be here, light luggage was all that was needed. He nodded to Chief Shaw to energize. The chief quickly scanned his instruments and said, "Have a good trip, sir. All systems are optimal. Transporting now."

The chief carefully pushed the sliders up to energize. There was the usual hum and shimmer of light from the containment beam and Rem's outline started to fade. The chief made sure the pattern buffer was charged before sending the matter stream to the coordinates in the system. It was at that moment that a huge power surge in the warp core shorted a relay in his panel. There was a sharp cracking sound as sparks flew from the console. Smoke started pouring from the panel, and there was an acrid smell of burning.

The backup routed the power back through the redundant circuit almost instantly but in doing so scrambled the coordinates. Rem could have been beamed anywhere.

The automatic fire suppression system kicked in instantly, as did the warning Klaxon.

The transporter hum faded, and the visceral tugging sensation stopped. Rem found himself in a large stone piazza or square. This should have been the London regional training office for Starfleet, but this was something very, very different. He looked around in amazement.

The smells and sounds hit him first. There was smoke in the air and the smells of cooking, there was also a distinct animal dung smell which was as out of place as woodsmoke and open cooking smells.

There were no modern buildings at all. Everything was built of stone blocks. Was this the castle he was booked to stay in? He was about to tap his comm badge to check coordinates when he was interrupted by a shout.

"You there, what are you doing here?"

Rem turned to see a man approaching, he had an animal walking beside him, but it was restrained by a chain around its neck which the man held onto with a meaty fist. The creature was straining and pulling on the chain and panting loudly. The rather portly sweaty man was dressed strangely in a fabric floppy cap and floor-length robes tied around the middle with a broad animal skin belt that was home to a scabbard and sword. It was not the welcome party he was expecting.

The man's pet creature was pulling against its chain and panting loudly. It was a horrifying strange looking thing with four powerful scaly legs and a thin whip-like tail. Its body was covered in broad overlapping

scales. Incredibly, there were two small, folded wings on its back. The creature's head had pointed ears and a large mouth full of teeth, its mouth gaped to reveal a forked tongue lolling out. Its eyes were blood red and fixed with utter malevolence on Rem.

The man called out again. "Are you with the performers? If you are, you are late! Get over to the hall now and join the others, Jump to it." He jabbed a finger over to a corner of the square where there was a small crowd gathered.

Rem couldn't look away from the creature and backed away a few steps, it was now almost upon him. His amazement at materializing somewhere so strange had been replaced by fear. His flesh was crawling, and his heart was thumping in his chest. The man pulled the chain tight to pull the animal away from Rem.

"What's that?" Rem said, his voice cracking, looking down in terror at the creature which by now had small flames dancing around its tongue. Actual flames in its mouth!

The portly man with the cap looked at Rem quizzically, clearly exasperated. He wiped the sweat off his brow with the back of his free hand.

"This is Fafnir; have you never seen a dragon before?"

Rem stammered out, his eyes fixed on the 'dragon', "No, never. Is it dangerous?"

The man let out an exasperated snort. "I don't have time for this, and neither do you. Get yourself over to the hall, go, go..."

Rem turned and walked on trembling legs quickly in the direction the man pointed. There was a throng of people filing through a doorway around a hundred meters away, he quickly joined the back of the queue.

This was not a Starfleet facility, but some sort of mix-up in transporter coordinates. He could not comprehend what was happening to him, his mind was racing as fast as his heart. Rem shuffled along at the back of the queue of people he had joined. Was this the group the man said he was supposed to join? Looking around at the group in front of him he noticed that most of the group were human. But there were some in the group that were not.

There was an individual that was around Rem's height but was powerfully built with a huge, braided beard and metal helmet. He was wearing some sort of animal skin armor and was carrying a large axe. Another individual was very tall and athletically built with long straight

blonde hair. Rem could not help but notice the pointed ears. Was he Vulcan? He instinctively thought of calling out but held back at the last moment. His sense of panic was clouding his judgment. This man was carrying a bow across his back and his skin tone was pink and not green. Yet another man was even shorter than Rem but looked mostly human, but in miniature. He had slightly pointed ears too. The height and the ears ruled him out as a human.

The group were chattering amongst themselves as they moved towards a large, open doorway.

Rem ducked behind a stone pillar to afford him some shelter to try contact with the ship. His mind was reeling, where was he? Who were the different species he had seen?

He tapped his comm badge and with a low voice said, "Lieutenant Rem to *Bellerophon*, can you check transporter coordinates for me please?" There was no answer.

"Lieutenant Rem to *Bellerophon*, come in please?" Again, there was no answer.

There was a rising sense of panic now. He had hoped for a friendly voice and a swift beam out back to the ship. His hopes were dashed. He could very well be trapped here. There had to have been some sort of transporter malfunction, and he couldn't contact the ship. He only hoped that the engineering section was doing their best to get him back.

Chief Shaw jumped away from his console his face deathly pale and his heart hammering, he may have just beamed someone into space or inside a solid rock on the planet's surface. With a trembling hand, Shaw tapped his badge. "Shaw to Lieutenant Rem can you please respond?" There was nothing but static in reply. He tried again. "*Bellerophon* to Lieutenant Rem, please respond?" Almost absently, but with a shaking hand, he cut the klaxon warning as he did so.

Again, there was nothing but static. He tried the ship's computer. "Computer, please locate Lieutenant Rem on the planet's surface." The computer replied in its matter-of-fact tone, "Lieutenant Rem is not on the planet's surface."

Shaw's blood ran cold. He tapped his badge once more. "Shaw to Captain Duleth, there has been a transporter accident can you make your way to the main transporter please, sir?"

There was a tinny response of "On my way" from the captain. Shaw thought he was around two minutes away from being the ship's only occupant of the brig. He fervently hoped that Rem had not come to any harm and was alive and well somewhere, wherever that might be.

His mind racing, he settled on the only thing he could think of doing and that was to ask for help from engineering. The Engineering chief would have his hands full, so it would have to be the EEH.

He said to no one in particular, "Computer, activate the emergency engineering hologram."

Almost immediately a figure coalesced into apparent solidity in front of him and said, "Please state the nature of the Engineering emergency," in a Scottish accent.

The figure was of around average height and rather nondescript. He had black hair that was swept across his forehead and a rather intense expression on his face. His uniform was a relic, it was so old, but then again the ship was a relic. The figure spoke again and fixed him with a steely gaze. "Don't just stand there with your mouth open laddie, what's the problem?"

Shaw was taken aback at the directness. He quickly stammered in panic, "It's the, the transporter, there was a short in a relay and the coordinates were scrambled. One man has just beamed down. The diagnostics are not working on the console."

The EEH said, "Och, let me see," and strode over to the console, his hands expertly accessing the controls. "There has been a massive power surge in the warp core, these old plasma conduits and relays couldn't take the power. This thing is bloody useless; it's been bypassed and jerry-rigged. It's a wonder it still works. Whoever you beamed down doesn't appear on the scan. The pattern buffer is empty, more the pity. He bent to remove the two panels underneath the console and quickly got down on his knees for a better look.

"Get me a hypo spanner and a phase compensator from the tool kit in the panel off to your left lad and be quick about it."

Shaw hurried to the panel in question and with trembling fingers fumbled the latch to reveal the toolkit, rather than root through it for old tools

he didn't recognize, he heaved the whole kit out and took it over to where the EEH was working.

The EEH spotted the kit and rooted through to retrieve what looked like a small hand fork used in gardening but with a bulbous end. This and a small oddly shaped metal tool were quickly taken out of the box and thrust into use under the panel.

A voice came out from under the panel. "Every engineering panel on the ship is gonna be lit up like a Christmas tree, Laddy. You might want to tell the captain about what specifically happened here if you haven't done that already. He'll have a lot on his plate though." He added, "Aye, the haggis is in the fire for sure."

Rem looked around in bewilderment and slight panic. What was he going to do now? He could assume, or could he, that he was still on Earth, or at least a version of it.

There was a wide exit from the piazza or plaza he was in. People were coming and going through it with handcarts and bigger carts pulled along by four-legged beasts of burden. It was the droppings from these animals that Rem could smell when he arrived. Despite the tang of woodsmoke in the air and the animal smell the air was sweet and fresh, with not a hint of any industrial activity that you could smell in the air of any modern Federation city.

A minute or so later saw him outside the gate looking down over a sloping winding road. The two guards that were stationed at the gate looked him up and down but said nothing.

Beyond was a wide expanse of forest. On either side of the road were wooden dwellings. There was a metalworking shop over to the right. To the left were stalls, some laden with plant tubers and fruits and others with metal tools. One stall had what looked like jewelry. He made a beeline for that and had a look at what was on offer, he had an idea of where he could get some of the local currency. He guessed that this sort of primitive society would use some sort of money. If he was stuck here, he had to blend in and get local clothing, he didn't want to steal any and run the risk of apprehension.

The stall holder peered suspiciously over her stall at Rem as he was looking at the trinkets. She asked, “Are you from the shire? We don’t get many halflings here if that’s what you are?”

“I am new to these parts and from across the sea,” stammered Rem who was by now searching for something in his bag. He had packed an item of jewelry, something that he rarely wore as it was against regulation when on duty. For some reason had thrown it into his bag before he left. There! He held it up. It was a pure gold bangle that he had picked up in a market back home, it wasn’t worth a great deal on Baatix, but here it might be worth something.

“Would you be interested in buying this?”

“Let me see,” said the stallholder holding out a grubby hand. She examined it closely before testing the edge with her brown discolored teeth.

“It’s gold and high-quality workmanship. I’ve not seen anything like it before. It’s worth more than I can give you though. Go and see Jotren the Dwarf in the village. He might be interested.” With that, she handed it back to peer at him suspiciously again.

“Thank you. The village is down this road I presume,” said Rem pointing down the hill.

The stallholder nodded wordlessly before turning to address another customer.

Rem was attracting too much attention; passers-by were staring at him. Although not in uniform his clothing was still very different from everyone else's, he needed to blend in and for that, he needed local clothing. With that in mind, he hurried down the hill, he had no time to lose as he had noticed with alarm that it was almost dusk.

The shop stood on its own, it was once an imposing wooden structure, but the years had taken their toll. The roof had a distinct dip and gave the building a slumped, careworn air, it wasn’t helped by the peeling paint and the barely legible handwritten sign hanging out front. The battered letters spelled the words ‘Jotren and Sons, jewelers to the crown’.

Rem gathered himself and went in, closing the heavy door behind him. He noticed the dust motes dancing in the fading sunlight streaming through the windows. His eyes were drawn to the glittering array of precious stones

set out in glass cases before him; he approached and carefully looked over the bewildering selection of stones. He saw beautifully cut diamonds, opals, and other unidentifiable jewels.

He almost missed the sound of a creaking floorboard, a sound so faint most would have missed it. Someone who was very light on their feet and used to moving without sound was standing behind him. If it hadn't been for that slight sound, he would have been none the wiser that he had company.

A deep baritone, strangely accented voice came from behind him. "Good day traveler. Can I help you?"

Rem turned and saw what he presumed was Jotren, the owner. Rem took an involuntary half-step back. Jotren was around the same height as Rem, but there the similarities ended.

Jotren was very powerfully built. The tunic he wore barely concealed the muscles of his chest and arms. His beard was enormous, a mass of brown curly hair flecked with grey and braided down to his chest. His hair was likewise braided and hanging down over one shoulder. There was a long knife in a scabbard hanging from a belt at his waist alongside a purse of some kind. Jotren's eyes were piercing blue and were regarding him with great intensity.

Rem composed himself and slowly stooped to his bag on the floor to retrieve his bangle before handing it to Jotren. 'Would you be interested in this at all'.

Jotren took the bangle in his tanned massive fingers, turning it this way and that whilst peering at it curiously. "It's gold and of high purity judging by its weight. I might be interested. It's unusual enough to be interesting. I can give you five castar for it?"

Rem was at a disadvantage, he knew nothing of the worth of anything. He decided to chance his luck. "I was thinking of six castar."

The Dwarf's face broke into a slight smile. He said, "Six it is then." He reached into the purse at his belt and fished out six silvery coins. As he handed the coins over, he asked, "Forgive me traveler but I have not seen your kind here before, where are you from? The eastern islands or further still? I will confess that at first sight, I thought there was something of the hobgoblin about you."

Rem tucked the coins away in a pocket before answering. He didn't know what a hobgoblin was, so decided to give some sort of explanation as to why he was there.

"I am from a great distance over, and it is my first time in your land and I am trying to find my companions. I need to buy some better clothing as I seem to be attracting a lot of attention and seek some food and shelter before I make my way." He thought that sticking to the truth as far as possible was the best policy.

He added, "Are there lodgings nearby?"

The dwarf scrutinized him for a long moment, his eyes lingered on his clothing and footwear. Rem had the uneasy feeling that Jotren didn't believe a single thing he had said. "Closer than you think, traveler. By what name are you known?"

"I am known as Rem, you must be Jotren," he said as he extended his hand.

"I am Jotren, son of Valdur, yes." He clasped Rem's slender hand in his meaty one, almost crushing it in the process.

"It's getting late and the tavern is a way into the village. The Tavern is no place for travelers, despite the fact it has rooms for rent. You would be relieved of your purse and your throat slit within an hour of entering. I would save you the trouble. I have a room here you can stay in; it will be safer than the tavern. I sometimes offer rooms to strangers.

"There is something of the lost soul about you, a fish out of water I would say. It is also getting dark outside. No time to be wandering around." He regarded Rem again, his face was smiling but there was uncertainty behind his eyes.

"What say you, Rem? If agreeable, I can show you to your lodging for the night? I will take half a castor for the bed and food."

He beckoned Rem with a movement of his head.

Rem thought about it; this Jotren seemed genuinely friendly. It was obvious though that his cover story wasn't believed. If the tavern was as dangerous as described, then staying here would be the better idea.

"Thank you for your kind offer. I do need to rest and think about my journey tomorrow." He noticed the failing light outside. He was out of options for places to stay. This whole encounter was going very quickly.

Rem followed Jotren up the wooden staircase, the dwarf practically filled the width of the stairwell. The wooden stairs creaked and groaned in protest at his passing. There were two rooms on the left and one on the right at the top of the stairs. Jotren stopped and turned into the first room on the left. Rem followed him in and looked around whilst his host lit a lamp for illumination in the dim light. The room had a sturdy wooden floor and smooth plastered walls, a sleeping cot or bed with a table next to it was the only furniture apart from a sturdy chair in the corner.

Jotren placed the lamp on the table and turned to face Rem. "This is where you can sleep. Don't worry, the bedding is clean. I used to keep both of these upstairs rooms as overnight lodgings for family and friends, and sometimes travelers, too. It's a habit to keep them clean and ready for visitors.

"I am a pretty good judge of folk and there is something about you that makes me want to help you on your way." Again, that look from the small being made Rem feel as though Jotren knew everything about him. Rem had met people like that before – individuals who could sum you up in a glance.

Rem didn't know what more to say. He needed some sleep and to formulate a plan of action.

Jotren moved to the door and half turned back to Rem. "As night is almost upon us I would ask that you to share a little broth with me. I need to lock up the shop and look for some clothing for you. You mentioned that more suitable clothing was needed. There are some clothes my nephew left here that might fit. Perhaps after a little food, you can tell me a little about yourself." With that, he made his way down the stairs.

Rem inwardly shuddered at the prospect of weaving a believable tale or backstory for someone who he thought could easily tell fact from fiction, or so he thought. He put his bag on the chair and sat down on the bed; it was surprisingly soft and comfortable. He thought he could try his comm badge again and gave it a double tap to check if the link was open, nothing but static. He got to thinking about his predicament. He had no idea if he had been thrown back in time, the surroundings and backward culture would suggest that, but highly unlikely from a transporter incident. Perhaps some sort of alternative reality or interdimensional rift? He just didn't understand what had happened, but it was important to blend in and not attract too much

attention whilst he was here. No doubt the ship would be searching for him, the might of the Federation would find him soon – or so he hoped.

He was still deep in thought when the sound of stairs creaking alerted him that Jotren was on his way up. Jotren appeared a few moments later in the doorway with an armful of clothing – the promised offering from his nephew.

“Here, I found these. They should fit ok. A tunic and some trousers with a light cloak. They are in serviceable condition and should serve you well. As I am about to set out for supper you can follow me down.”

Rem followed Jotren down the creaking stairs to a back room. The smell emanating from the small wood-fueled stove in the corner was marvelous! He couldn’t identify what was actually in the broth he was about to be served with, but he hoped that it tasted as nice as it smelled. He looked around at the room; it was lit with oil lamps set into the wall. The illumination was bright enough to reveal the features of the room and some of the treasures it contained.

On one wall was an enormous axe was hung. It had a polished handle, and its blade was inset with bands of other metals blended into the base material. Below this, there was a fan of knives and daggers all with intricate carvings and inset with semi-precious stones. It had taken incredible skill to make these objects.

On a chest of drawers on the other side of the room, there was a collection of three intricately crafted metal helmets. They were highly polished and, like the axe, featuring other metal seamlessly inlaid into the substrate material.

He turned to Jotren and asked, “These weapons are of exceptional quality, I have never seen anything like it. Who made them?”

Jotren answered without turning away from carefully adding ingredients to his simmering broth. “I did. They are apprentice pieces I made years ago.” He changed the subject as if it was something painful to talk about. “Here is your broth, I hope it is to your liking. It’s mostly meat with some vegetables.”

Two steaming bowls of food were placed on the table along with two polished metal spoons. There was also a bowl of bread placed on the table.

To Rem's senses, the broth smelled and looked divine. He was reluctant to eat for a moment as his experience with the Kuth-Maga on an

earlier mission had introduced him to other species' eating habits. Namely eating their kind. He didn't think that was the case here, but it did make him think.

The first mouthful confirmed that it was as delicious as he thought it would be. In seconds he was shoveling it into his mouth as fast as the heat of the food and some semblance of social niceties would allow. The bread was used to soak up the last of the liquid in the bowl. It was simply too delicious for words, and he had been hungrier than he thought. Years of synthesized food had dulled his palate.

He looked up from his bowl as Jotren was finishing his broth. "I must thank you for the most delicious meal."

Jotren reached for both bowls and stood up. "Think nothing of it. Once I have cleared away, I'll light my pipe and we can sit a while."

The dwarf carefully packed the bowl of his pipe with what Rem knew was something called tobacco, he had seen this very thing in old movies from Earth. A flame was applied to the tobacco and Jotren sat back in his chair and puffed contentedly on his pipe. His eyes closed momentarily as the swirls of smoke danced around his head.

Jotren leaned forward slightly and blew out a perfect circle of smoke. "I will help you where I can in finding your comrades, but our paths must part at some point. Make your travels short in these lands. Don't linger more than you need. As you are a stranger here you would not know of the danger that is everywhere."

Rem spoke softly as he steered the subject onto one of personal interest. "I just need to find my friends and then I will be on my way. In all of my travels, I have never been to such a place as this or met anyone like you."

Jotren was silent as he refilled his pipe and relit it. He paused to take a few short puffs before answering. "You are indeed far from home if dwarves are strange to you." There was that look again, directed at Rem. "Where are these friends of yours and how did you get here?"

Rem thought for a moment before he said anything; he knew that he had to stay as close to the truth as possible. "I was supposed to meet someone called Dr Camus to help me in some training after I was injured." He pointed to the faint scars on his neck as he said it. "My ship dropped me off in a location I didn't know. Before I realized I didn't know where I was the ship

had left. It was going to return to port. Do you have a map? I could show you where I came from.”

This was a massive gamble as he assumed that this society didn’t have accurate maps and that no one would know where all of the other land masses were situated.

Jotren rose from his chair and went to a low cabinet and rooted around for a few moments before he found what he was looking for and returned with it. He dropped what looked to be a parchment on the table.

“I have this map, I don’t know if it’s up to date or not.”

Rem rose and consulted it. He remembered that the stallholder had mentioned the eastern lands. That would do as the map only had partial details of islands to the East. He laid a finger on the edge of a large island. “Here is Baatix and that is where I am from. We don’t trade this far west usually. Where are we now on this map?”

Jotren put a finger on a dot just inland from the coast of the largest landmass. “Here, near Luminor. You must have journeyed in from the coast and then off to the east of where we are. Were your friends to meet you on the coast or inland?”

“The coast, I will need to get back there so that I can at least see the ship approaching if I don’t find Camus.”

“Ok, I can show you the road you need to take. The way is fraught with danger. I’ll give you a short sword to take with you, but your best course of action is to run if you see danger. Orcs or thieves rarely travel on their own.”

Captain Duleth had just handed over control of the ship to Earth control when the ship suddenly shuddered and groaned like a wounded animal. Every light on his console lit up at the same time as the lights flickered on the bridge.

He tapped his comm badge. “Engineering, report. What just happened?”

Lieutenant Commander ‘Milky’ Turner answered almost immediately. “We are on batteries, sir. The warp core went subcritical and pushed power output to 2 normal for a fraction of a second. It generated a warp bubble down to the surface during that time.

“It shouldn’t be able to do that but it did. The core is dead. It’s fused solid as are the injectors, and the antimatter system is being purged as a precaution. There are systems down all over the ship including life support. We have three hours minimum before that fails. I have done what I can to switch off power systems. Fortunately, there are no casualties in Engineering sir.”

“OK, Milky. Do what you can. I’ll will get some help.” It was at that exact moment that the call came in from Transporter Chief Shaw about an incident with the transporter.

As he terminated that call he instructed the comms/helm officer to relay to Starfleet what had happened and to send a shuttle to evacuate the ship. Luckily there were only fifteen crew on this mostly automated vessel. In all of his years in command, he had never had to abandon his command. This trip was supposed to ease him into retirement, but it seemed as though retirement would come sooner rather than later.

As the captain made his way to the transporter room he was struck by how quiet the ship was. There was no hum from the electrical systems and no sound from the air conditioning and life support. It seemed as though the ship was asleep. He was hoping that the transporter incident was just a glitch and that Lieutenant Rem was perfectly alright.

The transporter room was a little smoky as he walked in. He saw Chief Shaw standing over the panel with what looked like the EEH on his knees under the panel. There were tools strewn around the floor.

He pulled himself to his full height and said, “Mr. Shaw, report.”

Chief Shaw stiffened and turned to face his commander.

“Captain, there has been a power surge that has scrambled the coordinates during the transport of Lieutenant Rem. The pattern buffer is empty, but Lieutenant Rem cannot be found either by the transporter system or by scanning the surface. The EEH is assisting in trying to get the transporter back online.”

Just then the EEH piped up. “The transporter won’t be back online any time soon. The damn thing is junk.”

The Captain and Chief Shaw turned to the EEH as he was straightening from his position under the console.

“Aye, that piece of junk is useless. It can’t be fixed, and I have disabled it for now. I’ll be off to Engineering, Captain. I think my time will be better spent there.”

“I agree. Please report to Engineering. Mr. Shaw, brief Earth Control and arrange for an engineering team to collect all of the data and a thorough investigation on what went on here, and liaise with Milky on that. There is a shuttle on the way to evacuate the ship as a precaution. How certain are we that Lieutenant Rem isn’t on the surface?”

The Chief said, “The main transporter couldn’t find the Lieutenant and neither could the computer. The pattern buffer was empty so he had beamed somewhere. There is no evidence of being beamed into space or inside a solid object. I think he is on the surface as intended, sir. It’s just that we can’t find him.’

Rem woke with a start from a fitful slumber; his mind had been racing most of the night trying to make sense of how he got here and what he was going to do. His discussion with Jotren the night before was still fresh in his mind. This land was strange. He shuddered as he remembered the dragon he had seen. Most of what he had been told he simply didn’t understand, or want to, for that matter. Some normalcy would be nice.

At least his animal skin covered bed was comfortable.

The sun was shining past the thin threadbare curtains into the room, illuminating the sparse furnishings and the dust motes dancing in the air, which constantly reminded him he was anywhere but on the deck of a starship. There was birdsong outside and the sound of voices. The village was awakening.

He heard Jotren moving around downstairs and decided that he had better rise and get dressed. The clothes that had been provided the previous evening were hastily put on. To be honest, they were not too bad a fit. The pants were a little baggy and the cloak was a bit long, but overall, not bad. The clothing he had beamed down in was stuffed in his bag, but he made sure that the comm badge was well hidden but easy to get to.

The thoughts that had plagued him the previous evening were still swirling around in his head.

His situation was not sustainable; he would quickly run out of money and have to resort to stealing just to eat. Not exactly the way to keep a low profile. There was simply no way to know how long he would be down here, and he couldn't hang around twiddling his thumbs. He had to try and get to a point of self-sustainability. For that, he would need some help. Today was the day he had to strike out on his own and head toward the coast, there would be more opportunities for food as he was good at catching fish. Maybe he could get a sea-faring vessel to a bigger population center. It would be easier to hide amongst more people.

Just a short while later Rem and Jotren were standing outside in the warm sunshine. A short sword and scabbard had been handed to Rem, and he had quickly attached it to his belt. A big chunk of bread and cheese had been thrust into his bag as sustenance for the trip. Jotren had insisted he took provisions.

The dwarf pointed down the hill to a small path that bent off to the right. "That's the path you need to take. You will need to follow it for two days to reach the coast. It's mostly through the forest. Rest at night under whatever shelter you can find and don't light a fire. Be vigilant at all times, and trust no one except dwarves. I took the liberty of sending messages to the dwarves on the coast to look for you and to help you if they can."

Rem turned from surveying his surroundings to look at Jotren. "Thanks for everything you have done for me. I am eternally grateful."

Jotren clapped him on the back with enough force to make Rem stumble. "Think nothing of it. Safe travels."

With that, Rem was on his way; an uncertain future lay before him. He turned to look back as he reached the path, but Jotren had already gone inside.

The day was pleasantly warm, and the path was easygoing, he was pleased that he had not been wearing his uniform boots as they always rubbed his feet. A two-day walk in them would have crippled him. He pressed on unaware that he was being watched with malevolent eyes from the trees.

Most of the day had gone by easily enough, he had stopped at a stream to quench his thirst and had eaten some of the bread and cheese he had with him.

It was quite pleasant walking along listening to the birds singing and watching the dappled light through the trees. On any other day, this would have been a nice walk. Something to ease the stress of a working day.

The forest was closing in on the path as it wound in and out of the trees. As hours had passed, he decided really would need to think about where he would sleep for the night. Jotren had told him that he should not light a fire as it would attract attention. That wouldn't be a problem as Rem didn't have the foggiest idea of how he would start one in the first place. He made a mental note to brush up on his bush survival skills once he could get out of here. *If*, he ever got out of here.

The sound of a twig snapping off the right of where he was instantly got his attention. It was probably nothing, but he had been explicitly warned to keep his wits about him and be careful. He slowed his pace and carefully scanned the trees off to both sides; it was too dark under the trees to see much of anything but there was now the distinct feeling he was being watched. His hand fell to the hilt of the short sword he wore, and he moved the blade a little out of its scabbard so that it didn't stick if he had to use it quickly. He moved on, quickening his pace a little towards a bend in the path. As he rounded the curve a figure stepped out of the trees onto the path in front of him around a hundred metres from where he was. Even at this distance, the figure was obviously not human.

Rem recognised the move for what it was, a diversion. The attack would come either from right or left or even behind. He pulled the sword free of its scabbard just in time as an attacker exploded from the cover of trees to his right. Luckily the attack was poorly timed as the wild swing of the sword was swung too wide to connect with Rem. The attacker was off balance and too close to swing the blade again. Rem was also too close to use his sword. As the attacker turned Rem dropped his sword and locked both hands around the back of his opponent's head and sharply pulled the head down and brought his right knee up to connect, the impact jerked the head back fast enough and far enough to break the neck. The figure slumped to the ground.

An arrow whistled past close to Rems' ear. It would be seconds before another could be notched and drawn. The attacker that had stepped out onto

the path was advancing quickly whilst trying clumsily to notch another arrow. Rem had no option, he picked up his sword and threw it as hard as he could at him. The distance was too great to cover on foot before another arrow could be launched. Luckily the pommel of the sword hit the attacker square in the chest knocking him off his feet.

Rem sprinted forward to crouch above the sprawling figure as he was struggling to get to his feet in obvious pain from his injury. The figure managed to get to a sitting position and was gasping for air. Up close he was as hideous as the first attacker, the skin was a mottled dirty grey, devoid of hair, and stretched tightly over the face and skull. The mouth was full of misshapen black stained teeth, the smell emanating from him made Rem gag. The thrown sword was quickly retrieved and pressed to the neck of what Rem thought was an Orc, the very creature that Jotren had warned him about. The Orc shrieked and suddenly produced a knife which he thrust at Rem's chest. Rem reacted instantly by pushing his blade into the orc's neck. It fell backward and stiffened in death with sticky black blood pulsing from a gaping neck wound.

The first attacker was still motionless when Rem went back to check, he was absently wiping the sticky black bloody ichor off his blade as he bent to examine what had attacked him. It, too, was dead. Just like the first, it was hideous, and just as malodorous. There was some sort of leather armor on the chest and on the forearms and lower legs. A belt held a small pouch and a small knife. Nothing of any use on the body.

He quickly looked around before grabbing the orcs' legs and pulling him off the path and into the undergrowth and then went back and did the same for the other one. The bow and the arrows were snapped in half and the roughly made swords were smashed against a rock and thrown into the undergrowth to make sure that they couldn't be used against anyone else.

That old feeling washed over him, the same one he had when he had killed before. A momentary surge of emotion. He was not a stone-cold killer, life was precious. But when it was kill or be killed, he had to do what he had to do. The words of his first martial arts teacher were poignant. He had said that empathy was the preserve of the victor. The feeling was short-lived, and he pushed it down deep inside. Emotional detachment was what was needed, he could do that when needed. He had spent years training in martial arts all over Baatix. One of the first lessons you learned was to be in the 'moment'.

Respect your opponent, use your training, and never get angry. Only when your opponent has been neutralized, can you give yourself the luxury of any feelings.

Rem tidied himself up and managed to get his heart rate down before deciding what to do next. There could be other Orcs' around, the best course of action was to get out of the area as quickly as he could.

Engineering facility director T'Luth stood ramrod straight, her dark and sharp eyes scanning the assembled technicians and engineers. She saw familiar faces she had known for decades, but there were plenty of faces she did not recognize in equal measure. Starfleet engineering had changed during her forty-year tenure. There were more and more species admitted to the Federation, some of which were represented around the room.

The room lights picked up the silky blackness of her hair which hung like strands of glossy silk to her waist. Her untethered hair was an affectation she had picked up on Earth. Usually, it would have to be a regulation length, but her position afforded her some discretion.

She gently cleared her throat to get the room's attention. "After a detailed examination of the computer and transporter logs over the last week a course of action has been agreed upon. I believe that all of you have had the opportunity to study the proposal that I have put forward in conjunction with Dr Haarland?" She waited for a few seconds before nodding towards the eminent theoretician at the back of the room. There was a murmur of voices and Dr Haarland stood to address the delegates.

The Doctor was quite elderly and stooped. His sparse white hair was slicked back against his skull – the bones of which jutted out as if there was no flesh. He was as famous for his irascible bad temper as his pioneering work on dimensional physics. He stood visibly irritated and waited for the hubbub to die down.

He addressed the room in a papery whisper of a voice. The room audio systems enhanced it so that all could hear what the scientist had to say.

"I will be brief. We believe that Lieutenant Rem is alive and well and is currently in an alternate dimension. He will be on Earth's surface but unable to exit that dimension without our help.

“The unprecedented warp energy bubble that was created at the exact moment Lieutenant Rem beamed off the ship was responsible for allowing a hole to form temporarily between dimensions.

“The Federations' best theoreticians have, in conjunction with computer simulations, pointed to a plan. We plan to exactly match the conditions of the warp bubble to recreate that hole so that the officer can be returned to the ship. Setting up the right conditions is not without some risk; the opening window is tight. My calculations indicate that will have 6.9 seconds in which to locate the officer and beam him out. Any longer that and it's extremely unlikely that we will ever get him back.

“Your briefing packs contain all of the data you will require. Please coordinate with Director T'Luth. Her office will coordinate materials and staffing.” He nodded abruptly toward the director and sat down suddenly to start fiddling with his PADD, his face turning into a frown.

T'Luth addressed the crowd again, her voice surprisingly powerful in the small room and despite the audio systems.

“You all have the data that you need and the detailed plan so I will call this meeting to a close.”

The people started to file out of the room. The plan was afoot. Ahead lay the daunting task of coordinating teams to prepare for the attempted rescue.

Rem had made good progress on the trail, he had pressed on overnight, navigating by the light of the moon. He wanted to get as far away from the scene of the attack as he could. The whole sorry business had taken its toll on him, the rough clothing chafed and irritated his skin, and his feet had blisters forming.

The last of the bread and cheese had gone and he was famished and exhausted, but he was close to the coast now as he had been seeing seagulls wheeling overhead above the trees as dawn broke. He decided it was time to rest for a while.

He got off the track, noticing in the gathering light that it was much wider now and had wheel marks. There was a spot that was elevated off to the right amongst some big rocks where he could hide. It was defensible to some degree being on higher ground. At least he should see anyone coming

as the trees had thinned out and he had a 360-degree field of view. There was some shelter in among the rocks in the form of a small cave, it was a tight fit but afforded some shelter. He got as comfortable as he could and then removed the shoes that Jotren had given him to treat his blisters. His feet were covered in them, so he tore some cloth off the edge of his cape and carefully wrapped each foot in the fabric.

That was much better! he thought. The shoes were carefully replaced and adjusted as best he could. *Always sleep with your shoes on* he had been told, *you don't want to be fumbling with shoes when under attack*. Despite the cramped condition and the beetles and ants scurrying over him, he fell into a fitful slumber.

The day marched on whilst Rem slept. He was oblivious to the troupe of Orcs that had passed by looking for whoever had killed two of their number. They moved on quickly, melting into the trees.

He awoke slowly and tried to stretch his legs, but they were cramped and stiff. There was no sound from outside despite straining his ears. Rem carefully and soundlessly extricated himself from his resting place to crouch outside the cave and look around. The day was in the early afternoon he guessed, although he could not be sure.

There was no sign of any activity at all. He grabbed his bag and stretched a little before moving off in the direction of the widening track, this time he walked off to the side. His feet were more comfortable after he had wrapped them, but he was still being chafed by his clothing and he had insect bites on his back that were itching. With all of this and the gnawing hunger, he was feeling pretty miserable.

Hours later he was standing on a bluff overlooking the sparkling blue sea. The onshore breeze brought the smells of the ocean to him and that triggered memories of home. It also made him think of the predicament he was in. He had to get back!! If his species could cry, he would have hung his head and wept. He had pushed down inside the feelings of helplessness and loneliness being trapped where he was. He was miserable but had to make the best of whatever was thrown his way. A human friend had told him once that “When life gives you lemons, you make lemonade.”

Rem eyed a small port, and some wooden sailing vessels moored. A small village sprawled off from the port and there was smoke from blacksmith forges and individual houses. It was civilization. He scanned the

area around him and started to make his way down to the port. He had to get back onto the tree-lined main path as it would be too steep down the hill without using it. The light level dropped, and it was much cooler amongst the trees. Birds were singing and there was the buzzing of insects, other than that there was no sound, it was peaceful. He looked carefully around before setting off.

He never noticed the skulking shadows in the trees or the figure that stepped out onto the path behind him.

Rem had just swapped shoulders as the bag he carried was digging in. Suddenly, something hit him in the back and caused him to stumble, it was like a punch or a kick. Just as suddenly he could taste the metallic tang of blood. He looked down in a daze, his breath now suddenly wheezing, and was shocked to see 4 centimeters of arrowhead sticking out of the left of his chest. There was no pain, that would come later after the shock had subsided. His knees buckled and the ground came up to meet him as he keeled forward. There were guttural voices and shouts, but it was all as though it was a dream. He knew in almost a distracted way that his left lung was filling with blood. It was causing his breath to crackle and bubble in his throat. It was getting hard to breathe properly. Darkness swallowed him.

He was struggling to hold his breath because of the pressure, the water surface shimmered above him but seemed impossibly far away. Bubbles of air escaped his lips as he ascended, the pressure was squeezing his lungs, and they burned. Legs kicking he was almost there, the pain in his lungs was too much to bear. Suddenly he broke the surface gasping! Waves of agony washed over him subsiding slowly. He was alive!

A deep voice said, "He is awake. Go and get Lothar."

Rem was terribly confused; the dream he had woken from had been only too real. The pain he was in was certainly very, very real. His vision was blurry, there were shapes in the room but he couldn't discern them. He managed to croak, "Where am I? What happened?"

That deep voice was there again. "Lie still, you don't want to disturb your wound. We managed to get you to Lothar's house, that's where you are now."

"What happened?" Rem whispered. He couldn't take proper breaths as the pain was too great.

“You were attacked by a troupe of Orcs and took an arrow in the back. Lothar witnessed it and was able to drive them off, killing two in the process. If he had even been a minute later, you would have been killed. The arrow has been removed, and the wound is packed with Rose Honey and poppy milk. You have been unconscious for two days. The gods have been smiling on you.”

His confused thoughts were interrupted by someone coming into the room.

A rich baritone voice said, “Ah, I see you are with us. How are you feeling?”

Rem managed to croak, “I’ve felt better.”

“Let’s take a look at the wound.”

The blurry figure approached, and a careful hand pulled back the bandage that swathed Rem’s chest.

“That’s good, no infection. That was the biggest worry.”

A meaty hand encircled Rem’s wrist and an expert finger was placed on the artery.

“Heartbeat is strong if not a little slow. Looking at you though, I don’t know if that is good or bad. You are not a halfling, elf, dwarf, or man. Jotren tells me that you are from the Eastern Islands. I have not seen your kind before. At least you are not an Orc and that’s all I need to know. Some bed rest and we will have you on your feet in a week or so.”

Rems’ vision was clearing a little and he could make out the face of the man that had just spoken to him. He had sparkling brown kindly eyes but the thing that really stood out was the beard, it was simply enormous and forked!

The man noticed Rem looking at his beard and gave a deep dry chuckle. “Allow me to introduce myself. I am Lothar Forkbeard, son of Erlac Forkbeard. I am a healer and apothecary; lucky for you that I happened across you when I did.”

Rem replied in a low voice to save taking a deep breath, “For that, I am eternally grateful.”

Three full weeks went by with every day being a little bit better than the preceding day. Rem was now able to walk around outside for short walks. The weather was lovely and warm for his daily outings; he yearned for this

outside time every day. The air was so sweet and unlike any other world he had been on – probably because there was a very low level of industry.

He had decided to make his time here as useful as possible by teaching. He couldn't teach any of his martial arts as he was still too weak. What he had decided on was mathematics. He was no maths genius, but he had passed his mathematics and science courses at the academy, as this culture was an approximate Iron Age level mathematics would be basic at best. Someone had told him once that "In the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king." Even Rem's grasp of mathematics would be far in advance of what was known here. The village elders were reluctant to have someone so different teaching children, but they had eventually seen sense. There had been some thought on getting a school started but it had come to nothing. Until now.

Every day he would sit in the square surrounded by the village children and teach mathematics from a huge slate slab propped against a tree, using a piece of chalk to draw on it. He kept it to simple concepts to not bore the kids too much. He got as much out of the experience as the children did. They were astonishingly quick at picking things up and he was able to move on at quite the pace. Even some adults had begun to drop in to see the odd stranger from the eastern islands.

The only other people he had seen were "people of the shire", short in stature like the dwarves but not nearly as thick set, they tended to be travelers on their own that came and went quickly.

Rem had not forgotten that he was supposed to be near a port to look out for his friends, the ones that had dropped him off at the wrong location and would be looking for him. He did make the effort to walk down to the quay every day to gaze out at the shimmering sea. Mostly because he loved the ocean. In a week or two he thought he might risk a swim, the water was cold when he had dipped a foot in it but it was no colder than the seas around his family home. A swim would get his blood pumping again; he needed to get some exercise. He needed to get back his edge.

The preparations were almost ready. The *Bellerophon* had never seen so many people on board, every deck was buzzing with engineers checking systems, running repairs, and installing new equipment.

It was a bittersweet period as it had been decided to retire the vessel after the attempt was made to retrieve Lieutenant Rem. The ship would cost too much to refit, it needed a new warp core, new computer systems, and of course, a new transporter suite. The list went on and on. For now, the ship was running on batteries with a temporary transporter suite installed alongside the existing one.

The ship had been a gift to the Baatixian space fleet, but they had been vocal in their disapproval of the state of the vessel. That had caused friction between them and Starfleet, so it had been decided to add it to the museum collection and not press it back into service. Another more suitable ship would need to be found if relations were to improve.

Director T'Luth pulled herself stiffly upright and addressed the amassed engineers and technical staff in the forward section of the ship. This was the only space on the ship other than the cargo areas where everyone could meet at the same time. Even so, there was barely enough room for everyone. The director's voice cut through the background chatter and the room fell silent.

"You are all aware of the attempt we will make today to retrieve Officer Rem from his predicament. Trapped on the surface in between dimensions. I would like to thank all of you for the effort you have made to prepare the ship for our attempt at retrieval. This is a one-time effort and there will be no shame if it is unsuccessful because we will know that we have done our best. Please take your stations, it is now t-minus sixty minutes."

Everyone left in silence, there was still a good deal of cross-checking of systems and the ship had to be carefully maneuvered into the exact spot calculated.

The director was unsure if this would work. A good deal of what was being done was based on theory alone. The Federation had experienced incursions into other dimensions before, but it had always been as a result of natural phenomena or through other means that could not be adequately studied.

She was not worried about the outcome; she was incapable of that emotional process. The success would hinge on the careful application of scientific theory. The experiment would succeed or fail. To her mind, it was logical to try and retrieve a valuable officer who had benefitted from a great

deal of expensive training. There was a limit however in time and resources to achieve rescue.

She was, however, politically adroit enough not to use the logical aspects in reference to Officer Rem and his retrieval to anyone. It would be seen as cold and uncaring. It was bad enough to be seen as cold and aloof without reinforcing the stereotype with poorly chosen words.

The computer counted down the remaining seconds and energized the relay for the power feed to the transporter. The lights dimmed and the ship shuddered slightly. The pressure on the bulkheads put great strain on the inertial dampers. They were running at 132% over capacity for the duration of the experiment.

Enormous energies were required to bridge the gap between our universe and the world where Lieutenant Rem was. A lock was acquired on a target and a shape started to emerge on the transporter pad!

Rem was enjoying his walk – he had finished his teaching session and had excused himself to take the small path down to the quay. There weren't any people around as it was the time of day when most went inside for an evening meal. There was a sudden movement by his foot which caused him to stoop to investigate, it was a large black beetle. He picked it up and carefully studied it scurrying over his fingers. Such a beautiful creature, he thought, as he carefully put it down and watched it move off through the grass.

This was the best part of the day, the sun had lost most of its heat and the birds were starting their evensong. Rem looked out over the sea and unconsciously slipped a hand into a tunic pocket to rub his finger lightly over his comm badge. He had taken to wearing it all of the time in the vain hope that one day it would chirp into life to signal his rescue. He carried on down the path to stand on the edge of the quay to admire the water.

Time to head back he was getting hungry. Rem turned to start the walk back.

Suddenly his skin started to prickle and there was a visceral pulling sensation. He was being transported!

Rem materialized on what looked like a makeshift transporter pad. There was a group of people standing in front of him. Mostly engineering and technical staff eager to see if their efforts had been rewarded.

He stood there in utter shock blinking in the harsh lights.

Captain Duleth darted forward and grasped Rem's arm. "Lieutenant Rem, we got you back! How are you?" The room suddenly became very busy and very noisy.

Rem looked around vacantly. He managed to say, "Wh... what happened?"

A senior doctor disengaged from the throng and joined the captain. A full tricorder scan was started on Rem as the captain was trying to coax more out of the Lieutenant. The doctor interrupted his interrogation to say, "Captain, the Lieutenant has a serious lung injury. I need to stabilize him in sickbay before we can get him to hospital on the surface."

Rem suddenly piped up and in a panicky voice said, "I'll go by shuttle! I don't trust the transporter."