

“A distress beacon, Rassilon’s toothbrush!”

Garth slammed his boot against the floor of the empty docking bay, where mere seconds ago he’d landed with his TARDIS. Or, rather, he’d nearly appeared in his TARDIS, but stunningly his entire ship decided to vanish before his very eyes, with him inside. It was hard to process at first, considering Garth’s ship did not *normally* disappear on him; considering it was also stolen straight from the Gallifreyan military fleet, the very concept of it disappearing enraged him further.

The Time Lord took a full minute to vent his unrestrained rage on the clean docking bay, finding very little to throw or kick save the floor. As his initial anger dissolved, Garth’s analytical brain began booting up, and he took in the clues of his surroundings.

These were the things Garth knew: One, that he’d followed a distress beacon to this junk freighter. Two, from the images he’d snagged of the ship’s hull upon entry, it was in some level of disrepair. Three, he was now TARDISless and left to his own devices.

Thankfully, one of those devices was his sonic screwdriver. Garth patted his breast pocket to make sure it was still on his person—it’d make a long day a little more bearable.

“All right. Is anyone there?” Garth boomed in the open cavity of the docking bay. There was no answer except his own echoing voice. Blowing out a frustrated puff of air, Garth marched as only an ex-commander could march to the nearest door.

Controlling his residual anger enough to not yank the door off its hinges, Garth instead coaxed it just far enough open to slide his body through. The hallway he entered was wide and dark, with only emergency runner lights on. Garth wrinkled his nose up while his tail-tip wriggled with agitation. This was turning into an adventure he had no enjoyment being on.

Why’d he even follow the distress beacon? Old habits? Garth was on the run, trying to move faster than his past. As his anger turned to a red-hot and ferocious curiosity, he could feel the tight stress of war hanging just behind. Not wanting that ferocity to seethe to the surface again, the Time Lord took a moment to pinch the bridge of his wide maw and breathe slow, metered. Garth’s hearts thanked him for this by calming down quickly, the fluttering in his chest reducing to an adrenaline-fueled thumping.

Whipping out his screwdriver, Garth held it toward the ceiling and tapped a button twice. The tool went into scan mode, even though Garth wasn’t sure exactly what he was scanning *for* in the derelict ship. The screwdriver jittered and whined, and Garth’s face grew sour.

“Great load of help you are right now,” he mumbled, tapping the screwdriver against his meaty thigh. Garth choked up on the screwdriver and held it like an explorer with a torch as he started to walk, pulsing the scan every few feet to check for changes. Most ships didn’t just *eat* other ships, so if Garth’s screwdriver could find his TARDIS’ signal, it’d be a start.

The derelict was, thankfully, designed by a half-sane person. Hallways ran in perpendicular rows, and there were not many of them. They were all wide, so much so that Garth could have laid down a double of himself and together they’d barely be able to stretch the breadth of the hall. Wall plaques pointed in different directions, but half the signs were gone, scratched out or moved. Garth inspected a directional sign labeled ‘infirmary’, but when he touched it, it promptly tumbled off the wall, having been held up by little more than sticky-tack and hope.

"Who's even on this ship to call for help?" Garth mumbled to himself, before adding, "Not that it was legitimate." He turned left and followed a new hallway with no particular clue where he was going; moving was still better than standing around with a finger in his ear, at least. As Garth walked he passed rooms, choosing a few at random to peek into. Most of them were unused storage rooms, while one was an empty bunk and another, a mere maintenance closet. The rooms were unladen save for the barest fixtures. Either the current inhabitants of the ship were a small crew and didn't need the space, or Garth wasn't dealing with a normal presence. Either way, the Time Lord was on edge.

Approaching a crossroads in the hallways, Garth felt the tickle of intuition at the base of his brain. The fur on his neck stood up, hackles raising even without the Time Lord seeing anything. The air smelled worried, and Garth tightened his grip on his screwdriver. Grabbing at the corner where the hallways met, Garth inched his body forward. He was trying to see before being seen.

The silhouettes were unmistakable. Humanoid, L-bend pipes framing their heads like mechanical haloes. There were five or six of the figures, standing silently. Dormantly. Quiet, unmoving Cybermen.

Garth flattened against the wall immediately, his breath freezing in his throat. Both of his hearts were fluttering again, though this time it was from tension (and maybe a little fear). A derelict space ship, no way out, and *Cybermen*. Garth cursed his bad luck as he clutched his screwdriver to his chest. He stared across the gaping crossways, the seemingly endless distance between his position and the hallway's continuation. Down the hall, Garth saw a sudden sharp turn to the right.

Good, Garth thought, I can slip round the little phalanx here. Maybe lose them if I have to.

With a single breath to psyche himself out, Garth pushed off the wall and bolted across the wide crossway. He refused to give one stray look to the Cybermen, just barreling his body forward and falling headlong into the other passage. Tucking into a tight roll, the wrecking ball of a Time Lord tumbled before springing to his feet and turning back around, sonic screwdriver held out like a fencer's sword. Garth's chest heaved, but otherwise he didn't move, body on edge and ready to fight and run at quite the same time.

Nothing happened.

Wrinkles formed on Garth's brow as time marched forward. He was unsure why he wasn't being chased by those walking tin cans, why there were no thudding footsteps or loud, mechanical voices. A small part of Garth was urging him to go back and check things out, but most of his beat that small part into submission. There was no reason to risk yourself when you could keep moving. So that's exactly what Garth did.

Garth backpedaled for a few dozen feet before turning and jogging his way down the hall. When he came to the bank in the path, he paused and peered around the corner first before continuing. There was nothing to be seen as far as he could see (which was far, *thankyouverymuch*), so with a little more confidence and a little less perfectly rational paranoia, Garth pressed on.

Not two hundred feet down the hall, though, there was a crash from a door just ahead of the Time Lord. Garth froze, then stalked to the door. Aiming his sonic screwdriver once more,

Garth stood with his other hand ready to push the door open. The Cybermen were still fresh in his mind, and he wasn't about to be ambushed. Before he could open the door himself, though, the door opened for him.

"Oi! They don't build shelves like they used to, I swear!"

On the other side of the door was the most curiously colorful man this side of the Great Prism. Feline, in two shades of purple, wearing a tailcoat of variegated vertical stripes and green tuxedo pants to 'match', the man was almost too garish to believe. While not as tall as Garth (and really, who was?), the man was not short. He was also wearing a pot on his head.

"Terrible place to store cookware, absolutely dreadf--*egads*," the man yelped, stopping dead as he laid eyes on the lower half of Garth's thick body. He snatched the pot off his head and held it like a weapon, bright blue eyes wide and wild.

"I know how to use this! Most people know how to use a pot, but I know how to use it tactically!"

Garth's face went through a few emotions, trying to land on an appropriate facial expression for being threatened with a cooking pot. Finally, he flicked his tongue against one of his teeth and half-smiled.

"Tactical pot usage, that's one I've not heard before. Do you also fence with a ladle?"

The man's tense stance softened slightly, pot lowering, but he was still on-edge. His eyes ran up and down Garth's body quickly. His whole body perked up again when he processed Garth's sonic screwdriver, dropping the pot entirely upon that revelation.

"Oh! D'ya have one of those, too?"

The frenetic feline reached into his pocket and pulled out a similar, but nowhere near as utilitarian-looking, device. It had a purple nodule and art deco filigree. It was just as gaudy as its owner. Garth squeezed his screwdriver tighter, moving his hand to trail the smaller man's movements.

Looking back up, the smaller man stared at Garth's screwdriver for a moment before reaching a hand up and gently pushing it away.

"Bit rude, don't you think, thrusting that in someone's face?" he said.

"Never mind the screwdriver, kettlehead, what's your name?"

"I mean, I only threatened you with a pot, what was I going to do with a pot? You knew full well I wasn't going to do anything with a pot!"

"...Your name?" Garth sighed slightly.

"Ah, yes. Friends call me the Derecho! I guess enemies do, too, since it's the only name I give them, it's really all a moniker, you know, running around the cosmos, being a Renegade. Not a fan of kettlehead, mind keeping that out of your mouth from now on, that'd be nice," the Derecho rambled on, barely even giving Garth a look as he just talked.

Garth's brow furrowed at this constant babbling. He dropped his screwdriver a little in resignation that, at the very least, the Derecho was not going to leap up and attack him. Not if he kept himself busy with all this talking. The Derecho finally took a breath, and turned to look at Garth once more.

"And who are you, then, Thrusty?"

"The Commander," Garth said, wanting to keep some things secret at least.

"The Comman--dear me, you're a Renegade, too, aren't you? Well, *bonaroo* to that!"

"Bona-what now?" Garth half-chuckled as he spoke.

"Bonaroo! It's Polari, funny little Earth language, basically means hurrah or yippee. Picked it up hanging around some Romany gypsies, it's stuck ever since! Speaking of stuck, did your TARDIS--" The Derecho wiggled his fingers and drew his hands out, as if representing a disappearing entity. "Did it do that on you, too, Thrusty?"

"It did...disappear, yes. Also, I'll not call you kettlehead if you stop calling me Thrusty, deal?" Garth pursed his lips and turned to look back down from where he came. His intuition was starting to tweak itself wild again.

"Derecho, did you run into any Cybermen when you came this way?"

"No, must have missed them," the Derecho said, as frivolously as you please.

Of all the Time Lords to run into, Garth found the one who seemed more scatterbrained than most. Still, at least he had more personality than some of the Gallifreyans he directed while part of the military. Renegades always seemed to get the most personality.

"The facts," Garth began, "are these: we are both missing our ships. There are Cybermen lurking about. I pose the solution that we keep moving."

"We? What's this we nonsense?" the Derecho scoffed. "You seem very nice, Commander, but I've learned my lesson from running with other Gallifreyans--that is, I don't do it. Parting is such sweet sorrow, but I really need to look for *my* ship."

"You're going to flounce off into this ship alone? With Cybermen about?" Garth spat out.

"If not noticing them before kept me safe, I'll just *pretend* to not notice them this time. It'll be a piece of cake. Or pie. Or...no, I'd really rather a tart," the Derecho mumbled as he started walking away from Garth, rubbing his chin in thought.

Garth wiped a hand down his face before stomping forward. He grabbed the Derecho's shoulder, adamant to travel as a team--better coverage in case they ran into trouble, that was Garth's thought. The sudden touch caused the smaller Time Lord to leap and make the loudest shout, loud enough to echo and ping up and down the hallways. The Derecho's tail frizzed out, and he began patting and stroking his clothing with a mixture of anxiety and anger, his ears flattened against his head.

"No touching touching no no do you just *go around touching people, who touches people*, that's so rude I cannot *believe* all this touching!"

Adjusting every inch of his tailcoat and vest, the Derecho shivered once and took a step away from the Commander, his eyes steeled now.

"Now see here, just because you fancy yourself a military man does *not* mean you can just go around putting your hands on people, it's pos-i-lute-ly rude--"

"Derecho, be quiet," Garth breathed.

"I will *not* be quiet, you...you meathead! I am a grown man, only two hundred and some years old but I am an *adult* and I have--"

"And I outrank you at nine hundred. *Now, kettlehead, run.*"

"And already breaking our agreement! Excuse me, why should I...run...?" The Derecho's voice trailed off as he finally decided to follow the Commander's line of sight. He turned his head slowly, only to see six Cybermen, dead eyes and glowing bits, marching down the hallway toward them. The Derecho gulped once.

"Did you happen to mean those Cybermen?"

"Yes."

"Well. Running sounds very good, then."

"Glad you agree."

In a cartoonish fashion, the two Time Lords whipped their bodies around and took off at a breakneck pace. Garth, with his longer legs, got more stride for the step, but the Derecho was keeping pace by sheer speed, legs whirling madly. The hallway was long, a side passage with not many crossroads, making escape a smidge harder.

"Up here!" Garth barked, jabbing his finger to the right.

"Just want to let you know," the Derecho gasped out, "that I'm merely running in the *same direction* as you, we're not running *together!*"

"Just make a right, kettlehead!"

Garth changed directions on a dime, skidding and redirecting his momentum down the new hallway with no problem. The Derecho scrambled to jettison himself around the corner, grabbing the edge of the wall and slingshotting himself forward. The Time Lords' footfalls made complimentary sounds as they regained pace, the Derecho's colorful wingtips a high hat to Garth's bass drum boots.

"Why do spaceship hallways always look the *same*? No one decorates anymore, I swear, if they would just let me help them," the Derecho yelled to no one in particular.

"Yes, when we find the head Cyberman, you can bestow on them all sorts of *interior design tips*."

"I just might, Thrusty! I just might."

The first big crossways yawned before the Time Lords now, brighter than the ones Garth had first come through. The overhead fluorescents were dim, but better than the amber emergency lights. As they crossed the threshold into the open square between crossing passages, Garth got the distinct feeling that this was more a trap than a blessing. The Derecho ran a circle around Garth, looking down all four hallways before pointing.

"Left!" the Derecho breathed, jogging away from the Commander. He wasn't ten feet forward when a new sound started buzzing, accompanied by the cold, copper chassis of a Dalek wheeling its way into view. The Derecho nearly fell down he backpedaled so quickly, only to hit the Commander, stand up, having a visual moment of mental noise.

"*Definitely not left!*" the Derecho stammered before taking off down the same hallway they'd been following.

"What kind of madhouse ship is this?" Garth seethed, getting a good look at the Daleks trundling down the hall toward him. In his periphery he saw the Cybermen turning the far hallway corner, too. Something struck Garth as fishy about the whole situation, and he stood there in the crossway, staring squint-eyed at the Daleks.

The Derecho, a few hundred feet away now, turned around to see the Commander not moving. Cupping his hands round his maw, he shouted, "Are you coming, you nincompoop?"

Garth snapped his head to the Derecho, then back to the Daleks and Cybermen. They were still all heavily shrouded in shadow even as they grew closer to Garth's position. He squeezed his hands into fists, but finally gave in, turning to run after the Derecho.

Ears flat, tail twitching, Garth caught up with the Derecho as he rounded another corner. Something was still festering inside of Garth's brain, something very much off about this

predicament. He snagged a finger into the Derecho's lapel and kept him from running further, taking a moment now that they were around another blind corner to listen.

There was no sound coming from behind them. Even if there weren't footfalls, Garth would have assumed that when the Cybermen and Daleks met, there'd be lasers and cracking of metal. Still, there was no noise echoing down the hallway toward them.

"Do you find it odd that there's no battle noise coming from behind us?"

"I find it odd you're hanging onto me!"

"It's Cybermen and Daleks, they're going to want to kill each other. Unless they're working together? That's a terrifying thought."

"There will be a lot of terrifying thoughts if you don't let me go, Thrusty!"

"Are you *not* worried about our predicament?" Garth finally snapped.

"I am perfectly worried about our predicament, it's pos-i-*lute*-ly worrying, but I would rather be worried about it while not attached to your claw! So let. Me. Go!" the Derecho wormed his way off of the Commander's coat hook of a finger, stumbling away and turning around. He went to work adjusting his coat, smoothing everything out, his whole body jittering. Garth caught sight of this again, and left the soundlessness of the hallway for now.

"Are you okay? Did you get shocked or something?"

The Derecho breathed a little raggedly, but said nothing, working to adjust the creases in his vest. Garth's eyebrows arched, and he approached the Derecho, grasping his head.

"Let me take a look at you, make sure you're not concussed," Garth said. His hand was immediately slapped away by the Derecho, who visibly vibrated. Everything on the Derecho's body tensed up, mouth trying to remember how to form words.

"Touching! What did I say about touching! Hands, fingers, touching, I don't like it stop *touching me* it does not make me *comfortable* you are not *enamoring yourself* to me, if you don't stop touching me I-- I-- *my goodness I don't know*," the Derecho managed, partially slurred. A moment of rapid breathing and pacing in a circle managed to be enough self-soothing for the Derecho to calm down.

Garth was gobsmacked. He wasn't sure what he was doing wrong here, and what he'd brushed off as odd quirks were quickly starting to smack of something more. With Cybermen and Daleks breathing down their necks, though, Garth didn't have time to dive into this with the Derecho.

"Are you going to be okay enough to keep going?"

The Derecho, currently smoothing down his wedge of white hair, let a small sigh slip out of his nose. He stared at the floor but nodded once.

"Yes yes, I'm going to be okay. No more hands, though."

"No more hands, Renegade promise."

The Time Lords didn't have a terribly long time to make nice as the footsteps of Cybermen started to ring in their ears again. Both men whipped their heads around, and it was the Derecho who first saw the door across the hall. Running over with screwdriver extended and buzzing, the door slid into a wall pocket. The Derecho ducked in with the Commander hot on his heels, shutting the door behind them.

The room was pitch black, but it was hidden. The Time Lords stood still for what felt like ages, listening for footsteps outside the door. Both had their screwdrivers clutched tight in their hands, but as moments slipped with no incident, they relaxed an iota or two.

A small clattering made Garth buzz his screwdriver into the darkness.

"Just me! Just me. Trying to find a light switch or something," the Derecho chimed in, blindly pawing at the walls.

"Oh, that's--that's a good idea, right," Garth said quietly, and joined in the groping search for a light source. The room felt bigger than it probably was, and without even a sliver of light from cracks in the door, it became something of a comedy.

"I think I got it, Derecho. Cover your eyes if you don't want to be blinded."

Garth ran his finger up a small touchpad, and the hum of warming lights filled the room. A metallic crackle and the room was illuminated in white-lavender industrial lighting, cold and medical. Both men averted their eyes behind their hands, allowing their eyes to adjust to the new brightness. The Derecho dropped his hand first, and let a sharp gasp out. Before Garth could open his eyes fully, the whine of a sonic screwdriver filled the room. It almost immediately stopped, too.

"Commander. You need to see this."

Blinking hard a few times, Garth finally moved his hand away from his eyes and looked around the room. It was a standard storeroom, maybe ten feet by twenty feet. Cabinets lined two walls, and work benches lined two others. Everything here seemed normal.

Except for the Dalek and Cyberman body parts strewn about the floor.

Some of them were hanging and resting in open cabinets, but more of them were laying on the floor. A leg here, a plunger there, a head thrown unceremoniously on top of a cabinet. Garth's mouth went dry as he stared at the disarray, until his eyes locked on a Cyberman head in the cabinet directly in front of him. With the quietest steps he could muster, Garth approached the head. His hands hovered mere inches from those head handles before, like trying to catch a fly, Garth snatched the head up and recoiled.

The Derecho looked over at the Commander, eyebrows raised. Garth ran one hand down the front of the helmet. None of the facial features were correct--the eyes were too big, there was chipped silver paint, and the headpipes were clearly wrapped in silver tape.

Garth sild a hand inside the head's empty cavity. He poked two fingers out of the eyes and held it up like a crude ventriloquist dummy, facing it toward the Derecho.

A moment of silence hung in the room before the Derecho's face cracked into a grin. His laugh soon followed, a high cackle. Breathing to calm himself down, the Derecho looked down at the floor and, grin still plastered on his face, grabbed one of those Dalek bumps. He placed it on his head and modeled it, staring at the Commander.

They both broke into fits of laughter then, Garth's deep belly laugh mingling with the Derecho's cackle nicely. The Time Lords were unable to pull themselves together for some time, because every time they laid eyes on the strewn, fake parts it just re-upped the humor. They were standing in a sea of bad knock-offs of the universe's greatest villains, it felt so absurd.

Taking great gasps of air to calm down, Garth put the Cyberman head on the nearest table and wiped his eyes. The Derecho, still wearing the Dalek bump, swallowed a few small snickers, trying to seem professional.

"Costumes!" the Derecho finally spat out, and the two laughed once more.

"I knew something was wrong with those Daleks," Garth said, wiping his face to get rid of a few tears. "Who knew we'd landed on the Halloween ship!"

"It's just like Scooby-Doo."

"What?"

"Scooby-Doo! It's this cartoon from Earth, caught it when I was hiding out there, these four young adults and a dog solve mysteries, they always unmask the villain at the end."

"It's just four kids and a dog?"

"I know, it makes no sense!"

The Time Lords grinned at one another. Garth hadn't had a good laugh like this in ages, and it felt good. It heartened him, knowing the universe still had a sense of humor. Looking over to the door, Garth clicked his tongue.

"I think it's time to get to the bottom of this. Don't you think, Derecho?"

The Derecho already had his screwdriver out, wiggling it between two fingers.

"I think so, Commander. I really think so."

"All right, tin cans! You're all going to give up peacefully, you hear?"

The Commander thudded down the hall, making sure each footstep counted. The Derecho trailed close, twirling his screwdriver like a sheriff in the old West.

Walking into the crossroads from before, the Time Lords stood back to back, facing down two halls each. There was no movement, but the air stunk of company.

"That's right, you so-and-sos! Come on out and maybe we'll let you live!" the Derecho chirped, a little laugh following.

There was a small rustle from the side hall. Both men turned to look, and sure enough, Cybermen started to thud toward them again. Neither Time Lord shrunk away, and the Derecho even flicked his screwdriver like a lion tamer with a whip. Up the hall to the left, the Daleks began trundling toward them, too.

Garth let out a laugh, and took a step toward the Daleks.

"Right! Now, if you'd tell us where our ships are, we don't have to make this into more of a hassle than it already is. Daleks and Cybermen together, that should scare most people--but not me. See, I fought against you," Garth jabbed his screwdriver at the Daleks, "in the Time War."

"And I've dismantled more than a few of you," the Derecho said pointedly to the Cybermen.

"So, you're not going to get us so easily. You think you can scare us? You're threatening the wrong two men, then!"

"The wrong two Time Lords!"

The Cybermen and Daleks were at the edge of the crossway, leave the Time Lords to defend their position. A moment of silence descended on the scene while the Derecho and the Commander exchanged looks. They dropped their attack stances, pocketing their screwdrivers. The Derecho broke into a big grin and walked toward the Cybermen. He started humming, then whistling, then full-on singing.

"Scooby Scooby-Doo, where are you...."

The Cybermen turned to look at one another, confused. The Derecho stood inches from the head Cyberman, and then slammed his hands on either side of its head. With more strength than his thin body seemed to be capable of, he wrenched and tugged at the Cyberman's head.

"Ach! Ow, that's my *neck!*" the Cyberman yelped.

The Daleks started to shiver and shimmy backward, but the Commander was on them. He wrapped one big arm around the back of a Dalek as the other fingered its way around the front panel, clearly on a mission. Garth let a happy little chuckle out when he found a hidden hasp behind one of the Dalek's bumps, and tugged it free and open.

Inside the Dalek was a wolf, barely fourteen, sweaty and befuddled. He blinked and stared at the Commander, who looked back at him with a wide grin.

"You are the least terrifying Dalek I've ever seen, and that's a compliment," Garth joked.

"Stop pulling, I'll take it off!" yelled the Cyberman currently being manhandled by the Derecho. Those metal hands batted weakly at the Derecho, who finally dropped away and held his hands up like he was being arrested. The Cyberman fumbled with the helmet latches, revealing underneath a preteen puma girl with long brown hair wrapped back in a flattened bun.

"Guys, gals, drop the act. They've figured us out," the ex-Cyberman said. One by one, Daleks divested their internal operators and the Cybermen de-helmeted. A whole group of minors, no one over sixteen, now surrounded the Time Lords. Some were humanoid, some were of different alien races, but they were all young. Both Time Lords smiled, and Garth put his hands out to the entire group.

"Would you kindly take us to your leader? Or at least our ships."

Some of the kids exchanged looks before shrugging. The wolf rolled his hand in the air and motioned away from the group, further into the ship. The whole group, with the Time Lords near the front, began their short pilgrimage.

They entered the scrapyard through a high-walled cavern made of spare, mangled parts. The room opened up to something half the size of the docking bay from hours prior, but that still meant it was a massively large room—at least two hangars in size.

"So, what's your name, kid?" Garth said.

"Vasta," said the young wolf as he started to weave through the half-disassembled ships and machinery.

"Right, Vasta, so you use the distress beacon to lure ships here?"

"You got it, mister."

"Then where are all the pilots?" the Derecho piped in, after scanning a few piles of debris with his screwdriver.

"We teleport them to a close, friendly planet. We got a few kids that scan for places that have life and communications and drop them there. Then, we can get ships to scrap, and they're not not harmed, just angry. Best part, they never know who we are," Vasta explained matter-of-factly. He stopped the retinue next to a scouting ship of unrecognizable origin, and cupped his hands around his mouth.

"Oi, Ward! Got somethin' you might wanna see!"

A welding mask peeked out from a cavity in the scouter. Flipping the mask up, the red panda girl beneath squinted and stared down at Vasta and the men behind him. Dropping a large spanner into a loop in her overalls, she just sighed.

"Ah, crap."

Scrambling down the scouter, Ward walked up to the group with her tongue flicking at one of her pointed teeth.

"What've we got here? How'd you get past the teleporter?"

"Is that your name, just Ward? Bit of a strange name, you look more like a Melanie! Or maybe a Gertrude," the Derecho said, head canted to one side. Ward raised an eyebrow and laughed under her breath.

"Excuse my friend here," Garth said. "Though, your full name would be helpful."

"Jessica Ward. I'm head of the Orphan League here. But really, how did you get past the teleporters, they're supposed to--"

"Yes yes yes, beam us to the nearest habitable planet, your friend Vasta here explained it all to us, it's very nice but we'd like our ships back, I'm sure with them being TARDISes, they interacted oddly with your little porting scheme here, very good though a little illegal, actually very illegal, and *my goodness we'd like our ships back*," blustered the Derecho, stomping a foot to punctuate his point. Garth thought he looked a bit like a very angry housecat, and couldn't help but chuckle.

"What he said, but with less words."

Jessica tilted her head, staring both Time Lords down with a furrowed brow. Her fingers tapped the top of the spanner as she thought.

"So you're both Time Lords?"

"Yes, seems you know your ship-to-pilot stereotypes," Garth said with a smile.

"I met a Time Lord once. He plucked me from a boring life on a twenty-sixth century human empire space station and ended up dropping me here--or, I chose to stop here. Orphans stick with orphans, and these guys needed my help badly," Jessica jabbed a thumb at some of the other young crew members. The Commander raised his eyebrows at this admission.

"You mean--" began Garth, before being interrupted by the Derecho.

"So you're all orphans?" the Derecho said, peering at Jessica, then Vasta, as if absolutely stunned to be meeting a person with no parents. He studied them like a scientist would study a cancerous growth.

"Yeah. The ship you're on used to be a floating orphanage, repurposed from a scrapper. At some point, some of the kids got tired of listening to the adults, got tired of being ordered around by them, so they mutinied. That's how they ended up finding out about the teleport tech. They're not violent kids, just," Jessica struggled for the proper word. "Strong-willed. Like me!"

"This still doesn't forgive them for stealing ships," Garth admitted, to which Jessica merely shrugged.

"Look, we're sorry for the trouble. It's hard to make a living when you don't want to get found, you know? If these kids end up getting caught, it's not going to end with them going back to an orphanage or a home planet--they're going straight to a prison complex. Maybe Bernadot Three, maybe the Great Wall, but wherever it is, it's not going to be pretty for them."

Jessica motioned to the kids milling about. Most of them were now working on dismantling ships further, taking apart big pieces and laying them in piles--siding, pipes, wires. There were piles all over the scrapyards for just those things, being collected like fall leaves to then, it would be assumed, be collected and sold.

"I know your ships. We couldn't touch them, they wouldn't let us. Some metal bunker of a structure and a cart."

"It's a Romany gypsy wagon!" the Derecho said brightly.

"Right. Well, we knew they weren't normal ships because no normal ships look like that. I had a hunch that you confirmed. C'mon," Jessica nodded off to the right, and started walking. The Time Lords followed Jessica, who barked at some crew to clean up some of the oil slicks on the floor. She clicked her tongue in frustration.

"How many orphans are on this ship?" Garth inquired.

"About three hundred. It was an international orphanage, basically any world that didn't have room for their adorable urchins sent them here. When I arrived, it was mid-mutiny. They told me about being used as slave labor, forced to fight for things they didn't like."

Both the Commander and the Derecho exchanged a small look.

"Here they are," Jessica said. The two TARDISEs had made friends with one another, sitting in the same mostly-empty corner of the scraproom. The Derecho let out a squeal, running up to his ship and patting the railing on the steps, flicking a bit of dust off the door knob, adjusting the lantern that hung from the front and flickered a nice yellow-orange.

"Paramishus! My wonderful ship," the Derecho fawned on his vehicle before running back down the steps, and stopping back with Jessica and the Commander. The Commander shook his head and laughed kindly at the Derecho.

"So," Jessica said, for once looking a little nervous. Garth pursed his lips.

"So we are going to leave. I'll send some codes to you, Jessica Ward, that'll allow for overrides to your teleport service if, in case, another Time Lord happens to drop by," Garth said, fiddling with his screwdriver. He let it buzz twice, and nodded to himself, pleased. "I'll get to it once I'm in my ship."

Jessica smiled, nodding her head. "Thank you."

"I know what it's like to run. I think we're both running for good reasons--and perhaps with the same Time Lord. Now get back to your crew, they need you." Garth smiled, which Jessica returned happily. She turned on the toe of her boot and set back off into the junkyard, leaving the two Time Lords alone.

"So! That was fun, fun fun fun, the kind of fun I don't particularly have often, made the hearts rumble and thunder in my chest, not quite used to that, try to keep a low profile," the Derecho meandered.

"Right, low profile, with kettles and stripes," the Commander joked.

"Oi! That's a very nice kettle, I really should go back for it. Poor thing's going to get lonely."

Garth let out a belly laugh, shaking his head.

"For what it's worth, Derecho, it was nice to meet you. You're a little touched, a great deal strange, but I've been trying to tap into my own strangeness these days. It's good to see that strange people survive."

"Hey, I...well, I guess I resemble that remark," the Derecho said, smiling wide. Then, he dialed that smile back. "Do you ever get lonely, Commander?"

The Commander puffed out his cheeks, then blew out the air in a sigh.

"All the time, Derecho. All the time."

Nodding, the Derecho took a step backward, stopped, and stepped forward again. He fidgeted with his fingers, clicking claws against one another.

"It was nice. To meet a fellow runner, that is," the Derecho said, and smiled again. Fishing into his pocket, he pulled out his screwdriver and tapped it against the Commander's. There was a brief spark of light between the two of them before they both beeped.

"Get in touch sometime, we'll have tea. I know a bonaroo place on the outer rings of Daal."

"Bonaroo. Got it," Garth purred.

The Derecho tipped an imaginary hat and turned away from the Commander, climbing the stairs of his TARDIS. He stopped, turning back to look at the fellow Time Lord again, tail swishing happily as he flashed another big grin. Then, he disappeared inside. The wagon began to jitter, that lantern began to sway, and the quiet whirr of the Derecho's TARDIS kicked in.

Garth stood quietly, watching the wagon fade from view. He entered his own TARDIS, the war rig it was, his face cracked wide open in the biggest smile he'd had in months.

"What a frustrating man, it's no wonder he ran," Garth said to no one as he started up his own take-off sequence. "Then again, we're all running from the same thing. What matters more is what we're running to."

Garth furrowed his brow, and looked up into the dark corners of his control room. He let out a big guffaw and shook his head.

"Talking to yourself, Garth, you're truly going mad."

Then again, madness seemed to be a good way to survive as a Renegade.