

# STAR TREK BANSHEE SQUADRON

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# HUMANITY

RICHARD ADALBERT MERK



## **Time Travel With a Twist**

The Temporal Cold War heats up and the Banshees are pulled into the conflagration. Now they must fight to save their altered future and that of all of Humanity!



Star Trek: Banshee Squadron

# Humanity

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German dialog translation  
by Andreas Bodensohn



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## Table of Contents

<b>HUMANITY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Act One - Blast From the Past .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Act Two - The Humanity.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Act Three - Wrinkle In Time .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Act Four - Back to the Future.....</b>	<b>32</b>





## Act One - Blast From the Past

**Captain's log, stardate 60510.4.** The *USS Crockett* is continuing its survey probe into the outlying regions of the Briar Patch region. We are searching for metrion gas pockets, warp shallows, or any other navigation hazards, but have steered clear of any solar systems as per Starfleet's orders. Once we've charted safe routes, science vessels will be able to more safely negotiate this area and begin exploring in earnest.

We've been out here for three days and have four to go, but I can tell already that my crew will be glad when this mission is over.

Captain Matthew Cross finished his dictation and leaned back in his chair, looking thoughtfully out the front window of his new Cat's-Eye class recon vessel *Crockett*. His previous command, the *Longbow*, was still back on Kurnugi, on the wrong side of the Black Gate.

"You love doing those, don't you?" said a woman's voice from behind him.

Cross swiveled his chair to face Lieutenant Josephine Schmidt sitting at one of the auxiliary science stations along the port side of the spacious cockpit. "Doing what?" he asked.

"Those captain's logs," Jo replied, a tiny, mischievous smile tugging at the corners of her lips. "I can tell. Your voice gets all deeper and you get this serious expression on your face." She cleared her throat, contorted her lovely face into a glower, and lowered her voice in a silly parody of Cross. "Captain's log, stardate. We are continuing our mission to search for gasbags and hot air."

A pair of chuckles emanated from the directions of the co-pilot's seat and the starboard science station where Ensigns Dexter Gray and Alex Dalton sat.

Cross raised an eyebrow in a very Vulcan-like manner and smiled indulgently at Jo. "Don't you people have some work to do?" he suggested pointedly.

Jo laughed quietly, then said, "Aye aye, Captain!" She turned her seat back to face her console and began programming the next series of subspace scans into the *Crockett's* sophisticated sensor suite. After a few seconds though, she turned back and said, "By the way, thanks for letting me and Alex tag along on this mission."

"You're welcome. Besides, if I had said no to Dalton, Dexter would never have forgiven me."

Jo grinned, while Alex and Dexter turned a shade of red. The computer beeped and she turned back to her console. A frown wrinkled her forehead as she watched the displays on the science console before her begin scrolling unexpected information at her.

"Captain," she said. "I'm getting a very strange reading directly astern."

Cross left his chair to stand behind Jo. "Define 'strange' please," he said. An unknown blip suddenly appearing directly behind their ship was an unlikely and suspicious coincidence and made him uneasy.

"I... I'm not sure. Alex, can you confirm what I'm seeing here?"

On the other side of the *Crockett's* cockpit, Alex Dalton bent over her own science panel and studied the anomalous readings. "I'm just an engineer, but it looks like some kind of time distortion," she replied.

Cross grunted unhappily. He strongly disapproved of time distortions. If he had the power, he would eliminate them from the universe entirely; they were nothing but trouble. Turning to his copilot, he said, "Ensign Gray, put some distance between us and the distortion. I don't want to risk coming into contact with it. We can run our scans from a safer distance."

"Aye, sir," said the young man. The *Crockett* banked and sped away from the unusual formation, which was rapidly intensifying and was now visible to the naked eye as a seething vortex of light and energy.

"Captain!" called Jo. "There's a ship coming through the distortion!"

"Shields up!" barked Cross. "Charge the phasers." He returned to his seat and took the helm from Dexter Gray, leaving the Ensign free to carry out his orders undistracted.

The deck under their feet lurched unexpectedly.

"They're shooting at us!" yelled Jo.

"Brilliant observation, science officer," growled Captain Cross. As the *Crockett* continued being struck by the unknown ship's weapons, he steadied himself with one hand while frantically punching evasive commands into the helm. Two more direct hits pounded the shields making the cabin lights dim as the ship's A.I. automatically diverted power to bolster the defenses.

"Their weapons are incredibly powerful," reported Dexter. "Our shields are already down to sixty percent."

"Who are we fighting?" demanded Cross of anyone who had the answer.

"The ship doesn't match anything currently in use by any known race," called Alex. "The computer's doing a full records search." Another blast rocked the *Crockett's* cabin. "Here it is... Forty meters in length, modular design... It's a 'Suliban cell-ship' -- last known use, mid-twenty-second century."

"Suliban? Never heard of them." The cabin slammed sideways and a display panel above Cross' head blew out in a shower of sparks, forcing the Captain to turn his face away and throw up his arms for protection. "They sure pack a wallop for a two-hundred-year-old antique."

"I'd say they've gotten a few upgrades in the last two hundred years," said Jo wryly.

"Phaser banks are charged, sir!" called Ensign Gray.

"Time for some payback," growled Cross. His fingers did a wild mambo across the smooth black surface of his control console and the *Crockett* banked in a tight curve and sped directly back towards the small, geometric vessel that was biting at its heels. Four staccato streams of pulsed phaser energy leapt across the void connecting with the

cell-ship's shields and making them erupt with multicolored pyrotechnics.

"That's got them!" shouted Dexter while shaking his fist at the cell-ship visible through the front viewport.

"Don't celebrate yet," snapped Cross. "Damage!" he called back to Alex and Jo.

The two women played a duet on their consoles, then Alex reported the results. "A few circuit blow-outs and fried breakers, and random rearranging of the furniture back in the lounge. Our shields are at sixty-four percent and recharging. If you shunt some phaser power over you can have them back to one-hundred percent in under a minute."

"No time for that," said Cross.

Through the front viewport, the weird, alien vessel was circling around for another attack run. It steadied its course and launched another volley of particle beam blasts at the small Starfleet scout ship. Inside the *Crockett's* cockpit, the four officers had to shield their eyes from the sudden brilliant glare. The forward viewports automatically adjusted their opacity to compensate for excess light, but the Suliban attack was too ferocious and swift and the windows were overwhelmed.

Captain Cross never wavered however, and the *Crockett* flew straight on through the maelstrom and emerged unscathed on the other side. His index finger stabbed the phaser control and the four weapon barrels blazed hot subatomic particles. The Suliban cell-ship took the full brunt of the sustained counterattack on its forward shields. They sputtered frenetically and finally flashed out altogether.

The cell-ship corkscrewed away in a desperate attempt to escape, spewing a sparkling stream of warp plasma from cracks in its hull. Ahead of it, a new swirling energy vortex suddenly ripped cross the starry heavens, and the cell-ship was heading straight for it.

"They're trying to escape!" exclaimed Jo from her back seat. She checked her instruments. "It's another time distortion. I can't tell where it leads."

"We should let them go," said Alex from the other back seat.

But Captain Cross wasn't about to let their assailants get off that easily. "These Suliban, whoever they are, are going to have to answer for attacking us without provocation. Ensign, lock phasers on their engines."

"Aye, Captain."

Cross steered the *Crockett* on an intercept course, bringing them much too close to the time distortion for his comfort, but the alternative was to let them escape, and that was completely unacceptable. Just before the Suliban vessel slipped through the vortex, he said, "Fire!"

A single quad-pulse of phaser energy flashed from the leading edge of the scout ship's hull, striking the rear of the target. The Suliban ship lurched and spun out of control. An instant later, Jo called out, "I'm picking up a massive energy surge from the vortex!"

"Get us out of here!" shouted Alex in a frightened voice.

Cross did his best, but the helm fought his every command. As the energy waves from the time vortex crashed over the hull of the small Starfleet vessel, its systems began overloading and going out one by one. The overhead lights in the cockpit flickered and died, plunging

the four crew into near darkness. The only remaining light came the few small, mostly red indicators left active on the control consoles, and the angry, swirling vortex outside the front viewports.

Matthew Cross watched helplessly as the expanding shockwave of energy that had slammed into them reversed direction and came rushing back in towards the center of the vortex, dragging the *Crockett* along with it. He watched as the Suliban cell-ship struck the eye of the vortex and vanished in a brilliant flash of light. Only seconds remained before the *Crockett* was sucked in too. There was a growing roar in his ears like the end of the world.

"Hang on to something!" he yelled, and then everything turned white.

## Act Two - The Humanity

*A solid sheet of achingly bright whiteness wrapped around Captain Matthew Cross' entire field of vision. There was no up or down, no horizon. He felt as if he was floating, as though he'd left his physical body and was drifting through a vault of metaphysical nothingness. Above all, a strange sense of deja vu permeated everything. Visions coalesced out of the white backdrop and danced before his eyes. Or were they more than visions? Were they memories? Premonitions? In his present state, he couldn't tell.*

*He saw Jem'Hadar battlebugs and Cardassian Galors screaming across a blazing sky leaving death and destruction in their wake. The horrors of past wars.*

*Faces swam in and out of focus, a collage of familiar eyes and hair above the distinctive black-and-white uniforms of Starfleet pilots, and finally settled on one pair of lovely, confident, almond eyes beneath short, tousled, brown hair. The present, the Banshees, Lee Carter.*



*A horrific conflagration. Bodies were falling to their deaths while others burned, unable to escape. Cross tried to turn away from the nightmarish vision but couldn't force his eyes away. Was this the future? He instinctively knew it was, but dreaded it.*

*A woman with lovely almond eyes and short brown hair dressed in clouds of white, floaty veils, and himself in a black tuxedo standing beside her. He watched himself put a ring on her finger and say the words...*

And then he was awake! He shook off the torpor weighing down his limbs and thoughts and straightened himself in his chair. He placed his hands on the hard, cold console before him, letting its undeniable solidity reel him back to reality. The future visions had left him somewhat shaken, but he wasn't sure which he found more distressing: the image of the deadly conflagration and burning bodies, or the vision of himself at the altar with...

No. That had to be just an ordinary idle daydream. But even that explanation was difficult to accept.

He craned his neck around to check on his crew. At the station to his right, Ensign Dexter Gray was shaking his head vigorously and frowning. In the back, Ensign Alex Dalton was looking rather pale and frightened, while Lieutenant Jo Schmidt had her head back on her chair's headrest and was groaning disconsolately.

"Everybody okay?" asked Cross.

"No!" was the unanimous, grumpy reply.

"Good. Let's find out what happened to us—" The view of a deep indigo planetary sky instead of the starry black of

space outside the forward windows caught his eye for the first time. "—and where we are," he finished.

Dexter, Alex and Jo forgot their aches and any distress that may have been caused by their own personal visions and concentrated on fact gathering. The *Crockett's* sophisticated sensor suite and computer core were put to full use. A scant two minutes later, Jo was compiling the information when something alarming showed up in the data.

"Captain! I'm picking up trillithium readings! Weapons grade!"

"Where? Is it the Suliban cell-ship?"

Jo's face was bathed in electric blue light from the sensor displays on her console. "About fifty miles bearing 47 mark 350," she replied. She adjusted the scanners to give her more detailed information. "I'm not picking the cell-ship, but there is a large, slow-moving dirigible airship at those coordinates. The trillithium is a component in a small device situated just forward of the upper air fin at the rear."

"Let me see it," ordered Cross. He swiveled his chair to face the small screen on the bulkhead beside his console. The picture wavered a few times, but steadied to reveal a gargantuan, stately dirigible cruising above a pastoral landscape. Sullen storm clouds turned early evening to night obscuring any details, but intermittent lightening flashes illuminated the insignia emblazoned on the aircraft's tailfins.

"No... It can't be!" muttered Cross, disbelieving. He turned to Jo. "I need to know where and *when* we are, down

to the second!" he barked. What had the time distortion done to them? He was afraid he already knew the answer.

Jo had the answer quickly enough. "We are at Earth, sir. Five miles above sea level over the North Atlantic Ocean about fifty miles from the New Jersey coast of North America. The exact time and date are 1923 hours local time on May 6, 1937."

"Dammit," muttered Cross. "I knew that time distortion was going to be trouble. Ensign, set an intercept course, full impulse!"

"Aye, sir!" snapped Dexter Gray and began punching in commands. He had no idea what was going on, but he trusted his commanding officer.

"What is it, Captain?" asked Alex.

Cross turned briefly from his controls and said, "Replay the visual image and freeze the frame during a lightening strike." He waited while Alex did so and watched her astonished reaction when she saw what he had noticed, and was gratified that he wasn't the only one among them who remembered his history courses from the Academy.

Standing out in bold contrast to the silvery covering on the dirigible's tailfin was the designation 'LZ-129' and an enormous red, white, and black swastika.

"It's the *Hindenburg!*" exclaimed Alex.

Five seconds later, Jo had the historical files up on her library computer screen.

"The LZ-129 Hindenburg... length 804 feet... was destroyed on May 6, 1937 at 1925 hours. That's a minute-and-a-half from now!"

"Time to intercept?" demanded Captain Cross of Dexter.

"One minute, fifteen seconds," replied the young copilot.

"Thirty five people died in the disaster," continued Jo. "There were several theories about what caused the explosion, but no one ever found out for sure what happened."

"Until now," said Cross. "A Suliban bomb."

"What are you planning to do, Captain?" asked Alex. "If we interfere we'll be changing history."

"The Suliban are already changing history," replied Cross. "Just like the Borg tried to do ten years ago when they went back to kill Zephram Cochrane." There was a grim, determined expression on his face. "And I can't just stand by while dozens of people get killed."

"I can keep us above the storm clouds, sir," suggested Dexter. "At least no one on the ground will see the *Crockett*."

"Do it," said Cross. He turned to Alex and Jo, thinking furiously. "You two. Man the transporter. I want you to beam up everyone who's going to get killed in the fire. Tie the replicators in with the transporter and replace the people you beam up with replicated organic matter that looks like it's been burned -- that way no one will ever know anyone's missing."

Alex and Jo sprang from their chairs and headed aft through the cockpit doors into the small transporter room that separated the cockpit from the living spaces in the rear of the small ship.

Cross reseated himself at the pilot's position. "I'll keep us in a holding pattern above the Hindenburg," he told Dexter. "You use the fancy sensors we've got on this thing"

and get locks on the people down there. Feed the data to the transporter."

As Dexter worked to comply with Cross' orders, Cross gazed out the forward viewport, straining his eyes to catch a glimpse of the doomed German airship, but the cloud cover was thick and obscured everything beneath. Relying on sensors, he set the *Crockett* on a wide, looping circuit above the New Jersey landscape.

Below at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station, ground crew prepared to moor the great zeppelin to the mooring towers. At the edges of the airfield, hundreds of eager onlookers watched as the largest airship ever built came in on its final approach, reporters readied microphones and cleared their throats in preparation, and cameramen pointed their instruments skyward, ready to record history in the making. None suspected that history was about to take a severe left turn, and none could imagine that five miles above, a spaceship from the future circled, watching the human drama unfold.

It was fifteen seconds before Armageddon and Cross had never felt so helpless. Every fiber of his being screamed out to prevent the catastrophe, but he was forbidden to do so. Not only was the Prime Directive in full force, but the very future of humanity hung in the balance. The tragedy about to happen *had* to play out as it had before. It was one of those situations that no amount of Academy training can prepare you for.

But there was something about this whole situation that bothered Cross. Something wasn't right; there was something that didn't add up. He didn't know what it was or why he even thought so, but he was sure nonetheless. His

subconscious had noticed something, and he had learned long ago never to ignore his subconscious voice. He could almost put his finger on the skewed element, but whatever it was remained elusive... and then there was no more time.

Five miles below the *Crockett*, two hundred feet above the ground, the tail section of the doomed zeppelin Hindenburg burst into flame. Seven million cubic feet of pure hydrogen gas ignited in a flame hotter than perdition itself, and in mere seconds, the entire airship was engulfed. As the tail section had lost buoyancy first, it sagged to the ground and the nose of the Hindenburg pointed into the flaming night sky like a sinner in hell beseeching mercy from Heaven. Matthew Cross could do nothing but watch in horror.

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In the compartment behind the cockpit, shielded from the catastrophic spectacle unfolding outside their vessel by the absence of windows, Jo and Alex worked furiously at the transporter controls.

"I'm not sure I can program the replicators to create realistic fake burned bodies," said Alex worriedly. She was hunched over a console along the starboard wall of the small room.

From the other side of the five-person transporter pad that took up most of the center of the room, Jo looked up briefly from her own hurried preparations. "You're the engineer, so if anyone can do it, you can," she said

encouragingly. "Besides, the twentieth century didn't have our modern forensics techniques. I'm sure whatever you come up with will be good enough."

The transporter console beeped, recalling Jo's attention. "Ready or not, here we go!" she called over to Alex.

"Ready!" the sunny blonde replied.

The transporter hummed to life and five sparkling columns appeared over the pads and quickly coalesced into five extremely confused looking people. Their old-fashioned clothing was singed, and the little transporter room was instantly filled with the smell of smoke.

Alex quickly herded the group through the aft door into the *Crockett's* spacious living area, making room for the next batch. Jo had already started the materialization sequence even before the last arrival had stepped off - there was no time to waste if they were going to rescue everyone.

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Below, some people managed to jump from the burning wreckage and save themselves, some ran from the wreckage as it hit the ground. Ground crew ran every which way, some towards the stricken airship in heroic efforts to help, some away from the conflagration as fast as their feet could carry them. Hundreds of terrified onlookers screamed as they watched the disaster.

From his vantage point at the edge of the airfield, Chicago radio reporter Herb Morrison did his best to continue recording until he was finally overcome by the

horrible tragedy he was witnessing. "It burst into flames!" he cried. "It burst into flames! Oh! Get out of the way -- it's crashing! It's crashing! It's falling on the mooring mast! It's one of the worst catastrophes in the world! The smoke and the flame and the frame is crashing to the ground -- Oh the humanity and all the passengers! Oh I can't talk..."

Deep within the conflagration, the flames trapped many terrified passengers and crew, leaving them unable to escape the burning Hindenburg and condemning them to a horrible, agonizing death. Away from living eyes and cameras and camouflaged by the fires, columns of golden sparkles engulfed these people, snatching them from the jaws of doom, and replacing them with lifeless replicated dummies.

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"That's it, sir!" said Dexter excitedly. "I think we got them all."

"How many?" asked Cross.

"Thirty-five people and a German Shepherd."

"A dog?" Cross listened, and he could indeed hear the barking of a large dog coming from the rear of the *Crockett*. "Okay, whatever. Take us to a high orbit. I'm going back to talk to our passengers."



## Act Three - Wrinkle In Time

The uproar was deafening in the *Crockett's* crew module and chaos reigned supreme. Not only were three dozen angry and confused people demanding to know what had happened to them, but the dog that had been beamed up was doing more than his share to add to the cacophony.

Captain Matthew Cross stepped through the door leading from the cockpit and took in the scene. The briefing table and most of the other furniture had been shoved back against the walls to make room for all the people, but it was still crowded. The *Crockett* had been designed to comfortably accommodate eight people, not forty. Alex Dalton and Jo Schmidt were doing their best to keep the frightened victims calm and under control.

Cross shouldered his way through the crowd until he stood in the center of the room, and a visibly relieved Alex and Jo gratefully yielded the floor to him. He raised his hands and waved to get everyone's attention. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "I need your attention please!"

Those closest to Cross in the press of people quieted their quarrelling and turned to hear what this strangely-uniformed man had to say. The hush spread outward

towards the edges of the crowd like a wave. Even the dog ceased his baying.

One man in the forefront took a step forward and squared off in front of Cross. He was dressed in a fine brown suit and hat and was obviously a gentleman of high social status. "Ich habe ein Recht darauf zu erfahren was passiert ist, mein Herr! Was haben Sie getan? Wo sind wir, und wie sind wir hergekommen?"

Cross could guess the meaning of the man's questions. He answered in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear. Those that didn't speak English could ask one of their fellow rescuees for a translation. "First of all," he said, "let me assure you that you are no longer in any danger. As you are all aware, there has been an... emergency situation aboard the Hindenburg, but you are all safe here. You have my solemn promise."

The crowd visibly relaxed at that statement and the overall tension in the room dropped slightly.

Cross continued. "For the time being however, that's all I can tell you. I would ask that you remain calm and try to bear with the situation. Everything will be explained soon."

"Now see here, my good man!" sputtered another gentleman near the front of the crowd, clearly not the least bit satisfied with Cross' frustrating non-explanation and vague assurances.

Matthew Cross was done talking though. No sense telling them any more than absolutely necessary at this point. He passed back through the crowd, gathering in Jo and Alex with a look, and together the three Starfleet officers left the crew module. He noticed that Jo had the look of someone who was bursting with something to say.

Once the door was shut behind them, Cross held up a finger forestalling Jo and turned to Alex. "I want you to add a small amount of anesthazine gas to the air mixture in there; not enough to knock them out, but enough to keep them calm and out of trouble." From the other side of the door, the hubbub had escalated again, and the rescued dog was once again barking loudly. Cross drew his brows together in annoyance. "And see if you can replicate some dog food or a bone or something. Maybe that'll keep the animal quiet for a while."

"Yes, sir," said Alex and headed forward to the cockpit.

"Captain, something's really been bugging me about this whole situation," said Jo the instant Cross was done with Alex.

"Me too. What is it?"

"Well, we know the Suliban went back in time to blow up the Hindenburg, presumably to kill the ancestor of someone who would make an important contribution to history, right? I mean, that's the standard plot in all of these dumb time-travel stories, right?"

"Yes..."

"But the Hindenburg disaster is in the *Crockett's* databanks and in our memories. As far as we're concerned, the Hindenburg disaster *did* happen. Doesn't that mean that the Suliban succeeded?"

That was it. Now that Jo had explained it, Cross realized that this was the elusive 'something' that had been bugging him. But the implications of this possibility...

"Do you realize what you're saying?" he said gravely.

Jo nodded with equal seriousness. "It means that all our lives we've been living in an alternate timeline and never

known it. All of Earth and probably Federation history after May 6, 1937 is an alternate history, changed by the Suliban."

Cross shook his head. That was almost too much to digest. Was his entire life the result of alien tampering, and not only his own life but the lives of billions of other Federation citizens? No, something was still wrong with the theory.

"Something still doesn't make sense," he said. "Despite the tampering, history turned out all right for Earth and the Federation, yet the Suliban are gone and forgotten. If they really are trying to change things for their benefit, they sure didn't do a very good job."

"We're still missing a piece of the puzzle," said Jo thoughtfully, but her musings were rudely interrupted by a loud booming sound and the deck heaving under her feet.

Dexter's nervous voice came over the ship's intercom. "Captain, the Suliban cell-ship is back!"

"On my way!" replied Cross. "Come on!" he snapped at Jo as he quickly made his way through the transporter room towards the cockpit.

Another hit from the alien ship's weapons struck just as Cross and Jo reached their chairs. From the rear area of the *Crockett*, the sounds of screaming and barking could be heard as the Hindenburg victims were tossed around. So soon after being pulled from the burning wreckage of a crashing zeppelin, this new tumult was too much for many of them.

The captain switched on the intercom. In as calm a voice as he could manage, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We are experiencing a little

turbulence. It's nothing to worry about. We should be out of it in a few minutes." As he switched off, another shock rattled the cabin. "I think it's time we took care of the Suliban," he grated between clenched teeth.

Under Cross' direction, the *Crockett* swept upwards away from the Earth into open space.

"Why are the Suliban still shooting at us?" said Jo urgently from her seat in the back of the cockpit.

Another thunderous jolt rang through the cabin. From her station, Alex called, "Shields down to seventy percent, Captain!"

"Coming around..." said Cross as he maneuvered the nimble Starfleet vessel into the vulnerable six-o'clock position behind the dodging Suliban cell-ship. Staccato bursts of phaser energy leapt from the leading edges of the *Crockett*. Some of them connected with the cell-ship, causing it to shudder and weave aside. The *Crockett* followed.

"Does it matter why they're still shooting at us?" demanded Cross. "We've got to keep our passengers safe."

"But captain, you don't understand!" cried Jo over the roar of more weapon hits on the hull. "According to the records, thirty-five people died in the Hindenburg crash, and that's exactly how many people we have back in the crew module. We haven't changed anything by being here. The Suliban should be happy with the way things turned out, but they're not."

More shots rang off the hull and a gas line above Alex's head burst, sending a burst of vapors straight into her face. The young engineer cried out and dove from her seat,

clutching at her face. Dexter was instantly at his girlfriend's side to make sure she wasn't hurt badly.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," said Alex rubbing her eyes. "It just stings. Hit the cutoff valve."

Dexter plunged his arm into the ruptured wall section and found the manual valve that closed off the gas feed, and the hissing eruption ceased moments later. He helped Alex back to her chair before diving back into his own to resume the battle against the Suliban.

Cross meanwhile, was doing his best to deliver some damage of his own to the Suliban cell-ship. He squeezed off another volley of phaser shots and watched with grim satisfaction as they penetrated the enemy's weakening shields and blast away sections of his outer hull plating.

He spared a moment to crane his neck around and yell at Jo. "If the Suliban don't want the people we rescued, then what?"

He and Jo both thought furiously while around them the battle raged. The structure of the *Crockett* wouldn't last forever against the punishment it was taking. Already, joints were creaking and groaning every time Cross forced the little ship into a radical maneuver it was never designed to make. From the crew compartment on the other side of the doors at the rear of the cockpit, their unplanned passengers screamed and shouted in fear and anger, and the big German Shepherd added his basso barking and anxious yowling to the chaos.

The identical realization hit both cross and Jo in the same instant. They looked at each other and in unison shouted "The dog!"

"You get the dog to the transporter and prepare to beam it back," ordered Cross. "I'll take the *Crockett* back down to transporter range."

"We'll have to lower our shields to transport," Jo reminded Cross.

"I know, so be ready. The Suliban is going to be right on our tail and I don't want to have our shields down for more than half a second."

"Aye!" Jo sprang from her chair and headed aft. "Come on, Alex!" she called. "You get to help me wrangle a doggie."

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The *Crockett's* crew compartment was much as Jo and Alex had left it less than fifteen minutes ago, the only difference being a significantly thicker degree of tension in the air. Jo could almost smell the fear these poor people were feeling.

They were spotted the instant they stepped through the door. One man wearing a derby hat and carrying a walking stick accosted them. From behind a bristling mustache, he barked, "Say here, what in blazes is going on? First we're all nearly killed by raging fire, now we're being held prisoner in this room. What is all that noise outside and shaking? If I didn't know better I'd swear I was back in the Great War!"

Alex worked her way around the man and began whistling for the dog, while Jo stopped and calmed the

man's nerves. "Please, sir," she said. "Try to stay calm. Everything is under control, and the Captain will be back as soon as he can to talk to you all." She walked on deeper into the crowd of refugees, following the sounds of Alex's whistling.

She found the young woman standing in front of an older gentleman. The beautiful German Shepherd sat obediently at his side. When she saw Jo walk up, a look of relief washed over her face and she said, "I'm trying to find out who the dog belongs to, but this guy doesn't speak English."

"I'll ask him," replied Jo. She turned to the gentleman and in a perfect accent said, "Entschuldigen Sie bitte, ist das Ihr Hund?"

"Nein, junge Dame, ist er nicht. Er gehört dem Jungen aus meiner Nachbarkabine."

Jo translated for Alex. "He says the dog belongs to a boy that was in the compartment next to his."

"The boy's not here," said Alex, thinking out loud. "He must have been one of the survivors. That's great! Ask him the dog's name."

Jo turned back to the German gentleman. "Wie heisst der Hund denn?"

"Max. Warum fragen Sie?"

"Ich werde ihn zurückbringen."

The gentleman smiled and nodded, and even Alex understood that. She whistled and bent down, patting her knee. Max got up and trotted over, then stood wagging his tail. Alex scratched behind his ears.

"Danke," said Jo to the gentleman, and together with Alex and Max the dog, headed for the transporter room.



"I didn't know you spoke German," said Alex admiringly.

"My last name's not Schmidt for nothin' y'know!" laughed Jo. "Now let's get this mutt back to Earth so he can save humanity!"

## Act Four - Back to the Future

Lieutenant Jo Schmidt's voice rang over the cockpit's intercom. "The dog is standing by on the transporter, Captain."

"Acknowledged," said Captain Matthew Cross. In an aside to his copilot Ensign Dexter Gray he said, "Hang on."

Cross took the *USS Crockett* in a steep dive back towards New Jersey and the Lakehurst Naval Air Station where the smoldering wreckage of the Hindenburg lay crumpled on the field.

"That took the Suliban by surprise," reported Dexter. "They're falling behind."

"They'll be back soon enough," was Cross' grim reply. "We better make this quick."

No sooner had Cross made his dour prediction than a new barrage of explosion began rocking the little Starfleet vessel.

"That didn't take them long," he muttered angrily. Another hit on the aft shields sent on overload into the ship's systems, causing an entire row of display screens at the rear of the cockpit to blow out in a shower of sparks. The pounding didn't relent. Hit after hit rocked the *Crockett*. The reverberations made his teeth rattle. Cross

tried every evasive technique he could think of, then started making up new ones, but all were spectacularly ineffective. The ferocity of the Suliban attack was overwhelming.

"I guess we should be happy the Suliban are trying so hard to kill us now," he commented. An especially powerful hit jolted the ship.

"Are you kidding?" exclaimed Dexter.

"It means they've guessed that we're trying to beam someone back and will stop at nothing to keep us from succeeding. That means we're on the right track," Cross explained. "I just hope the dog is the right choice," he muttered too low for Dexter to hear.

He opened the intercom to the transporter room. "Stand by. We're almost there. Wait for my mark..."

The range indicator on the sensor display rapidly ticked down the distance to the fallen Hindenburg. Cross watched it with one eye while trying desperately to keep the Suliban from scoring too many hits on the *Crockett's* failing shields. "Stand by!" he shouted.

The *Crockett* did a wild zigzag above the cloud tops causing the Suliban cell-ship's next volley of shots to miss.

"Drop shields!" shouted Cross to Dexter. "Energize!" he yelled into the intercom.

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Ignored amid the belching smoke clouds and running emergency personnel, a distraught mother knelt in the mud consoling her crying child. The smoke stung her eyes and

she could feel the heat from the blazing ruins of the Hindenburg prickling on the back of her neck, but even in the face of the terrible decimation of life around her, the tears of her son were by far the harder for her personally to bear.

"Don't cry, Billy," she cooed, hugging her son to her breast, tears of empathy forming in her own eyes. The strong emotions welling up inside her were as much a response to her child's crying than from the shock and overwhelming relief and thankfulness that they were both still alive after such a horrible tragedy.

"We'll get another dog," she said.

"I don't *want* another dog!" wailed Billy. "I want *Max!*"

"There there," crooned the mother, stroking the little boy's hair and silently praying for a miracle.

Hidden by the oily smoke and unseen by human eyes, a four-legged shape coalesced out of a cloud of scintillating gold sparkles. It raised its nose into the air and sniffed, searching for one particular scent, then loped off, barking joyfully.

Billy raised his head from his mother's shoulder and looked through the swirling smoke. He thought he had heard something. He wiped the tears from his eyes to clear his vision. There! A familiar shadowy form galloping straight towards him through the obscuring haze! Yes!

"Max!" cried Billy as the big, exuberant dog bowled headlong into his young master knocking him into the dirt and started licking his face.

Billy's mother could do nothing else but sit back in disbelief and marvel at the happy reunion, and thank heaven for small blessings.

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"Transport complete!" sang Jo's triumphant voice across the ship's intercom.

"Good work," replied Cross. "Now get back up here." He turned to Dexter. "We have to keep the Suliban from killing everyone on the ground or this is all for nothing."

The instant Jo and Alex were back in their seats, Cross sent the *Crockett* into as tight a turn as the already-overtaxed SIF could handle, heading straight back towards the Suliban cell-ship. The Suliban vessel may have been upgraded at some point in its time travels, but what they had here was a game of chicken between two comparably-sized ships, and it was a game Matthew Cross couldn't afford to lose, for to do so meant the destruction of the future history of humanity.

His thoughts wandered back to the time-travel-induced vision he'd had of himself standing at the altar, and the woman with lovely almond eyes and short brown hair standing beside him smiling. He realized that if that glimpse of things to come had any chance of coming true, the story couldn't end here.

Taking a deep breath and holding it, Cross tapped the phaser firing control. Brilliant blue bolts of energy slammed into the nose of the boxy cell-ship, sending it spiraling away. Cross didn't relent. He kept the *Crockett* tight on the Suliban ship's tail and pecked away at its shields with continuous phaser fire.

Apparently, the Suliban decided that it wasn't going to come out of this fight the victor, because it suddenly angled sharply upwards and rocketed away from the Earth back into deep space. A roughly circular region of space in front of the fleeing ship began twisting around itself, reaching tendrils of energy across the sky seeking to pull in anything they touched.

In a blinding flash of white light, the Suliban ship dove straight in and disappeared.

"Another time warp, Captain!" said Jo from her seat at the rear of the cabin.

"No kidding," snapped Cross. His fingers danced across his control board, and before the vortex could collapse, the *Crockett* dove in after the Suliban vessel. His ears were filled with a roaring like the end of the world and then everything went white again.

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Matthew Cross slowly became aware of the normal, mundane sounds made by the cockpit's instruments, the soft hums, clicks, and beeps. The sound of his own breathing was loud in his ears. He opened his eyes. The cabin lights were on. Beside him, Dexter sat in the copilot seat, eyes closed but still breathing. Behind him, Cross could hear the rustling of Jo and Alex as they recovered from their trip through time.

The powerful sense of *deja vu* wasn't quite as strong as last time, the visions much less intense and disquieting.

Was that a good sign? Had they managed to save humanity?

He looked out the front window. Stars.

And something else. Something BIG. A dark shape that blotted out the stars as it moved across his field of vision with a swiftness that belied its immensity.

His console beeped at him, pulling him from his stupor. It was the ship-to-ship communication system indicating there was an incoming call. He thumbed the activation toggle and was rewarded with the visage of a middle-aged man on the comm screen. He wore a deep blue uniform and a recognizable, sideways, elongated Starfleet insignia on his left breast.

"I am Captain Braxton of the Federation Timeship *Relativity*. Please stand down your weapons; we have secured the Suliban vessel in our hangar and taken custody of the crew. We would also like to take charge of your refugees so we can relocate and reintegrate them back into society."

Cross sat up straight in his chair and replied. "I am Captain Matthew Cross of the Federation *starship Crockett*. Would you mind explaining what's going on here?"

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Captain," replied Braxton in an unbending tone of voice that told Cross he had no hope of ever getting an answer. "Suffice it to say that the Suliban have been causing quite a bit of trouble and you helped us avert a serious corruption of the timeline. We thank you for that."

Another officer strode into the camera frame and whispered something to Braxton, who nodded in reply.

Braxton returned his attention to Cross "Safe journeys, Captain. Braxton out."

The viewscreen blinked off, and out the front windows Cross saw the Federation Timeship *Relativity* slide forwards and disappear in a flash of light through another of the tell-tale time vortexes.

For the next minute, silence held lease in the cockpit of the *Crockett*, none of the crew knowing quite what to make of their encounter. Finally, Jo got up and walked back to the door leading to the crew compartment. She opened it and peered inside. She turned back and said, "Yup, thought it was too quiet back here. They're gone."

Matthew Cross rolled his eyes in abject disconsolation. "I hate time travel," he muttered, and silently swore to himself *never* to time travel again.

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"I think I've figured it out!" exclaimed Jo from her science station.

After the *USS Crockett's* brief encounter with the Timeship from the future, Captain Cross had decided that the only logical course of action was to resume their original mission, mapping subspace phenomenon here at the edges of the Briar Patch Nebula. He was in no hurry to return to Serenity and face the inevitable debriefing by Temporal Investigations. Jo meanwhile, had buried herself in the library computer, determined to find some answers.



Matthew Cross, Dexter Gray and Alex Dalton crowded around the port science station. "If you can explain this crazy story, I'll give you a medal," said Cross.

"Okay, here's what I think happened," began Jo. She took a second to organize her thoughts, then proceeded. "In the original original timeline before the Suliban interfered, the Hindenburg successfully completed its flight from Frankfurt to Lakehurst. There was no Suliban bomb, and everybody lived happily ever after. We'll never know how that history unfolded afterwards.

"The Suliban went back in time and altered that original timeline by planting a trillithium bomb on the Hindenburg blowing it up. Thirty-five people died, but a certain dog named Max survived. This is our present timeline, the one we're living in. It's altered, yes, but not enough for what the Suliban were trying to accomplish. Apparently, we're responsible for that by going back and rescuing the dog Max.

"The Suliban figured this out, so they came to the 24th century and attacked us, thinking to destroy the *Crockett* before we had the chance to go back and save Max. This would have been a third timeline, one where Max was killed and history was totally screwed for Earth and the Federation but very good for the Suliban."

"But they're the ones responsible for sending us back to the 20th century," commented Dexter.

"Yes, there's the irony," replied Jo. "If they hadn't come to the 24th century to destroy us, we would never have wound up in the 20th to foil their plans.

"I hate time travel," said Cross for the n-th time.

"All this over a dog?" wondered Alex. "How in the world can a dog change history so profoundly?"

"Simple chaos theory," replied Jo. "Go back in time far enough and even the tiniest change has enormous, far-reaching consequences."

She turned to her console and punched up a data file. "I found this in the library's history files." It was an image of an ancient newspaper article. Above tiny print was a black & white photo of a German Shepherd. The caption above the article read 'Heroic Dog Saves Local'.

"Max, I presume," said Cross.

"Yup. Seems that after his harrowing and miraculous escape from the Hindenburg, he and his family went to live in Colorado. A few years later, there was a house fire in the town they settled in. Max ran into the building, pulling out a man who had been overcome by smoke inhalation, saving his life. Seems like his experience with the Hindenburg affected his doggie brain in a way that he felt compelled to help the trapped man escape the flames. The man was Harry Muldoon."

"Never heard of him," said Cross.

"Of course not. He's not famous in any way," replied Jo. "What he is though, is the ancestor -- six generations removed -- of Judith Templeton."

"Never heard of her either," said Cross, quickly losing patience.

"Of course not. She's not famous either," replied Jo smugly, enjoying her time in the spotlight. "However, she has the distinction of being a very skilled midwife who delivered Lily Sloane. Without her, it's likely that Sloane wouldn't have survived. It was the Post-Atomic Horror,

after all, and without Lily Sloane there probably wouldn't have been a first warp flight in 2063."

"Zephram Cochrane did that," said Alex.

"Sure, Cochrane was an engineering genius who built the first warp drive and he was the one who greeted the Vulcans who landed after his flight, but he was also a fall-down drunk. Sloane helped him build the Phoenix, but she also helped keep him on track and focused. We owe Lily Sloane a lot more than history gives her credit for, and our little trip through time proves that.

"Incredible. Such a small thing turned out to be so important..." mused Dexter.

"Ugh," groaned Cross. "Temporal Investigations is never going to believe this."

