

# Dark Territory Gods and Monsters

By DarkKush

**USS Cuffe**  
**Main Bridge**  
**2373**

“You’re no Jean-Luc, Kathy, or even Benjamin,” the chestnut-haired man with the vivid eyes and permanent smirk assessed, “But I’ll guess you’ll have to do.” He looked the captain up and down again and shook his head in disappointment.

Captain Terrence S. Glover didn’t rise to the bait. “I want you off my bridge now Q,” he said with surprising evenness. After Sisko told him about his encounter with the troublesome entity, Glover had always imagined the best way to handle him would be to treat him like a small annoyance, a mere pest. The alien’s eyes brightened, as did his smile.

“Certainly,” he snapped, and Terrence’s world peeled away.

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“What did you do?” Glover demanded.

“Temper, temper,” Q remarked, wagging a finger. “But I applaud the show of emotion. I knew you couldn’t play it cool for too long.”

“I’m not going to ask you again,” Terrence warned, and Q’s mouth lips formed a circle.

“Wooo,” he said. Commander Nandali Kojo stepped forward, her expression predatory.

“It’s in your best interest to answer the captain’s question,” the woman threatened.

Q’s eyes flicked to her, assessing her in seconds. “All you’re missing are the head ridges but you’ve got the growl down pat. Growl for me again, show me you care.”

"I can do more than growl," Kojo promised, her voice filled with lethal intent.

"Stand down," Glover ordered his first officer. The Kriosian reluctantly complied. She stepped back slightly, but didn't sit back down. And she kept her gaze firmly on Q.

"What is this about Q?" The captain asked again. He was relieved that he and it appeared none of his crew had been removed from the bridge. The dossier compiled on Q showed the alien had a penchant for whisking away his 'favorites' to dangerous locales. At other times he would merely conjure up beings or other things to amuse himself, usually at someone else's expense.

"Saving the future, namely yours," Q said, cryptically.

"What kind of answer is that?" Kojo snarled. "More games and deceptions."

"Captain," Lt. Commander Dhalamanisha zh'Shakobheto, the operations officer, interceded. The Andorian glanced at her terminal before looking up again, pausing to gather her thoughts.

"What is it Commander?" Glover didn't mean to snap, but his nerves were frayed.

"You're not going to believe this," the Andorian began.

"Believe it, believe it," Q urged.

"It appears that Q has catapulted us back to Sector 001...Earth." Glover looked back at Q.

"Why?"

He merely pointed at the operations officer. "That's not all, is it?" He asked. Reluctantly, Glover looked back at Lt. Commander Bheto; the captain hated playing along with Q.

"No," she replied. "Q apparently opened a temporal vortex. He just didn't send us to Earth, he sent us back in time to Earth." There was a collective gasp of shock among the bridge crew.

Terrence also hated to repeat himself, but he had little choice in this instance.

“Once again, why Q?”

“Excuse me sir, but I’m not finished,” the usually reserved Andorian spoke up.

“What’s the rest of it?” Terrence demanded, his gaze boring into a nonchalant Q.

“The year is 2026,” Bheto remarked. Glover shook his head, unable to understand why Q would send his ship back so far in time, and for what purpose. At the mention of the year, Lt. Seb N’Saba, at the science console, snorted and harrumphed.

“Out with it Mr. N’Saba,” the captain demanded.

“This is the year that Earth’s World War Three began,” the Alshain remarked, with a hint of familiar condescension that the date hadn’t been immediately obvious to everyone.

“Oh my God,” Ensign Jean Hajar muttered from Flight Control. Glover, still not believing, ordered the main viewer to focus on Earth.

Ugly scars and angry fires marred the surface of the blue-green orb. “Commander Bheto, run a sensor scan over the planet. I want to know its condition.”

“It’s not a trick, I assure you,” Q said, with disappointment so thick it had to be mocking. “But of course, trusting superior life forms must be an issue for Starfleet captains.”

“Yeah, that’s really gone well in the past,” Glover said as an aside. “Got anything yet Commander?” His heart sank as the Andorian ran down the depressing findings. Billions had died in the decades-long war and the Earth had suffered environmental damage that had lasted centuries. It was a testament to the human spirit that humanity had rallied enough for Vulcan to consider first contact with them a worthy proposition nearly forty years later. But Q had sent them to the perhaps the darkest period in human history.

“I don’t understand,” Glover replied.

“Now, you’re getting it,” Q said, “But honestly I thought it would take a bit longer to wring some humility from the great Terrence Glover. You know, I had to throw the Borg at Jean-Luc to get him to admit that he needed me.

You're coming along much faster."

"Damn it, you petaQ!" Kojo bellowed. "If you don't tell us the purpose for this, I will separate your head from your neck, your magic be damned."

Q tsked. "I like you." Kojo lunged toward him. Q merely teleported to another spot and Kojo attacked thin air. Q chuckled. "An A for effort."

"Q, you said that you were saving the future, how?" Glover asked, still trying to wrap his head around the unreality.

Q nodded, "Good, good, excellent. You are a fast learner, eh? I should say, more appropriately, that you're going to be doing the saving. I'm just the catalyst. Before you get a big head, believe me you weren't my first choice. Didn't have time to reach Jean-Luc, and Kathy is all the way in the Delta Quadrant. Even Ben is stuck on that big, imposing monstrosity. Time was folding in all around me, so it was you or nothing. I'm betting you're more than nothing. Don't let me down." He winked, before disappearing in a blinding flash.

Glover wanted to curse, but Kojo took care of that, and the Klingon epithet was a good one. There was another bright flash, but his time only Q's head appeared, hovering above the bridge. He frowned at the fuming Kriosian. "I heard that," he said, disapproving. "Oh, and there's a time traveling race called the Na'kuhl. For some reason, they can't leave humans alone, go figure. Anyway, a Na'kuhl faction has seeded the Earth with a devastating invasive species called the Meganulon. And nothing works better for hatching their eggs than nuclear explosions. Oh, and good luck." He said before exiting again.

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## **USS Cuffe Observation Lounge**

Glover felt punch drunk. Both Bheto and N'Saba had scoured the system's computer banks for any mention of the Meganulon and came up with nothing. Thankfully the ship's sensors had detected the alien biosigns implanted deep into the Earth's crust, despite the heavy radioactive interference. These Na'kuhl had seeded the creatures on every continent.

Thankfully there was some data on the Na'kuhl. "I can't believe it," ship's

Historian Professor Ren Hayata said, amazed. Glover had so rarely relied on the man's expertise, due to having the ship's biggest brains in Bheto and N'Saba close at hand, that he hadn't even remembered Hayata's name. In fact it was Kojo who recommended inviting him to the meeting, if for no other reason than to 'make use of him for once,' in her words. "At the time, many of his contemporaries thought that Captain Archer had been suffering from the stress of his success against the Xindi, with his talk of alternate histories and Temporal Cold Wars, but it was all true, all true."

"Would you care to let us in on the conversation you seem to be having with yourself?" Lt. Commander Pedro Rojas asked, echoing Glover's sentiment.

This brought Hayata back to the present with a start, "Oh yes, of course, of course." He hustled over to the screen at the end of the long conference table. He pressed one of the buttons at the base of the screen an expertly hand drawn portrait of a gray-skinned, grotesque alien, with reddish, rodent eyes peered at them.

"This is an artist's rendition of the aliens Q called the Na'kuhl, though that species designation was previously unknown" Hayata explained, "When the Enterprise NX-01 returned to Earth after successfully ending the Xindi Crisis, Captain Archer and his senior staff revealed that their return trip had been circumvented by a temporal event that propelled them to Earth, circa 1944. The Na'kuhl, a time traveling species had allied with Nazi Germany, one of the primary actors in World War II. The Na'kuhl had helped the Nazis alter the timeline, in the hopes of returning to their own 29th century. The actions of the Enterprise prevented that."

"So it appears that the Na'kuhl either left a gift the first time or came back at a later stage and left these creatures?" Glover asked.

"It would appear so sir," Hayata remarked.

"I would argue for the later," N'Saba said. "With the recent Borg incursion, there is enough chronometric distortion surrounding Earth for the Na'kuhl to hide their tracks."

"Interesting" N'Saba remarked, rubbing his furry chin, "Pretty ingenious."

"Pretty cowardly if you ask me," Commander Rojas interjected.

"I'm not disagreeing," the captain added, "On either count. So, Mr. Hayata, do

you have more to add?"

"Well sir, only that Captain Archer also informed his superiors about a Temporal Cold War that will occur in the 29th century, and that it pitted various factions against one another, actors that manipulated the timestream for their own ends."

"Sounds like people trying to play God," Ensign Hajar muttered, punctuating it with a shiver.

"It's not the first time Ensign, nor will it be the last that sapient beings attempt to bend the universe to their will," Glover remarked. "Anything else Mr. Hayata?"

"No sir."

The captain thought about dismissing him, but then changed his mind. "Pull up a chair." The historian brightened, and eagerly took the seat Commander Rojas pulled out for him.

"Okay," Glover began, "What's the deal with these Meganulon?" Both Bheto and N'Saba began speaking at once. The captain stopped them. "N'Saba, you first," he decided.

"Yes," N'Saba remarked with smugness. "Being the chief scientist on board, I should go first", was the look written all over his face, Glover thought with disapproval. "Our initial scans reveal that the Meganulon are an insectoid species, a large insectoid species."

"That all?" Glover remarked.

"Yes," N'Saba said, as if the question was a challenge.

"Commander Bheto?"

"Secondary scans reveal that the Meganulon can evolve or mutate quickly," she remarked, and N'Saba huffed.

"That's speculative at best," he remarked.

"There's already evidence in some of the eggs, especially the ones nearest ground zero level nuclear explosions," Bheto rejoined.

“That’s enough,” Glover remarked, stopping the incipient argument. “How do we neutralize them? Mr. Meldin?” All attention turned to the ship’s Security Chief.

The pale blue-skinned Benzite responded. “I think the best thing would be to use all of our teleporting technology to remove the eggs from Earth before they hatch.”

“How many eggs are you talking about?” Kojo asked.

“One hundred thousand, seeded across six continents,” Meldin answered.

“After we’ve transported them, what do we do with them?” Rojas asked. “There’s no way the transporter buffers can hold that biological content.”

“That’s simple,” Kojo said. “We beam them into space.” Her comments caused a raucous debate.

“Enough people,” Glover snapped. “How much time do we have before those eggs hatch?”

“Hours at best,” N’Saba said. “I can’t be sure for certain; though I would argue that the eggs closer to nuclear events have been incubated faster.”

“Great,” the captain muttered. “We’ll beam those...into space first,” he said, in a tone that brooked no debate.

“Excuse me sirs,” Ensign Hajar raised her hand, nervously, as if she were in school. Heads snapped in her direction.

“Go ahead Ensign,” the captain encouraged.

“Sir, shouldn’t we...do something to help down there,” Hajar ventured. “I mean, nuclear fires are occurring on Earth right now, there’s so much terror and suffering, and we seem...oblivious to it all.”

“We can’t alter the timeline,” N’Saba said, his tone pedantic.

“With all due respect, the Na’kuhl have already done that,” Hajar shot back, and Glover smiled with pride. She had learned something from him when he mentored Nova Squadron. “It seems callous not to help alleviate the

widespread suffering.”

Glover leaned forward, softening his manner and tone. “Jean, believe me, I can sympathize, but we might do more damage to the timeline, threatening the future if we intercede. Unfortunately these people were meant to suffer and it is the horrors of this time and of the decades that follow that will give birth to an evolved humanity that made reaching out to other species and building first the Coalition of Planets and then the Federation possible. It is a callous thing to say, but this has to happen.”

“The captain is correct,” Kojo said, her voice less gruff. “In fact, we will be lessening the tragedy if we eliminate this new threat the Na’kuhl have laid at your forebears’ doorstep.”

“Yes, these Meganulon are an invasive species that will decimate all life on Earth, and without Earth, there’s no Federation,” Commander Bheto added.

“I get all that...I suppose, it’s just...” Hajar bit her lip, frustrated with herself and the situation.

“Believe me Ensign, I can relate,” Glover said. “But right now, I need everyone on their game, and on the same page. I want all transporters working at max capacity. I will take all our shuttles and encircle the planet, adding their transporting power to the Cuffe’s. Kojo you have the conn.” The Kriosian was clearly displeased at not getting closer to the action. But Glover had more important concerns on his mind, chiefly saving the sliver of humanity left on the burning planet below, “Dismissed.”

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## **Shuttle Rising States Earth Orbit**

Captain Glover kept the ship a safe distance from the satellites and debris ringing the planet. It wouldn’t do to chance detection by even the rudimentary 21st century equipment. With the mass paranoia gripping Earth at the moment, the presence of his ship might precipitate another nuclear strike.

Being so close to it, tracking the devastation below, Terrence could only marvel at the resilience the survivors showed in putting their lives back together. Many who lived through the opening salvos of World War III would



never see the end of the conflict, or survive the Post-Atomic Horror that followed, but just enough did, and it renewed his respect for the sacrifices of his ancestors. It also brought home how precious, and truly the fragile the freedoms he enjoyed were.

He opened a line and checked in with the rest of the shuttles: Traveller, Industry, Hero, Alpha, Sun Fish, Mary, Box Iron, and Ranger, most named after ships owned by the Cuffe's namesake. All of their pattern buffers were almost filled to capacity, despite the fact that they were re-beaming the creatures into space as far as they transporters would permit. "What's our status?" Glover asked the Transporter Specialist Kojo had assigned to Rising States.

"We're almost at capacity too sir," the comely, red-skinned Orion officer replied. Glover nodded, but held back his frustration. Even with Cuffe engaging all of its transporters, they were still behind, and they were running out of time.

"Carry on," Glover said wearily.

"Captain!" Kojo's voice cut in.

"Glover here," he remarked, all traces of tiredness gone.

"Captain, several of the eggs have hatched," Kojo said. "Over a small island nation in the Pacific Ocean...Japan."

"I'm on it," he said, angling the ship toward Earth. Department of Temporal Investigations be damned. As the shuttle went into a well controlled fall, Glover looked back and managed a grin at the suddenly pale Hayata, who was gripping his armrests for dear life, "About time to see some history close and personal, Professor."

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## **Earth**

"Tokyo," Glover wistfully remarked, admiring the cityscape. It was amazing how much of the city hadn't changed, even by his time. The graceful, snow capped Mount Fuji stood silent watch over the gleaming city. He, Ben Sisko, Calvin Hudson, and a few others had spent quite a few rowdy weekends in Tokyo when he had been at the Academy. So far the city had been spared the atomic devastation that had rent apart several other Earth megalopolises, but

was now faced with perhaps an even more horrific terror.

“Magnify forward viewer,” he ordered. A superimposed holographic screen formed over the shuttle’s main viewer. Below, large, brown insects scuttled over the ground and crawled over buildings, piercing and attack the running throngs of people. The few police and military forces that had been rallied were clearly outmatched. The ones not already dead or in the jaws of the insects were retreating. Some of the Meganulon were capable of flight and had taken to the skies. They were battling Japanese fighters, injecting their tail stingers into military aircraft to vaporize them. Several Meganulon had been alerted by the sound of Rising State’s engines, and had turned their yellow compound eyes toward them.

“Sir, I think we’re going to need back up,” the Orion remarked.

“No kidding,” the fair-haired ensign at the tactical console muttered.

“Stow it Mr. Madden,” Glover snapped. “Levna, you’re correct, but right now, we’re the only show in town.” Glover increased the ship’s forward shielding and took evasive maneuvers. “On my command Mr. Madden, start swatting.”

The Meganulon curled their tails toward the shuttle, the sharp tips glowing. Zaps of energy smashed into the shuttle, causing Rising States to tailspin. “Oh my,” Hayata gasped before he threw up.

“Hold it together,” Glover said, not just referring to the professor. He was speaking to the shuttle and himself as well as he struggled to right the shuttle. By the time he got the ship back under control, it was rattled again.

“What’s going on?” Levna asked. A cacophony of scraping metal and fluttering wings filled the cabin. The holographic screen had gone dark.

“The Meganulon have covered our shuttle,” Hayata remarked.

“They’re stabbing us with their stingers,” Levna reported. “We’re losing shields and propulsion.”

“And they are bringing us down,” Glover said. “Mr. Madden, blast them off.”

“No can do sir,” Madden said, slamming the console. “They’ve gummed up the weapon’s ports!”

“Damn,” the captain said. “I got an idea.” His fingers ran over the console. An awful crackling filled the cabin. A weight was lifted from the shuttle.

“You polarized the hull,” Levna caught on.

“Nice,” Madden nodded.

“But not nice enough,” Glover snapped. The few insectoids that hadn’t been fried regrouped, and other Meganulon joined them. The captain set his jaw, and angled Rising States face them. “Damage report?”

“Not good sir,” Levna remarked. “Shields are down to 25%. We’ve lost warp, and are leaking plasma.”

“Great,” Glover remarked, “adding to the catastrophe below.”

“We’ve got to withdraw sir,” Hayata said.

“No,” Glover shook his head. “We’re the first line of defense for these people, right now their best hope.” He paused, “Contact the Cuffe and have the other shuttles on standby.” He was reluctant to bring the Cuffe into it because their less precise targeting might cause unnecessary collateral damage.

“Target the gathering swarm,” Glover said. “It appears they have to get close to inject their stingers. We stay away from them, we’ve got a chance.”

“Aye,” Madden said, aiming the shuttle’s phasers.

“Let them have it,” the captain ordered. At first the insectoids were able to use their tails to absorb the injury and hurl it back at them, but Glover juked the shuttle away from most of the ricochets. “Stay at it,” he ordered Madden. Eventually the beams cut through the swarm, forcing the Meganulon to disperse. “Good shooting.” The shuttle pursued the retreating insectoids, taking out as many as possible, but they made little hay. More and more Meganulon took to the skies and soon Rising States faced a dark line.

“Commander Kojo, a little assistance please,” Glover said.

“Aye sir,” the Kriosian said with relish. A line of phaser fire reigned down, burning the insectoids with surprising precision. He would have to commend both Kojo and Meldin. Unfortunately the Cuffe didn’t incinerate them all, and the survivors headed toward the shuttle with full speed.

“Back up, full impulse,” the captain ordered. The ship lurched backward sluggishly. “What’s the hold up?”

“Captain, our engines are severely damaged,” Levna remarked. “We’ve lost too much plasma.”

“Shit,” Madden muttered.

“Watch your tongue Ensign,” Glover chided. He took a look at the screen and saw that the angry swarm was about to overtake them. “On second thought... good choice of words.”

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## **Rising States**

The pit of his stomach felt like it was now in his throat, but Glover fought against nausea and the pull of gravity. He held onto the console for support as Rising States dropped to Earth. “Get to the transporter!” He gestured toward the small transporter pad at the back of the cabin.

“It’s not working,” Levna said.

“We’re done,” Madden muttered.

“Never say that, ever,” Glover snapped. He sighed, a wave of nausea roiling his stomach as he knew what he had to do. He glanced toward the shuttle’s roof. “Q, I know you’re out there. Q?”

A bright flash filled the screen and Q appeared in the cockpit beside him. “You rang Captain?”

“Stop this now Q,” Glover demanded. “You bought us here, and you can stop this.”

“Well, it’s not quite up to me,” Q said, “though there is someone here, among you that was born to handle this threat.”

“What are you talking about?” Glover asked, after swallowing to keep his lunch down. He didn’t know how many more seconds they had before the shuttle crashed into the ground. “And how about stopping the shuttle?”

“Oh, of course,” Q twirled a finger, and the shuttle stopped with such jarring force that it almost it almost snapped Glover’s seat harness. The captain winced from the pain. Scraping and pounding continued outside the shuttle. The brood was still attacking them.

“Professor Hayata,” the alien said. “You are the heir of a very special legacy,” he revealed.

“Excuse me?” The historian asked, clearly as confused as everyone else.

“The pen, the one that has been in your family for generations, the one currently on your person, do you know what it is really is?”

“I don’t understand.”

Q sighed. “Of course, but of course you don’t have to limit yourself like the humans you were raised to imitate.”

“Q,” Glover warned.

“Fine, fine, the pen, isn’t a writing implement, it’s a Beta Capsule, a device that will transform the good professor into his true form, one uniquely suited to handle this disaster. Captain Glover, did you really think you and your quaint little crew could contain this infestation?”

“Well, yeah,” Glover remarked. Q shook his head and chuckled.

“It was Hayata that was needed, is needed,” Q said. “If he is willing to embrace his destiny.”

“This is insane,” the professor declared.

“What about life isn’t?” Q rejoined. The professor looked at the captain, but Terrence shrugged. He didn’t know what to do or who to believe.

“I don’t know if Q is right or if this is another con, but if you do have the power to save lives down there, you’ve got to do it.”

“Okay,” Hayata said after few seconds. He swallowed hard. “What do I have to do?”

Q nodded, and both men disappeared. They emerged outside the shuttle, hanging in the air. Some of the Meganulon broke free from the shuttle to circle the duo. With Q's urging Glover saw Hayata pull out the pen and hold it aloft. The pen's tip blazed like a sun and the light engulfed him. Glover winced at the intensity, the shuttle's viewer illumination filters momentarily overloaded.

In place of the flare a giant robot stood. It had to be 40 meters at least. Trim, sleek and covered in steel gray armor, with dashes of red paint adorning the chest, the metal man faced the gathering swarm. They attacked him fiercely and he tore through them, slashing some with chops while crisping others with energy rays from his hands.

"Let's help him," Glover ordered, and Rising States lurched forward. The shuttle began firing at the Meganulon crawling on the ground. The flying ones were attacking the giant. Glover got Cuffe back into the act to assist the robot.

"An energy field is forming around the giant," Levna remarked.

"I'm going to fly below it," Glover said, dipping the ship down. The shuttle fishtailed as the energy field washed over them, throwing insectoids past them. Another projected field quickly followed.

"I think we're gaining the upper hand," Glover replied, with renewed confidence. "And it's been what, only about two minutes," he said, amazing. "We could've used this guy a lot sooner."

"Sir," Levna's voice was raised in alarm. "The robot is leaving."

"What?" Glover asked, activating the aft viewers and putting the visual on the forward screen. Through the mass of Meganulon crawling over it, the captain spotted a beeping oval disk on the robot's chest. The metal man glanced skyward and took off, many of the insectoids still clutching onto him.

"Wow, look at that thing go," Madden breathed. Glover was stunned himself, though he knew the job wasn't finished.

"Unidentified aircraft; identify yourself," the tinny voice piped through the cabin's speakers, and turned into Federation Standard via the Universal Translator. Several military fighters were flanking the shuttle.

"We're just here to help," Glover offered.

“You have violated Japanese airspace. If you do not identify yourself we will be forced to fire upon you,”

“Listen,” Glover tried to keep his voice level. He knew that the soldiers were doing their duty. “I think you’ve got bigger worries than us.”

“Worries that they can handle now,” Q wavered back into existence. “The crisis is over.”

“Wait a min...”

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### **USS Cuffe Main Bridge**

“..ite,” Glover finished, stopping once he realized he was back in the center seat on the bridge of the Cuffe. “What the hell?”

“What the hell indeed,” Q remarked, sitting in Hajar’s seat.

“Where’s Ensign Hajar?”

“On Risa,” the alien said. “I thought she needed a break. The last few hours have been so stressful wouldn’t you agree?”

The captain jumped out of his seat. “I want her back, right now!” Q rolled his eyes.

“Alright, alright,” He winked and Hajar was back in her normal chair, but dressed in a bikini top and sarong. Jean looked just as shocked as everyone else.

“Q”, Glover warned. The alien was now standing in the center of the bridge. Kojo, not to be caught off guard a second time, was crouched by her seat, a mek’leth in her hand.

The alien huffed, snapped his fingers and the woman was back in her standard black and red duty uniform.

“All right Q, what the hell was that about? And where is Professor Hayata? Did

you turn him into that robot?"

"No, I did not," Q sounded indignant. "That's what the Beta Capsule was for. Hayata did it of his own free will, with encouragement from you might I add."

"Where is the professor now?" Glover asked. "And what was that robot?"

"I returned Hayata to his home system, which some refer to as the Land of Light. You know, they've got some pretty appealing names for things. I'm going to have to talk to the Continuum's public relations department," Q said, tapping his chin as he pondered. Glover cleared his throat loudly. "Oh yes," the alien began again. "They prefer to be called Ultramen, another rather catchy name wouldn't you say," Q remarked. "Experts at handling gargantuan threats like the Meganulon. Earth actually used to be quite a magnet for such creatures, until the Ultras thought they had eradicated them all. They left a guardian just in case, but over time, and without an enemy to fight, the Hayatas forgot their destiny. The Na'kuhl just provided me with an opportunity to reintroduce the good professor to it...and to pay off a debt."

"I'm not following you," Glover admitted. Forty-foot tall robots, big flying insects, it was too strange even for a Starfleet explorer.

"I know, but someday you will, I'm certain of that," Q said. "That used to concern me, but not so much anymore. Your crew performed ably captain, though I must admit, you guys aren't as fun as the Enterprise or Voyager crews, you need to tighten up a little bit more." The alien held up his hand, preparing to snap his fingers.

"I'm not done with you yet," the captain said.

"Oh, so you want a second date?" Q asked. "You're on." He said before vanishing.

"What the hell just happened sir?" Hajar asked.

"Beats me," Glover said, resuming his seat. "In fact, where the hell are we?"

"The outskirts of Nebula M78," N'Saba said after a few minutes. He wrinkled his snout. "Why would Q leave us here?"

"Good question," Glover conceded. "But I'm not sure I want the answer. Take us to the nearest starbase. I think we all need a little downtime, well, maybe



everyone except Jean.” The bridge chuckled and the helm officer turned a shade of crimson before joining in. But amidst the good cheer, the captain felt a now familiar presence observing them. “Goodbye Professor Hayata,” Glover whispered. “And thanks.”

**The End**