

Another Fine Mess...

by Angela Reese

Shredder stomped through the halls in his base, furious. Beaten by those damn turtles again! No matter how carefully he planned, something always went wrong. At least Crane was off-planet for a while longer, and couldn't make any nasty remarks this time. One of these days, though...

Someone tapped him on the shoulder.

"What?!" he snarled, whirling around. Shredder narrowed his eyes as he realized a stranger had somehow found his way inside. "Who are you?" he scowled.

The man in black smiled evilly. "I am the Master," he said with an intense stare, "and you will obey me."

"You are the Master," Shredder repeated, staring blankly ahead.

The Master smiled. "Come," he said, continuing down the corridor, "I wish to see the rest of your base. And then I shall need some supplies – I have a surprise planned for an old friend..."

All was peaceful inside the TARDIS. The Doctor had decided they needed a rest, and brought them to the Eye of Orion. He and Ace were off picnicking, leaving the TARDIS systems to rejuvenate and reconfigure in peace.

Ace lay in the grass, jazz music playing from her boom box. She sighed happily. "This is fantastic."

"Um-hmmm," the Doctor replied drowsily.

"How long can we stay?"

"Oh, as long as we like."

"Mmmm."

A few minutes later, the stillness was shattered by the tolling of a deep resonating bell.

The Doctor jumped up and started sprinting back to the TARDIS as Ace hastily gathered up the tape player and picnic basket. "Hey, wait for me! What is it?"

"The TARDIS warning system," he yelled back. "Come on!"

By the time Ace reached the TARDIS, the Doctor had shut off the alarm and was checking several different readouts. She dumped the picnic gear in a corner and walked over as he began setting coordinates.

"Professor! We're not leaving already, are we?"

"That alarm," he said without looking up, "was connected to a monitor I set up on Earth. It's programmed to go off whenever someone is interfering with the space/time field near the planet."

"And someone's messing with it now?"

"Yes."

"Which means," she sighed, "that naturally we have to go and find out who it is and what they're up to."

The Doctor glanced up at her and grinned. "Who else?"

"Liberator, this is Avon."

"Blake here, go ahead, Avon."

“We’re nearly finished here,” Avon replied, glaring at the main tent where Vila and Cally were still going through the rebels’ ceremonial farewell. Avon had made certain he was first. “As soon as your friends finish their chanting and parading, we’ll be ready. Stand by to teleport.”

“We’re ready when you are,” Blake’s voice said cheerfully.

Avon clicked off the communicator just as Cally came out of the tent; they sat down on a large rock to wait for Vila.

The TARDIS was shaking wildly, and it was all Ace and the Doctor could do to hang on. “What is it, Professor?” Ace yelled over the horrible, straining sound of the engines. “What’s wrong with the TARDIS?”

“Nothing’s wrong with the TARDIS!” he yelled back at her. “We’ve been caught in a time corridor through the vortex. It’s pulling us directly to the source of the interference on Earth.”

“Is that good?” she asked hopefully.

The Doctor frowned anxiously. “That all depends on who’s doing the interfering – and whether they’re expecting us.”

“But can’t you do anything?” Ace wailed. She noticed her backpack flying past and quickly grabbed it, before the pack – and the nitro-nine inside – smashed into the wall. “We can’t just stand here and be trapped!”

“Actually,” the Doctor said thoughtfully, “there is one thing that might help. We haven’t the power to break free entirely; however, if we were to knock a hole in the corridor and let something else in…”

Ace gave him a shocked look. “What, and pull in some other helpless travelers as well? How would that help?”

The Doctor glared at her, already adjusting controls. “Don’t be silly, Ace. The odds of another ship being trapped are ridiculously high. We’ll let some space debris be sucked in, which should be enough to knock us slightly off course. So…”

“So we won’t land where they think we’ll land!” Ace interrupted, grinning excitedly. “Wicked!”

The Doctor grinned right back at her. “Hold on tight,” he warned. “This is likely to get very rough. Ready? Three, two, one…here we go!”

Avon nearly sighed with relief when Vila finally came out to join them. “Liberator, this is Avon. Ready to teleport. Finally,” he added under his breath.

Unfortunately, it was at this precise moment, exactly where Avon, Vila, and Cally were standing, that the Doctor managed to create a hole in the time corridor. Before Liberator had time to answer, the three of them were swept into the time stream along with a good-sized chunk of the surrounding land.

On Liberator, Jenna was reaching for the buttons and levers. “Teleporting now, Avon,” she said with a grin, having heard the last part of his comment. She set the controls and activated, looking up expectantly.

No one appeared.

Jenna frowned and went through the process again. She was activating for the second time when Blake walked in. He was the worried look on her face and frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m not sure,” she said, reaching for the communicator. “Avon, this is Liberator. Come in.” She waited for a long moment before trying again. “Cally, Vila, this is Liberator. Come in, please.” Silence.

Blake hit the shipwide intercom. “Gan, come to the teleport right away, please. I’m going down,” he said to Jenna, snapping on a bracelet. “Do you want to work the teleport, or come along?”

“I’m coming,” she said determinedly, picking up a bracelet for herself, as well as three spares. She stepped onto the platform as Gan hurried in and was brought up to date. Seconds later, Jenna and Blake were standing where, minutes before, Avon had waited impatiently for Cally and Vila.

They stood in the center of a large crater, fifty feet across. The rebel tent stood unscathed, about twenty feet from the edge of the crater. It looked as if something had appeared, taken a huge bite out of the meadow, and disappeared again.

“I don’t understand,” Jenna muttered, horrified. “There couldn’t have been time for this. I hit the teleport less than two seconds after Avon called, and they should have seen something this big coming. They must have seen it!”

Blake looked at the tent, where they could still hear the sounds of the natives’ farewell celebration. “It couldn’t have been a bomb,” he said thoughtfully, chewing on his thumb. “The tent hasn’t been affected at all. In fact,” he added, “it must not have made much noise, either, since none of them have come out to investigate.

“Then what was it?”

“I don’t know,” he said grimly, signaling Liberator, “but we’re going to find out. Gan, start checking the teleport system. Get Orac to help. If there’s any chance that the teleport did this, I want to know immediately. And have Zen check for any ships within sensor range. Jenna and I will be looking around down here.”

Gripping the edges of the console tightly, the Doctor watched the readouts in front of him carefully. If his plan was going to work, it had to work quickly, and so far...

“It’s working!” he yelled triumphantly, seeing their course alter by a fraction of a degree. “Not that I ever doubted it,” he added smugly, grinning at Ace. “We should land a good distance from where our friend was planning to welcome us.”

“Just so long as we land,” she said queasily. “How much longer?”

“Oh, any second...now,” the Doctor said as they landed with a bump and Ace lost her grip on the backpack. The Doctor casually plucked it from the air as it flew past and handed it back to her as she sat down wearily. He immediately began fiddling with the console.

“Now what?” she asked, getting up to see what he was doing. “I hope you’re not planning to take off again already, are you?”

“No, no, we’ll stay here a while,” he assured her. “I just want to check on the debris we pulled in with us. We can’t leave it lying about the neighborhood if it’s dangerous, can we?”

Ace rolled her eyes and shrugged the backpack on. “Well, I’m going out to find something to eat,” she declared, opening the door. “All that shaking about made me hungry. Want anything?”

“No, I don’t think so, Ace,” he said absently, engrossed in his work. “Stay close, and try not to be too conspicuous, and stay out of trouble!” he finished with a shout, as the door snicked shut. He shook his head and turned back to the screen. “Why do I even bother...

“Oooohhh. I’m dead, aren’t I? We all are. Dead, dead, dead.”

“Oh, shut up, Vila,” Avon snapped, dragging himself to his feet. He leaned against a wall and looked around, bewildered. They seemed to be in an alley, in a large, busy city. He remembered calling Liberator for teleport, then being dragged into some kind of horrendous storm,

and then...nothing. Until he woke to find the three of them on a strange planet, in a strange city, who-knew-how far from Liberator. As Cally began stirring, Avon went over to help her up. Vila had stood up, still holding his head, and was staring around him. "Avon," he asked nervously, "where are we?"

"Wherever we are," Avon replied firmly, "we are not dead." He pressed the button on his communicator to signal the ship, but unsurprisingly got no response.

Cally had wandered over to a familiar rock – the very same one she had sat on before they had been caught in the time stream. She sat down and was gazing about when suddenly she froze, stiffening. Her eyes became unfocused and she stared blankly ahead as Avon and Vila hurried over.

Deep in the sewers, Splinter was meditating when his mind brushed against Cally's. Startled by the contact, he cast about to find it again, gently greeting the surprised Auron.

//Welcome, my child. I am Splinter.//

//Greetings, Splinter. I am called Cally. What is this place?//

//You are not from this planet? No, I sense from your thoughts and memories that you are not. Very curious. This is Earth, however.//

//Earth!//

//Yes; not quite the Earth I see you remember. This is indeed a unique situation. Perhaps you and your friends should join me here; we may be able to come up with a solution.//

//How are we to find you?//

//I will send someone to meet you. Also, let me show you where we are, so you can meet them. Here...//

//Yes, I see.//

//Good, Cally. I look forward to meeting you and your friends.//

//As do I, Splinter.//

Splinter slowly blinked and opened his eyes, then smiled and went to join the turtles. Luckily, April was visiting tonight; she could take her van to meet Cally.

"Cally? Cally, are you all right?"

Cally slowly came back to herself, hearing Vila's worried voice and sensing, rather than seeing, Avon's worry. Blinking, she smiled at them reassuringly.

"What happened?" Avon asked, once she seemed recovered.

"I was talking to someone," she replied, still smiling happily. "He's invited us to visit him, and offered to help us figure out what happened."

Avon scowled. "How do you know we can trust him?"

Cally sighed. "We have to trust someone, Avon. We need to find out about this place before we can figure out how to leave it. And Avon...Splinter says this is Earth."

"Earth?" Vila cried in shock. "This? There aren't even any domes! How can this be Earth?"

"I don't know, unless that storm swept us into an alternate universe as well as another planet. All the more reason for us to accept Splinter's offer. Avon," she added, gazing at him intently, "if he is lying to me, and he does intend to harm us, we shall prevent it. I do not believe he is lying, however, and we do need his help."

Avon was silent for a moment, then nodded shortly. "How are we supposed to find this...Splinter?" he asked.

Cally stood up and led them down the alley. “He showed me the way,” she said confidently, “and he is sending someone to meet us. Let’s go.”

Cally, Avon and Vila made their way quietly through the city, doing their best to remain inconspicuous. About ten minutes later, a white van with several antennas pulled up next to them, and a pretty redhead leaned out the window.

“Are you Cally and friends?” she asked, smiling. Cally nodded warily. “Good, we found you. I’m April; Michaelangelo’s in the back – he’ll open the doors for you. Welcome to New York!” she added perkily, then ducked back in. As Cally led the way to the back doors, they heard April bang on something inside and yell, “Company! Open up!”

The doors were opening as they rounded the back of the van. Cally hopped in, looked up – and found herself facing an alien!

“What on Earth...” she gasped, vaguely aware of Avon and Vila tensed behind her. “You’re, you’re...”

“Michaelangelo, at your service,” the green creature said cheerfully. Cally noticed that it (he?) made no move toward the weapon on his back. “Also a turtle. You must be Cally; didn’t Splinter warn you? Oh, well. Hello,” he went on, ushering them all in. “You must be Avon and Vila. Are you really from a different planet?”

Cally glanced at Avon, then spoke up. “From a different Earth, at least; perhaps a different time.”

“Wow! Hey, are you guys hungry?”

Vila brightened up. “Starved!” He winced at Avon’s glare. “Well, we were in such a hurry to get out of that reception, and then there was our horrible trip here...”

Michaelangelo was already opening a sliding panel to the front of the van. “Hey, April! How about a pizza stop for our guests?”

“Splinter said to come straight back,” April reminded him. “Isn’t there any left from earlier? No, never mind, silly question... They’ll get worried if we’re not back soon, with Shredder being so active lately. Besides, most places are closed now.”

“There’s that all-night place across town; we can call ahead. Please, April?”

Cally and Avon were suddenly reminded of Vila, and hastily stifled their grins.

April sighed. “Well, we can’t all go, and you can’t go alone...”

“Vila can go with him,” Cally offered. “You’re the one who’s so hungry, Vila, after all.”

“Great!” Michaelangelo exclaimed, clapping Vila on the back. “And I get to drive!”

“Oh, brother,” April muttered. The van pulled over and stopped. “Here we are! And Michaelangelo,” she added, glaring back at him, “if you put so much as one little scratch on this van, I’ll take it out of your shell. Got it?”

“Relax, April,” he said, grinning, as everyone got out and he and Vila climbed into the front seat. “Now, let’s see, how do you start this thing again?”

“Michaelangelo...” April said warningly.

He smirked. “Just kidding.” Then he started the ignition and looked at Vila. “Ready to burn rubber?”

“Burn whaaaaaat?” Vila’s cry trailed off as the van screeched off at high speed.

Avon looked after them doubtfully. “Are you certain that van is quite safe?”

April grinned. “Oh, sure. He only does that to annoy me. Come on,” she added, leading them into the alley ahead of them, “it’s this way.”

Vila gripped the ledge in front of him with both hands, and found himself wishing he was back on the Liberator, even in a battle. At least there wouldn't be so many things to run into...

His peace of mind – or lack of it – was not helped when Michaelangelo took one hand off the wheel and took a plastic object from a stand by the seat. He pushed some buttons on it, listened, then began talking into it. Vila decided it must be some sort of communications device; since they hadn't crashed into anything yet, he relaxed slightly.

"Should be ready when we get there," Michaelangelo announced, replacing the phone. He turned to Vila. "So, what's it like in the future? They got pizza there?"

"Almost there," April said, leading Avon and Cally down a ladder into the sewers. "It's just a little ways down from here."

They rounded a corner and saw a bright light ahead; as they drew closer, they could see someone coming to meet them – a giant rat!

Cally paused then stepped forward again, somehow sensing who it was. "You are... Splinter, are you not?" she asked.

"Indeed. And you are Cally – and Avon, yes? Welcome, my dear," he said warmly, taking Cally's hand and leading them in. "But, I thought there were three of you... and where is Michaelangelo? No don't tell me," he interrupted himself with a sigh. "Pizza."

"What else?" April said wryly. "Their friend Vila went with him to pick it up. They should be back soon – as long as they don't get a speeding ticket."

"Ah, well. Come, let us go into the other room. The others are waiting to meet you."

"Others?" Avon queried, then saw the three – turtles, Michaelangelo had said – waiting in the next room. "Interesting," he murmured, glancing at Cally.

Meanwhile, Splinter was introducing everyone. "Cally, Avon, meet Leonardo, Donatello, and Rafael. The Ninja Turtles."

"Greetings," Cally said, smiling. Avon simply nodded. Cally turned to Splinter again. "I don't wish to appear rude, Splinter, but is there some way we can find out what brought us here?"

Splinter gestured for them to sit down, then sat cross-legged on the floor. "For an effect that would pull you through time," he said, "it must have been something of our enemy Shredder's doing. As soon as Vila and Michaelangelo have returned, and you have eaten and rested, we shall find out what it was."

Leonardo now spoke up. "While we're waiting... are you really from the future? What's it like?"

The van screeched to a halt in front of a brightly-lit building. "here we are," Michaelangelo said, opening the glove compartment and pulling out some bills. "Here's the money. Now, I put it in your name, so just go to the counter and tell them you're picking up the order for Vila."

Michaelangelo watched him go in, then shook his head. "A future with no pizza. Major bummer."

He glanced around, always alert for any sign of Shredder's goons. The only other person in sight, though, was a pretty, dark-haired girl in the pizza shop, eyeing Vila. Just then, Vila picked up the three pizza boxes and headed toward the van, and Michaelangelo leaned over to open the door for him.

Ace sat in the pizza shop, thoughtfully chewing her pizza, and eyed the strange man at the counter. He didn't seem to understand the money amounts, although he spoke perfect English; it

reminded her of her problems with money while time travelling. Curious, she followed him out and watched as he went to a TV van and handed the pizzas in to the driver.

Grinning at her overactive imagination, Ace was turning away to go back to the TARDIS when the driver suddenly leaned into the light...and she realized it was a giant turtle! Gaping at him, she suddenly saw six men, led by two nightmarish goons, attack the van. Incensed at the odds – besides, the guy she had followed was kind of cute – Ace pulled out a canister of nitro-nine and hurled it at them. She managed to wave a warning to the driver, who tackled his friend and rolled him out of the way as she dove for cover. When the smoke cleared, all eight attackers were dazed or unconscious.

Vila leaned against the van, holding his head where one of his attackers had hit him. “I feel right at home now,” he said ruefully. “Does this sort of thing happen often around here?”

“Happens all the time to me,” cheerfully announced the dark-haired girl who had thrown the explosive. “How’s your head?”

“It’s been better,” Vila replied, brightening at the sight of a pretty face. “I...”

“Oh, no!” Michaelangelo interrupted. “The van! April’s gonna kill me!” Sure enough, the van had more than the mere scratch they’d been warned about.

“Sorry about that,” the girl apologized. “That last batch was stronger than usual.”

“No problem – if not for you, Shredder’s goons would’ve got us for sure. We can get the van fixed. By the way, I’m Michaelangelo, and this is Vila.”

“My name’s Ace.”

Vila gave her a curious look. “Either oversized turtles are common around here, or you’re remarkably calm about meeting one.”

Ace grinned. “I’ve met stranger things. Besides, I’m not from around here.” She paused a moment. “Actually, you sound as if you’re new here too.” She looked at him questioningly.

Vila blinked. “How could you tell?”

“You don’t know whether your friend here is unusual, and you don’t seem to know the money system – I can relate to that one,” she grinned. “Besides, you don’t act like you’re from this area.”

“Uh, guys?” Michaelangelo sounded anxious. “I hate to interrupt...but we got company.”

Vila whirled around just in time to get slammed against the van by someone very large. He just had time to see three of them tackle Michaelangelo and another grab Ace before he was knocked out.

“Hmmm...” The Doctor stared at his calculations, tapping his fingers on the console. He had managed to locate the spot where the debris had landed, and it was safely void of toxins and radiation...but there wasn’t enough. By his readings, it appeared that a portion of it had...walked away. Which meant that some of it could walk away, which meant that he had dragged some sort of alien life form to Earth. “As if there weren’t enough of them coming here on their own,” he muttered. “Ah, well, we’ll have to go track it down, Ace. Ace? Isn’t she back yet?” Collecting some equipment from under the console, the Doctor left the TARDIS, locked it, and looked around. He sniffed. “There seems to be food...that way.” Picking a direction, he headed off in search of Ace.

“You know,” Rafael said, “I’m getting hungry. Aren’t they back yet?”

April looked at her watch, startled. "You're right, they are awfully late. They should've been back half an hour ago. Do you think something happened?"

Leonardo got up. "I know where they went – I'll go check. Anyone else?"

"I'm coming with you," Cally said, forestalling Avon. "If there's trouble, I can contact Splinter and let the rest of you know...and if they show up meanwhile, you can let us know."

"All right," Leonardo agreed. "Come on – this way's quickest."

They arrived at the pizza place to find the damaged van, with no sign of Vila or Michaelangelo. However, a strange man was poking around it, holding a large knapsack.

Cally motioned Leonardo to wait out of sight, and walked up to the man. "Excuse me, but can I help you?"

He looked at her intently. "Perhaps. I'm looking for a friend of mine. Is this your vehicle?"

"No, but some friends of mine were in it," she replied, deciding to trust him for now. She beckoned to Leonardo. "Have you seen anyone around it?"

"No, I..." the man broke off and looked sharply at Leonardo. He doesn't seem surprised, Cally thought. "If you don't mind my asking," the man said slowly to Leonardo, "did you perhaps just arrive here, in a sort of storm?"

Cally gasped, as Leonardo answered, "No, I didn't, but my friend here did. What do you know about it? Who are you?"

The man stared at her, startled. "I'm the Doctor. You were pulled to Earth? You're not from this world?"

<<I am Cally of the Aurnae,>> Cally sent to him, then spoke aloud. "I and two crewmates were on Taxista IV when we were swept into some sort of storm, as you described, and landed in this city. One of my companions was in this van with a friend of Leonardo's."

"And the van was not in such bad shape before," Leonardo added. "Before we work out how you got here, Cally, we'd better find out where Michaelangelo and Vila went."

"Wherever it was, they definitely did not go willingly," Cally said suddenly, picking up Vila's broken teleport bracelet. "There was a fight here."

"And Ace is probably with them," the Doctor added, holding up the knapsack. "This belongs to my travelling companion, and I think it's short one of the homemade explosives she's not supposed to be carrying. It would seem that she caused the damage to the van, but she wouldn't leave the bag behind."

"I think I have a good idea what happened," Leonardo said grimly.

Michaelangelo stopped mid-pace as he heard someone at the door to his cell. He quickly moved to stand behind it when it opened. The door opened slowly, and a hand appeared on the edge, pushing it open. Michaelangelo reached around to grab the wrist and hurled the man onto the floor.

"Ow!" Vila glared up at him. "If you don't want out, just say so."

"Sorry, man," Michaelangelo apologized, helping him up. "How'd you get free?"

Vila grinned. "There's not a lock made that I can't open. Especially if it's locking me in." He gestured to the open door. "Shall we go find Ace and get out of here?"

"Sounds good to me." Michaelangelo followed Vila down the corridor, carefully checking the various rooms for any sign of Ace. They eventually came across a locked room with no window, so Vila unlocked it. This time, though, he nudged the door open while staying out of grabbing reach.

"Psst. Anyone home? Ace?"

“Vila!?” Ace pulled the door open and set down the chair leg she’d been holding. Vila eyed it, thankful she hadn’t used it on him. “Boy, am I glad to see you two. Where are we?”

“Shredder’s HQ,” Michaelangelo said. “I’ve been here before, and I think the way out is this direction. Shall we go?”

“Yes!” Vila and Ace chorused, following him down the hall.

“Are you sure the exit is this way?” Ace whispered, as they crept quietly along yet another hallway.

“Pretty sure,” Michaelangelo replied. “Anyhow, it’s better than sitting still, right?”

Suddenly, Vila froze. “Someone’s coming!” he hissed. “Quick, hide!” They started frantically checking doors as the sound of footsteps and voices became clearer from both directions. Finally, Ace found an open door and they piled in.

The trio found themselves in what looked like a large conference room. There were floor-length curtains spaced around the room; unfortunately, the windows behind them had been bricked up.

“Drat,” Ace muttered. “No escape that way.”

“No, but at least we can hid behind the curtains,” Vila pointed out. “And hurry – I think they’re coming in here!”

The three scrambled behind curtains just in time, as the door opened. The Master strode into the room, followed by Shredder.

“You fool!” the Master spat. “Your idiot troops grabbed the wrong people! None of those three is the Doctor. Didn’t you tell them to watch for a blue box and grab whoever came out?”

“But, Master,” Shredder replied, almost groveling, “the girl did come out of a blue box. My goons were waiting for a chance to grab her when the turtle and his friend showed up, so they thought they’d grab all of them.”

“They are not supposed to think,” the Master sneered, “they are supposed to follow orders. However,” he mused, “at least I have the girl. The Doctor is certain to come looking for her. Now, how can I...”

Suddenly, the door burst open and five goons burst in, only to come skidding to a halt when they spotted the Master and Shredder.

“What is going on?” the Master growled angrily.

“Th-th-the prisoners, s-sir!” the taller one stammered. “They’ve escaped!”

“Then find them, you idiots!” The Master turned to Shredder. “Can the monitors be checked from this room?”

“Yes, Master,” he replied, pressing a button set into the table. One of the curtains rose up as a panel slid open behind it, revealing the monitors.

Unfortunately, it was the curtain Ace was hiding behind. Without giving the goons time to react, she yelled and attacked.

From behind his curtain, Vila realized that he and Ace were too far from the door to make it out, especially if reinforcements arrived. Michaelangelo, on the other hand...

Vila jumped out and grabbed a chair, swinging it at one of the goons. Michaelangelo had just emerged from his hiding place, right next to the door. “Michaelangelo!” Vila yelled. “Get out! Get help! Run!” He clobbered one of the goons with the chair, but two more jumped him.

Michaelangelo hesitated just outside the room, unwilling to simply desert his friends, when about thirty more goons ran around the corner. Michaelangelo turned and sprinted in the other direction.

Vila woke to hear a voice in his ear. “Vila? Hey, Vila, you awake yet? Come on, I’m tired of talking to myself. Vila?”

“Hmmm? What...?” Vila suddenly realized that he was tied to a chair, back-to-back with Ace in another chair. “Ohh, my head.”

“Yeah, I think they hit you with the wall; well, vice versa. ‘Bout time you woke up.” Despite her efforts to sound calm, Vila could tell she was worried. “Think Michaelangelo made it out?”

Vila glanced around. “Well, he’s not in here with us, so he probably got away. Which means that at least the others will know what happened.”

“Yeah, I just hope he can find the Doctor, too, so he doesn’t walk into a trap.”

“Hey, don’t worry,” Vila said, “I’ll bet your friend has met up with my friends, and they already have six different rescue plans.” He paused. “Speaking of which,” Vila continued, testing the ropes, “I don’t especially want to be sitting here all tied up when the others arrive – bad for my reputation.”

Ace wriggled around a bit. “I think you could reach one of the knots in my rope; I can feel it, but I can’t reach it. Here, can you grab my right hand?”

Vila felt around a bit before bumping her fingers. They grabbed hands and squeezed reassuringly. “Okay,” he said, “where’s the knot?”

“Close to my wrist, on the outside.”

“Got it!” Vila said after a moment. “Now, hold your arm so the rope stays fairly taut...yes, just like that. Okay...” After several minutes of patiently tugging at the knot, it finally came free. “There!” Vila exclaimed. “Can you get loose now?”

“I think...yes!” Ace exclaimed as she pulled her arm free. Within minutes they were free of the ropes.

“Now, to get out of here,” Vila declared, looking at the door. “Hmm, this looks like a fairly simple lock. Shouldn’t take me long at all.” He glanced past Ace. “Hey, would you look at that!”

“What?” She whirled around, trying to spot whatever Vila had seen. “What? I don’t see...where did that come from?” Ace had looked back at Vila to see him holding an oddly shaped bit of metal. “Where was that?”

Vila grinned. “Professional secret,” he said, winking, then went to work on the lock. Moments later there was a click, and Vila straightened up. He eased the door open a crack and peeked out, then hastily closed it again. “Guards! Four of them.”

“Hmm...time for Plan B,” Ace replied, looking around the room. “Think you could fit through that?”

“That’ was a wall duct. Vila sighed. “I could, but I wouldn’t enjoy it much.”

“Not to worry,” Ace reassured him, grinning. “First, lock the door again. Here’s the plan...”

Clang! Thud!

The guards looked at the door, then at each other, debating whether to check on the noises. Finally, one of them unlocked the door and looked in. The clang had been the duct cover falling off. The thud had been the chair falling over, after having been used as a stool. And a bit of cloth had caught on a nail just inside the duct.

“Oh, no, not again!” the guard wailed. He looked at the others. “Okay, who gets to tell Shredder they escaped this time?”

Eventually, the sound of guards rushing around searching faded away, and the room was silent. With a slight scraping noise, a section of the ceiling slid away, and Vila peered down. “All

clear,” he whispered, and dropped to the floor. Ace followed a moment later. After replacing the ceiling tiles, they crept out to the hall.

“Unless we can find an exit,” Vila whispered, “I think we should find someplace to hide until the others arrive.”

“Okay. Let’s go...this way,” Ace replied, heading down the corridor.

Cally, Leonardo and the Doctor arrived back and were updating the others when Michaelangelo rushed in. “Guys! Hey, guys, we’ve got trouble! Come on...who’s this?” Michaelangelo interrupted himself, seeing the Doctor. “Oh, you must be Ace’s friend,” he continued. “Come on, we’ve got to help them!”

“Wait a minute, where’s Ace?”

“And where is Vila?” Avon demanded.

“Shredder has them! Er, at least,” Michaelangelo paused, “well, it looks like Shredder, but he doesn’t act like Shredder. And there’s no sign of Crane, but Shredder’s taking orders from some spiffy guy in black. Kept calling him ‘master.’”

“The Master!” the Doctor exclaimed. “Now that explains a great deal.”

“I take it you know this person?” Splinter asked.

“My mortal enemy. Well, actually,” the Doctor grinned, “one of my mortal enemies.”

“What, do you collect them or something?” asked Rafael.

“Sometimes it seems that way. But who is Shredder?”

“Oh, that would be one of our mortal enemies,” Leonardo replied cheerfully.

“I’m beginning to feel left out,” Avon murmured to Cally. “Think Servalan will show up as well?”

Cally patted his arm. “Don’t worry, I’m sure we can share their enemies.”

“Now that we know who is involved,” Splinter commented, “why don’t you tell us just what happened, Michaelangelo?”

“Well, Shredder’s goons jumped me and Vila when we were leaving the pizza place. They’d’ve got us, too, except Ace threw a bomb or something at them. Oh, sorry about the van, April,” he apologized.

April sighed. “It’s okay, I’ll explain it somehow. What happened then?”

“Well, we were introducing ourselves, when a second bunch of goons jumped us. It was almost as if they knew we’d escape the first group. Anyhow, there were more this time, so they got us.

“Vila got us out of our cells – he’s amazing with locks – and we were hunting for the exit, when we spotted Shredder and this Master guy. Shredder was yelling at the goons for grabbing the wrong people when someone spotted us. They grabbed Ace, and Vila yelled at me to go get help, then ran to help Ace.”

“Our Vila?” Avon exclaimed, astonished.

“Yeah, why? Anyhow, before I could help them, about thirty more goons caught up, so I took off to get the rest of you.”

“And without his bracelet, we can’t contact Vila at all,” Avon said. “All right, what do we know about this building they’re in? What kind of security do they have?”

“No problem,” Donatello assured him, “we’ve been in there before. Here’s the layout...”

“I thought we were looking for a hiding place,” Vila whispered, following Ace down another hall.

“We are.” She peeked through a door, then opened it and pulled Vila into what turned out to be a staircase. Ace started down.

"I guess we have different ideas on hiding places," Vila muttered.

"One thing I've learned from traveling with the Doctor – people never expect you to hide in their main center of operations."

"Assuming we can find said center."

"Well, yes." Ace grinned at him. "If we're lucky, maybe we can even blow something up."

"You should join us on Liberator; you'd have a blast with Blake's sabotage missions."

"What d'you mean, sabotage? Against who?" Ace tried the door at the bottom of the stairs – locked. She moved aside so Vila could open it.

"Well, see, in our universe the Federation controls Earth and most of the galaxy, and it's corrupt and oppressive. Blake's been leading rebels against them for years." He opened the door and waved Ace through.

"So you're rebels?"

"Well, no, Blake and Cally are the rebels. And Gan, I suppose. I'm a thief," he grinned, "Avon's the computer expert and embezzler, and Jenna's a smuggler."

"But you all follow Blake?"

"Uh-huh."

"And you sabotage the Federation?"

"Right."

"But you don't think you're rebels." Ace shook her head. "Whatever."

Vila grinned. "Avon just hates to admit it," he confided, then froze. "Someone's coming! Quick, in here...damn!" There was only one door in sight, and naturally, it was locked. Vila hastily unlocked it, and they ducked inside just before the guards turned the corner. "Whew." He looked around.

Ace was staring at the room, grinning wildly. "Well, we didn't find the control room," she said, "but this could be a lot more fun."

They were standing in the armory.

"Wicked."

"The question is, how do we find them once we get in?" Cally asked. "I doubt Vila will stay locked up for long, if he can help it."

"If they can get free, I see one of two scenarios," the Doctor replied. "Either they escape and try to find us..."

"Except neither one knows where we are," Avon pointed out.

"...or Ace will start destroying things." The Doctor smiled. "She gets very destructive with people who annoy her."

"So we break in and head for the chaos?" Leonardo asked. "No problem." The four turtles high-fived each other. "Let's do it!"

Vila carefully paid out the roll of wire, peering down the duct until the package gently touched the ledge. "Are you sure this will work?" he asked nervously.

"Relax," Ace replied calmly. "You know locks; I know explosives." She finished hooking up another package of explosives. "And this is much more stable than my homemade stuff."

"Oh, good," Vila muttered, securing the wire inside the duct. "Okay," he said, walking over to Ace, "the timed devices are all set. Now what, O Mistress of the Bombs?"

"Cute. Here you go, these are set to detonate on impact," Ace said, handing Vila three small bombs. "Don't run into any walls, okay?"

"Wouldn't dream of it," Vila assured her, gingerly carrying the bombs. "Shall we go?"

They checked the hallway, then headed out again. “We’ve got about 10 minutes left on those times,” Ace said cheerfully. “Think we have time to find the control center?”

Vila rolled his eyes. “Oy.”

“Just kidding...”

They turned another corner and Ace grinned. “Great! An elevator. Hey, wait a minute...” Vila glanced over to see here staring at a beautifully carved wooden cabinet, incongruously standing in the hall. “I wonder...?”

“What?” Vila asked, puzzled.

“Keep watch, okay? I’ve gotta check something out.” Ace walked over to the cabinet, opened the door...and walked in.

Vila just stared and shook his head. “This has been the weirdest day...”

A few minutes later she walked out of the cabinet again, gently closing the door behind her, and pushed the elevator button. “Come on,” she waved Vila over, “going up.”

He joined her in the elevator. “Do I want to know what you were doing in there?” he asked. Ace smirked. “Oh, just leaving a little going-away gift...”

Following the turtles through Shredder’s complex, Avon leaned toward Cally. “I don’t know about you,” he whispered, “but I’m feeling fairly redundant right now.”

Cally grinned. “I know what you mean. They are impressive fighters, aren’t they?”

Leonardo, Michaelangelo, Donatello and Rafael led the way through the maze of halls, making little effort at being unnoticed. So far, three separate groups of guards had spotted them, and the turtles had effortlessly taken out all of them. Avon, Cally and the Doctor seemed to be along to watch.

Suddenly, in the depths of the complex, they heard several explosions. The Doctor smiled. “That would be Ace,” he stated calmly.

“Yes, but how do we find them in this maze?” Cally asked.

“Simple,” the Doctor replied, pulling something from his pocket, “we give them a homing signal to follow.” He set down the portable tape player and hit play; jazz music filled the hall.

“Cool!” Rafael exclaimed. “I hope they can hear it.”

Ace and Vila were still in the elevator when the timed bombs went off; luckily, despite a few shudders, it kept working. Vila glared at her. “Ten minutes?!?”

She shrugged. “So, my timing’s a little off. We’re okay, aren’t we?”

Just then, the elevator stopped and the doors opened...to reveal a group of about 20 goons. Ace yelled and hit the button for another floor, then she and Vila each threw a bomb at the group. The doors closed just before the explosion.

She looked at Vila and shrugged, grinning. “Not our floor.”

He shook his head. “You are having far too much fun with this situation.”

The door opened on the next floor. They waited with bombs ready to throw...and no one was there.

Ace sighed. “Typical.”

“So, do we try this level, or keep going up?” Vila asked. She seemed to be listening to something. “Ace?”

“Shhh!” she waved him to silence, listened for a moment, then laughed. “This level’s the exit,” Ace said, pulling Vila out of the elevator. “Hear that music? It’s the Doctor. Come on!”

“Well, the music’s attracting everyone else in the building,” Avon muttered. “Naturally it’s only Vila and Ace that aren’t here yet.”

“Not quite,” the Doctor replied. “The Master and Shredder aren’t here, although I’m sure they’re watching.”

“I still think we needed a better plan than just to walk in and let our turtle friends fight everyone.”

“They have done this before, remember,” Cally replied. “We know Vila and Ace are not locked up, and if we go looking for them we could all get lost in here.”

Avon just frowned and went to look down the cross-corridor again, as they heard the sounds of yelling and running feet.

Vila turned to throw the last of his bombs at the horde chasing them, then grabbed Ace’s hand and dove around the next turn to avoid the blast.

Right into Avon.

Vila blinked, startled, then scrambled to his feet. “Hi, Avon. Come to join the party?”

Ace grabbed them both by the arms. “Don’t chat, run!” she yelled. They sprinted toward the group as the goon squad stampeded around the corner. Cally and the Doctor led the way back out as the turtles took care of any goons catching up.

April was waiting anxiously with the van; everyone piled in and she took off for the sewers at high speed.

After a celebratory party – with plenty of pizza – the travelers said their farewells by the TARDIS.

“We appreciate all your help, Splinter,” Cally said warmly, shaking his hand (paw?). “I wish there was something we could do in return.”

“It was a pleasure simply to meet you, my dear,” he replied. “I hope your friends will not be too worried by your disappearance.”

“Not to worry,” the Doctor replied. “If all goes well, your friends won’t even know you were missing.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard that one before,” Ace whispered to Vila, grinning.

“I heard that!” the Doctor replied, swatting at her with his hat and chasing her into the TARDIS. She pulled Vila in with her, waving at Michaelangelo, followed by Avon and Cally.

Splinter and the turtles watched, amazed, as the TARDIS disappeared amidst flashing light and a horrendous noise.

“Whoa!” Michaelangelo exclaimed. “What an exit!”

The Master stomped through Shredder’s complex, furious. “How does he manage to escape every time?!” he muttered angrily. “You made a mistake this time, though, Doctor,” he mused, smirking. “You didn’t find the tractor device I used to bring you here. You managed to break free of it this time, but if I boost the power...” The Master opened the door to his TARDIS and stepped in...and tripped over a wire.

“What...Nooooo!” the Master screamed in fury as he looked up to see the bomb falling onto the tractor device and his control panel. Completely destroyed.

“Damn you, Doctor!”

The Doctor finished adjusting settings for their destination. “So, would you like to arrive on the planet, or on your ship?” When no answer was forthcoming, he glanced up to find the Liberator trio staring around in shock. The Doctor smiled. “Ah, yes, I’m afraid we neglected to warn you. The TARDIS is dimensionally transcendental.”

“That’s impossible,” Avon stated, but without much conviction as he wandered around the room. “Nothing can be bigger on the inside than on the outside.”

“Then I guess you’re hallucinating,” Ace said cheerfully. “Come on, I’ll give you the tour.”

The Doctor watched the four of them leave and shrugged, patting the console. “I’ll just leave the decision up to you, then,” he whispered to the TARDIS. “Ship or planet?”

The TARDIS materialized on the flight deck of the Liberator, and the Doctor opened the door to peek out. “The ship. Good choice, I think.” He went over to the TARDIS intercom. “Ace! Tour’s over, we’ve arrived.”

“Already back, Professor,” she replied from behind him. He turned to see their three guests follow here into the control room, looking dazed. Well, Avon was starting to look as if he wanted to know how it was done...

“Time to go,” the Doctor announced, waving them to the doors. “Here we are, back on your ship.”

As soon as Avon realized where they had arrived, he walked over to Zen. “Zen. State Liberator’s location. Where is the crew?”

The Liberator is currently in orbit around Taxista IV. Gan is in the teleport bay. Blake and Jenna have teleported down to the planet’s surface to determine why you, Vila and Cally disappeared.

“How long ago did we...disappear, Zen?” Cally asked, curious.

You failed to teleport two minutes, ten seconds ago.

“Wow!” Vila exclaimed. “We just left, and now we’re back...they’re never gonna believe what happened to us.”

“Well, we must be going,” the Doctor announced. “We have business to get back to. Goodbye, all. Come along, Ace.” He ducked back into the TARDIS.

“Bye, Vila,” Ace waved, grinning. “It’s been a blast.”

“Funny. Come back and visit anytime you want to help us blow things up...after you’ve solved that timing problem.”

She rolled her eyes and followed the Doctor into the TARDIS, closing the door. The light on top started flashing as the Liberator crew watched it disappear.

“I wonder how that works,” Avon mused, staring at the now empty space.

Vila sighed. “Figure it out later, Come on,” he continued, smirking, “don’t you want to welcome Jenna and Blake back to the ship?” He headed toward the teleport bay, followed by Cally and Avon.

“I don’t understand,” Jenna muttered, horrified. “There couldn’t have been time for this. I hit the teleport less than two seconds after Avon called, and they should have seen something this big coming. They must have seen it!”

Blake looked at the tent, where they could still hear the sounds of the natives’ farewell celebration. “It couldn’t have been a bomb,” he said thoughtfully, chewing on his thumb. “The tent hasn’t been affected at all. In fact,” he added, “it must not have made much noise, either, since none of them have come out to investigate.

“Then what was it?”

“I don’t know,” he said grimly, signaling Liberator, “but we’re going to find out. Gan, start checking the teleport system. Get Orac to help. If there’s any chance that the teleport did this, I want to know immediately. And have Zen check for any ships within sensor range. Jenna and I will be looking around down here.”

“Um, Blake?” Gan replied hesitantly, “I don’t think that will be necessary. In fact, I think you should come back to Liberator. Teleporting now.”

Blake and Jenna looked at each other, puzzled. They were even more puzzled when they arrived back on Liberator...and were met by Avon, Cally and Vila. “What the hell happened?!” Blake demanded.

“Let’s all go back to the flight deck and sit down first,” Cally said calmly. “This will be a long story...”

The End...