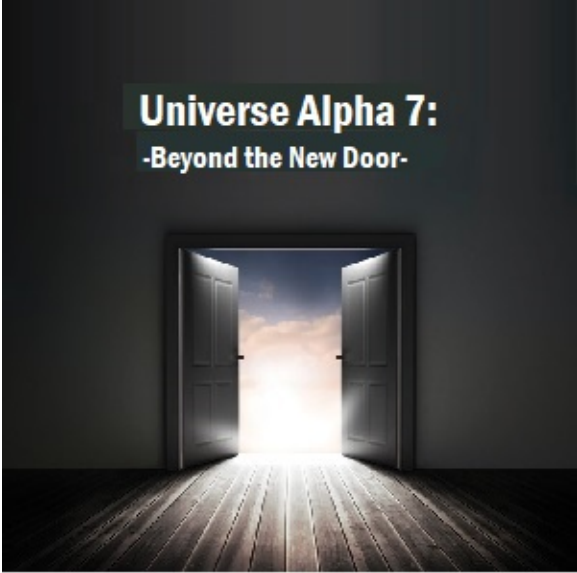


Universe Alpha 7:

-Beyond the New Door-





Universe Alpha 7:

A New Door Opens 2: Beyond the New Door

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Chapter 1

"Please awaken. You're having a nightmare."

The voice wasn't familiar.

The bed wasn't familiar.

I wasn't familiar.

"W-What?" I stammered as I fought against weariness and disorientation and struggled to open my eyes.

"You were crying out in your sleep. I suspect, from the sound of it, that your pain was from an emotional source rather than a physical one."

The guy had a green pallor, which told me more than his formal style of speech that he was a Vulcan... the pointy ears might have tipped me off a little bit too.

"Who are you?" I was finally able to make myself ask. I mean, yeah, it's about as cliché an opening line as you can get, but I wasn't at my best.

"Do you honestly not know?" My pointy-eared companion asked with what appeared to be actual concern.

"Yeah. I'm completely serious. I don't know who you are... or where I am, for that matter." I said as I began to feel a bit more self-assured. I mean, if pointy-ears was going to hurt me, he probably would have done it by now. Beyond that, I'm totally lost.

Before I could explain further, he looked upward as he calmly said, "Computer: Notify Solak that his patient, Rory Teeter, is suffering some sort of mental aberration. Please advise."

Solak? I know that name. We were on the *Enterprise*, leaving for Vulcan... that would explain pointy-ears. We must have gotten there.

"*Message transmitted.*" The computer immediately responded.

"I'm not hurting or anything, I just don't know where I am or how I got here." I hurried to assure him. If Solak was doing something important, I wouldn't want to interrupt him just because I woke up weird.

"Be comforted Rory. I am certain that Solak will return with all due haste and he will know what is the appropriate action to take." Pointy-ears said confidently. I wouldn't think that a Vulcan would make a good nurse, what with the 'no emotions' thing and all that. But Pointy-ears was doing alright. I felt like I was in capable hands with him watching over me.

"Can you tell me your name?" I cautiously asked. I mean, from the way he was acting to begin with, he expected me to know who he was. Besides, my choices seemed to be rather limited. I could either ask his name or call him 'Pointy-ears' to his face. That probably wouldn't be good.

"I am Sahnek."

Like the hedgehog? No. Don't go there. I'm in a really serious situation here, the last thing I need to do is to break into a fit of giggles.

"Where are we, Sahnek?" I was able to ask with a mostly straight face.

"This is Solak's home on Vulcan. I serve as his assistant and stay with you when he is away, performing duties at the hospital or lecturing at the Academy." Sahnek explained calmly and professionally.

"This is Solak. How can I be of assistance?" Sounded over the intercom.

There was no denying it, I'd recognize his voice anywhere. It was definitely him.

Before Sahnek could respond, a terrified scream erupted from the other side of the room.

I must have jumped nearly a foot straight up, and that's really something when you're starting from a lying position.

I hadn't noticed that on the other side of the room there was another hospital bed like the one I was in.

As Sahnek hurried to help the distressed person in the other bed while at the same time saying into the air, "Something is happening to your patients. It may have to do with your experimental treatment, so I'm reluctant to do anything that might exacerbate their situation."

'Treatment? Have the treatments started?' I thought to myself, then experimentally raised my arm to see if it was still working as well as I remembered.

"What are their symptoms?" Solak asked professionally.

My arm was fine. In fact, it was better than I remembered. It felt stronger and more under my control than ever before. I would guess that with this level of stability that I could probably thread a needle... not that I've ever had the desire to actually do that.

"The most profound effect appears to be memory loss, perhaps to a lesser degree, disorientation." Sahnek said loudly to Solak as he simultaneously tried

to calm his other patient.

"I will transport to you directly. Solak out."

Yep. That's Solak alright. Straight to the point... honestly, I wouldn't want him to be any other way.

"What happened?! Where am I?! Who are you?!" I heard a terrified voice asking. It's one of those things that kinda rips your heart out when you hear it.

"Be comforted. Solak will be here shortly..." Sahnek was saying when the sparkle of a transporter beam lit the room.

"What troubles you, Rory?" Solak asked me as casually as if he were simply stopping by for a visit.

"I... I don't know." I said honestly. I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Are you experiencing any physical symptoms like pain or difficulty breathing?" Solak asked clinically as he performed a standard evaluation with a medical tricorder. I've seen it done so many times that *I* could probably do it myself.

"No. Nothing like that. I'm not hurting or anything, I'm just really confused." I said slowly as I tried to consciously take inventory of my physical body.

"Very well then. I need to scan my other patient. Please relax and let me know immediately if you notice any pain or discomfort." Solak said professionally.

"Yeah. Do what you need to do. I'll be okay." I said slowly as I tried to come up with any scenario that I could to explain the situation I found myself in.

As Solak crossed to the other side of the room, Sahnek returned to my bedside.

"Are you discomforted? Can I get you anything?" Sahnek asked me quietly.

"No... actually yes. I need to go to the bathroom. Could you help me?" I asked uncomfortably. Of all the things I hated about my condition, needing help to use the bathroom was one of the worst.

"Your walker is beside the bed, what other assistance do you require?" Sahnek asked me curiously.

"Walker? Since when can I use a walker?" I asked in astonishment.

"Since I've known you, at least." Sahnek immediately responded, then further explained, "I have only been assisting Solak for twelve days. I have no knowledge of your capabilities, or lack thereof, prior to that."

"Let's see if I can figure out how to make this work." I said as I fought to turn my body in the bed.

"Here. I'll help you to pull yourself up." Sahnek said as he hurried to my bedside.

"Yeah. Thanks." I said as I finally reached the side of the bed and fought to turn myself.

"It surprises me that you would regress both physically and mentally." Sahnek said, sounding to be concerned.

"I'm not sure that I did. I mean, I'm stronger than I remember being. I just don't know how to get out of bed and balance myself on my own with my muscles and stuff being like this." I fought to explain.

"Where am I? How did I get here?" The terrified young man's voice on the other side of the room demanded to know.

"You're on Vulcan. I am your doctor." Solak patiently explained, then added more gently, "How you came to be here is a tale that should be postponed for a later time, once other considerations have been dispensed with."

"What can I do to help you?" Sahnek cautiously asked me.

"Sorry, I got distracted." I said as I turned my focus back to the matter at hand.

With a blast of effort, I pushed and pulled with all my might to slide myself the last few inches off the side of the bed to achieve a standing position... admittedly with a white-knuckled grip on the walker.

I was a little shaky starting out, but after a moment to reconfirm my grip, I felt more or less assured that I could manage to remain upright without his help.

"Do you believe you can make it to the facilities on your own, or would you like for me to get your wheelchair?" Sahnek asked me cautiously.

"I can probably make it on my own... if you can tell me where it is." I finished shyly, feeling that I should probably already know.

"Through the doorway." Sahnek said as he gestured at a door across the room from me. While I knew that in reality it was only a number of feet away, it might as well be miles from the amount of effort it was going to take to get me there.

"Wait. Did you say Solak? Are you Aunt Mariah's husband?" The boy in the bed asked with excitement. His mood had gone from despondent to ebullient in a heartbeat.

"Yes. That is correct. You are my nephew." Solak responded impassively.

"I remember my cousin Xain saying that his mom... oh, man. She must have been your wife... sorry." Kennon said softly, apparently back in the dumps again.

I fought to drag my attention back to my main objective and focused on taking the next step.

"Based on the preliminary evidence, I concur with Sahnek's speculation that your conditions appear to be in some way related to your treatments." Solak said seriously.

That caught me off guard. I was once again diverted from my purpose.

"You're not going to stop the treatments, are you?" I asked anxiously as I stopped and turned slightly to look at him, waiting for an answer.

"I have no plans to discontinue your treatments, but there is a possibility that I may suspend treatments for a short time while I investigate the cause of this shared episode." Solak said informatively as he kept the majority of his attention on his medical tricorder.

"I may not remember everything, but I remember who you are and what the treatments are supposed to do, so you can do your stuff on me to find out what went wrong if you want to." I hurried to offer, then thought to add, "Just let me use the bathroom first."

"That would be acceptable. I will prepare the scanning equipment and summon you when all is in readiness. Please, do not hesitate to notify me should you have need." Solak said before walking out of the room purposefully.

* * * * *

After using the bathroom, I slowly began my journey back across the vast wasteland between the bathroom and my bed.

"What was your name?" The boy in the bed cautiously asked me.

"Rory Teeter. What's yours?" I answered as I maintained my 'one foot in front of the other, then scoot the walker' rhythm.

"Kennon Werner." He said quietly, and I could imagine the fear that he was feeling. I at least had *some* clue about who Solak was and what I was doing here. From the sound of it, this whole thing was taking Kennon completely off guard.

"And Solak's your uncle?" I cautiously asked, hoping that it would help give him a feeling of connection about where he found himself and $\frac{1}{2}$ what was

being done to him.

"I guess so. I joined a genealogy message board trying to find out what happened to my Aunt Mariah and ended up getting in touch with my cousin Xain, Solak's son." Kennon told me seriously.

"Hey! I know Xain!" I hurried to tell him. If we had someone in common, then neither of us was quite as alone in all of this.

"Xain and Jake put me in touch with some clan people and they asked me some questions." Kennon said in a voice of distant remembrance.

"I'm a member of the Clan... In fact, I *might* even be the clan's representative on Vulcan. At least that's what we were planning when I left Earth." I said excitedly, happy to find another connection between us, however tenuous.

"I can't be sure of anything that happened after that point. My memories feel like they were taken out and put back in backward. The stuff that's farthest away is clearest to me and the stuff that happened more recently is really fuzzy or I can't remember it at all." Kennon said slowly, obviously trying to put the strange sensation into words.

"Yeah. That's exactly how it feels. I clearly remember leaving Earth, then bits and pieces of things since then." I said as I fought to remember more recent events.

"The last thing I clearly remember, I was like a slab of meat, not able to talk or do anything for myself. My entire existence was on the internet, even though it could take me most of a day to tap out an email, it was the only way I could stay a part of the world. I don't know how long ago that was, but it must have been a while. Now I'm on a different planet and I can talk and even move my hands and arms some." Kennon finished with a smile, recognizing his good fortune.

"I know that feeling. Thanks to Xain doing a neural alignment on me, I was able to talk and use one arm. When Solak arrived he gave me another alignment and I gained the use of my other arm. It was like the whole world opened up to me." I quietly shared with him.

"Do you think the neural alignment thing is what caused whatever happened to us?" Kennon asked me cautiously, perhaps wary of biting the hand that feeds.

Before answering, I turned and noticed that Sahnek was standing in the doorway and seemed to be waiting for my answer with as much anticipation as Kennon.

"No. I don't think so. From what I understood, the neural alignment was just a way to reconnect the things that had come undone, like the nerves and stuff, that had lost their connection because of a genetic condition that I have... I guess you probably have it too or you wouldn't be here." I said speculatively, then hurried to continue, "If Solak has started the experimental treatment for the disorder, I'd bet that *that's* what caused whatever happened to us."

"Sound reasoning." Sahnek said as he started the process of relocating two wheelchairs from the hallway into the bedroom, one motorized and the other ultra-modern.

"If you tell me where we're going, I can walk there." I hurried to volunteer before my silence could be taken as automatic acceptance of his plans.

"Whatever else has happened, it is comforting to know that some things are consistent, such as your dislike of wheelchairs." Sahnek said in a voice that could almost be taken as teasing.

"Then I can walk there?" I asked hopefully, not really believing it to be so, but still trying, nonetheless.

"Unfortunately, no. We don't have the time to wait for you to traverse the distance. However, once your scans are complete, you may elect to walk back, contingent upon your condition and Solak's approval, of course." Sahnek said firmly as he parked the motorized wheelchair beside my bed.

"I guess so." I reluctantly agreed, as much as I wanted it to be otherwise.

"Solak should be ready for you shortly, so I will help Kennon into his hover chair. I assume that you will be able to relocate yourself." Sahnek said to me, even as he moved to Kennon's bedside.½

Looking at the old fashioned battery powered electric wheelchair that might have been older than I was, I felt compelled to ask, "Why does Kennon get a fancy new chair and I get a ratty old one?"

"According to the story I was told, you vehemently declared that your first attempt to pilot a hover chair would also be your last." Sahnek said as he turned Kennon on his bed, then slightly lifted him as he moved him easily into the hover chair.

Fortunately I had enough experience with wheelchairs to relocate myself from the walker in a reasonable amount of time and without undue effort.

"I need to use the bathroom too. Is there some way I can do that on my own?" Kennon asked hopefully.

"Yes and no." Sahnek said simply, then at Kennon's confused expression, he explained, "The restroom facilities are such that it is possible for you to relocate yourself from the hover chair to the toilet unaided, however the process is not intuitive. You will need assistance until you've learned how to use certain of the less obvious features of the hover chair."

"Will you help me then? I need to go." Kennon said urgently.

"Yes. Of course." Sahnek confirmed, then turned to me and said, "Solak's work area is located out the door to the right, at the end of the hall. You may wait here for us if you wish or you can proceed us so that Solak may begin as soon as he's ready."

"We might as well get this started." I said before turning my wheelchair toward the door.

"We will join you shortly." Sahnek said as he guided Kennon's hover chair where he wanted it to go.

* * * * *

The hallway spanned the entire home, from the bedroom area, through a large and well-appointed living room, past a surprisingly Earth-like kitchen area, on through a utility room, ending at the door to Solak's lab.

"Is it okay if I come in?" I asked from the doorway.

"Yes. All is nearly in readiness." Solak said without interrupting what he was typing on the computer before him.

"Where do you need me?" I asked as I looked around his lab, which looked much like a larger version of a hospital room.

"If you would get up on the biobed, I would like to do a comparative analysis to detect any obvious physical cause for your condition, should there be one." Solak said calmly while rapidly typing on his computer.

I parked the electric wheelchair beside the biobed, then locked it in place before slowly and carefully pushing myself to standing.

"It appears that your physical state hasn't regressed to any notable degree." Solak said clinically as he watched me achieve a standing position.

"I guess not." I said as I strained and struggled to pull myself onto the biobed.

Once settled into place, I continued, "I was thinking that if Kennon and I are at different stages in our treatment, me being nearly able to walk, and him still building up his arms, then something outside our treatments might have triggered whatever happened to both of us at the same time."

"Yes. It is at least worth considering that an outside force impacted both of you adversely. Perhaps the treatments made you vulnerable in a way that others typically aren't." Solak said speculatively.

"If that's true, then there might be other vulnerable people who lost their memories and stuff at the same time we did." I said slowly, continuing the thought.

"I have a few more tests to schedule. Perhaps you could query Starfleet for unexplained phenomena recorded in the last several hours. That could, perhaps, provide a heretofore unexplored avenue to investigate." Solak calmly suggested.

"Yeah. I'm not used to Vulcan computers, but if you can get me logged into something in English, I can probably take it from there."

"Sign in. The computer should automatically default to your preferred language and other personal settings. As the clan representative on Vulcan, your diplomatic access should be invaluable in performing searches." Solak said frankly.

"I remember that I was planning to be the clan representative, but I wasn't sure if I had gone through with it." I said as I brought a padd on a swing-arm around where I could access it easily.

"You don't often speak to me about your work. However, I get the sense that not only are you satisfied with your position, but your clan is likewise satisfied with your job performance." Solak said conversationally as he moved to work on another piece of equipment.

"Have I said anything to you about someone named Kenny?" I cautiously asked, not knowing if I could handle it if we had broken up for some reason.

"Yes. At length." Solak said without hesitation, then explained, "As I understand it, he is working to complete his current level of education and finalizing some projects for The Clan before coming to Vulcan. The additional room should be complete before his arrival."

"He's going to move here?" I asked with happy surprise.

"He is your mate. It is only logical that you should cohabitate." Solak said reasonably.

I smiled as I pressed the activation button on the padd and calmly said, "Computer: Search for reports of unexplained phenomena involving memory loss within the past two hours."

I was surprised when the padd didn't automatically come back with either a list of matches to my query or at the very least, a screen showing that the search had failed.

"Rory? *What's going on?*" A familiar image on the screen cautiously asked.

"I don't know. I was doing a simple search and all of a sudden I got you on the screen. Keith? Is that really you?" I asked warily.

"*Yeah. It's me.*" Keith chuckled.

"What's going on?"

"The Enterprise has been tasked with investigating an anomaly which has affected people throughout the Federation. We don't have many answers, but if you have a minute, I'd like to ask you a few questions so that maybe we can fill you in on the basics, at least."

"Hold on. Before you do that, can you tell me why did my computer contact you when I just did a simple search?" I asked anxiously, something really freaky and surreal seemed to be going on.

"The short answer is that it's because of your clan access. Regular people are being directed to a call center where their information is collected and forwarded en masse to the Enterprise for evaluation. Since you're clan, your inquiry was directed to me so that I can do a more in-depth interview and clue you in on what we already know about what's going on." Keith said frankly.

"Yeah. Okay, what do you want to know?" I asked cautiously, not certain about what I had gotten into.

"*How many realities are you currently aware of?*" Keith asked seriously.

"What kind of a question is that?" I asked dumbfoundedly.

"*Can I take that to mean 'one'?*" Keith slowly asked.

After a moment to consider, I finally responded, "Yeah, one... maybe less."

"*How is that?*" Keith asked curiously.

"About an hour ago, all of a sudden, I woke up here, on Vulcan. I don't remember anything that happened in... well, I don't know how long. The last thing I *clearly* remember is leaving Earth."

"*But you're not aware of another reality or another version of yourself living a similar life?*" Keith asked curiously.

"No. Nothing like that. I remember what I think is my life, but after a certain point it's all bits and pieces." I said seriously.

"Do you remember us meeting at my dad's house?"

"Yes. I remember that clearly. You and Ethan were giving Vincent moral support while he did some kind of testing stuff on the Starfleet sim."

"Right. How about when the Enterprise had to divert to help the Yorktown evacuate Kimber IV. Do you remember that?" Keith asked slowly, in a leading tone.

"Now that you say it, I *do* remember us changing course and meeting up with Vincent's ship... It's fuzzy, but I remember it."

"What about Vincent's wedding? Do you remember that?"

"Yeah. More or less... mostly less. It seems like it was a million years ago."

"It wasn't quite that long. But do you remember me being there?"

After a moment to consider, Rory slowly admitted, "I'm sorry, but no."

"If we're dealing with alternate realities, then maybe I wasn't. You might be remembering a different reality than I am." Keith said seriously, which was disconcerting, considering the outlandish nature of what he was telling me.

"But maybe you were there and I just can't remember. It's not like I can remember all of what happened and everyone else who was there. My memory is so jumbled that there might be big gaping holes where memories should be." I said anxiously.

"Like looking at a puzzle with missing pieces." Keith suggested.

"Yeah, except that the closer you get to now, the more pieces seem to be missing." I confirmed.

"This is different from what's been happening to other people. Most of them are remembering two or more realities with one overwriting the others." Keith said frankly, then thought to add, "They have too many puzzle pieces, and they're not all from exactly the same puzzle."

"So I'm just getting the overwriting without the background story?" I guessed.

"Maybe, or the overlay might be wiping things out instead of replacing them with new memories."

"Or maybe it could be that everything's normal and I'm just having a bad reaction to my treatments." I reluctantly postulated, as much as I didn't want to

believe it was so.

"The only way that would be true is if your treatments somehow altered the perception of reality for people all over the universe. From your description, what happened to you happened at the same time that everyone else just slid into, or out of, an alternate reality." Keith said frankly.

"Solak's doing some groundbreaking work, but I don't think his treatment is quite that powerful." I said with a questioning look at Solak, who had obviously been listening.

Solak noticed and shook his head to confirm that his treatment probably wasn't capable of causing the invalidation of all reality.

"With this just happening in the last hour, you can imagine the chaos we're going through here. I'll make sure to let the command staff know how it affected you and one of them might get back with you to ask more questions."

"Before you go, you should know that there's someone else here who's taking the same treatments that I am and he has the same gaps in his memory that I do." I hurried to explain.

"What's his name?"

"Kennon Werner." I rushed to say, hoping that I was remembering correctly.

"Got it. I'll be sure to pass it on." Keith said seriously, then added, *"Enterprise out."*

* * * * *

"How's it going? Have you guys figured out what's wrong yet?" Kennon asked as he glided into the room in his hover chair, followed immediately by Sahnek.

"He just started. We don't know anything for sure." I said as I watched Solak's expression, hoping to get some indication of how the testing was going.

"Had you not received the communication from the *Enterprise*, I would have no reason to believe that these readings had any significance. As it stands, the most I can detect are insufficiently terminated neural linkages."

"What does that mean?" I asked cautiously.

"Typically, neural linkages are formed as memories are created. The curious thing is that many of your neural linkages fail to connect to anything. I would normally assume that the memories are missing or damaged, most likely due to one of many diagnosable physical ailments. But the look of this, coupled with the information from the *Enterprise*, leads me to believe that the memories

were never there to begin with and that the linkages were copied from elsewhere." Solak said speculatively.

"How could something like that happen?" I cautiously asked.

"Perhaps with diligent study we might be able to determine that. But at this time, I don't have enough information upon which to form a reasonable theory." Solak reluctantly admitted.

"Is that it? Are my memories just gone?" I asked anxiously.

"Not necessarily. It is entirely possible that they might not have been there to begin with." Solak said seriously.

"What does that mean? Are you saying that I'm not me?" I asked as my anxiety increased.

"I'm not sure that I understand what you're asking." Solak said slowly.

"It sounds like whatever happened might have updated people's memories to rewrite them to match up with the new or altered universe. Kennon and I somehow didn't get the base memories, only the updated ones." I said slowly as I fought to fit the pieces of our bizarre situation into a coherent order.

"Perhaps the treatments that you have undergone have had the effect of making you immune to the 'update' or have somehow altered your memory organization so that the new linkages aren't connecting with the existing memories." Solak said speculatively.

"Do the scans from before and from now show any big differences?" I asked as I tried to make sense of it all.

"The scans show insufficiently terminated neural linkages. That would indicate memory loss. Whether the memories were actually lost or are temporarily inaccessible remains to be determined." Solak said slowly as he studied the readout.

"Could you find more answers if you did a mind meld?" I asked as I glanced at Sahnek to see his reaction to the suggestion.

"Since I hadn't performed a mind meld with you before the incident, a mind-meld now wouldn't be likely to uncover anything that you haven't already noticed for yourself." Solak said honestly.

At a pause in the conversation, Sahnek cautiously said, "I don't understand what you're talking about."

"It appears that Rory and Kennon's memory losses may be somehow associated with a temporal/spacial event of concern to Starfleet. The first indication that it

may be related is the timing, the second is an awareness of alternate realities, one overwriting the other, coinciding with Rory and Kennon's loss of certain memories and not others." Solak explained to Sahnek and Kennon.

"It sounds like Solak's treatment caused me and Kennon to lose some of our memories instead of remembering the memories of the new timeline or alternate universe or whatever it is." I quietly added, hoping that what I was saying somehow made sense.

"Are you suggesting that we have undergone such a rewriting of reality and aren't aware of it?" Sahnek asked curiously.

"If that were the case, we wouldn't be. Kennon and Rory might be exempted from the altered awareness due to some effect of the treatments to reconfigure their genetic codes." Solak said speculatively.

"Does your treatment employ some temporal component that might cause such a result?" Sahnek asked cautiously.

"Not that I am aware, although I have not, as yet, been able to quantify the causal relationship between my treatment and the corresponding effect on the genetics of the individual being treated." Solak quietly admitted.

"So you tried things and found something that works, even though you're not completely sure why?" I asked speculatively, wanting to confirm my understanding of what he was saying.

"Most of the treatment is a simple genetic replacement therapy, which is a fairly straightforward process. But what sets my treatment apart is the acquisition of healthy genetic material used as a template for the replacement therapy." Solak slowly explained.

After a moment to consider what he was saying, I finally scraped up the courage to ask, "Where did you get undamaged genetics to replace what's wrong with me?"

"A sample of your genetics is repeatedly bombarded with low level quantum frequencies which causes variations in the sample to manifest. Once viability is achieved, the bombardment is stopped and that sample is used for the genetic replacement." Solak explained.

"So you're rolling the dice, over and over, until you get the pattern that you want?" I asked uncertainly, trying to restate the process into easily understood terms to confirm my understanding.

"In essence, yes. Altering existing genetics without a fresh viable sample to use as a template causes the treatment to be rejected by the host organism. The

sample can be tested for viability with a single simple scan, if the sample is not viable, then the process is repeated."

"So how does this have anything to do with alternate realities or timelines?" I hesitantly asked, fairly sure that I already knew the answer.

"We're only assuming that it does based on circumstantial evidence. However, until we can develop a reasonable hypothesis as to why, we won't be able to administer further treatments to either of you."