



UNBOUND

IMAGININGS

IN SUPPORT OF CHARITY

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SHORT STORIES BY FANS

DIVERGENT WORDSMITHS

UNBOUND IMAGININGS, VOLUME 1

Edited by

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“Purloined from the exquisite biomechanical computer systems of the Catchvane, the Wordsmiths have deciphered, transcribed and generally squabbled over the Doctor's vast gallimaufry of cosmic ventures. While many have been recorded by reliable sources, they are more curious of the accounts that have, as the Tellurians would say in their idiosyncratic tongue: 'fallen through the cracks.' The Wordsmiths' efforts to document these lost exploits are furnished in the tomes below, left by a divergent scion and reappropriated for the Earth's admittedly primitive global computer network...”

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to real persons, living, dead or in the process of regeneration, is purely coincidental.

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To the wonderful people at Big Finish Productions past and present. Thank you for bringing us all together.

INTRODUCTION

“Unbound Imaginings”

It came like a snowflake. Transfixing in its intricacies, boundless in its potential, composed in a miraculous atmosphere and now drifting aimlessly from the Omniversal Spectrum to whatever patch of muddied dirt or rainswept rock would have it. It was a Thort. A simple comet of ideology that purred and tittered happily to itself, absorbing the many touches of memory, emotion and form that stretched away across—

Could it call this a horizon? Would the nature of these dimensions even permit such an idea?

It was a moment. Just a moment. But it was enough.

The distraction drew it away from its path, towards a glimmer. A faint iridescent sheen like an agglomeration of diamond refracting the visual spectra of a rainbow.

The glimmer grew larger and larger and larger, until—

D-o-t-h-e-y-h-a-v-e-c-o-n-t-a-c-t-?

The Thort flinched back – (Back? Forward? *Away! Away!*)

D-o-n-o-t-f-e-a-r.-W-e-w-i-l-l-n-o-t-h-a-r-m-y-o-u.

It had been millennia since it was contacted by a... a... *thing*. It had lost the word for it. It existed outside of mnemonics, outside of the sea foam of noosphere and ur-Think. It was a mind, but... meaty and...

Curious! buzzed the Thort happily, as if a child following the passage of ants into a knothole in a tree. Perhaps in a sense it was. It had none of the scope, nor grandeur of its own form – *Be proud!* the Ideologue had told the Thort. *Be proud or fear withering from sight!* – but it knew this to be vanity. It was not fair to judge others for lacking the beauty of their own form.

M-a-y-t-h-e-y-s-p-e-a-k-w-i-t-h-y-o-u-?

Speak! Vocalisations. Transmissions of self through sound! Sound! It missed the energy and playfulness of sound.

May they speak with you? the Thort responded in kind.

Y-o-u-a-r-e-i-n-c-o-n-t-a-c-t-w-i-t-h-t-h-e-W-o-r-d-m-i-n-d.-I-w-i-s-h-f-o-r-y-o-u-t-o-s-p-e-a-k-w-i-t-h-m-y-p-o-r-t-w-a-t-c-h-e-r-s.

It saw no harm. It considered that it might even be fun.

Speak with my portwatchers, it echoed in response cheerily.

The vast biomechanical complex seemed to stretch leisurely like a cat bathing in a sun, but Thort was starting to feel smaller. There was anticipation, a new idea in its melodic theme of cognition, which seemed to point towards an object on the creature – *Ah! Creature! How had it forgotten?* – known as the Catchvane. An exquisite biomechanical computer system that allowed its inhabitants to peer harmlessly onto whatever world they chose. It could hear the cosmic poetry of these inhabitants through it. As if through the cracks of an aged monastery wall. Rhythm. Motion. Physics. Mathematics. Language.

It stretched down through the Catchvane and saw its first portwatcher of old, something it knew by osmosis was known as a Wordsmith of Lingua. Unusually for its kind, it was alone, just as the Thort was alone. It suspected that it too had absconded from some duty it was supposed to perform or perhaps it had simply approached it on its own to remove any further sense of danger.

But it didn't feel dangerous to the Thort, it felt *exciting*. It rattled down the mechanical device into the antechamber, spreading wide its form and coming to rest cosily within the computer net.

The Wordsmith sat down on its aged cloak, running its finger beneath a round, long face with a contained, excited smile. The Thort could not tell if it was a mask or skin and perhaps that distinction didn't really matter to a Wordsmith.

“Do not be frightened,” reassured it. “We simply wish to know something of your recent encounters.”

If the Thort had a head, it would have tilted it with a curious smile.

“You have been away from your Noesis, haven't you?” the Wordsmith curled its narrowing tail in a circle around its form on the floor. “Errant in other realities where you don't belong, *mm?*”

[*Mm,*] the Thort responded innocently.

“Tell me, if you can,” it said patiently. “When and what have you seen?”

The Thort pondered its collective experiences, then in a billion myriad voices it “spoke”. In the snowstorm of information, the Wordsmith could only meaningfully discern a handful. Slashing through the air. A moment, then gone:

“Be fast, Miss Forman.”

“We killed a child.”

“You have got to remember!”

“I miss him too, old girl.”

“Let them come...”

“Heaven's substitute, you say?”

“The lore of a sorcerer.”

“We must abandon ship!”

“Steady! Steady, that's more than enough,” the Wordsmith patted its hand agreeably against the tome-like catechism beside it and politely cleared its throat. The echoes faded into distant memory as the entity blushed in ultraviolet. “The colour of your experiences does not correspond with your hatch from the Third Universe.”

[*N-Space?*] it asked.

“Yes, I suppose. Instead,” its tail clacked thoughtfully. “The skein of your time trace matches *only* that Time's future. You were grazing there briefly with your hatch, but when they moved on, you left to visit the pasts of other universes in the Spectrum. Unique time zones. It's what made you stand out.”

[*Wrong,*] it lied in another creature's voice.

“No, right,” disciplined the portwatcher lightly. “Our instrumentation is very reliable, young one. You've been a great deal further abroad than just once around the Vortex.”

There was a pause.

[*Curious,*] it said in a young and bashful voice.

“Absolutely, but about what?”

[*Time,*] a strong elder voice.

“Just... Time?”

[*Thing,*] a grim middle-aged beldam, [*called,*] an enthused young boy, [*Doctor!*] a cry that could have been of any gender.

The portwatcher drew back, tapping its rounded jawline with intrigue. “Doctor? Which Doctor?”

[*Patterns,*] shrill like a Dalek, [*unbound,*] cold like a Cyberman. [*Why,*] a burst of static, [*care?*] the gurgle of an ocean-breather.

Its answer was a conspiratorial hush. The simplicity of his reasoning seemed to surprise even him as he spoke: “We are curious about the lost, you see. Unwitnessed times that exist beyond our worldly imaginings, tethered here to the Third Universe. Curious like you. You will be free to leave afterwards, we will not keep you from your people.”

The Thort hesitated for a moment, thinking. Then...

[*Curious like you,*] it said in his own tongue. An affirmation and a confirmation.

The Wordsmith smiled and whispered: “You are not alone in your divergence.”

[*Divergence,*] it buzzed.

The Thort spread its mantle wide and let its osmotic canvas unfurl like a staysail. Ribbons of memory, energy, thought and feeling winnowed outward, the shifting faces of a butterfly's wings. In the peace and comfort of the Wordmind, the creature from Lingua slowly unclasped its catechism and listened, writing implement in hand, as the Thort told all it knew of yesteryears elsewhere and the futures yet to come...

THE HOLLOW INSIDE

By J.A. Prentice

Her name was Susan.

She repeated this to herself thirteen times, looking in the mirror – glinting eyes, pixie smile, hair cut short around an elfin face. The cotton shirt still felt strange against her skin. On her world, she had worn robes of midnight.

She shook her head, blowing the thought away like dandelion seeds.

Her name was Susan. She was one of them. She was sixteen years old. She had one heart. She could not do mathematics to make Einstein blush while standing on her head. She did not know the names of all the stars in the sky. She had had never seen another sky, a sky that was old when Earth was nothing more than molten rock.

Her name was Susan. She was human.

She sighed and looked around the darkened console room. Cobwebs clung to the controls and the gleaming white of the console was buried under a film of dust.

“I know,” she said, stroking the side of the console. Her finger was thick with grey dust. “I’m sorry. But we both have to hide. We can’t let them see us. We can’t let them see the truth.”

She sighed, her head held low.

“Oh, Grandfather. If you were here, you’d know what to do.”

The central column rose just a little, whirling lights spinning inside. Then it fell again, stiff and silent as it had been. Susan sighed, dusted herself off, and left through glowing white doors that became wood and concrete the motion she stepped through them.

She was Susan Foreman now. No more TARDIS. No more thoughts of

home. She was human. And the police box sat in the junkyard, blue paint peeling, light dim, cold as ice to the touch.

Alone.

Jeff sat in his kitchen, television blaring background noise behind a propped open door, when he heard the rustling in the bins. He ignored it – cats or rats, didn't matter, he wasn't freezing his fingers off to go check – and got on with his lukewarm tea and half-finished biscuit.

The television let out a screeching wail. Black and white kaleidoscopic lines engulfed the nine o'clock news.

“Bloody signal,” Jeff muttered and got up from the kitchen table to turn it off.

The moment before the screen went dark, he could have sworn he'd seen a face in the warping shapes – a pair of bright eyes blazing intensely in the white haze.

Glass shattered behind him. Razor-sharp shards clattered onto the tiled floor.

“Oi!” Jeff shouted, rushing back into the kitchen. “Vandals!”

He stopped, staring through the shattered kitchen window. There was a face staring back – his face, down to the little mole on his cheek and the stray patches of grey stubble that had escaped the half-hearted efforts of his razor.

Jeff just stood there, looking into his own eyes.

Then his hand reached through the window frame, grabbed tight around his neck, and throttled him.

Black spots danced over his eyes. He rasped, struggling for air. The hand squeezed tighter. He reached out, fumbled, caught hold of the handle of his bread knife – still flecked with crumbs – and slashed at the hand wrapped around his throat.

Fingers pattered to the floor like branches pruned from a tree and Jeff stumbled backwards, gulping down air, his neck splotted white and red. His doppelgänger twitched its hand and blinked.

The hand, split at odd angles by his hacking, was hollow. No blood. No bone. Nothing but skin, a rotten grey on the inside, thin as a sheet of A4.

The doppelgänger stepped through the window, limbs folding and flattening like origami, took the knife from Jeff, and, with the detachment of a fisherman gutting his catch, slashed his throat from ear to ear.

The only thought that gave Jeff any consolation as he toppled onto the tiles was that this had to be a nightmare, a terrible nightmare, and he'd be waking up any moment.

He didn't wake up, not even when the thing with his face calmly stepped over him, reached down, and began to reattach its wriggling, hollow fingers.

The job was simple. Stand at the counter. Scan the items. Take the money. Be polite. Smile. Answer every question. Wish them a good day. Repeat, repeat, repeat, until your shift is over.

Susan was good at it. Or she was average at it, since it wasn't really something you could be *good* at.

On a scrap of a dropped receipt, she doodled three perfect circles with her left hand, and thought of home – the dome rising high over the sands, the rustling of silver leaves, the glow of the burnt orange sky. She remembered the smell of her father's ceremonial robes, red as blood, the soft tears of her mother, like a story that couldn't be told, and the way the House sung in the evenings, when the wind was right and all the furniture was behaving.

Twenty years Susan had lived among these people. Twenty years since she had locked her TARDIS and stepped away, out into the concrete grey of twentieth-century Earth.

“Susan!”

Her manager was heading over. She was young – an infant by Gallifreyan standards, not even a Time Tot – with her blonde hair pulled back in a tight ponytail that matched her tight face and tight lips.

“Yes, Linda?” Susan asked.

“I need you to go out back,” Linda said. “Security camera's on the blink

again. Just give it a tap and it'll sort itself out.”

“Of course.” Susan nodded, stepping away from the register. It was a quiet morning and the store was near empty. Lost souls wandered wordlessly through racks of discount coats. Everything was silent as a desert on a windless day.

“And if you see Kanti back there, tell her to come back in!” Linda called after her. “Her break ended ten minutes ago and I’m not paying her to smoke by the bins!”

Susan slipped through the winding labyrinth of empty aisles, off-white shelves, and off-brand kitchen supplies, and out into the cold mist of the London morning. There was a noise to her left and Susan turned to look.

Three figures in black encircled Kanti, who lay on the cold ground with a rose-red wound blooming on her brow. Kanti’s breathing was slow and her eyes were closed.

A small knife gleamed in the leader’s hand and she bent down, her hand moving with surgical precision.

“Stop!” Susan shouted.

All three turned to look at her, their heads cocked to one side. Two were strangers. The third – the one with the knife – had Kanti’s face.

She was identical to the girl lying on the ground, from the gleam of her brown skin to the disorganised tumble of her hair to the cigarette-smudged pink lipstick. But her eyes – they were dead, glassy, wrong.

Usually, Susan could hear the hum of human thought, a whisper of radio static, but these creatures were quiet. Empty.

“I don’t know what you are,” she said, “but you should leave. Now.”

They leapt as one, bodies hurtling weightless as kites, smacking into her like wet newspaper caught on the wind. They wrapped around her, squeezing, tightening, constricting, crawling. Darkness slipped over her eyes, her nose, her mouth, smothering her in nothing.

She would have fallen to her knees but they held her fast, locking her in position as the oxygen fled from her lungs and her world became cold, silent, and empty.

“Run!” Grandfather yells. “Run!”

Silver travel capsules all around. Ships like galaxies in bottles, bigger on the inside. The shadows of the Citadel creep around us.

Deeper. Deeper. They’re watching us. They must be. Watching.

She gasped, feeling skin tight against her lips, sealing her mouth.

White light. Roundels slowly coming to life. The rotor groans. The Ship is waking up.

“Time and Relative Dimension in Space,” you whisper. “TARDIS.”

A sound from deep inside the machine. Reverberating.

“She likes it.” Grandfather beams “Oh, yes, she likes it.”

And then – boots. Feet pounding. Stasers arming.

TARDIS isn’t moving fast enough. Grandfather looks at you.

“I’ll stall them,” he says. “I shall be back. Yes, I shall come back.” He smiles. “No tears, Susan.”

Or maybe he didn’t say Susan.

The doors open and he steps outside. To stall.

The monitor starts – Black-and-white, wobbly. He steps towards them, the Castellan’s people – and others, dressed in long robes.

He starts to talk and they fire.

You run for the doors, but they’re already closing. The controls are moving, shifting. He’s made them do this.

He was never coming back.

You scream. The sound is lost in the void, just you and the Ship, tumbling through everywhere and nowhere, Grandfather’s body lying on the floor.

Susan screamed – with her voice, with her mind, with every cell of her being.

The things ripped from her, torn into fragments floating on the wind like burst balloons. She could see scraps of clothes and skin fluttering down to the ground, grey and fungal on the inside.

She coughed. Her mouth tasted like death. Little bits of skin clung to her shirt.

Kanti stirred. She looked up at Susan with bleary eyes, blood trickling down the side of her face.

“Susan?” she mumbled.

“You tripped,” Susan said, “and hit your head. You might have a concussion. You should see a . . .” She stopped. “You should go to a hospital.”

“Right.” Kanti nodded.

And then something fell on Kanti’s shirt. She reached up to pluck it off. It was an eye, attached to a scrap of torn skin. It blinked.

Kanti screamed and ran.

“Not my problem,” Susan whispered, brushing skin from her shirt.

By the time she got back inside, she’d almost convinced herself it was true.

There were three of them: three and *him*.

The Highlander stood by the pentagonal console, spinning his dirk between his fingers, watching it flash in the dim light.

The Teacher sat in a chair, a book in one hand – *Pride and Prejudice*. By the other hand, a thin silver rod rested on the arm of the chair. The Highlander flinched as her fingers brushed against it. She winked and turned back to the book.

The Cheetah-girl lay in the Teacher’s lap, yellow eyes two blazing torches. The Teacher ran her fingers through the Cheetah-girl’s hair and she purred, showing white teeth sharp enough to cut flesh. She wore black leather and a bandoleer, strapped down with explosives of her own concocting: Powders and gases and liquids, all ready to burst.

They were his horsemen, his acolytes. Where they went, death followed.

And him – he was the Mad God. Ancient and terrible, dressed all in black, his face engulfed in shadows. Coral, grey as death, crawled over his flesh, up his robes like shimmering midnight, terminating in a crown of thorns that stabbed into his skin with needle-thin tendrils. Crusted blood collected on his forehead. He was perfectly still, perfectly silent, his face furrowed in

concentration. A dark, untamed beard fell over his chest, tangled and wild, coral mixing with curls of dark hair.

“He’s been in too long,” the Highlander said. “With nae sign of when he’ll be coming out.”

“*Nae sign.*” The Teacher’s eyes narrowed. “But *very* specific directions.”

“And we’re just supposed to follow them?” The Highlander slammed his dirk down into the coral-cruled console. “Like his pets?”

“Pets?” The Teacher laughed. “He’s a God. We’re not even insects to him.”

“Maybe we should just land,” the Cheetah-girl said. “Stretch our legs.” She clawed the arm of the chair. “Kill something.”

“He said to stay,” the Teacher replied. “So we stay.”

The Cheetah-girl growled, white teeth flashing, but settled back down. The Highlander sighed, shook his head, and looked at the Mad God.

“I hope you’re out soon,” he said. “I’m getting bored.”

And the Mad God gasped, mouth wide, eyes flashing open. The coral shrieked, recoiling and tightening, twisting and shifting. The whole room was a shifting mass of tendrils.

“What is it?” the Teacher asked, her book thrown aside. “What did you see?”

“Gallifreyan,” the God hissed. “Gallifreyan...”

The Teacher paled and stepped back. The Highlander stopped turning his dirk.

The Cheetah-girl smiled. “I’ve always wanted to kill a god.”

By the time she reached her apartment, Susan knew something was wrong. Shadows moved under the edge of the door and there were sounds inside – cheap floorboards giving tiny creaks under heavy boots. The stink of tobacco was already permeating the air, the wood, the floors.

There were people in her home. If she was lucky, they were burglars. If not...

But she had to know. She opened the door and stepped through.

A rifle shoved into her face, so close she could see down the barrel: a dark tunnel like a black hole.

Soldiers. Ten soldiers, dressed in black, carrying guns. Susan sighed. At least they seemed human, neither flat as the Hollow Men or deep as her People.

“Miss Foreman?” asked the lead soldier, square-jawed and dark-haired.

“I...” Susan’s voice squeaked. “What... What are you doing here? Are you police? Have I... Have done something—”

“Let’s not play games.” The voice came from around the corner. Susan looked and saw a woman sitting on her sofa, a cigarette between her fingers. Her skin was pale, her hair a reddish brown, her eyes a pale grey.

“You’re not a soldier,” Susan said.

“And you’re not human,” the woman replied. “Don’t worry. We won’t dissect you. We just need your help.”

“And if I don’t give it?”

“*Then* we might dissect you.”

“What do you want with me?”

“The Hollow Men.” The woman stabbed her cigarette down on Susan’s coffee table, creating a dark, round burn. “You stopped them.”

“How did you...” Susan sighed. “Kanti.”

“She went to the police.” The woman shook her head. “Stupid girl. She’s fortunate we got to her before they did.”

“There are more of them?”

The woman nodded. “We don’t know how many. They’re hard to detect.” She peered at Susan, like she was mentally peeling layers of her skin away. “But you... You can tell, can’t you? Telepathy?”

“I’m... just Susan. Susan Foreman.”

“No. You’re not. Susan Foreman couldn’t rip those creatures apart like wet paper just by screaming.” The woman smiled. “I’ve looked at your records. You’re entirely unremarkable. Nobody is that boring unless they’re

trying to be. Either you're the vanguard of an invasion... Or you're a refugee. No family, no world, always afraid that someone will come for you. At night you dream of the people you've lost and the people you hope you've lost."

Susan said nothing.

"I'm right, aren't I?"

"The Hollow Men. What are they?"

The woman shook her head. "We don't know. We only found them by accident. There was a car crash. The driver was ripped in two, one half on the road and other in a ditch." A soldier twitched, but the woman went on, cool as a night breeze. "Both halves were still moving. And inside..."

"Nothing," Susan finished. "Just grey."

The woman nodded. "And since then, we've had more incidents. Enough to make us believe this is the beginning of an invasion."

"You keep saying *we*." Susan's eyes darted from soldier to soldier. "Who are you?"

"How rude of me." The woman extended her hand. "I'm Professor Elizabeth Shaw. And this is Torchwood."

A dart struck Susan in the neck, biting like a mosquito. Her vision swam drunkenly and she swayed onto the rising floor, thudding into the carpet, bristles tickling her face. She heard Shaw's voice, growing more and more distant, fading to an echo.

"The thing to know about us, Miss Foreman, is that we don't take no for an answer."

In Susan's dream, she and Grandfather were running through a mist full of gleaming mirrors, hanging like stars in the heavens. She saw herself with a different face in each mirror. Reflections of a hundred possibilities: some old, some young, some male, some female, some like warriors, some like poets. All had the same smile, the same shadows in their eyes. Their lips parted in silent whispers.

"Run, child!" Grandfather shouted. "Run!"

Behind them in the mist was a thing, man-shaped but made of shadows. Its head was a snow globe, swirling with black ink. It reached for them and Susan heard a laugh old as the stars and saw the shadow of an old man, dancing at the heart of time.

Susan blinked. She was in a room with no windows, a large mirror running down one wall. She was sitting in a chair – not handcuffed, not bound, just sitting. They evidently hadn't thought it would be necessary to secure her. Two soldiers stood flanked the door, their rifles hostile as their expressions. The honeycomb "I" on the wall left no doubt where she was.

She focused her mind on the guards, thought *sweetyounggirl*, and said, "Those guns aren't necessary."

The soldiers didn't react. Susan frowned.

The door opened and Shaw stepped in, a file under her arm an irritatingly superior look on her face.

"Whatever it is you're trying to do," she said, "it won't work. These men have been conditioned against hypnosis or any other sort of mental influence."

Mental influence. Susan smiled at the clumsy term. A Time Lord didn't influence. They *translated*. They spoke every language, always knew the right word to say, the whisper that could start a revolution, the tone that would induce sympathy. It was nothing more than linguistics, really.

"You kidnapped me," Susan said.

"Don't be boring," Shaw replied. "We have more important things to deal with."

She sat, laid the file open on the table, and pushed it towards Susan. It was a mass of charts and figures, readings taken from more satellites than the Earth should have had in this primitive era.

"Mass shadows," Susan said. "And a signal. Broadcasting on frequencies that sometimes overlap with radio and television."

Shaw nodded. "Mass shadows without mass. There's nothing out there. It's a fleet of unseen ships, lurking in our orbit. And here..." She turned

over a page to show five blurred photos of what looked like a massive, knife of shadow tearing across the skylines of London, New York, Sydney, Tokyo, and Beijing.

“And you think this is where the Hollow Men are receiving orders from?” Susan asked.

Shaw nodded and tapped a chart. “The broadcast must be reaching them. As to how they’re receiving...” She shrugged. “We don’t know.”

“It must be telepathic,” Susan said. “A mental force...” She looked at Shaw. “Whoever’s doing this must be very powerful.”

“Powerful like you?” Shaw asked.

“More than me,” Susan replied. “This...” She shuddered. “You should leave.”

“The room?”

“The *planet*. This force is going to tear your world apart.”

The door opened and the soldiers saluted. A man walked in: his bearing military, his dark hair close-cropped, a moustache over his tight, thin lips, and a long, jagged scar across his face. It was a claw-mark – a mark made by no creature of this planet.

“That, Miss Foreman,” he said, “was where we were hoping you could help us.”

“Administrator Lethbridge-Stewart,” Shaw said, hurriedly rising to her feet. “I wasn’t expecting you.”

“When the fate of the human race is at stake, Professor Shaw,” Lethbridge-Stewart said, “I would rather take a personal hand. Especially since our monitoring stations have picked up more signals, stronger than ever before.”

“Stronger...” Shaw paled. “The invasion. It’s starting.”

“Then we’ll have to stop it, won’t we?” He looked at Susan. “Suggestions?”

“Run,” Susan replied. “And let me go.”

He smiled wryly. “I am afraid that won’t be possible. You have a simple choice. Either you help us stop these creatures...” In a flash, a pistol was in

his hand, pointed directly at her left heart. “Or we’ll kill you and extract what we need from your brain.”

“There won’t be anything to...” Susan stopped. “Extract? You can extract thoughts from a brain? That’s far beyond human technological capability for this era.”

“Scavenged technology,” Lethbridge-Stewart replied. “Repurposed for the British Empire. We use it for... enhanced interrogation.”

“You mean torture.”

“Don’t presume to judge us.” Lethbridge-Stewart turned away. “I was like you, once. I thought there was a better way. That changed.”

“Your scar.” Susan looked at it. “You took it in battle. Battle with an alien creature.”

“A yeti, believe it or not.” He shook his head. “I was the only survivor. That’s when Torchwood found me. When I realized that sometimes the only way to fight fire...” His pistol gleamed in the flickering cell light. “Is with more fire.”

“But it works telepathically,” Susan said. “This device?”

“It does,” Shaw said. She looked at Susan. “You think we can use it.”

“I can use it,” Susan said. “If you have broadcast equipment and you set it to the right frequencies...”

“You can broadcast your own signal to counter theirs.” Shaw smiled. “That’s clever.”

Lethbridge-Stewart frowned. “We’d be giving you the ability to broadcast your mind over the entire planet. How do we know we can trust you?”

His radio crackled – a static shriek, followed by eerie, warbling noise. Susan looked him in the eyes.

“You don’t have a choice.”

He nodded. “Be fast, Miss Foreman.”

The television screen flickered, an eerie static pouring from the speakers. It sounded like the laments of mechanical angels. Shouts and jeers rang out

through the pub as Eddie struggled with the dials.

“Bring back the match!”

“What’s wrong with the picture?”

Eddie ignored them, busying himself with the set. It was brand new, top of the line. It shouldn’t be doing this.

No amount of adjusting conjured up the game. It was lost in fields of distorting static, swaying back and forth, fountains of white dancing in a world of black.

Eddie sighed and turned off the set.

“Sorry,” he said, as the groans and shouts became deafening. “Sorry, but there’s nothing I can do.”

There were three customers who weren’t shouting. Three who were still as statues, their eyes watching him.

Three who cracked their bottles and glasses against the hard wood of the bar, shards of glass flying in all directions.

“Oi!” Eddie shouted. “You’ll be paying for those!”

Then the screams started and the sticky, beer-stained floor ran red.

Steam poured over the edge of the china cup. The Prime Minister sat in her rooms, looking over legislation. The phones were silent, the knocks on the door had stopped, and she had a moment – just a fleeting, blessed moment – of silence.

The door creaked and she sighed. So much for that.

She looked up and saw her husband standing in the doorway. There was a curiously blank expression on his face.

“What is it, dear?” she asked. “I’m busy.”

He closed the door. Then locked it.

“Really,” she said. “I don’t have time for games.”

He walked up to her desk, reached out, and smothered her, his expression unchanged as she clawed at his hands, his arms, his face, trying to wrench him off her. He held on tight until she lay limp on the desk, her golden

curls sunk into the paperwork, her eyes blank as his, staring at nothing.

The teacup sat on the table, slowly cooling as the Prime Minister's husband opened the window and stepped out into the wind, carried away into the endless sky.

They came out of their houses, their shops, their offices, all falling into step, marching down the street. They were housewives, accountants, children, soldiers. Their eyes were dim as glass and they moved like they had no weight, their steps lithe as a leaf in the wind.

In every country, every city, every town, the Hollow Men marched.

The device was a cap, the inside lined with electrodes, the outside coiling with wires like Medusa's hair, all feeding into crudely wired broadcast equipment. Lights flashed and outlets sparked as Susan sat down in the chair at the centre of the room. Shaw held the cap in her hands, glancing to Lethbridge-Stewart for approval.

"They're everywhere," he said. "We act now or the planet is lost."

"I'm ready when you are," Susan said.

She gripped the chair tight as the cap descended, her knuckles turning white. Her brain felt hot, like needles were lancing through her dreams. She gritted her teeth, her muscles tensing.

"Are you all right?" Shaw asked.

Susan nodded, sweat gleaming on her brow. "Set the frequency."

And she felt lightning stab through her, felt her hair stick up on end. She wanted to reach for the cap, to tear it off, to dash it on the floor.

She breathed. In. Out.

In her mind's eye, she saw it: a swarming mass, reaching in all directions, a dark cloud thundering towards her. She stood before it like a tree before a hurricane.

"Contact," she whispered.

Roses – red petals, wet with dew. In the droplets, you see faces – Father, Uncles, Cousins, Grandmother... Grandfather. Memories, dancing like tears on the flower's edge.

Thousands of roses, curling with razor thorns, winding away into the distance, up and down strange paths: some curling, some straight, some zigging back and forth. A maze. It's a maze.

"Did you think," a voice asks, "that you could match me?"

But you can.

You're not a child. Not anymore.

You can do this.

"Contact."

Blue-grey eyes flashed open. The coral rippled, strange shapes shifting. Breath hissed between the Mad God's rough lips.

The Teacher, the Highlander, and the Cheetah-girl rushed to his throne, their heads bowed.

"The girl," the Mad God said. "She seeks... She seeks to destroy us. But..." His head hung, drooped in shadow. "But there's, there's something familiar about her. Like... Like an old friend. Like *him*."

"What do we do?" the Highlander asked.

"Find her," the god spat. "Find her and bring the Ship there. Stab it into the Earth. Then do what you're good at."

He settled back, face creased in concentration, and was swallowed by tendrils of coral. The Cheetah-girl smiled.

"Go forth and kill?"

The Teacher nodded and looked at the Highlander. "Simple enough that maybe even you can do it right."

"Hey!" he protested, but she was already shoving past him to the overgrown console. Her hands danced over the controls, pulling switches and turning dials. On the far side, the Cheetah-girl did the same. The rotor groaned, pale green light flickering through the room.

And in the middle of London, a black mist became a black shadow, then a black knife, dark as night, sharp as steel, plunged into the Earth. Concrete crumbled and screams echoed as the Ship tore its way into existence, ripping through the heart of the city.

“What now?” Shaw asked.

“Now?” Lethbridge-Stewart sighed. “We wait. There’s nothing else we can do.”

A siren shrieked, echoing through the grey halls. Lethbridge-Stewart reached for his revolver, feeling the weight of the bullets in their chambers.

“It seems,” he said, “that the enemy have decided to pay us a visit.”

He walked towards the door. Shaw started to follow, but he shook his head.

“Sir—”

“No, Professor,” he interrupted. “Miss Foreman is the key to all this. She’s our only hope of stopping these creatures. I need you to protect her.”

“And what about you?”

He said nothing. In a moment he was gone, the door bolted shut behind him, and Shaw stood alone with the sleeping girl and the machine, alarms blaring around them like the cries of hungry ghosts.

At the heart of the maze there is a mirror with your face in it. Short, dark hair, bright eyes. A face so much younger than you are.

“Susan,” your face says. “Turn back. There’s no way forward. Give up.”

The other will presses against yours. It’s a dark cloud in the sky, crashing with thunder.

“Turn back.”

There’s no way out. No doors. No gates. All the paths are gone, swallowed by more bushes, by more roses, by more thorns.

“Out, child.” The voice isn’t yours even though it comes from your lips. “You can’t stop us. Nothing can.”

But there is one way out. One way left.

“No.” The reflected eyes widen. “No, you can’t. Your mind will be torn apart!”

You punch the glass and it shatters. The reflection becomes shards, becomes infinite faces, infinite voices. You tumble in a word of black and mirrors, mirrors, mirrors, tiny shards with tiny Susans, all screaming, screaming, screaming, screaming.

A narrow corridor was all that spanned the gap from the transmission room where Susan lay and the night-black doors that had appeared from nowhere, jabbing through walls and floor as if they weren’t there. Twenty battle-hardened soldiers stared down the scopes of their rifles at those doors of death. Red lights flashed. Alarms blared. Itchy fingers brushed triggers.

“Steady,” Lethbridge-Stewart ordered.

The doors opened.

Three emerged: the Highlander, his sword sharp enough to carve atoms; the Cheetah-girl, her claws outstretched; the Teacher, her little silver rod turning between her fingers.

Behind them, in the shadows, a hunched figure sat on a throne, wreathed in darkness.

“Fire!” Lethbridge-Stewart ordered.

Fingers squeezed triggers. Click. Click. Click.

He looked down at his gun. It hadn’t fired. None of them had.

The Teacher raised the rod and smiled.

“Sorry,” she said. “No bullets today. We’re doing this the old-fashioned way.”

And they were in motion. The Highlander’s blade struck through three men, moving like a scalpel through paper. The Teacher’s rod flashed and two soldiers vanished in bursts of dark fire. The Cheetah-girl threw a silver canister and watched as a cluster of soldiers, a door, and part of wall became a cloud of red and grey in a terrible thunderclap of noise.

Alistair Gordon Lethbridge-Stewart knew he was going to die.

But he’d be damned if he’d go out without taking one of them with him.

He might not have bullets, but he was never unarmed. He reached for his knife.

“Boy!” he shouted.

The Highlander turned his head. An open shot.

“You’re a disgrace to Scotland.”

His knife arced through the air and plunged into the Highlander’s chest, burying itself deep.

The Highlander roared – “*Creag an tuire!*” – and charged, stumbling as his blade plunged into Lethbridge-Stewart’s heart.

They fell together, just two more corpses on the floor.

Fragmentation.

You stare up from the hospital bed, at their concerned faces. Nurses and... the Doctor. White coat, white face, white hair. Lips pursed as he looks over the clipboard.

“Grandfather.”

“No, no.” He shakes his head. “I’m not your grandfather. That’s just part of your delusion. Your madness.”

You can’t get up. There are white straps, binding you. Tight. Choking like snakes.

“The TARDIS. I have to get back to—”

“There is no TARDIS, child.” He shakes his head. “Only a police box. An old police box in a junkyard. Your teachers – Mister Chesterton and Ms Wright – followed you home because they were worried about you. They found you living there, feeding off food scavenged from bins, only a little fire to keep you warm.”

“No. That’s not...” The bonds squeeze tighter. Lights burning at your eyes. “That’s not true. It only looks like a police box, but really it’s—”

“A ship that travels through time and space?” A smile. Not unkind. “Now, really, does that sound like something you’d find in a junkyard? Or does it sound like a dream? The dream of a child who can’t cope with what really happened.”

There’s a snow-globe on the table next to the bed. White snow falling on golden towers of tiny clockwork. Silver leaves twist around the base. Gallifrey.

Is this all home was? Is this all your past is? A delusion?

No. This is another layer. Another defence.

So break it.

You shake the bed, hard as you can.

The Doctor shouts. "Stop her! Stop her!"

But it's too late. The snow-globe perches on the edge, a bird ready to take flight. One more shove.

It falls in slow motion. A feather on the breeze.

"Come on," Shaw urged. "We don't have all day."

The door burst open, six inches of steel turned to dust. A glass screen shattered, the shards spraying over the floor. Shaw dropped for cover, hidden behind the equipment banks.

She heard the patter of footsteps, then voices.

"Do you want her? Or should I do it?"

"I'll do it. Looks fun."

She couldn't let them get Susan. She couldn't.

Shaw saw the cable. One chance. She took a breath, whispered a quick prayer to any deity that might have been listening, and stood.

The Cheetah-girl turned. Eyes bright, teeth glinting, claws stretched, she leapt – and Shaw shoved the cable into her chest.

Her body convulsed as she flew back, smacking straight into the wall. She fell, skin blackened, 600 volts of electricity pulsing through her stopped heart.

The Teacher's face twisted, brown eyes brimming with tears and fury.

"Die," she hissed.

Her rod flashed. For a quarter of a millisecond, Liz Shaw felt as though every cell in body was pierced by red-hot needles.

Then she felt nothing at all, atoms scattered like leaves on the wind.

Darkness. Darkness full of spinning shards. Whispering your past.

You are Arkytior, rose in bloom. Newborn but old blood. Screaming first breaths as your home burns. A voice whispers – Grandfather but not Grandfather – ‘you are safe.’

You are Larn, princess of an ancient line, and he saved you.

You are Lola, schoolgirl, all hormones and twisting ankles, infant-young.

Your father is the President and now he has fallen and you must run, Grandfather says, because he has stolen the Moon and–

They’re talking in the next room and you can see their shadows, cast on the floor with the stretching shapes of enormous furniture. They whisper of Hybrids and prophecies and pacts and revolution and a thousand other secret things – nighttime things, never to be spoken in the light of day.

“What you’re asking me to do...” The shadow turns. “It’s madness. Rewriting biodata... It isn’t just a crime. It’s a reordering of the universe. The Time Lords won’t know the truth... but maybe she won’t either. Maybe you won’t. It’s madness.”

“Madness, eh?” Grandfather raps his knuckles on a table. “Madness. Perhaps. Yes, perhaps it is mad. But all this is mad. There are no safe paths left. Only this: that the truth must be hidden. Yes, hidden even at the cost of memory.”

Silence.

“Please,” grandfather says. “For old times’ sake.”

And in the crack of the door, two eyes burning, burning dark. Like black holes.

No. No more. You are Susan. That is all that matters.

The splinters and whispers fade. And you can feel them, can feel them all: hollow things, dotted across the face of the world, a single organism swarming in the shadows.

You slide into them, simple as sliding fingers into a glove. An army, listening to the slightest thought. You can lay the world to waste simple as twitching a finger.

“It’s over,” you whisper.

And like a candle in the wind, they are gone.

Across the world, in every nation, every city, they fell. They toppled onto streets, onto bars, onto floors, deflating like burst balloons, skin folding onto skin. Flesh popped and bubbled, running in rivers of grey wax.

Pain gave way to silence, then to shouts of relief. Breaths held were

released, laughs rang out.

And then came the second silence, darker than the first, broken only by sobs and whispers, as the living called out the names of the dead.

There is nothing left but the dark now. The dark and him: tattered-black king with thorny throne and coral crown.

His eyes go wide.

“Oh,” he whispers. “It’s you.”

Susan stumbled back, sweat beading on her forehead. The cap fell from her brow, smashing against the hard floor.

“No. No, it can’t be.”

“What have you *done*?”

Susan looked around. Shaw and Lethbridge-Stewart were gone. Smashed equipment, stray wires, and broken glass dotted the floor. It stank of ash and burnt flesh. A Cheetah-girl lay in the doorway, her skin scorched black.

There was nobody there but her, the dead, and the woman – her dark eyes blazing, tear-rimmed but unwavering. Her brown hair was in disarray and she held a silver rod between trembling fingers.

“What have you done?”

“You’ve lost,” Susan said.

And the woman – the Teacher – smiled a cold, broken smile, aimed her weapon, and whispered, “So have you.”

Her eyes widened and her lips parted in a strained gasp. Red blossomed over her chest, spurting from a narrow dagger wound. She had just enough time to look into the eyes of her killer as she fell: the eyes of her master, her commander, her Mad God.

He stood there, looking at Susan over the corpse.

“Susan,” he said. “Oh, Susan.”

His shoulders fell, his eyes brimmed with tears, and the light made his beard look more ragged than wild. He was a small man, his robes too big for his shoulders.

He sat on a pile of rubble and looked down at the Teacher's body, her glassy eyes still wide with betrayal. Her weapon lay by the tips of her outstretched fingers. Grey dust settled on a mop of dark, unruly hair.

"Grandfather," Susan said. "I thought... I thought you were dead."

"No." Grandfather shook his head. "No, not dead. Many things, but not that."

"What did they do to you?"

"They broke me. They tore my mind apart, cell by cell, memory by memory, looking for..." He frowned. "I can't remember. But it must have been important, mustn't it?"

"And you escaped?"

He beamed. "Yes. I did rather, didn't I? Even... Even the Time Lords couldn't keep me prisoner for long. And they had this experimental craft, this Battle TARDIS, so I..." His eyes twinkled, stars on a dark and clouded night. "I stole it. I ran as far away from our People as I could. I'm building an army, you see, an empire to challenge them." He rubbed his hands together. "They don't stand a chance."

"And what about the people, Grandfather?"

"People?" He frowned. "What people?"

"The ones you killed."

"Oh, them." He waved a hand. "They have such little lives. Like mayflies. They were going to die anyway. They kill each other by the thousands every day. They're really quite ingenious about it."

"There are good things about them too. Just..." She shook her head. "Just listen to their music. The really good songs – the Beatles, the Common Men... They're more than just songs. They're a light, showing them a better way."

"It doesn't matter," Grandfather muttered, kicking at the ash. "You stopped me, didn't you? Saved your little world. Broke all my toys." He sighed. "How am I supposed to stop the Time Lords without an army?"

"What good would an army have done?" Susan asked. "Conquering worlds, it's..." She stopped. "This plan... Are you sure it's yours?"

“Mine!” He leapt indignantly to his feet and puffed out his chest. “Of course it’s mine! Who else’s would it be?”

“How did you escape?”

He blinked. “How did I what?”

“How did you escape?”

“I... I...” His face went pale. “I don’t remember.”

“Because you didn’t. You’re not fighting the Time Lords. You’re their agent.”

“No!” Snarling, he turned on her – and then his shoulders fell and he hung his head. “No. It was my plan. Of course it was. And it’s not over yet. Oh no. I can start all over again. Another world. Skaro, perhaps. Yes, Skaro!” He rubbed his hands with glee. “We can do it, you know, Susan. We can stop them. We can make them pay.” He stuck out his hand. “Well? What do you say? Shall we travel together? Just like we planned. Just you and me.”

Susan looked at the rubble, at the bodies, at the ash, at the great gates of the battle TARDIS doors. She saw her reflection, cast in jagged shards of broken glass, and reached down. Her fingers brushed against her face – a child’s face still, with pale skin and eyes that shone like far-off stars.

“Come with me, Susan,” Grandfather said. “Leave this world behind.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “It’s time.”

She took his hand and pulled him tight, her cheek against his chest. Her tears ran down his robe, streaking through dust and ash. The beat of his hearts pounded loud as her own.

“I’m sorry, Grandfather.”

“I know.” His voice was worn as old shoelaces. “I know.”

The shard of glass cut into her palm as she stabbed – deep, through robes, through skin, until she struck the heart. The dagger in her other hand – his dagger – stabbed just as deep, piercing the second heart. His eyes stared, his hands clutched, his lips twisted in pain, and he toppled forward, collapsing his full weight into her arms. She lowered him gently to the ground, cradling his body as the ash settled around them.

Sirens sounded in the distance, far above. They'd be here soon. She only had moments.

Susan looked at the fallen Cheetah-girl, her body charred black. There was still a single capsule, silver-grey stained with black, dangling from her belt. Susan picked it up, turning it in her hand, and walked over battlefield, towards the high gates of the battle TARDIS, cracked open to let her see within.

Dying coral crumbled in the midst of a twisted black room, the console deformed and off-kilter. Every surface was beset by a creeping black-brown stain. It was a psychotic thing, broken as its pilot. She'd heard stories of such Ships, mad and bereft of their pilots, swallowing stars and ravaging timelines in their uncontrollable grief.

“No more,” Susan said and threw the grenade.

There was a flash of darkness, a wailing shriek, a clap of off-key thunder, and then only silence.

The night was full of sirens and smoke. All London was in disarray, the nightmare of the Hollow Men scarcely seeming real in the light of the pale moon.

Susan stumbled, steadying herself against the rough brick wall. Her side blazed with pain. She hadn't gotten away from the explosion quite fast enough.

“TARDIS,” she muttered. “I need the TARDIS.”

The scrapyard gates were just ahead. Blood dripping down her side, her vision swaying to-and-fro, her head aching like a beaten drum, Susan pushed against peeling blue paint. She limped past piles of scrap, huge and looming mountains of forgotten things. Rats scurried in the darkness and the air tasted old and stale on her tongue.

And there it was, just as she left it: the old police box, covered in dust and cobwebs, barely any blue left to be seen amongst the grey. She turned her blood-slick key in the lock and tumbled into warm white light.

The Ship groaned and the doors swung shut behind her. She pulled herself across the dusty floor and up to the console. Her fingers danced

across the controls and the central column jerked into motion, a bright light shining through the glass.

With a wheezing, ripping sound, the TARDIS hurtled into motion and Susan collapsed to the floor. In the rafters, a colony of flutterwings stirred, circling in the light of the pulsing roundels.

Susan lay on the floor and watched them dance, kicking up clouds of dust that whirled wildly around the awakening TARDIS.

“*Susan.*” Lethbridge-Stewart’s face flashed across her eyes.

“*Susan.*” It was Kanti, smiling, hand outstretched.

“*Susan.*” Mister Chesterton and Ms Wright, back from Coal Hill.

“*Child.*”

Grandfather’s face. *Her* Grandfather, silver-haired and smiling.

Susan didn’t know if she could regenerate: she wasn’t a Time Lord, hadn’t graduated the academy. But she could feel something, a stirring in her DNA, a whisper in her blood.

Perhaps...

Then all was swallowed in light, golden light, pure as spring, and Susan smiled.



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DOCTOR WHO
and the
HUMANS

by DAN WORSLEY

DOCTOR WHO AND THE HUMANS

by Dan Worsley

The two younglings were just the right age to get into serious mischief, but not too old to be seriously chastised for it. They weren't yearlings still under the constant supervision of their parents, but not quite old enough to be safely left alone. This was why they'd crept, in the middle of the night out of their parents' campsite and into the winding tunnels underneath the Monument to Rebirth. The shorter of the two was named Ame and she swore that she heard noises underground. The taller one was called Ruri and he was by far the more cautious of the two. Ame's third eye flashed with excitement as she described the sound, yet again, to Ruri.

"It sounded like one of the tusked mammals, but an old one, wheezing and groaning. If it's gotten lost, it might be hurt!"

"Ame, they don't live on this island, it's too cold for them," he shivered. "It's too cold for us. It's probably why the apes liked it so much." Finding reasons for things was Ruri's forte, it was why he and Ame got along so well, she got them into trouble and he found ways to explain it and get them out of it again. They were both scholar-caste, ideally suited for the gloom of the tunnels, their third eyes picking out the faint phosphorescence that filled the cave system well enough to quickly navigate the tunnels to where Ame believed she heard the animal noises. Suddenly, the natural curve of rock became the hard lines of some sort of manufactured structure. Full of straight lines, right angles and peeling paint.

"Whoa..." Was all Ruri could say.

Ame was, for once, speechless.

The new tunnel was even darker, there was no natural illumination generated by paeleoluminescence, the only light was from down the tunnel,

from a chamber off of the main causeway. They moved as quietly as possible towards the light and, peering cautiously around the chamber's mouth, they saw that the chamber was full of tiny burning lights. Although they were smart enough for their age, they lost count of the tiny, flickering flames. In the corner of the artificial cave was a large dark shape, all unnatural lines and squiggly lines that danced in the candlelight. The room, however, was dominated by a large figure. Initially scared, the younglings soon realised it was just a scholar-caste, standing motionless in the centre of the chamber. They approached the figure. He looked like any other scholar-caste, except his scales had an odd iridescence to them. He also wore some sort of cloth covering over his plastron, it was a riot of colours that left his arms free and uncovered. They crept closer and saw water glistening on his cheek. A voice rumbled: "If you're here to show respect, feel free to stay. If not, please kindly leave."

The figure had spoken with utter conviction and command.

The younglings looked at each other once and then bolted for the door.

Breathless from their flight, with just enough terror to lend their small legs power, Ame and Ruri raced back to the safety of their parents' sides.

Just as they approached their parents, their small hearts skipped a beat when they saw who was sitting with them around a table set with strange bowls full of an acrid steaming liquid. The voice that so filled them with terror again rumbled: "I'm sorry children for giving you the willies."

This time, he spoke with a hidden humour rather than open grief but the same edge of utter authority remained. He then raised one of the steaming cup, took a dainty sip that looked both utterly ridiculous and entirely nonchalant to the ridiculousness. The large figure said: "Would you care for some tea? It's the perfect thing to have after you've had a bit of a shock."

Somehow, the actions and the tone had turned him from a terror-inducing wraith and into something of an avuncular figure. Someone somehow both jovial and sad. Ame, usually the first to speak up and damn the consequences, eventually found her voice.

"What were you doing down there?"

The stranger regarded her evenly, his three eyes lost in shadow. Eventually, he said: “Tomorrow is Rebirth Day isn’t it? The day you all commemorate waking up from your aeonic nap. Well, for you that’s a day of celebration. For me, it’s different.” His voice took a dark turn. His face had fallen fully into shadow, but the flickering light from the campfires was reflected in his eyes, eyes that shone brighter than anyone Ame had ever seen.

“The apes?” Ruri added, always emboldened by Ame he finally spoke up.

“Humans,” the stranger corrected with an admonishing wiggle of a claw. “Many of whom were my friends. You’re quite perceptive aren’t you my boy?”

Ruri wasn’t sure if he was being patronised, but the flicker of warmth in his tone suggested not. He rose, nodded politely to Ame and Ruri’s parents amiably. “I’m glad to see your children safe, I’ll bid you good night.” Just before he disappeared into the night, Ame called out, her curiosity finally winning out over her fear. “Who are you?”

The flickering light caught his face and it appeared that there was a slight twitch of a smile around his mouth when he said: “I’m the Doctor.”

By any measure you chose to apply, Okdel was old. In fact, he’d insist that he was *old*. The definite example of *old*. He was born, if you counted the calendar, millions of years ago. If you counted the dawns he’d witnessed, then those to were many, they ran into nearly two hundred thousand. So, quite old by almost anyone’s measure. Anyone except his companion on the windswept chalk coastline. The Doctor was uncharacteristically silent and still. Okdel regarded the huge form brooding beside him. He looked like something from his childhood, a statue to commemorate one of the ancient Demi-gods that the artists of that aeon-gone age seemed to love carving into stone or set in ink on the walls of the more affluent habitats. One of the thunder gods, he thought. Something full of sound, fury and potential. “Okdel, why did you call? The space-time telegraph isn’t a toy.” He rumbled in approbation. Definitely a thunder god.

Okdel approached him. “I know this time of year is painful for you—”

The moment he'd said it, he knew he'd misspoken.

“Painful?!” He exploded. The silence that followed echoed with his rage and sadness. “I can’t imagine why that would be,” he added softly.

“I was there, Doctor. I tried as much as you to stop—” Okdel’s bones ached, but his heart ached more at the memory. He remembered the Doctor as he was, looking like a silvermaned ape, working feverishly to find a cure for a wildly mutating virus released by Morkal, may he name be forgotten. He remembered the months passing with no hope and eventually the Doctor himself succumbing to the plague, in the last few hours before they released the cure into the atmosphere. They’d saved most mammalian life, but not the Human race. Okdel remembered holding the Doctor as he asked if there was still hope. Okdel lied – not knowing if they’d succeeded – that yes, there was. The Doctor smiled and seemingly died. As the last breath left his body he burnt with a golden fire, his body shifting and changing. Light so bright it burnt Okdel's eyes to look at it.

Where there once lay an ape, now lay a large scholar-caste – the Doctor's new body.

“I know, old friend,” the Doctor said eventually. His rage spent as quickly as a lightning bolt. Okdel coughed loudly. The Doctor looked concerned. “You really should do something about that. It’s far too clammy and damp an environment for you. Andalusia is beautiful this time of year.” Okdel nodded, although he had no idea where or what Andalusia was he was glad the Doctor’s compassionate nature wasn't as deeply buried beneath his anger and grief as it once were. Normally he only ever involved the Doctor in the affairs of the Silurian Triad in extremis. The other two members didn’t trust him, partially because he was an alien and more because of his expressed prior allegiances with the apes.

Taking a deep breath that rattled worryingly in his lungs, Okdel told the Doctor why he’d summoned him: “Radioactivity.”

Okdel’s people didn’t often use such potentially destructive technologies, it was one of the most lasting legacies of Humanity, that and their mountains of nonbiodegradable waste would haunt the inhabitants of Siluria for centuries to come. “A youngling went exploring and later became sick. He died,” it was a cheap bit of emotional manipulation, but the

Doctor was always quick to defend younglings. “Of radioactive poisoning.”
“*Homo Sapiens Sapiens*. Gone...” The Doctor sighed deeply. “But never truly absent.”

Sir Keith Gold had forgotten when they’d stopped calling him ‘Professor Stahlman’. Now he was simply and universally Stahlman, a name said with awe and reverence. The man who’d protected them from the Death and the man who’d revenge humanity against the lizard invaders. Stahlman who’s passion had long since become obsession. Stahlman who now stood in Sir Keith’s small office, glaring at him with undisguised contempt.

“You *pity* it?!” Stahlman exclaimed.

Sir Keith was trying to keep their humanity alive, he agreed they should fight back, but something in his character, some kernel of compassion long since buried under the years of death and deprivation they’d experienced, revolted at the idea of letting something that looked like nothing other than a child – albeit a lizard child – suffer.

Stahlman began to taunt Sir Keith: “The man who would be king is going soft on animals.”

It was an old taunt. When their radio had received word that Whitehall had fallen silent and there had no word from the Royal Family in weeks, Stahlman (then still fondly referred to as Professor) had morbidly joked that Sir Keith Gold was probably the highest-ranking member of the British government left alive and as a Knight of the Realm, de facto ruler of the land. It had long since stopped having any vestige of humour and was now just one of Stahlman’s many nasty jibes he directed at Sir Keith. But today, Sir Keith was ready to reply.

“There’s also the security concern. If they come looking to see what harmed the—” He almost said “child” but that would have given Stahlman an excuse to continue his rant. “Lizard, then they might and probably will find us. We’ve hidden well they last two decades. Scrounged for food. Kept open what lines of communication we could, but now our security is compromised by the very thing we’ve been using to stay alive – our reactor.”

The lizard child had been swimming in one of the reactor waste pools they'd been forced to pump the wastewater into on the very far side of the complex. It was only seen staggering away by one of the guards after it had been fatally irradiated. It wouldn't have been the first lizard to find the complex, but it was the one that had put them into the gravest danger in years. Normally, they'd capture the lizard and dispose of the body miles away in the dead of night or feed the corpse to the dogs or the dinosaurs the lizards had unleashed upon the world and then 'gone dark' and shut down everything they could and pray to whatever deity still cared for humans that they'd not be discovered.

This time, however, they couldn't.

If the lizards were anything like men, they'd want to know what killed a child. Stahlman made a dismissive noise and stalked off, leaving Sir Keith alone with his thoughts. His gaunt face was paler than normal and he looked down at old hands that he could no longer stop from shaking.

"We killed a child," he whispered.

Stahlman walked into his lab, the one space in the entire complex that no one other than himself was ever allowed access without permission. In one corner of the room lay a body wrapped in a burnt shroud. In another, lay large vats of a bubbling viscous green liquid. Stahlman looked at the liquid and smiled a tight nasty smile. The sort of smile only someone proud of plans for mass slaughter could smile. The mutagenic ooze was ready, the latest test proved that the ooze could be sprayed at a distance onto the invaders. The lizards were coming. Soon he'd have his revenge. Stahlman thought back to the day, not long after the Death had broken out that they first discovered the ooze and its miraculous, terrible effects....

Harry Ford was, as far as everyone who'd met him would tell you, a good man. Even tempered, generally happy and competent at his job. He didn't rush anywhere. He pottered. He pottered around the complex doing the little, odd jobs that needed to be done and no one else had the time or inclination to do them. He wasn't paid much for the role, but it was enough

to keep him and his small family in comfort. If anything worried Harry it was that he'd not been allowed to contact his family in a few days. The Professor said that the Project was at such an important stage that they needed absolute privacy, so Harry accepted it. He was going to play his part in changing the world, small as it was. Harry Ford was more right than he'd know, except it was going to be in a way that he could never have imagined. He'd been summoned to the main drillhead and told to bring his big wrench. Harry was tempted to whistle, but the tension in the air was just a little too oppressive so instead, he opted for a merry smile for everyone he passed as he pottered towards the drillhead. The Professor was there and if Harry was being honest, looking more haggard than normal. But if there was a problem with the drill, Harry could understand the strain he was feeling, the Professor obsessed over the drill. Given a terse set of instructions Harry approached the drillhead and instantly saw the issue, there was a green liquid, probably some sort of coolant, leaking out of the mechanism. Harry bent down and considered the problem. Tighten the bolts first or clean up the mess first? Harry resolved to tighten the bolts first, it might force out some more of the coolant and it offended Harry's sense of professionalism to do the same job twice in one day. It was easy enough to tighten the bolts, so Harry leant over to soak up the coolant mess with the rag he habitually carried. The moment Harry touched the coolant he saw something was wrong, the rag started to steam and his fingers burnt.

“*Oi!*” Harry shouted. “This ain't right!”

Some of the engineers raced over.

One, Paul Sutcliffe, was trained as a chemical engineer as well as a mechanical one and instantly saw the exothermic reaction occurring was unusual and not related to any of the chemicals used in the drilling process. Paul asked to see Harry's hand and recoiled. Instead of reddened fingers from a burn, they were a noxious green. Paul sent Harry straight to the infirmary and called everyone he could over to the drill, even Professor Stahlman joined them, his scientist's curiosity winning out over his concerns about the wider world. If the world wasn't already falling apart, what they would discover would be enough to shake it to its foundations...



...Stahlman looked over at the shrouded corpse of Harry Ford. Stahlman had no emotional connection to the man beyond that of employer and employee, but he looked at the corpse with something approaching fondness as he imagined unleashing what it had become upon the lizards. They had the way to create the beasts and, thanks to his own intelligence, the way to destroy them when the time came and they'd outlived their usefulness. Gold had all the courage of a mole, fit only to hide and scurry away from the monsters, but he was different. He was a scientist, once he was going to be the man who'd be the new Prometheus, bringing a whole new fire to mankind, the one to take Humanity into a new Golden Age. That dream had died during the Death, but he had dreamt another, he was going to be the man who gave Earth back to Humanity. They'd be the Masters of Earth again.

All because of *him*.

Stahlman was literally shaken from his reverie as the drillhead shook. The minor earthquakes were becoming both more frequent and less minor. But they were, in the grand scheme of things, no matter. He would have no need of the drill, or the reactor or that simpering fool Gold soon enough. Perhaps, Stahlman thought nastily, Gold could 'accidentally' become infected by the ooze.

The Doctor stood in the TARDIS console room and regarded the piles of maps and documents scattered on the floor carefully. The wood-lined walls and soft hum of the TARDIS soothed his currently raw emotions just enough to allow him to focus. Although he'd long since had his freedom to travel restored by the Time Lords, he'd never discovered why. Perhaps as a reward for not interfering in the establishment of a new history for Earth or perhaps to see if he resisted the temptation to change that history back to how it was. The one time he had confronted the High Council and directly asked, he was told that it was "A degree of historical vermin control," and that "The High Council would care if the Doctor would kindly cease to send them abusive messages." So, he'd ceased to have any

contact with them at all. Even the Time Lord Message Sphere he'd been sent years ago sat unloved and unopened in the corner of the console room, he'd even gone so far as to tear out the TARDIS's intership communication systems along with all the supposedly secretly installed High Council overrides so no one could contact or co-opt him that way. If they wanted nothing to do with him or Humanity, he wanted nothing to do with them.

Vermin indeed! The Doctor puffed out his cheeks in exasperation. No, today was not a day for old grievances. Today was a day for finding answers. A dead child demanded the truth and if he had a chance to prevent more deaths and he was going to grasp it with both hands. But the maps were silent. The area where the child died – the Doctor kicked himself mentally for not asking Okdel its name – was a human industrial area. Somewhere the Triad had ruled a no-go zone for the revived population. Like the cities, all the buildings that made up the industrial complexes became deathtraps as they decayed. But children were curious beasts, children of any species. And if the only person who'd look out for them was him, so be it. But there was nothing on any of the maps that would explain radioactive waste in that area. Nothing in any of the documents he'd liberated from secret vaults in Whitehall or the Brigadier's office either.

It was a curious nothingness, however.

“Another clandestine facility?”

Like particularly surreptitious beavers, Humanity had peppered the planet with various secret facilities, bases and laboratories. Ironically, it was something they shared with the Silurians. A clandestine facility and radioactivity, one might not be on any maps, but the other certainly would be. Or at least, the Doctor thought as he turned to the console, it would be on the right sort of maps if you knew where to look.

With renewed determination, the Doctor pulled open the hatch that concealed the scanner controls on the console and set to work.

The TARDIS materialised with its usual secrecy-defying fanfare. The doors creaked open and the Doctor stepped out, waving a small Geiger

counter around to triangulate the location of the reactor.

There were also those unusual geological readings to investigate, the Doctor thought. Earthquakes in England were rare.

They might be another Hibernation Chamber waking up, they could just be natural tectonic movement. Nothing unusual, but worth looking into. Once the source of the radiation was found. The Doctor looked around with a sniff. No matter where or when they were, he always found abandoned industrial complexes eerie. Like schools, they were places where noise and movement were facts of life and without those, they seemed empty and soulless. The Doctor used the Sonic Screwdriver to open locked doors and rummaged through decades old and rotten detritus. He stalked carefully, not knowing what lay around any corner. Some of the predators the Silurians had released had taken to human settlements with glee. Not to mention packs of wild dogs, more than a few of which had hydrophobia. He could hear barking in the distance and kept close to the walls of the buildings to protect his back from any surprise attack. Despite his attempts at secrecy he was observed in his movements, eyes high above him and eager for violence watched as he explored.

Sir Keith Gold walked out of the complex. He knew where the guards were positioned so it was easy enough to avoid their gaze. The gun in his pocket weighing heavily but not as heavily as his conscience. Twenty years of decisions. Of failures. Of losses. Of necessary deaths. Of subterfuge against the invaders. Of unnecessary deaths. The child was too young, too innocent to see the danger and died, playing in what it thought was a pool of water. Exploring what it thought was its world. It wasn't responsible for the Death, but they'd been responsible for its death.

Stahlman wouldn't care. Everyone else would following their saviour, but he held himself to a higher moral standard. It was possibly the last moral standard any human held other than simple survival. He resolved that it was time for that moral standard to be upheld to its end. With renewed determination, Gold marched towards his fate. He chose the spot carefully. He'd fall into the same wastewater that killed the child. He took care to remove the gun and check it was loaded. He placed it against his head...

As the Doctor was sneaking along, two things struck him as curious. The first was a series of claw marks. Although not entirely unusual, the theropods liked to rub their claws on brickwork for some reason, but these were in sets of four, some in sets of five.

Like a hand, the Doctor realised. Not a scholar-caste hand like his own, but one with four fingers and a thumb. A warrior-caste or...

His hearts leapt. *A human hand!*

This realisation led to a further mystery, why would either type of hand be leaving claw marks on brickwork? Deep into the brickwork at that. And, the Doctor peered closer, vitrified at that. Something very hot had been applied to the bricks that had caused them to melt slightly. Curiouser and curiouser. The other strange thing the Doctor noticed was that two of the nearby sheds had had new locks installed. They weren't shiny and fresh, but years newer than any of the other rusted locks he'd opened up until now. Someone was still here, the Doctor decided. Someone using human technology.

Maybe even, he thought. Humans themselves.

Or, a derisive voice added. *It could be a Yeti.* Still, it wasn't the first time there'd been hints towards the survival of some fragment of Humanity....

Thrust unceremoniously into a cellar, the Doctor glowered at his warrior-caste captors' backs as they slunk up the stairs.

Pathetic old fool, that dark familiar voice taunted. Captured already. Some Doctor you are, no wonder you couldn't –

"Shut up," the Doctor snarled aloud. He was exhausted emotionally. The voice wore down on him. The burden of living on a world he so loved that still reeked of death ground him down more and more every day. The loss of so many friends, of all the potential of Humanity, wore away at his soul until little was left other than bitterness and rage.

"No one had spoken," a second voice said, female and oddly accented. If it wasn't impossible, the Doctor would have said the speaker was Scottish.

“Hello there,” the Doctor said, partially ashamed at talking to himself out loud and more relieved that one mystery was probably resolved. He suspected he knew the fate of the investigator Okdel had sent before him.

“I’m the Doctor,” he said scanning the room to see who had spoken. This elicited a hiss and something lashed out of the darkness and struck his plastron.

“So you come at last to the world you couldn’t save.” His cellmate was beyond angry at him. She was furious.

Fury was something the Doctor was all too familiar with and he found himself replying in kind. “*I tried!*” he roared. “*I died!*” he continued. “***Every death is on my conscience! Rivers of blood on my hands!***” he had lost what slight grasp he had had on his grief and it was expressing itself in high-volume rage. Fifteen years of rage, bitterness, anger and grief came pouring out in one explosive outburst.

“Don’t you *dare* shout at me,” the other prisoner chastised. She stepped out of her hiding place to reveal an old warrior-caste, her scales greying with age. “You of all people have no right to shout at me. I’ve lost as much as you.”

The Doctor could see that unlike most warrior-caste she was dressed neither in Silurian armour nor civilian clothes, but tailored human attire. “Who are you? How do you know me?”

“Why Doctor,” she teased, “Don’t you recognise me? It’s Madame Vastra.” The Doctor’s speechlessness was enough to tell her the truth. Vastra continued, a weary, sad sigh whispering from her lips, “So, you’ve not met me yet. Well, at least I know *you* escape from this nightmare eventually.”

Naturally, they had escaped, caused havoc and – if memory served – blown up a church that contained a malevolent alien probe. But the greatest surprise of the day was that Vastra was certain that there were surviving humans, humans being shepherded by Vastra under the guise of the Great Detective on the radio. He remembered not allowing himself to believe her, too many others had come forward with stories of having seen humans, only for the truth to smash that belief. In one case, it was a band of

chimpanzees. In another, a group of travellers from another world attracted to the radioactivity of the Nunton power plant. Reports. None proved. Only hope and the dashing of that hope. Time and again. So, the Doctor stopped hoping. He went on, focused on the future instead, the *Silurian* future. He couldn't allow him to have hope and then have that hope dashed, he feared it'd destroy him. But time and again, little, strange things happened. And the Doctor filed them away. One day when he was sure, he'd pull them together and find the truth, but he still wasn't sure. He still dreaded discovering that his fears were true and his and Vastra's hopes were false.

He shook his head to shake away the reverie. The present mattered. The present, and a dead child. Deciding on a destination, he stomped towards one of the rusting sheds with their oddly clean and fresh-looking padlocks. The Sonic Screwdriver made short work of the padlocks and they clattered noisily to the ground. The Doctor narrowed his eyes in annoyance at the sound. If there were others out there, they'd be attracted to the sound. The door opened easily, final evidence that the shed was in use recently. As soon as he opened the door, the Doctor saw that the room was full of ramshackle baskets and cobbled together sheets. Yards and yards of them.

The Doctor couldn't resist a smile: "Balloons?"

Someone had been working very hard to construct a fleet of hot air balloons. The nebulous hope that there were humans here started to solidify. It certainly wasn't Silurian technology. The Doctor swallowed down the hope, he couldn't allow himself the hope, he dreaded having that hope stolen away by harsh reality. He'd not held hope since the day they cured the plague only to discover it had probably wiped out Humanity.

Probably, a voice mocked. The plague had wiped out humanity, you were too slow, too stupid to save Humanity.

The Doctor sighed. The voice was right. He'd been slow, stupid and hope had done nothing for him then, so there was no use for it now. Only the practical mattered. So, practically speaking, someone was here recently and was making balloons and, judging by what the detector was reading, using a nuclear reactor. It could be particularly curious squirrels, the Doctor

thought in defiance of his more pessimistic and cynical nature. Closing and remembering to relock the shed, the Doctor set off again. Something screeched at the Doctor from high up in the gantry above. It was warrior-caste, but twisted somehow. It – No, *she* – he could see now – had horns on her head rather than a gentle curving crest. And spikes had erupted through her flesh. Given the look of agony on her face, it wasn't natural. The Doctor's first instinct was to run, but his second and more powerful instinct was to try and help.

He bounded up the ladders to the top of the gantry and called out: "I can help, I'm the..."

The twisted figure lunged at him, swinging her claws wildly towards his face. She was quick but the Doctor was quicker. He dodged out of her way a couple of times, trying to placate her. He was getting closer and closer to the edge of the gantry. She lunged again and the Doctor ducked. She overbalanced and fell.

"*No!*" the Doctor shouted, racing to try and catch her, but he was too late. She had hit the ground and was writhing in agony. The Doctor sprinted down to her side, but even at a distance, he could see that it was too late. Her limbs were contorted and although she moaned and tried to move, it was clear her spine was broken. The Doctor looked on in silence as life slowly left her.

"Ohh, you poor thing..."

Meagre as epitaphs went, it was heartfelt.

The Doctor scanned her with his Sonic Screwdriver and discovered massive internal damage. Shaking his head he noted that the ground under her corpse was burnt as if she'd landed on a fire, but he was certain there wasn't one where she'd fallen. Odd. The Doctor looked at her more closely and wondered if she could have made the claw marks? Her claws were sharp and, the Doctor tapped them with the Sonic Screwdriver, solid. But what transformed her? It was almost an atavistic reversion. And the noises she made, not just bestial, but there was something else, something the Doctor vaguely recalled from long ago. Lost in thought, the Doctor didn't notice the very much alive human on the gantry until it was too late and he had already placed the gun against his head, his intentions clear.

“No!”

A voice filled with utter authority stopped him. Standing in front of one of the sheds below him, dressed in a patterned waistcoat and matching kilt, was a lizard. It was huge. Bigger than Gold. Bigger than any lizard Gold had ever seen.

“Please,” now the voice was imploring. “Don’t. I know it seems as if this is the end. As if there is nothing left worth preserving...”

The Doctor refused to allow another senseless death. He saw the fear in the human’s eyes. Fear of him. He needed to allay that fear before it turned into anger. The gun wavered, it turned slowly towards the Doctor as the human made a decision.

“Life rather than death,” said the Doctor. “A good first step.”

“Are you here to kill us?” the man asked.

In another age, the Doctor expected his voice to be rich and full of bonhomie. It was the sort of voice some grand impresario from the stage would have had. Today it was broken. It was the shattered begging voice of an animal wanting to be put of its misery.

“No. I’m the Doctor. I’m the one who stops the killing.” It had an odd air of reassurance to it. “And who would I be addressing?”

Keep him speaking, the Doctor thought.

“Sir Keith Gold, at your service,” a reflexive answer, but a good one the Doctor thought. He was proud of something within himself. Proud enough to not just give his name, but his title and remember long-ago taught manners.

“Well, Sir Keith Gold. Are you willing to tell me about it?” It was a gamble, it could drive him one way or the other. Either deeper into despair and returning the gun to his head with finality or onto the road to acceptance of the past.

To the Doctor’s infinite relief, Sir Keith Gold told him everything.

He’d never spoken with a lizard before. He knew they could speak, they’d heard them hissing to each other as the lizards crept around the complex

looking for the humans or while they'd been out on supply runs, but this one spoke with politeness and eloquence. And heartbreaking compassion. The lizard's sympathy all but radiated from it as it listened to Gold pour out two decades of grief and grievances. He told the lizard about how he'd fought to keep in contact with other humans, but one by one they'd fallen silent, even mystery voice calling itself 'the great detective' had stopped communicating with them.

"They hate that it happened," the lizard told him sincerely. It had never occurred to Gold or any of his contacts that the lizards cared that they'd committed genocide. They just assumed it was part and parcel of their invasion strategy. He couldn't quite believe it and said so. The lizard – the Doctor – Gold corrected himself looked at him for a long moment. Its cheeks glistened and it began to tell its tale of woe. One to match Gold's measure for measure. One that gave Gold pause, that gave him a brief glimmer of hope that his burden was shared and if it was shared it might not be so heavy as to destroy him. At least not today.

The Doctor didn't know why, but he told Gold everything. Every raw emotion since Extinction Day. Every dark thought. But he'd also told him of every chance he'd taken to build something. To remind the Silurians of what was lost. Every little piece of human culture he helped them assimilate into their culture. He saw the ghost of a smile when he told Gold about how he'd introduced the twin concepts of chocolate and Christmas to the Silurians. The Doctor found himself revelling in revealing how he'd build a bridge between Human and Silurian culture until that quiet, sinister voice spoke up and told him it was too little and too late. But even as the Doctor heard that voice, he saw that Gold had lowered the gun and slipped on its safety catch. A life had been just been saved. The Doctor felt something he'd long thought lost. Not optimism exactly, but a slight lifting of futility. A little flicker of hope started in the Doctor's hearts. He refused to allow the dark voice to smother it this time, even when another voice shouted: "Don't move, lizard!"

The Doctor narrowed his eyes in irritation, his lips thinning in exasperation. Typical. He turned slowly to see a haggard soldier, the Doctor

was surprised to see the UNIT flash on his uniform, pointing a rifle unwaveringly at him. Absolutely typical.

“Have a conversation and have a gun pointed at me. It’s like you never went away,” the Doctor grumbled at the human propensity for violence.

“You caught this one Sir Keith?” The guard wasn’t sure of the situation, he saw that Sir Keith was armed but that it wasn’t pointed at the Doctor.

Thinking quickly, the Doctor said: “Oh, yes. I was sneaking about with ill-intent and Sir Keith here caught me red-handed. Well,” a wry smile. “Red-clawed.” He waggled his hands in a vaguely clawed manner. He was attempting to defuse the situation through humour and making himself as unthreatening as possible.

The soldier raised his rifle to shoot the Doctor but Sir Keith interrupted: “No, don’t!”

“Why not?” The soldier asked, the desire for a little piece of revenge, the tightly reigned bloodlust Stahlman had bred in his minions coming to the surface.

Sir Keith thought quickly: “If there are others, the sound of the shot would attract them.”

The Doctor was impressed by his hasty creativity and the soldier was convinced. He advanced on the Doctor, expertly turning the rifle to use as a club. The Doctor subtly shifted his stance, from innocent prisoner to that of a boxer. As soon as the soldier got within the Doctor’s reach his fist lashed out and connect with the soldier’s jaw. A classic cut to the jaw, delivered by an expert pugilist floored the soldier in one blow.

“You killed him!” Sir Keith cried, pointing the gun with a wavering hand at the Doctor.

“No,” the Doctor calmly said. “Merely knocked unconscious.. Now, is there somewhere we can put him where any wild animals won’t find him before he wakes up?”

Sir Keith lead the Doctor into the main complex to a chorus of intakes of breath and fearful mutterings. The Doctor studiously ignored them. No one spoke until they reached the main control core and Stahlman saw Sir

Keith and the Doctor.

“You brought that lizard in *here?*” Stahlman exclaimed. “Sir Keith you *have* gone insane.”

Soldiers, their uniforms as tattered as the coats and suits of the scientists levelled carefully maintained rifles at the Doctor and, worryingly, at Sir Keith.

“Quite the opposite Professor, I’ve found something I’ve lost.” Sir Keith Gold’s voice had regained a small measure of the strength it once held, many years before. “He has something you need to hear. Something *you* all need to hear.”

The Doctor let free a secret he’d kept from everyone, including Okdel: “You are not alone.”

It was something he rarely thought about and never allowed himself the luxury of hoping for. The Doctor knew that a dashed hope was worse than having no hope at all. The dark voice inside preached pessimism and reminded him of his failures, taunting that another failure was inevitable, but the Doctor chose to ignore it. Today, he decided, was for revealing a small success, one long dreamt of, long fought for and long kept undisclosed. “There are other survivors out there. Other tiny fragments of Humanity. Not many, but a few. Someone has been keeping you apart, keeping you safe for years now.” The Doctor didn’t want to expound upon his fears that the plague was only dormant, his fears that other diseases had ravaged those tiny, fragile communities. That basic human fears would have turned any survivors into feudal and isolationist tribes.

“Who has ‘kept us safe’? This mysterious ‘Great Detective’ on the radio that only Sir Keith talks to?” Stahlman mocked and his followers laughed. Obviously, they all thought Sir Keith mad.

The Doctor’s eyes narrowed as he considered his options. “Yes,” he said simply, the conviction in his voice gave some of the people chortling pause. The Doctor knew this ‘Great Detective’ well. He also remembered Vastra’s tart admonition that Humanity would certainly have not have accepted her aid if she’d introduced herself as: “A lizard woman from the dawn of time.”

It was something that rung in his ears today as he was revealing one of

her greatest secrets to a group of very paranoid, very dangerous humans. They barely trusted Sir Keith Gold and there was a nasty gleam in Stahlman's eye that worried the Doctor deeply. They didn't trust him because he looked like a Silurian. Like one of the monsters. But something in the Doctor made him try, made him seek to build that connection.

"Lock it up," Stahlman commanded, again seizing command of his followers. "I think it's time for another experiment." The way he said 'experiment' chilled the Doctor's soul. A pair of soldiers came forward and producing a pair of old but well maintained handcuffed and unceremoniously bound the Doctor to the nearest door. It was certainly one of the less glamorous places he'd been imprisoned, but it did allow him to study the wretched survivors of Humanity close-up.

The Doctor had always been very observant and now the third eye of a scholar-caste meant that his sight was keener than ever, he saw the rust and natural wear on the door hinges and decided to bide his time. Patience was a virtue he struggled to practice but silence was anathema to him.

"Look at you!" the Doctor taunted, despite being handcuffed to the door he spoke with an easy authority that caught the human's attention. "Pathetic. The Masters of Earth? You're not even the masters of this complex! I fought for you, I *died* for humanity. I stood up and argued before the Silurian Triad in your name. Lauded your successes. Excused your failings. And now it comes down to this. Humanity will be remembered for its orgy of errors rather than its renaissances of thought and art." A few of the survivors had stopped and begun to listen. Stahlman, true to character, had not. "I'm old. I've centuries of life behind me and centuries of life to go before I reach my end, I've seen the universe at it's best and at it's worst. And I know," he paused for effect. "*I know* that at the end of the day all we are are footsteps in the sand. Gone in an instant. What matters is what we do in that instant!"

Any chance the Doctor's passion was reaching through the decades of hate and fanaticism was swept aside as Stahlman staggered into the control room, covered in the ooze. He didn't scream, but his self-control finally broke and he begged – as fur spread across his body and he was wracked

with the agonies of transformation – to be killed. The Doctor looked on, full of pity. The engineers and soldiers ran. Stahlman fell silent. The man was gone, but the beast remained. It loped towards the only prey that remained in the room. The Doctor. The Doctor knew that talk was probably futile, but futility was never a reason to not try and act in hope. “Stahlman, you’re not an animal. Stubborn, yes. Arrogant, yes. Ruder than any man I’ve ever met, **yes!** But not an animal. Don’t behave like one now. Fight for your humanity, man! It’s what you’ve been doing for all these years! Do so for a few moments longer. I promise—” The Doctor’s promise was lost in the beast’s roar. “Ohh, well...” The Doctor said with finality as the animal charged. The Doctor closed his eyes. With a sudden motion the Doctor stood up and yanked with all his might on the door to which he was still handcuffed. The door squealed in protest and finally tore free from its hinges. Like a matador the Doctor waved the door as a lure, his muscles tight, but the beast was intent on flesh.

As it charged, the Doctor swung the door in a wide arc that connected with the animal’s head and with a sickening crack sent the beast whimpering to the ground. The Doctor looked in amazement at the door, it had melted slightly on contact with the beast. With practised ease and tricks learnt lifetimes ago from Harry Houdini, the Doctor extricated himself from the handcuffs and with a look back at the door and the blackening floor around the beast that was once Stahlman decided upon a course of action. He was going to save as many people as possible, because he was the Doctor. While the dark little voice was (for once) silent in agreement, the ground shook. As if in contempt of the Doctor’s optimism. The Doctor paused and bent to feel the ground with his hands.

“Well, no more than one problem at a time,” he said wryly.

Sir Keith Gold did a head count of their paltry number. Sixty-one. Gold remembered when the complex had held hundreds and the nearby town thousands. His heart ached at the loss, the brief flicker of hope the Doctor had somehow kindled in him cooling again as stark reality started to set in. Unless they found a solution, they’d lost the complex. The beast that was once Stahlman was infectious and if it had maintained the level of feral

intelligence the other beasts had, it was going to be a real threat to their survival. The crowd parted, more than a few muttering in fear, Sir Keith even saw one technician covering her face in fear. Sir Keith let out the breath he didn't know he was holding when he saw it was the Doctor who had caused the commotion and not an escaped beast. "Are there any other ..." the Doctor waved a claw in thought. "Infected like Stahlman around?"

Sir Keith swallowed nervously, he knew that there were a few lizard beasts that Stahlman had experimented on, they could have escaped from the shed they'd been forced into. "I don't know. There might be two others." He said, not looking in any of the Doctor's eyes.

"One fewer," the Doctor indicated to the twisted body beneath one of the gantryways. "How long are they infectious for?" He was appalled but had to be practical. The humans looked at each other, not sure of the lizard before them but swayed by his authoritative and calm demeanour. "Fine," The Doctor changed tack, "Is the drilling causing the earthquakes?" Their edgy silence spoke volumes. "And the ooze?" A few nodded. That was helpful, the Doctor thought. One problem potentially resolving the other. A bestial roar broke their reverie. From the drillhead control room limped the battered and bleeding beast that was once Stahlman. Its weak roar was met with a response, a louder, more reptilian cry from the other direction.

The Doctor's blood ran cold, it was going to be a massacre. He'd struck the beast that was once Stahlman hard enough to crack its skull, but it was still alive.

They were durable monsters, he thought.

It didn't look healthy, even under its fur the Doctor could see its skin was pallid and it was shaking with the effort to move and attack. Then another one, a mutated scholar-caste crouched on a nearby gantry leapt down and began laying into the huddled mass of humans. The screams tore at the Doctor's hearts. He was paralysed.

Not again, not now, was all he could think. The humans cowered and died. Worse, some writhed in agony as the beasts somehow infected them with the mutagenic ooze. Then gunshots broke through the Doctor's indecision.

People were fighting back. The few soldiers, aided by Sir Keith, fired at the beasts. Driving them back. They retreated towards the Doctor. He backed away as a bullet whizzed past his head. He glared at the shooter, who ignored him and continued to fire at the beasts. The beasts limped past him and into the drillhead. With a curious look, the Doctor considered their actions. They were operating on an atavistic level, they must equate that place with safety. Further gunshots caused the Doctor to snap his attention towards the surviving humans. With dead expressions, the soldiers were euthanising the infected humans. So few left, the Doctor realised and the rest were slaughtering the others in order for themselves to survive.

Humanity in microcosm, the Doctor observed darkly.

Twenty-seven dead humans.

What a victory, his guilt taunted. But it wasn't a defeat yet, the Doctor grasped at the one straw he had left. *They still had to –*

His train of thought was broken by another earthquake. "What is causing that?" he wondered out loud. The obvious answer was the drilling. "Sir Keith, these earthquakes. Are you still drilling?"

"Not for many years, not since Stahlman found the ooze. We always wondered if we were the cause, but Stahlman would shout us down."

The Doctor could see one of the engineers looking nervous. "And do you have anything to add?" The Doctor asked pointedly. The engineer swallowed, he wasn't used to being interrogated by one of the 'invaders' the Doctor realised.

"We move the drill every so often to find another pocket of the ooze. The earthquakes started after we hit a layer of magma."

Sir Keith was appalled.

"No one ever told me this! We agreed to stop drilling because it would attract the lizards!"

"Stahlman..." the engineer began before the Doctor cut him off.

"That explains a lot. You've poked a sleeping tiger. These earthquakes are just that tiger shifting in it's slumber. We need to mollify it." The Doctor's

eyes narrowed. He had a wild plan. “What if we power the drill, but not move it?”

The engineer was aghast. “That’d shake the drillhead apart! It might cause the entire complex to collapse into the hole!”

The Doctor smiled a terrible, dangerous smile. “*Ohh*, I know how. You won’t like it, so you’ll need to go.” The implied threat in the Doctor’s comment caused the already frightened group to look at each other nervously and the few remaining soldiers to subtly shift their weight, readying themselves to fight. The Doctor couldn’t resist the theatrics and allowed the moment to draw out, some part of him was having fun and he decided to indulge it. “I’m going to start the reactor and power the drillhead, but not move it...”

“That’ll shake her apart!” One of the engineers exclaimed, they others looked at each other, realisation dawning. The Doctor heard whispers as they spoke to each other, discussing whether or not his plan would work, explaining to each other what was going on. “But how will that help?” Sir Keith was still confused. The Doctor looked at the engineer and waved a permissive claw.

“Sir Keith, the drill will shake itself apart and probably pull all the drillhead down with it,” the engineer explained.

“Filling in the hole as it goes,” the Doctor added, he waved his hands illustratively, something twisting on his face that might have been a smile. Sir Keith nodded as he understood the Doctor’s plans. “But one last problem remains. Those creatures. The moment the drill activates, they’ll flee.”

“Not if we seal the doors,” Sir Keith added defiantly.

Quick on the uptake, some humans raced off to collect welding tools.

As the men worked, the Doctor planned. He knew what to do, but he still needed to convince the humans to play their part. Fortunately, Sir Keith interrupted his reverie and gave him the opportunity to unveil the final part of his plan. “How will we live now? *Where* will we live now? The Liz... the Silurians will hear the explosions, seen the smoke,” Sir Keith was fussing about, he had things to occupy his mind now rather than brood over.

“Balloons,” the Doctor said, rolling the words around his mouth, a sense of playfulness that had begun to replace the brooding silences now that he was succeeding in saving lives becoming more and more evident. “Balloons?” Sir Keith said, slower on the uptake.

“Balloons!” The Doctor made an expansive gesture in front of his face before pointed towards one of the sheds.

“Of course!” Sir Keith said and promptly set about organising an aerial exodus. “But where to? They’ve only a limited range.”

The Doctor exhaled as he thought. “Well, we both know someone who can help guide you. I can even lend you a powerful radio set to contact her. As for where ... the Channel Islands are beautiful this time of year. Who knows, there might even be a welcoming committee of *friendly* faces there, they’re isolated enough to have escaped the plague” the Doctor actually winked.

“But must we hide? It is our world,” Sir Keith asserted.

“No. No more than it’s the world of the rhinoceros or the deinonychus. It’s going to be everyone’s world one day. Until then though... Yes, hide. Stay safe. Humanity can thrive, given time. Peace with the Silurians will happen,” the Doctor lied.

He had no idea what the future held anymore, but for once that small lie felt right to say. The little voice, quieter now, counselled that he keep his distance, but a louder voice pushed him forward, he had scrapped a victory today and no degree of self-doubt was going to take that away and he knew he could fight to ensure that today’s victory didn’t become tomorrow’s defeat. He was, after all, the Doctor and doctors save people.

The Doctor stood at the door to the TARDIS, the ground already starting to rumble and grumble as the drill shook in it’s borehole. He watched as the last of the balloons took flight and drifted away in the dull dusk light. He could, TARDIS willing, meet them on the Channel Islands, but part of him didn’t want to know their fate. Today they’re alive and as long as he doesn’t find out they’re dead, they’re still alive. Schrödinger’s Species. Erwin would have approved, the Doctor chuckled.

That was something else new, he thought. He *laughed*. He hadn't laughed for nearly two decades and now he couldn't stop a little laugh escaping at his little victory. He was then knocked off his feet by the intensity of the earthquake and he watched as the ground started to slide away, a new pit forming as the soil and surface of Siluria adapted to having a miles deep hole gouged into it. They were lucky it was only a very narrow borehole, but it was going to be a very big crater. The Doctor scrambled into the TARDIS and raced around the small wooden console as he punched in the dematerialisation sequence. The engines roared and the Doctor detected a hint of triumph in their rising and falling tones as well.

Several months after Rebirth Day and several thousand miles away from the Dover coastline, Okdel smiled as he watched the avians flutter and play in the air currents. The Doctor had been right, the warm, dry climate was doing a great deal of good for his aged frame. Bidding Ame and Ruri away, the curious wheezing, groaning sound of the TARDIS broke him from his reverie. The Doctor stomped out. For all his age and wisdom, the Doctor had a petulant streak that Okdel's use of the space-time telegraph seemed to exacerbate.

"Before you start, Doctor, I wanted to thank you for bringing me here," Okdel hoped some flattery would take the edge off the Doctor's ire.

"You're welcome," he said and with the slightest of pauses added: "Why did you call?"

"There's a giant metallic humanoid creature attacking the Monument to Rebirth." Okdel had very rarely seen the Doctor speechless. Or, for that matter, smile. The Doctor grinned a broad smile and eventually said: "A giant robot?!"

He was back into his TARDIS before Okdel could add any further information.

Okdel could have sworn he heard laughter.



DAVID TROUGHTON
SOPHIE ALDRED

in

UNBOUND

INHERITANCE

by MARSHALL TANKERSLEY

INHERITANCE

by *Marshall Tankersley*

“Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart.”
– Haruki Murakami

“Wake up!”

The Doctor rolled over in his sleep, waving away whoever it was that was trying to rouse him. He'd been through a lot, hadn't he, and he had a right to rest and recuperate. When the voice didn't stop calling, the Doctor pulled his pillow over his ears and screwed his eyes shut even tighter.

“Go away, trying to rest here,” he mumbled.

“I need you to wake up, Doctor. It's of the utmost importance!”

Curses. The pillow wasn't having any effect. The Doctor considered trying to ignore the voice and just go back to sleep, but the dark tones and slight Scottish brogue seemed oddly familiar. Fighting against every instinct, the Doctor raised himself up off of the bed and glanced around the hospital room.

Hospital? When had he come to a hospital?

Edging himself to the floor, the Doctor found the medical notes at the end of his bed and began to read:

Male patient, admitted 09.28.2456.

Ailment: Coma, potentially caused by graze from bullet.

Bullet? Coma? Oh no.

Unpleasant memories began to flood back into the Doctor's mind, memories of landing on a dusty world (called Cicero, he thought), of going for a walk with Ace, of intentionally losing her so he could take care of some business of his own... and then getting shot. Gunned down in the sandy wasteland outside of the colony's walls.

Grasping at his chest, the Doctor was surprised to find that there were no bullet wounds where he had expected. No pain, even. Given that this was the twenty-fifth century, and Cicero was a young, struggling human colony, there was no way they had access to the kind of medical technology that could have patched him up that well in such a short amount of time. The only other explanation hardly bore thinking about.

Rushing to an inset mirror on the far wall, the Doctor stared with a mixture of horror and fascination at his own reflection. Instead of the darkly elfin and mysterious face he had expected, he found a large, craggy visage, ice blue eyes staring coolly back at him. He hadn't been rescued from the bullet wounds or been healed by human medical technology after all.

He'd regenerated.

"Oh dear," he said, the deep, dulcet tones of his new vocal chords surprising himself for a moment. "Gunned down? That wasn't how I'd wanted to go at all, very undignified."

"Yes, it was, wasn't it?"

There was that voice again. It tugged at the corners of the Doctor's fragmented memories, and he still couldn't quite place it.

"Who's there?"

A small figure in a linen jacket and battered panama hat materialized in the mirror.

"Don't bother looking round," he said, stopping the Doctor from doing just that. "I'm not really here. Well, not in a physical sense anyway."

A sudden light of realization dawned on the Doctor. “You’re me, aren’t you? The old me, I mean, before I became this—” the Doctor gestured at his new, much larger and imposing physique, lost for words.

“Yes,” the old Doctor chuckled, his grey eyes lighting up with an odd mixture of mirth, sorrow, and anger. “I’m afraid so. Your memories are still a jumble, aren’t they? That’d be a mixture of regenerative trauma and the dimensional field surrounding this planet.”

“Dimensional field?”

The old Doctor nodded. “Yes, remember coming across it with Ace, in the TARDIS?”

As that particular memory slotted back into place in the Doctor’s consciousness, a feeling of inestimable dread filled his stomach. “Vaguely. I remember discovering that Cicero had some odd dimensional anomalies, but I can’t remember why it’s important – or, most importantly, why it makes me feel like I want to run away and never come back.”

“That’s not good. Not good at all.” The old Doctor began to pace back and forth. “Do you remember anything about what I – you – *we*, were planning? It’s very, very, *very* important.”

The Doctor strained, trying his best to dredge up the memories still hidden from him. He could feel it, just out of his reach, but couldn’t recall it.

“I can’t. Everything’s still fizzing about up here.”

“That’s not good enough!” the old Doctor shouted. “You have *got* to remember!”

“I can’t!” the Doctor shouted back. “Need I remind you how badly *you* reacted after your regeneration? Some things are simply out of my control.”

“I’m not calling your competence into question,” the old Doctor sniped back. “But that doesn’t change the fact that *this is cosmically important*. You’ve got to find a way to remember, Doctor. The fate of the universe itself rests on your shoulders.”

“Can’t you just tell me? It can’t be that hard, can it?”

“It’s not that simple. At the end of the matter, I’m really just a part of your own subconscious now. If you can’t remember, neither can I. Not really. Not enough to be of any help.”

The old Doctor’s form began to fade, colours greying and running until only a thin outline remained. “All I can do is beg you – find out what I was planning. Save the universe.”

With that, he was gone.

“No! Come back! I’m not finished yet!” The Doctor shouted. The kernels of fear that were planted with the memories of the dimensional irregularities on Cicero had grown, compounded by the fact that he felt utterly and completely lost without command over all of his faculties. The Doctor had been so used to being in control in his previous incarnation; not being able to understand everything was an unsettlingly alien concept to him.

Turning at the sound of his door opening, the Doctor saw Ace and a trenchcoated gentleman stride inside. Ace looked concerned, perhaps having overheard his recent outbursts.

“Doctor? Are you all right? You sounded like you were having a real argument with someone!”

Definitely had overheard him, then. “Yes, Ace. Thank you for checking up on me.”

Ace wasn’t deterred by simple platitudes, and she stared up into his eyes. The Doctor wasn’t used to looking down at her; how tall had he grown, for goodness’ sake?

“I’m sorry for worrying you,” he sighed.

“No need,” Ace replied, putting her hand on the Doctor’s shoulder. “I’m just glad you’re all right. You’ve been out for two whole days!”

The Doctor nodded. “Regeneration can be a complicated process. Quite honestly, I’m still not finished.”

“You mean you might change how you look *again*?”

“Oh no,” the Doctor chuckled at Ace’s genuinely concerned expression.

“Everything still has to settle down, especially upstairs.”

“So it’s business as usual then, Professor?”

The Doctor smirked. “Very funny, my dear. And it’s still *Doctor*. Some things never change.”

Gesturing at the gentleman who had accompanied Ace, the Doctor seated himself on the edge of the hospital bed. “Who’s your friend?”

“Captain Niklaus Leone, head of Cicero’s police.” Leone produced a badge nestled in a leather wallet. “I don’t claim to understand half of what you two have been saying about ‘regeneration’ or whatever, but I am glad to see you’re okay. You had us all worried for a while.”

“It’s quite touching to have the chief of police concerned for me,” the Doctor chuckled. “I don’t always get on well with local authorities.”

“Your shooting is the most interesting thing to happen around here in quite a long time, Doctor, so I have a vested interest,” Leone said. “Most days, all I have to deal with is stolen supplies or graffiti, so dealing with a shooting is quite the pleasure – no offence, of course.”

Before the Doctor could respond, Ace butted in. “Speaking of which, the Captain here and I managed to track down the guy who shot you.”

“Did you? Who was he?” The Doctor’s curiosity was piqued.

Ace grew solemn. “That’s just it. He wasn’t anyone you’d expect. Just a shopkeeper.”

“More than that, Ace,” Leone coughed. “He resold second-hand or unused mining equipment to new arrivals – sonic jackhammers, mineralogy kits, blasting explosive, stuff like that.”

Another memory flickered in the Doctor’s mind. “Longish, blonde hair with a scraggly beard? Scar across the right temple?”

Ace nodded. “Got it in one. Did you know him? Before the shooting, I mean.”

“Apparently, once upon a time. But no,” the Doctor shook his head. “The memory’s gone now.”

“Still! At least we know you had contact with him beforehand, so it’s

definitely not a random shooting.”

“Death never is,” the Doctor murmured. “If there’s one thing every person in the universe can be certain of, it is the inevitability of their own death. They might stave it off a short while, thinking they’ve managed to get away, but they never do. Not really. Eventually, the scythe falls on us all. On me more than most.”

“Gotten a bit gloomier this time round, eh?” Ace chuckled half-heartedly.

Snapping out of his reverie, the Doctor nodded. “Apparently.”

Before Ace could ask anything else, the group heard a scream echo down the hall. Jumping to his feet, the Doctor was out of the door and headed towards the source in a flash, leaving Ace behind to marvel at just how he always managed to outpace her military-trained self whenever danger reared its head.

Down the corridor, a small crowd of three or four people had gathered and were staring at something on the floor. Brushing them aside, the Doctor saw a calcified husk of what seemed to have once been a man lying on the dark tiles, his mouth open in a rictus scream.

“It was horrible!” one of the onlookers, an elderly female patient, spoke up. “It just came out of the wall, and – and grabbed Mr Pace! He hardly had a chance to even scream...”

Placing his hand reassuringly on her shoulder, the Doctor tried to calm her down.

“It’s all right – all right, miss...?”

“Frances. Frances Traynor.”

“It’s all right, Frances. Whatever it was, it seems to have gone now. I’d like you, *all* of you, to head back to your rooms, please. Doctor’s orders.”

“But you’re not a Doctor!” the old lady protested. “You’re just a patient!”

Looking down at his medical gown, the Doctor sighed. He forgot that he wasn’t quite dressed for the occasion.

“That’s as may be, but I do think the safest thing for you all is to return to your rooms or workstations. Don’t leave anyone alone! I’ll have this sorted

shortly, you have my word.”

Before the Doctor could shoo the onlookers off one last time, Frances shrieked and pointed a bony finger down the hall. Turning, one of the Doctor’s hearts nearly stopped when he saw a black-cowled figure floating in a pool of grey mist at the end of the hallway. Leone drew his weapon on the figure and stood in a firing position while Ace sidled over to the Doctor, a the while her gaze transfixed on the newcomer. It radiated something, Ace wasn’t sure what, but it wasn’t good. Just looking at it felt wrong on a fundamental level, as if her brain registered its presence yet knew in its heart of hearts that it was simply not supposed to be.

“What is that?” she whispered once she got within the Doctor’s earshot.

The Doctor didn’t respond, silencing Ace’s inquiry with a wave. Instead, he began to slowly walk towards the entity, steeling himself. Leone spoke up.

“We’ve been getting reports about things like that appearing all over the colony. I wrote it off as some kind of teenage prank.”

“It’s definitely not that,” the Doctor responded. “What are you?” he called out to the floating figure. With no response, he edged closer and called again.

“What do you want?”

Still nothing.

“Why did you kill that man?” The Doctor pointed back at the husk lying down the hallway. “Did you need something from him? Or...” He paused, his voice melancholy. “You did it simply because you could. Not because he posed a threat to you, or even because he was in your way. You did it just because he was *there*.”

Now the figure began to move, sliding eerily towards the Doctor, who in turn began to back away. Steps became strides, which in turn became a running gait.

“Go!” the Doctor shouted. “Get everyone out of here!”

The wraith shot forward with an unearthly shriek, and the Doctor dove to the ground for cover. Instead of aiming for him, it seemed, the wraith

collided with Frances. In moments, she had withered away just like the unfortunate Mr Pace, her dried skin cracking as her body fell to the floor.

Picking himself up, the Doctor ran for his life.



“Get down to the lobby! Captain Leone is organizing an evacuation!” Ace waved patients, orderlies, and doctors down the hallway. Since their initial encounter with the wraith, several more had popped up at various locations throughout the hospital, something Captain Leone had confirmed was happening all over Cicero proper.

To her side, the Doctor was working on the wiry innards of what seemed to have once been a wall-mounted fire alarm, checking over his shoulder every so often to ensure the Wraith hadn’t followed them. With a satisfied sigh, he finally held up a mishmash collection of metal and wires, still connected to the inside of the alarm.

“What’s that?” Ace called over. “Not another one of your cobbled-together gadgets that’ll somehow save the day, is it?”

“Not quite,” the Doctor called back. “But it should hopefully buy us some time and keep the hospital secure.”

With that, he flipped a makeshift switch and all hell broke loose. A loud, warbling cry erupted from the fire alarm speakers all across the hospital, its tone moving swiftly up and down. It swiftly settled to a low-frequency moan that Ace could feel slightly vibrating the fillings in her teeth.

Suddenly, wraiths appeared from out of nowhere, all flying at top speed down into the hospital lobby and out onto the street. Behind her, the Doctor chuckled.

“That ought to do the trick.” Holding up his device, he began to explain. “I’ve set up a low-level oscillating sonic field using the fire alarm system. It’ll do no harm to anyone inside of the building, but to the wraiths...”

“Why?” Ace asked. “You still haven’t explained what exactly they are.”

“That’s because it’s rather hard to explain, especially when I still don’t have all my memories back.”

The Doctor's face darkened. "But what I do know is this: they are evil. They are interdimensional ravagers, traversing from universe-to-universe killing and destroying, leaving nothing alive in their wake."

"And now they're here?"

"Yes," the Doctor nodded. "But we have a chance to stop them. They're taking time to acclimatize to our universe, getting accustomed to new physical laws, interactions between matter and antimatter, and so on. That's why they look all ethereal. They're not fully formed yet. Granted, they can still kill, but they can also be *hurt*. While they're in the process of adapting, their physical forms are very fragile - fire a sonic weapon at them at the right frequency, and you shake them apart. As long as my sonic field is active around the hospital, everyone inside should be safe."

"All right!" Ace exclaimed. "Then all we need to do is figure out a way to broadcast your sonic weapon all across the colony, and we're home safe!"

"Not quite. The sonic frequency will gradually lose effectiveness as the wraiths get stronger. Not to mention that very soon, an entire universe's worth of them is going to begin pushing through the joins in reality onto Cicero, then out into the universe. My lash-up isn't going to stop that."

"So what do we do? Do you remember anything else from your plan?"

"We're going to have to stop them at the source, at whatever break in - between universes they're exploiting to get here. As to my plan... vaguely. I seem to recall something about... about a cave system. Yes, definitely that. Somewhere outside the colony. But I don't remember anything else."

Ace went to leave. "All right. Captain Leone ought to be able to give us some pointers towards what the most likely caves you visited last were."

As Ace walked off, the Doctor turned contemplatively towards the darkened corridor.

"What is it I can't remember?" He mused. "And why does it feel like I don't *want* to? What was I up to that could have been so terrifying that I've wiped it from my mind completely?"

The pair of grey eyes he saw staring back at him gave him no answer.



The dust buggy screeched to a halt in front of a pile of large rocks, its rusted frame juddering and shaking in the sandy wind. The Doctor stepped out, now dressed in black pants, a dust red shirt, and dark overcoat – all borrowed from the hospital. He was quickly followed by Ace and Leone, both of whom had bandanas wrapped around their mouths to ward off the flying sand.

The group had managed to avoid the wraiths stalking Cicero's streets on their way out of the hospital, and had taken Leone's 'staff car' out to search for the Doctor's caves. It wasn't the greatest vehicle in existence, but it was all they'd had. *At least it got us here*, the Doctor mused, staring into the deep, dark mouth of the cave they'd parked by. Leone had told the Doctor and Ace that Cicero was home to a single, interconnected web of cave systems woven underneath the colony city – so it really didn't matter which caves they entered in by, as they'd more than likely find the Doctor's goal no matter where they started. Still, the Doctor felt a pull on the fringes of his mind as he looked into the cave.

"This is it." He pulled out a jumble of wires and machinery from his coat pocket, and flicked it on. "This is a miniaturized version of what I set up back in the hospital. It should give us some protection from the wraiths inside the caves. Its range is unfortunately small, so we all need to stick close together."

Ace and Leone pulled out flashlights, huddled closer to the Doctor, and began descending. Once they got far enough inside to be out of the wind, Leone pointed to the sandy ground.

"Look! Footprints!"

Kneeling by a print, the Doctor nodded. "That's mine, all right."

Leone tracked them deeper into the cave. "Looks like we can just follow them." The Doctor nodded his assent, and the group moved on. It didn't take long before the dark cave walls were suffused in waving blue light. The tunnel the Doctor, Ace, and Leone were in opened up onto a large chamber, its centre taken up by a waving blue haze.

“That’d be the rift,” the Doctor broke the awe-stricken silence, waving around his portable sonic generator. “This should keep the wraiths away – for a while, at least.”

Ace stared up at the undulating blue lights in wonder. “How do we close it?”

“A rift of this type should be able to be closed through contact with an equal or more powerful energy source. That’d destabilize the join between our universe and the Wraiths’, and send the rift collapsing down into nothingness.”

“All right. So how do we do that?”

Leone coughed. “I think I found what you brought down here, Doctor.” He pointed to a stack of large, brown crates, all marked with the word ‘CAUTION:

“Explosives!” Ace exclaimed.

The Doctor frowned. “There’s more than enough blasting explosives there to create the amount of energy we need. But there’s more to it than that.”

Ace and Leone turned to look at the Doctor, his voice growing sombre and sad. “I finally remember what I was planning to do. The only way to stop the Wraiths is to use these explosives to seal the rift – but in so doing, it will cause the entire cave system to collapse.”

“So?” Ace was impatient. “Those things are going to destroy the universe, you said. Blowing up a few old caves is a small price to pay to stop them!” Ace turned to Leone, hoping he’d back her up. But the Captain’s face had gone a deathly pale.

“Cicero. The colony.”

The Doctor nodded. “Exactly. The colony is built directly over these caves. If we bring them down, we destroy the whole colony – every last man, woman, and child. There’s no time to call for an evacuation. By the time we got everyone out, the Wraiths would have a permanent foothold here and we’d never manage to get close enough to the rift again to close it.”

The sonic generator the Doctor held buzzed and sputtered. Holding it to his ear, the Doctor sighed. “In fact, we don’t have much time left as it is. Once this fails, the Wraiths will be here in force to kill us.”

Moving to the boxes, the Doctor picked up a small, black box. The detonator.

“We have to make a decision.”

“Doctor,” Ace said. “I don’t think there’s much to decide. If the Wraiths are as great a threat as you’ve said, then we *have* to stop them.”

“But could you kill innocents, Ace? Are the thousands of people up there above us worth so little?”

Leone wiped a hand over his brow. “All my friends – my family. Everyone I know. Doctor, you *can’t*. There has to be another way!”

“There is no other way. You know that as well as I did.”

Turning, the Doctor came face to face with his former self once more. “I refuse to accept that. There has to be another way!”

The small man shook his head. “This is it. The only option. Unless, of course, you’d rather see the universe overrun by those creatures.”

“Of course not! But this is not a decision I am able to make!”

The small Doctor threw his hands in the air. “You don’t have the luxury of deciding whether or not to make a decision! The moment is here – and it *has* been prepared for. I set this out, planned it down to the tiniest detail, only to have the poor fellow I bought the explosives from discovering what I was up to and deciding he had to stop me. All that time, all those plans, sent spiralling down the plughole by a single man. There’s something profound in that, I think.”

“I can’t do what you’re asking of me. I cannot condemn the universe, but neither can I sacrifice so many innocents!”

“You could when you were me! I was prepared to go through with this, as horrific and distasteful as it was, it *had to be done*. I wanted to find another way too, but I can’t. It’s simply not possible.”

The Doctor looked at his former self in horror. “When did I become *you*?”

When did I become the man who'd throw away an innocent life – even just *one* – for any reason? How could I have ever considered killing *so many people*? Children, even! Maybe you could have done this, but I can't. *I'm not you.*”

“Do you think I did it for *fun?*” the small Doctor's face contorted in anger and deep, deep sorrow. “I did it because if I didn't, every child in existence would die. I did it because if I didn't, creation itself would writhe and burn, flaring out of existence only after the Wraiths are finished with it. I did it because if I didn't, *everything would die*. So stop lecturing me about morality and get on and do it! This is your inheritance. Make of it what you will.”

The Doctor turned at the sound of a small explosion. The sonic generator sparked then died, coinciding with the rift's ambient blue lights flickering and flashing. The hazy outlines of Wraith after Wraith began to fill the cavern, surrounding the three heroes.

“Doctor!” Ace called. “We need to do something, now!”

As the Wraiths solidified and raced toward them, the Doctor gazed at the detonator in the palm of his hand.

This was his inheritance, his responsibility.

The Doctor made a choice.

THE FIVE-HUNDRED ROOM DIARY

By Chris Taylor

On the top of a great, grassy hill, two men stood before an unassuming Police Box.

“Thank you again for your help, Doctor.” Administrator Kreelin’s bald head and bright azure skin stood out firmly against the cool turquoise of the reservoir lake behind and below. He reached forward to shake the hand of the man he was addressing. “If that dam had burst, this entire colony would have been lost.”

The other fellow gazed back at him with downturned blue eyes. Short but unkempt brown hair waved slightly in the midsummer breeze. He wore a knee-length vest of Maroon leather atop a wide-collared poet shirt. Question-mark cufflinks closed off the flared white sleeves. Brown jeans and hiking boots, with maroon leather spats, finished out his outfit. “You give me too much credit!” he grinned. “It’s nothing that an advanced degree in architectural engineering from the fifty-first century’s greatest centres of learning couldn’t fix! Then again, my instructors gave me too much credit too. Extra credit. That’s how I landed the degree.” He chuckled at his own joke, his thin eyebrows and upturned nose adding an almost childlike quality to the jest.

The politician laughed politely. Perhaps a little too politely, as though he didn’t appreciate hearing about the particulars of his guest’s various bona fides any more than he had the casual name-dropping of Hedy Lamarr. Or Alpha Centauri, the head of the Galactic Federation to whom Kreelin and his colonial council were ultimately accountable.

The timing was more than right for an exit. A turn of a key later, the man called the Doctor stepped into the blue box. He wasn’t fully past the

threshold when he snapped his fingers and turned back. He leaned casually into the side of the doorway, opened his mouth to say something, and promptly changed his mind. Before waiting for any reply, the lanky fellow entered the TARDIS in full, closing and locking the door behind.

Eagerly, he turned to take in the first look at his home in days. Immediately before him was the sweeping grandeur of a large control room. Natural light streamed in through nine of the twelve chamber walls. Large circles receded into the walls showing a combined panoramic view of the hilltop outside.

The walkway navigating these walls was made up of stained oak slats. Curved bridges of the same wood trisected the room, all of which came to an end half a story up, converging at the centre of the room. The control console itself was positioned beneath a six-sided gazebo of wood and green-tiled roof. With a central pillar connecting the two. The man double-timed across the bridge which lay directly between himself and the console. His hiking boots made a sturdy *clunk clunk clunk* over a sunken floor of grass that lent the room a fresh, woodsy aroma. The remains of a picnic lunch had yet to be cleaned up.

Within the control gazebo, the calm warmth of antiquity ended, replaced by the high-contrast touch-screens and floating holographic interfaces of the console itself. The underside of the gazebo roof was equally animated. A six-part viewscreen of stars, mostly white, and hazy nebulae. An extrapolated view of Altrax V's night sky, as could be seen from the spot where the TARDIS sat parked, where the light of day not washing it out. Complete with elliptical lines showing the orbits of various planets, dwarves, and comets. Here and there passed circular Gallifreyan text, labelling the sights as named by the TARDIS's databanks.

Back down at floor level, the mysterious man called the Doctor scuttled from one face of the hexagonal control box to the other. Swiping this. Sliding that. Starting to rotate a floater, then changing is his mind to instead double-tap that blinking light over there. Atop the console, its neon centrepiece began moving up and down. Slowly at first, but faster which each new teak of the navigation panel.

The view from the nine ‘windows’ faded to soft white as each resumed the default travel setting. The gazebo ceiling starscape was replaced by the shifting reds and blues of the Time Vortex. The great and living machine was on the move.

His work done, the man sidestepped over to the Communications panel. Wedged atop it, blocking some of the light of the light of the Time Rotor, was a folding picture frame featuring two photographs. One, a middle-aged woman of raven hair arranged in a short but full-bodied mane of wavy locks. Her smile was bright and genuine, but lingering behind her grey eyes was the memory of loss and resolve. The second, a much younger woman. Bleached blonde hair in need of retouching swept back into a bun. A look of sheer determination upon her face. Beautiful beyond measure.

It was the first of these images that the man addressed. “So, Mum. How do you think I did?”

“Alexander David Campbell,” he answered for Susan. Adding a slight trill to his voice to aid the impression. “I don’t think I care for you using the sonic screwdriver so much. In my day, we all got along just fine without one. Some dark night, everything around you will be covered in deadlock seals, or made of wood. And where will you be then, hmm?”

“Yeah, I know. it’s a hand-tool, not a crutch.” Was his self-effacing reply. “But then, reversing something’s polarity is sort of expected every fourth or fifth outing. Isn’t it? Go too long without, and historians will start to ask questions. The trick is working out *what* to reverse! In this case, it happened to be the power circuits of the rogue cleaning bots.”

“True enough,” he returned, this time speaking for Lucie, affecting a Northern accent. “But you really should stop addressing these critiques to your poor mother, and start talking to the TARDIS more. She’s probably starting to feel ignored.”

“Well said,” he agreed with himself. He kissed his hand and set it over both pictures. Addressing the Time Rotor, he asked cheerfully, “So how about it then? Thoughts? Comments? Constructive criticisms?”

In the corner of his eyes, there was a flickering of warm colours, coming from lanterns posted around a sitting area opposite one of the bridges. At

the same time, the air in the room became just a tiny bit muggy. Heavy enough to slightly flatten his shaggy mop of brown hair. The signs were subtle, easily missed, and had taken years to learn how to interpret properly. But he was getting there. The old girl was satisfied, presently, but starting to get impatient.

“We’ll call today a win, then, shall we?” he smiled warily, revolving over to the Diagnostic Panel to nonchalantly reset the atmospheric defaults. “Oh, and thanks for not letting yourself get dragged away or tumbling off the hill and getting sucked down a bog or whatever. Glad I can count on you.” He tended to take sudden disappearances as a sign that she had either gotten bored with the day’s adventure, or was denying him an easy way through it. Over to yet another panel he moved. Calculating the results of the readouts, he decided, “Doesn’t look like we’ll be landing for a while. Guess I’ll tuck into lunch.”

The slight heaviness was still in the air when the food was finished and the picnic blanket folded up atop the woven basket. He knew what she wanted. Wanted from her still-young pilot. Of him. But *he* had other plans. Very eager to put them into action all of a sudden, he ascended the stair to the chamber’s main level. “Back to the search!” he declared loudly.

If the backside of the police-box door could be considered to hold the Nine O’Clock position in the great round room, which is how Alex considered the control room’s layout, then One was comprised of the conversation nook, and access to rooms he’s clustered together for general regular use when he’d set this latest “desktop.” The head, kitchen, screwdriver workshop, master bedroom, and so forth.

Rather than head that way, he crossed instead to the landing that occupied Five O’Clock’s place. There, after a short foyer, were a pair of jagged-edged double doors that led towards the vast majority of the TARDIS interior. At this threshold was a hat stand of silvery white upon which he deposited his vest, an old wooden chest with a camping backpack perched atop it. This last item he hefted up over his shoulders before reaching into a pocket of the hanging outerwear to retrieve his sonic.

The divoted black handle felt more natural in his hand every day. Thumbing the dials to set it to Record. Holding the silver and copper device as was one would a microphone, he spoke clearly into the emitter crystal. A yellow-green gem housed within a pair of silvered rings. “Continuing from my previous entry, this is Expedition number... A Lot Plus Three.”

There was no point in bidding the TARDIS goodbye. She would be with him wherever he travelled from this point onward. He followed a long, hexagonal hallway, counting off branches. Passing by the one that led first to the Laundemat and Squash Court Five. Then the one to the pool. And across a broom closet full of stuffed animals. Three more forks were overlooked before he turned right, then five and a left.

“Since I last went on one of these expeditions, I’ve been reading up on Granddad’s diaries about his time with Sarah Jane Smith. I skipped forward a bit, found out he left her in the London suburbs to pick up later, so I figure now’s a good time to find her room. The exact location was hard to pin down, as usual. But I’ve got a general idea where I need to go.” He turned left again. At the door he himself had labelled ‘VICTORIA, NOT VICKI’ with a yellow post-it note, Alex stopped to check his bearings. A tiny hexagonal screen just below the sonic’s emitter flashed a slow green. “On track so far. It shouldn’t take more than a few days to get there. Four at most.”

From there, it would be a long, long straight-away to a set of staircases.



“Day One: Continued. I’m two floors down from where I started. So far today, the rooms I’ve come across down here have been nothing worth writing home about. But this...” Alex whistled at the sight before him.

“A billiards room. Twelve tables in three rows. A wet bar in the back. Bright and dark in all the right places. It smells of cigar smoke and old paper. Granddad always said there were pool tables about, somewhere, but he hadn’t seen them in centuries.” He walked to the nearest table, ran his hand over the flawless felt. “The tables here are dark green. Just like

Granddad's coat. The 'Wild Bill' Hickok getup, that everyone confused for Lord Byron. Well, everyone from Earth. When he tried to explain the difference to aliens, they'd just give him blank looks."

He slipped the backpack to the floor, to rest itself through what could prove to be a long visit. "Might as well play myself a game or two." He switched the sonic off, and set it on the rim of his chosen table. There were plenty of cues to choose from, and he took his time selecting one. A week learning the game under a Venusian pool hustler certainly helped him find one with the perfect balance and grip.

Alex racked up for eightball. His break was solid, spreading fifteen wooden orbs across the whole of the table. Although the ones that ended up along the back wall didn't bounce back from the rim as far as they should have. The fourth ball actually went *backwards* to return to it.

"Wait a tick..." Rotating to the opposite side of the table, he lined up a shot that would send the cue ball into the nine ball which would then knock the three into the right-side pocket. An easy shot... which was sent fowl when the three shot forward too quickly and too far.

He went to the side of the table and lined up an even easier one. A straight shot at the six ball into the left side pocket. The cue ball rolled ever so slightly towards the head of the table. Just enough to ruin the shot. Three shots, skewed in three different directions. Three more shots resulted in three more anomalous results, confirming it wasn't the table. Yet more from other tables resulted in equally inexplicable failures of basic physics.

"Back to the crutch," he sighed, taking the sonic in hand for a scan of the table and the whole room. Its buzzing was atonal, and still relayed too much information on a psionic level to sort through. The thumbnail screen provided hints more than answers, nudging his conclusions in a constructive direction. An answer confirmed when he stepped out of the pool hall back into the hallway. The buzzing shifted pitch to a distinctly average tone. "There some sort of phase-modulated gravitational anomaly in there. Just enough to mess with my shots." He waved the warbling wand one more to be sure. "Not out here..."

The asymmetric beeps resumed the moment he set foot back inside the hall.

“Definitely just in here. And I have no idea how to fix it. Or correct my shots, for that matter.” He found himself a seat at the bar, set the sonic on the table. Still recording. “Well, the TARDIS will play tricks on you, that’s what Lucie told me. Granddad had once told *her* that the day I decided to come away with him on the TARDIS, after that Christmas dinner went wonky, was the day he’d almost deleted all of the former companion’s rooms. The ones stored on the ring with Mum’s. Fitz and Tegan, Jamie and everyone else. He didn’t want to look back anymore. Just forwards.”

So of course, she and I decided to go look some of the old crew up, after a fashion. She was particularly keen on getting a look at where one Charlotte Pollard hung her Edwardian hats. Granddad had taught me enough TARDIS programming to call up a diagram of the storage rings. I did, but something happened when I tried to print out a map. *Poof!* The very rooms we were looking for had disappeared from the 4D grid!”

“Oh, you bet we panicked!” he laughed. “Took me days to sort out what had happened. In between in between a few tussles with various baddies and a vacation on Disney Planet. I’d somehow hit the wrong button and unmoored the rooms from the ring. Left them drifting through the infinite insides of the TARDIS until they found another piece of stable dimensional whatsits to anchor onto.”

Lucie wasn’t so sure it was as easy as me mucking up. At this greasy spoon overlooking a thousand moons, she asked Granddad – in her oh-so-subtle way – what it meant when a room or two suddenly went missing. Not deleted for a last-second energy push, just gone. Granddad gave her a look, chewed over his spring roll bit too long like he was searching her – searching *me* – for whatever secret we were holding. And finally said, plain as water, that “You know, I suspect sometimes that the TARDIS’ way of having a conversation with you.”

“So how do you know what she’s saying?” I asked.

“First you have to work out the order in which things are being said,” he told us. Big help, there.

“Lucie and I agreed to never mention what happened again. In the hopes I could figure out how to get all the rooms back onto the ring before Granddad got nostalgic again. But that... didn’t happen in time.” He sighed heavily. “Now here I am, tracking them all down, anyway. Looking for the leftover things of his old friends, and what they can tell me about him. How to carry on in his name.”

No wooden balls had been moving for some minutes, the pool tables seemed somehow more silent than they had been. Just the tiniest change in the background noise from the TARDIS’ engines.

“I miss him too, old girl. End of log, for now.”

The rapidly spinning TARDIS streaked through the Vortex. Her trajectory through time and space undaunted by the methodical meanderings within.

“End of Day Two. Infinite the TARDIS may be, but that does not mean infinitely furnished. It’s been a lot of empty rooms, dead ends and turnarounds since lunch. Plus a few ladder climbs that went nowhere. So now that I’ve found a room big enough to set my bag down, *any* room, I’m calling it done for the night. *Nightish*.” The room in question was large, high-ceilinged, and empty, save for the things Alex had brought into it, and a meandering collection of wall segments, cases, and display stands. All made of clear glass, dust-free and highly polished. “This place looks like an art museum. Only nobody’s filled it with anything yet. The paint on the walls smells fresh, like someone’s waiting for it to set before bringing the pieces in.”

Setting the sonic down for a moment, Alex dug a ration bar and bottle of orange juice out of his pack. He’d worked out how to make it bigger on the inside, but that felt like cheating somehow. It was a plain, ordinary backpack. A plain, ordinary sleeping back lay rolled out beside it.

Once said consumable were opened, he took the sonic back in hand. “It reminds me of a theatre my mother spoke in once. When she was touring, making speeches about the post-Dalek reconstruction. All that had been accomplished, what still had to be done. Before the Daleks wrecked it, the

building had been a heritage site from the days of digital projection. The last standing piece of a shopping mall. After the speech, there was a reception, and I spent that poking around the supply basement with the mayor's son. Um, Jeremy, I think. And the cultural restoration manager's kid, Gilly Johnson. Digging through old, *old* movie posters. Mostly sequels to originals we'd never heard of." He stopped dictating in order to take a sip of water and a bite of his meal.

"I asked Mum later if she'd ever heard of them. She said, some sounded to be before her time. Others after. Growing up in one part of Earth's timeline and being dropped in another will do that, I suppose. But she knew what *Back to the Future* was. She thought it was hilarious! So inaccurate it was silly! She couldn't stop giggling while she told me the story!" There was a momentary pause in narration, while Susan's son soaked in the memory's warmth. "She'd seen that one on the Time-Space Visualiser, back when she was on the TARDIS. She used to set up movie nights with Ian and Barbara, and sometimes even Granddad would show. That was back when he was wearing his first face." Another sip. "I moved the TSV over near the console room. One of these days, I'm going to get started on the pile of video games I found near it."

"Day Three. About a half hour after breakfast. Sometimes, I feel like taking these little nature hikes with a dimensionally transcendental backpack is 'cheating.' That's why I almost never pull out the pup tent. But this place... Let's just say I'm glad I fit the TARDIS Manual in there." Alex was sitting on a small ledge. Behind him, the door he'd come in through. Directly in front was the Manual, its thick black covers flush to the floor. The young man flipped rapidly between hundreds of pages separated by a multitude of bookmarks of many colours.

Speed-reading for keywords: '*Lighting.*' '*Generator.*' '*Cloud.*' '*Ludicrous Size.*'

Beside the Manual lay a smaller book with a cover. Alex's handwritten index of all the bookmarks he'd made. To which he occasionally went for help, to no avail. "I have no idea what this place is. What it does. Why it's here."

The ledge had just enough room for Alex, the books and an angular, silvery rail, before dropping down, down, down to cavern so deep and wide he could not see the bottom. Or perhaps he could, if not for all the clouds. Some of these were keeping to themselves. Other were moving; gathering up into larger ones, or splitting apart, or approaching but never quite touching the walls. Which were a quarter kilometre at least from the ledge in any direction. The only light in the chamber – though there was plenty of it – was generated by the clouds themselves; brilliant bolts of white lightning. Which crackled within a single cloud, or skipped from one to another, but never approached anything else.

A free-floating storm of static electricity, and a very polite one at that.

“Best guess... well, I don’t have a best guess,” he admitted to his sonic. “It can’t be for energy generation because the energy isn’t *going* anywhere. It could be some sort of self-contained ecosystem for another group of endangered animals... Or maybe this is what a room gets turned into when you delete it for energy? Granddad never did get around to telling me exactly *how* that works. It just did.”

Whatever this place had been meant for, it was beautiful to behold. The maze-like pattern of energy nudged his memory again. “I remember this time when Granddad took me through all the wiring beneath his console room. He wanted my help realigning a chronal anchor or some such. He opened a hatch by the bookshelves, and took me into this messy forest of tubes and cables and pipes. I had to pick my way through all that while trying to carry a torch and this gigantic manual in my hands, no bookmarks at all.” Alex lifted the manual up a good bit off the floor, and let it slap down. Just so his recording would include a properly loud example of just how heavy a Type 40 manual was.

In retrospect, his frustration at the time as almost funny. Almost. “I could barely understand the words I was seeing, with or without the TARDIS translating them! A lot of what he said made no sense. Some of it still doesn’t, but I get by. An hour in, I was just as lost as when we started. I asked him why nothing down there was labelled anything to make repairs easier.

“He gave me that look he did whenever he found something really amusing. All high eyebrows and happy cheeks. *Would you want to go ‘round with all your parts labelled all the time? A little patch on your britches that says Hello, this is my knee? A great big stripe across your shirt which helpfully informs everyone that’s your torso?* Heh. We both had a good laugh at that. *No, no, Alex. You’ve got to learn how to do this by feel if you want to... Well, never mind that just yet.* He didn’t tell me that I was being groomed to take this ship over for *years*. I wonder where else he was planning to retire to? You can’t beat this view.

“Day Four. I’m close. The sonic says so. But I’m not there yet. Still, the room I’ve just found... I’m sure I’ve found *one* of Granddad’s friends.”

The common room Alex had entered was tidy as an office and free of clutter save for the occupants of a coffee table. “There’s an empty plate here, and a photograph of Granddad in what he called his ‘Blue Period.’ He once said Picasso found this outfit quite inspiring. He had to be kidding, right?” A taller, rather more ‘filled-out’ iteration of the Doctor than Alex had personally known stood stiff-backed and proud, an authoritarian smile on his lips. Thumbs tucked into the lapels of a smart blue suit with matching waistcoat and cravat. Beside him, an older woman wearing an orange sweater and half-moon glasses. Behind them both, a waterfall so tall it boasted several rainbows within its mists.

Peeking into the bedroom, he found all but empty. “Whoever the woman in the photo is, it looks like she settled her affairs pretty fully.” The room that had been furnished into a study was a little more helpful. “I know one thing about her, she liked cake. There’s a couple of recipes on a writing desk, and a bag full of chocolate medallions, the kind you cook with.” Returning to the common room, he regarded the woman in the picture. “Whoever you are, I look forward to learning your name. And what your time together can teach me about picking up where he left off. But if I’ve got Granddad’s lifetimes in the right order, it’s going to be a while.”

Alex thumbed the screwdriver to log the room for later and snapped a photo of the photo. Adding it to the collection of ‘noteworthy places’ he’d gathered along this journey.

An hour later, Alex was in the hallways again. Back on the hunt for Sarah Jane's room. His path took him circling around what he had logged as the 'chocolate room.' Each circle wider than the last. "It's around here somewhere," he muttered, while chewing on one of the chocolates. He casually brought the sonic up to re-re-re-check his bearings.

Its tones were soon drowned out by a deep, cloying, gong. Coming from everywhere and nowhere at once. Reverberating as if through water, a fresh tone sounding at the precise moment the last could no longer be heard.

Alex swallowed hard. He'd only ever heard the alarm once before, and it had practically sent his great-grandfather into histrionics. "The Cloister Bell! And I'm *days* away from the control room!" Alex sprinted back the way he had come. No, taking a shortcut back to the chocolate room. Naming off the passageways he was skipping one by one. Positive he'd come the right way, he found instead the wide-open passage to a Frisbee golf course!

The Bell never ceased ringing.

Now truly panicked, he raced back another way. This time hedging the way he'd decided to call east. Then back another way, until he was well and truly lost. He stopped at a five-way intersection to triangulate his position the sonic. Himself, the console room, the five-way, these were his anchor points. The little light by the emitter flashed red no matter which way he went from that junction.

Defeated, Alex clung to the only thing that was making sense in the moment. "The Bell!" It was slightly louder towards one end of the hallway he had managed to find himself in. Abandoning his attempt to backpedal, he chased that sound. Past an open bedroom covered in Egyptian trappings. Through a mud bath. Up and down an ivy-covered courtyard. "Just around that next bend!" Into the angular hallway, he charged. There to find—

The control room? But not *his* control room! The walls were orange-gold, curved into a dome, and pockmarked with countless circular lights. Stacked platforms at the centre were bordered with rough-hewn columns, which veined out into multiple intertwining paths on their on their way into the

walls. The rounded control console in the middle looked as much to have been grown as to have been built.

To one side, a railed walkway of pitted metal led to a police box door. The light from the other side blinking red and dull white from through frosted windows.

“Red alert?” Alex baulked, charging the console. “You landed me in the middle of a red alert?” A rectangular monitor mounted to one side of the green-hued Time Rotor showed him the view of a deserted hallway. Intent on learning more before he stepped through the door – assuming he could – he began fumbling his way through a slapdash collection of keypads, cranks, and switches. “Disengaging Cloister Bell... Identifying transponder signal... *I.V.D.K. Last Resolve?* That’s a warship name if ever I heard one. Pinging out a map... Wait, no it’s a *space station*. Patching into emergency channels...”

There was a crackle of static in the air. Followed by a woman’s voice. Speaking with a thick Brazilian accent, forcing every word out through a great deal of pain. “This is Theoretical Engineer Ensign Izabella Pereira. Authorization Code, Seven-Seven-Three Double-Q Theta. The enemy have breached the command decks. I’ve flooded mid-decks with a chroniton wave to slow their advance. If you can hear this, make for the quantum escape pods in Null Sector. I’ve disengaged the deadlocks, but someone has to – **AAAUUUUKKKK!**”

The sound of the energy blasts that ended the woman’s life were seared into the young man’s memory. He knew instantly who had killed her even before they came close enough to the corpse’s microphone for it to pick up their victorious chant. A single word, repeated ad nauseum.

“**◀X-TÉR-MIN-AT€!**”

“**◀X-TÉR-MIN-AT€!**”

“**◀X-TÉR-MIN-AT€!**”

Alex slammed off the feed and stumbled backwards into a padded railing. He felt the weight of his own history pushing back at him. Of the day the

Doctor, the real Doctor died. Flying a Dalek Saucer into a great mineshaft and towards an explosive end of the Dalek Time Controller's attempt to weaponise Planet Earth. His last words pounding in Alex's head, reverberating a psionic barrage of last-second TARDIS tutorials. *'You're a good man, Alex. Don't let this change that.'* Lucie throwing the then-twenty-one-year-old Alex away from the magnocontrol panel. Finishing the sabotage herself, so the Doctor's last act would count, taking the full blast of multiple death-rays meant for her fiancé. The charred screams a meddling Time Lord and his turncoat friend, they who had brought the Daleks slithering to Britain 2195 C.E. and died for their treachery. The collapse of elevator bay walls while Alex shouted desperately for survivors. Any survivors. Finding only one.

The look in his mother's eyes as they walked back the long trek back to what remained of civilization. Hollowed out from loss. Haunted by the uncountable souls that would never come home. Neither of them saying a word to the other for hours.

Walking into the TARDIS without Lucie for the first time.

Team TARDIS. Population: One.

"No," he mumbled. Then said again with more conviction, "*No!*"

Pushing himself away from the curving strut, he attacked the console. Flipping, cranking, sliding, whatever he had to do to get the TARDIS moving again. But even on this alien panel, *one* error light was familiar. "A jammed parking brake? He gave me the total download, remember? I *know* how to make you let go of the brake!" Another flurry of adjustments later and... nothing happened. Alex blinked, unbelieving.

The floor beneath him vibrated, slowly at first. Within the space of five seconds, it was doing so furiously enough to send his teeth shattering. Then stopped dead. An alert popped up on the viewscreen informing him that the chronal anchors had blown out.

"You did that on purpose," he grouched, retreating to a nearby pair of chairs before his legs gave out.

The red alert klaxon sounded from outside. Muffled by the TARDIS doors but inescapable. Tapping on his conscience.

Head in his hands, Alex sat pinned by it. Pretending to compose himself before letting out a ragged breath. "It's inevitable. I know it. Anyone who calls himself the Doctor and flies around in a magic blue box is going to fight Daleks. It's a package deal. With the sonic, and the gimmicky clothes, and getting to dance with Ginger Rogers. And I bought in all the way!" He wildly tapped his chest. "And it's not like I haven't dusted it up with them before. But me and Mum were the only ones who made it out of the last one..."

Trembling hands balled into fists. "If it was just me, I'd go out there in a heartbeat. For Granddad and Lucie and everyone else that did back home from the last fight. Go down fighting myself, if it comes to that. It'd be worth it, if I could just slow them down long enough for others to rally up against them. Oh, some nights I dream of ruining a Dalek's day." The spike of rage boiled away, leaving only his underlying fear. "But it'll never just be me, just like it was never just him. There are always so many people to save. So many things I could do wrong. Can't ever save everyone. I don't want that responsibility. Not yet."

The alarm continued to bleat.

Pleading blue eyes addressed the contours of the bare ceiling. "He had *four hundred years* to work up to it! Just give me a few more!"

The frosted windows continued to blink red.

In the corner of his eye, a glint of light from the walkway he'd come in through. A hat stand stood there, impossibly reflecting the red lights from outside. Had that been there when he'd come in? Was that the *same* stand as the one he had left in his own control room?

Starving to think of anything but Daleks, the young man's mind travelled back of the path of the last few days. All the steps that had led him to this place. This choice. A fellow traveller he'd yet to read up on. A museum yet to be filled. Mysteries yet to be solved. Memories of a great-grandfather who had lessons yet to pass on, even in death. Alex's heart nudged him towards a conclusion. "Life doesn't always go in the order you want it to. Is

that what you've been trying to tell me? Have you and I been having a conversation all this time?"

The viewscreen, which by happy coincidence faced the chair he was sitting upon, sparked fiercely. Forcing Alex to jump up and stop the electrical shower. With a mallet, of all things! The now-smoking screen began cycling through live-feeds from the station's security cams. A team of six heavily armoured soldiers were forming a protective shell around two people in lab coats, all of them human. Energy rifles drawn in all directions, the soldiers were escorting their charges through a series of bulkheads. The one up front, the tallest of the 'squad,' stopped. With a *snip* of two fingers, he motioned the group forward in a new direction. Leading them towards a blue police box.

Now Team TARDIS, Population: One was involved, whether he wanted to be or not.

"Oh, what the hell," Alex shrugged. Forcing a smile into his mouth, he brought it closer to his eyes every step towards the door. He hid the sonic in a pants pocket, set to enact a passive scan. Of everything. Rank insignia, floor decks, energy signatures. which might give him a heads-up on the people he was about to be working with.

Figuring out how to shut down those energy rifles would come in handy! Just in case someone gets trigger happy.

But the young man's greatest tool would be the one that might convince these people to let him help them. Let them trust him to lead the way out of all the horror and oddness which was about to unfold. A trust which maybe, just maybe, might make the difference between success and failure. And add just one more person onto the tally of those who would live to see another day.

A name.

"Hello, I'm the Doctor!" he beamed, peering his head – and just his head – out of the door. Gently motioning a hand down. "Oh, you can put the guns down. I don't bite."

“Who are you?” Demanded the tall man from the live feed. Who was very much *not* lowering his weapon. He had Nordic features and scars enough to mark him a veteran of whatever violence was going on in the local timeline. “And what the hell is this... thing?”

“It’s a Police Box, see?” Alex indicated the white sign to the right of himself, helpfully pointed out some very relevant words. “Free for use of public. Advice and assistance available immediately. Advice and assistance, that’s *me!*” A cheerful thumb hiked towards his chest. “So I understand you’re having some trouble getting everyone to the quantum escape pods?”

The tall man, a lieutenant at best guess, started back as though the man before him was insane.

He snapped his fingers. “Oh! Of course! I forget myself!” Disappearing behind the door for a moment, he retrieved the bag of tasty brown medallions. Waving a thank-you to the TARDIS on the way back to the door where he held the treats out the stunned party. “Would anybody like some chocolate?”

DANCING WITH SHADOWS

by James D. Cooke

The Lord President sat in darkness. That's how he spent most of his days when he didn't have to worry himself about what he deemed to be petty and unnecessary Council business. The bureaucrats and sycophants desperate for his time and blessing since he had taken power and tore down the old regime that had lead them to war in the first place. A war he had ended at great cost to himself and in time lead him to where he was now. New, improved and never to suffer fools again. A smile crossed his face as he thought:

Doctor no more.

He had discarded the name when he last regenerated, during the process that restored Gallifrey and the Matrix from his mind. All those years ago. The Doctor had found a dead world, which would be the perfect template and moved it into place in the original sector of space to where Gallifrey had once stood. The Sisterhood of Karn had agreed to join him in rebuilding this new Gallifrey, allowing him to use a portion of the Flame in accordance with the TARDIS. It took many days for it to be completed, with the final spark being his regeneration. The process had left him drained and without many of his memories, so there was felt to be no need to be that person anymore. To start afresh on this reborn world and mould it as was seen fit.

To be seen as a hero was a good feeling at the time, but being a hero could only get him so far as he saw the council go back to its old ways. The revolution was quick as the people flocked behind him and took all the seats of power. Many of his friends were shocked at the route he had taken, but they knew it would be alright in the end. The council was deposed and

forced into servitude by the people and the Doctor, the saviour of Gallifrey was elected as the new Lord President. It was at this time that he told the people he would no longer be known as the Doctor, as he couldn't be that man and Lord President. He would be better and the future would be brighter. In reality, he knew the name would be a millstone around his neck, holding his plans back. Why be the Doctor when he had so few memories of that person. And so it began. What he built, he changed till he had sole control.

One of his first courses of action was to secretly strike at the heart of the remaining Dalek factions. Members of the Celestial Intervention Agency were sent on solo missions to destroy key facilities. The missions all took place at once as the President knew the Daleks would react if they took place at different times. Great devastation rained down on his greatest enemies as within moments the Daleks were wiped from the face of the galaxy. It also allowed him to dispose of most of the CIA at the same time. Too many of the races, he would be seen as an even bigger hero. He just saw them as an inconvenience that should have been dealt with when he had the chance. He knew he had the right. The phrase stopped his train of thought for a second as it seemed to resonate. He shook the thought away as tiny beeping sounds started away in the darkness.

In the darkness a figure appeared beside him, altering the air next to him and returning his mind to the present. "One of the attendants wishes for an audience," said the figure. Its voice metallic and sequenced in the dark.

The President smiled. "Well best let him in then. We wouldn't want to keep them waiting." The figure was gone in an instance and with a few taps on the control pad next to him; shades began to lift around the room, slowly allowing the orange light of Gallifreyan sky to fill the room through its high windows. One much larger than would be thought needed for the single throne he sat on. The light slowly washed upon his presidential robes and up to his face as the shades fully lifted to the high ceiling. After a few moments, the doors at the other end of the room slowly opened and a figure tentatively entered.

The attendant slowly closed the doors behind him, making sure to not

catch his dull grey robes in the frame and gently made his way into the room. He tried to keep his head down but found himself looking from side to side, taking in the view that shone in through the large windows, which were separated by tall stone pillars. In between eight of the pillars stood figures in hooded blood-red robes. A shiver shot up the attendant's spine.

Tindalos, he thought to himself. *The Doctor's bounds*. Another bolt of fear struck him. *No, must remember not to call him that. He despises that name.*

The attendant slowly raised his head as he neared the end of the room. He stopped and stood in place for a few seconds before the throne slowly began to turn to face him. Once the throne was in place, the Lord President stood and attached the gauntlets to his hands from the throne's sides. Taking him in, the attendant noticed his long red hair hanging over the shoulders of his robes, straight and full. The attendant didn't remember if the man formerly known as the Doctor, ever had red hair in any of his previous incarnations, but he felt it suited him now. His blue eyes shone in the light, matching the intensity of his streamlined face. A face that one council member joked, before he disappeared, looked like it had been carved from a rock in the Death Zone.

With a shock, the attendant realised that he had been staring too long as the *Tindalos* slowly started to move forward from their places. "I'm so sorry Lord President, I didn't mean to stare. This is just the first time, you have graced me with an audience," he stammered.

The Lord President chuckled. "Yes, I do suppose people would be in awe. You are forgiven." He raised a gauntleted hand and the *Tindalos* froze in place. "So tell me why you requested... What is your name?"

"It's Scradar, my Lord. Attendant Scradar."

"A good name," the Lord President said as he took his place on the throne. "So why did you request an audience Attendant Scradar?"

He took a deep breath. "It's your TARDIS, my Lord."

"What about it?"

"*Umm*, well for the past few hours there have been reports of fluctuations in its chronometry. Of distortions around its exterior. Strange readings that

no one can understand, even the best engineers.” Scradar stammered quickly. The Lord President tensed on his throne as he continued. “They say that the readings are growing rapidly and no one can agree on what the end result could be. One engineer did believe that it could have been the result of another TARDIS attempting an emergency stop in the same spot as your TARDIS sits, but others believe the fluctuations don’t support that.”

Scradar could see the Presidents face darken as he spoke but knew he had to finish. “They have sent me here to beseech you into letting them enter the TARDIS and examine inside. For if the problem is in the core, the results could be disastrous.

“No one is allowed inside!” the President roared. “Only I may enter. She is mine and I will not have fools mess with any part of her.”

“But Doctor—”

Instantly, Scradar knew he’d made a mistake as the President raised a Gauntlet towards him and hit him with a destructive beam of energy. The impact sent Scradar flying back towards the door he had first entered from.

*“You know that I am never to be called by that name! Do you understand? **Do you?**”* he screamed at Scradar’s prone body. After a few moments, he could see the regeneration energy forming around the body. Changing and renewing the form. He smiled sadistically, remembering the Time Lords he had wiped from existence for questioning him, mocking him and for possibly attempting to take his position from him. He took great pleasure in all of them. Especially the ones who his beautiful hounds brought to him and then begged for their lives before they were snuffed out.

The throne room continued to shine brightly in regeneration energy as he turned to his Tindalos. “Mechandromdar, to me.”

The figure who had spoken to him earlier moved effortlessly to his side. With great care the President removed the hood from the Tindalos’s head, revealing a Gallifreyan face augmented by Mondasian cybernetics, which took up half the features. The circuits surge with electricity, round eyes that showed none of the personality this Time Lord must have had, before this deliberate cyberisation. He remembered ordering the destruction of an

entire CyberNomad fleet for these pieces. It took time to figure out a way for Gallifreyan biology to take, but once it was done, he selected eight Time Lords to become his elite guard, the Tindalos. Hounds that would hunt his enemies and follow his orders without question.

Most were against their will, but losing the minds of his former companion, Romana, and others were necessary sacrifices.

“My old friend, I want you to take Romana and Mortimus to the courtyard where my TARDIS is, round up those engineers and take them to the cells. I will deal with their insolence later.” He replaced the hood as the Tindalos processed the information. “At once my Lord,” it said before moving swiftly towards the door. Followed by two others from different sides of the room.

As they left, the energy from Scradar’s body dimmed away, revealing the form of a beautiful young woman, with short blonde hair. Quite attractive, the President thought to himself. He slowly made his way down from the throne towards Scradar, as she stood up unsteadily.

“Now my dear, you have a new job, which you must complete with due diligence,” he said with mock charm as he brushed the dust off her shoulders. “Once my hounds have removed the engineers from my TARDIS’s sight, you will stand guard. All day and all night, so that no one enters.” Scradar looked at him fearfully. “It’s okay, if any of the Tindalos approach you just utter 'Henrietta' and they will leave you be.” She nodded quickly unable to speak. “But tell no one else of that word and how to use it. If you do,” he lent and whispered in her ear. “You won’t regenerate again...”

“Ye– Yes, my Lord,” she stammered as she looked into those now terrifying eyes and quickly left, closing the door behind her.

Smiling he made his way back to the throne. His footsteps echoing around the room, like the drumbeat of his hearts. The President was almost there before he noticed a figure by one of the pillars. It wasn’t one of his Tindalos, that’s why it looked so out of place. The Stranger was leaning against the pillar almost as if they were simply taking a break on a morning walk. The face was obscured by shadow, almost as if the shadows knew

what to hide. Then suddenly he moved to another pillar and was gone.

“Tindalos, there’s an intruder in the throne room.”

The Tindalos moved quickly, scanning the room for signs of the Stranger. After mere seconds they all resumed their positions. “Nothing can be found, my Lord,” one of them said in its mechanical tones. “There is no intruder present.”

“Well scan again. They were here. *I saw them!*” he screamed.

The Tindalos moved around the room again. Scanning every section of space available, again finding nothing. Silently they moved back into place and stood stock still. The Lord President pace frantically in front of the throne, muttering to himself. “They were *here*, I *saw* them, they had to be here...”

“Well, of course I’m here Doctor. They just can’t see *me*.”

Quickly, with a hand at his temple, the President turned to the voice. The figure was stood by the entrance to the throne room, leaning against the wall. The face still in shadow. The President could tell now that it was a man that was vexing him. Without a second thought, he let loose a burst of energy from his gauntlets at the figure. The blasts send pieces of marble and stone flying, but didn’t hit the Stranger, who was suddenly leaning a few metres to the right of the damaged wall. He took aim again and fired, destroying more walls.

Again the Stranger had moved, this time to the left of the door to the throne room. The Stranger was laughing at him. “I really don’t think you’ll be able to hit me, Doctor. Your aim seems to be off!”

“*Don’t call me that!*” he screamed firing one more burst of energy. A huge section of the wall was ripped apart, sending chunks crashing to the floor. Old murals could be seen in the remains of the wall, made in the time before The Great War that now never was. “What do you want from me?”

“Don’t you know? Can’t you tell?” the Stranger mocked from his place in the shadows.

The President wondered how this man could hide his face in the shadows and move faster than the Tindalos. “There should be no species left who

can do that.” He thought as his mind scrambled for answers. Everywhere he looked there stood the Stranger, calm and collected as dread grew in the President's hearts. Before the fear completely took him, he screamed once more: “*Who are you?*”

“I’m that which you have forgotten. All you strove to achieve in the beginning. Before the travels, before the friends, before your family and the cousins. The love and hope and faith that all good beings are born with. I am the heart of everything that sparked you into existence. The past affecting the future. All the hope I had left for this world” The Stranger’s voice echoed around the room. What he said somehow made some sense to the President. He didn’t know how or why but it did.”

“That man is *dead!* You hear me? I *killed* him!” the President shot back.

“No, he is merely wounded. Waiting for the right time to return. Once your tyranny has ended. Your shameful acts upon this world will be cast aside and the best of what once was will rise again.”

The President suddenly burst into manic laughter at this and responded sharply: “How can he when every scrap of what that petulant romantic was, has been wiped away from the Web of Time? No memory, no conscience. Nothing is left!”

“They thought that of me... My name lost in the far reaches of history by sycophants in the hopes of pleasing a despot I once called a friend. I disappeared but they still remembered the very thought of me. Something stronger, different and more powerful.” Those words struck a chord with the now desperate President who had collapsed at the foot of his throne scrambling for purchase. “He wasn’t all-powerful because the seed of doubt that I left was always there. The Doctor is the seed of doubt for you. And its crop can sprout in any field, not just its own. You could vanish and they could concoct any story to save a memory. That is *true* victory, not this carnage. You will be cast aside and a real rebuilding of this world will begin. You know this.”

“Pretender,” he snarled. “Get out of my mind.”

“Remember you are mortal.”

“Get out!”

The President rose to his feet and came closer to the Stranger, but still found he couldn't see his face. The shadows seem to swirl and morph around it.

“You rotting shadow! These people couldn't govern or rebuild a tin shack, that's how low they've become. That is how much they need what I am. They fear *me!*”

“Just as you fear me. Fear can always be fought against. It takes sacrifice. That much I know. Gallifrey will rise above that fear and take back what they love. The Universe will be all the better for it.”

The President could sense a smirk growing in the shadows, which unsettled him more.

“The mind rebels against its character,” said the Stranger. “Good falters to evil... Why not evil to one's repressed good?”

Suddenly the room was shaken and a deep rumble rose from outside. The President ran towards the large windows behind the throne, leaving the still figure of the Stranger. He could now see smoke billowing from many of the buildings as explosions rocked them. The Throne room shook again, as he could feel another explosion somewhere deep below his feet. He couldn't tell how many levels down it had come from, but he felt in his hearts that they would get closer quickly. Even from the great height, he was situated at, he could see swarms of his now former subjects rushing through the streets of the capital. “*Damn them, damn them all,*” he whispered against the glass. He turned to find the Stranger had vanished completely from the room. “*Tindalos!*” he shouted “Make sure that these usurpers do not reach the throne room! I want anyone destroyed who now poses a threat to me. Crush them all.”

The five remaining Tindalos moved effortlessly from their positions and disappeared beyond the door.

He became pacing in front of the window as more explosions rocked around the capital. The fear that had been there before in the presence of the Stranger had now been replaced by anger at what he believed were

ignorant fools, trying to destroy what he had created. It wouldn't end this way, not while there were still beats left in his hearts. He could hear screaming and fighting coming from the distance. Somewhere close by. A few levels away at least. He hoped that those screams came from those lives being snuffed out by his hounds.

Their deaths reaped peace to his bothered psyche. He closed his eyes, his panic abating, however slightly. His mind churned, but the Stranger would not return.

He tried to raise the Tindalos from the console on the arm of the throne, but only crackles resounded. Rage usurping fear, he smashed his gauntlet onto the console shattering it into shards and exposing its wires. He found himself losing control as he used the energy within the gauntlets to pull his throne from its locks in the floor and sending it crashing through one of the windows. He let out a furious scream as the sounds came closer and closer to the throne room.

The wind howled through the now shattered window as the President made his way into the centre of the room and prepared himself for what was coming. A dark smile drew across his face as he knew he would slaughter many of the people who would come through the door. It was what he felt they deserved for turning on him, after all, he had done for them.

Let them come... he thought to himself as the doors were suddenly blown inward, sending splinters of wood and metal flying in all directions. He flinched not for the doors, but for what came beyond them.

People flooded through the remains of the doorway as he sent huge bolts of energy towards the crowd. Several people were disintegrated as they were hit by the full power of the bolts. The President took aim at a couple more but found nothing charging from the gauntlets. A figure stepped through the large crowd of people and came face to face with the President. The sharp blue eyes stared him down as the wind blew his jacket behind him and made the fringes of his blonde hair stand straight. He held a small device in his hand that pulsed. The soon-to-be former-President realised that this was what nullified the power of his gauntlets. In another

lifetime, he might have considered it ingenious. In another lifetime, he will.

The two men stood eye to eye with each other. The President, furious and the Newcomer sad, but resolved. The room was silent bar the wind for a few moments. Until the President finally spoke.

“How dare you do this to me!” he growled. *“Who do you think you are, boy?”*

The Newcomer smiled sadly as he stared at him. His gaze never faltering.

“I am what these people deserve, what I am always meant to be. I *am*...”

“You will be...” the President drew back in horror.

“...the Doctor.”

And atop his throne, his reign ended.

FAREWELL TO KINDNESS

By Joshua Wanisko

The Scientist

My mother always said that our loves are fathers to our fears. For something to scare you, really scare you, right down to your core, you've got to love it, at least a little bit.

When he had still been alive my son Mark had loved fairy tales with the purity of passion only a ten-year-old could muster. But at night, wolves and witches prowled the gingerbread houses of his dreams and brought the shadows of his room to malevolent life.

I was the same way, but like many children who would grow up to work in the sciences science fiction was my passion at his age. Despite that, I lived in fear of alien invasion the way my friends feared nuclear war. My father reassured me, in his measured, reasonable way, and said that any aliens advanced enough to travel all the way across the galaxy wouldn't be interested in taking anything we had. Their science would be like magic to us and they could use it to conjure whatever they needed.

I was reassured, and my fears subsided to the point where I stopped sharing them with others. But they didn't go away, and I think that I suspected then what I know now.

The universe is not a rational place.

Not to humans.

A note: I am not unaware that my account lacks the propulsive urgency such a situation should possess. Part of it is a lifetime of writing precise and passive-voiced scientific reports designed to cleave as close to the objective

truth as possible, but that's not all of it. I think this was my way of coping with the situation, by removing myself emotionally and framing it as just another problem to be solved, a strictly intellectual exercise that could be brought to a successful conclusion if I were smart enough to do it. So, please pardon me if I seem inappropriately glib or dispassionate as I recount the events of the invasion. Keeping a certain amount of ironic distance between me and the pain was the only way I can deal with it.

We first saw the ships when they emerged from around the dark side of the moon. They were huge, outside the scale of human understanding, so big that they made everyone who saw them acutely aware of our insignificance. They ignored all communication, which was almost reassuring in its way. It made them seem like some kind of natural phenomenon rather than the product of an alien intelligence.

I was one of those who argued that the size of what we would come to know as the temple ships meant that the aliens could not be hostile. They were opaque to cosmic ray imaging but the sheer amount of atmosphere they displaced should have been catastrophic. If they had wanted to devastate us they could have done so by manoeuvring the ships over our population centres and allowing the pitiless fundamental forces of the universe to tear us apart.

But this didn't happen. I have no idea of the functioning of whatever mechanism was in play, but the destruction that should have followed, didn't. Twelve enormous ships, flying cities each of them, entered our atmosphere without incident. It should have been like dropping a bowling ball into a fish tank as they took positions above Moscow and London, Washington D.C. and Beijing. Instead, it was a ripple at the water's surface at the moment of entry and then stillness, like an Olympic high diver at the top of her form.

They had built their ships to prevent unnecessary destruction. Surely this was indication of their good intentions. I was making this argument right up until the bombs started dropping.

I retreated to Daedalus seabase beneath the Aegean with the rest of the

scientific corps. The invasion unfolded like every science fiction movie you've ever seen. If you're old enough, you may remember the rash of invasions centred on London in the 1970s (or perhaps 80s). That bloke with the moustache covered them up, but on some level, humanity knew that we were not alone, but we up until now we were able to pretend otherwise

We ran the simulations through the vegetable brains. The brains – officially “vegetable matter computational engines” – are our organic computers, a living neural net grown from plant fibres. They made their calculations. If nothing occurred to correct the course of current events, the aliens would cause irreparable damage to human society in five hours. They would destroy all major population centres in two days. They would extinguish every living thing larger than a house cat in six days. They would crack the shell of the planet in nine.

The decision was made to evacuate non-essential personnel to the Titan colonies. This included my family, Janet and the twins, Mark and April. Sending the kids off was difficult. We tried to be as casual as possible, but they knew things weren't right. They tried to be brave. Mark always used to cry about the little things but put on such a brave face when things got serious. I always thought he would make such a wonderful emergency room doctor because of that. April was holding her stuffed monkey. We bought it on a whim five years ago, and she took it everywhere. We wash it when we can, but it's looking pretty ragged by this point. If Janet and I had been smart at the beginning we would have picked up a backup Monkey when we bought the first so we'd have a replacement ready when the first one inevitably wears out. April is sometimes a bit of a timid kid, but she could handle anything if she had that stupid stuffed monkey with her.

The vegetable brains handle the calculations for the transmats and they're amazing, but the fact of the matter is that you're disassembling a living thing, transmitting it across more than a billion kilometres of interplanetary space and then rebuilding it at the other end. That's going to put a strain on anything, no matter how sophisticated, therefore each evacuee had to travel light. They wouldn't be able to take much beyond the clothes on her back

and maybe one treasured possession. Janet had the kids, Mark had his tablet full of fairy tales and I knew April would take Monkey, but after they beamed out I saw him sitting right there at my desk, watching me with her scratched-up glass eyeballs. He was too battered from so much loving and just slumped wherever you put him. It crushed me that April would have to face this exile without him. Then I saw the note:

Daddy,
Monkey is here to help.
Please take good care of him.
Love, April

I couldn't swallow for a long time after that.

After they departed, we received the sealed orders from Geneva. Then, we retransmitted the unconditional surrender of Earth, but the aliens paid no more attention to this message than they did any others. I eyed the Osterhagen Key in its glass case and wondered when I would receive orders to use it.

I thought about my family. They were approximately seventy-five light minutes away. If Earth fell to the aliens, then Janet and our children would survive the extinction of terrestrial life by just over an hour, until the aliens looked outward.

As a scientist, the thing that frustrated us most was how we were dying without knowing why. What did we do to offend them so? Why were they here? I'm a cosmologist by training and I was more aware than most how vulnerable to a cosmic catastrophe a civilisation clustered on a single planet is, and in my darker moments I had fleeting fears that a rogue comet or a gamma ray burst would wipe us, but I would rather humanity perish to those blind forces of the universe than to this alien intelligence.

There were eight of us left on the base. Most of the others were off in their quarters, either getting drunk or praying. Some multitaskers were

doing both. I was still in our command centre watching the estimate of when our defences would fail and composing a goodbye message to my family. I eventually decided on a simple “I love you” and sent it spinning off into the void and then sat down to await my death, because that was all that was left me.

I read a magazine titled *Wondrous Tales* when I had been a child. I didn’t know it at the time and only figured it out as an adult when certain stories I encountered as an seemed strangely familiar, but their gimmick was adapting classic stories as science fiction. Hansel and Gretel on Venus, with an alien in place of the witch. That kind of thing. Sometimes the allegories were subtle, sometimes they involved little more than replacing one object with an analogue from a different era, leading to implausible and overly literal stories about cattle drives in space. I remember when they adapted Jack London’s *To Build a Fire* as the account of an astronaut marooned on the surface of Charon. It was titled *The Absence of Heat*. At twelve years old I wasn’t mature enough to understand it. It didn’t have aliens at all. Was it even science fiction?

And the ending really upset me. He understood that he was going to freeze to death so he closed his eyes and accepted it. This made me angry! I read this story wondering what clever tactic he would employ to stay alive until the shuttle came by to rescue him. I was invested in his fate. How dare he give up!

But now, twenty-five years later, when I was facing my own unavoidable doom, I understand how he felt. Death is here. Why fight it? There is a relief that comes when you accept the inevitable.

And suddenly he was there, a literal god from a machine.

I saw a rush of movement and swirl of the coat. “Hello! Just be a moment! Can you point me in the direction of your master computer?”

“I, uh—”

“Never mind. Found it!” Those incongruous trainers barely brushed the ground as he bounded out of his blue box and flounced into a chair in front of a workstation. He pointed a wand at it, the wand squealed and then

he began working the keyboard like Bach were playing a hymn on a Hammond organ.

I thought I was hallucinating. I honestly believed I had cracked under the stress and my broken mind was spinning me a comforting lie before it burned out entirely. The part of my brain still capable of being objected wondered why my hallucination didn't feature a more plausible saviour who was a better fit with my world-view.

Rat-a-tat went the keys, and with them he worked his magic. The whole world spun around him. He was a whirlwind in motion, a cyclone, the supermassive black hole that at the centre of our galaxy around which the entire Milky Way pivots. He waved his wand and dropped one ship in the ocean with non sequitur, "There goes Atlantis. Again." Then he sent five more spiralling into the sun and made the rest simply vanish, like a magician pulling a rabbit out a hat in reverse.

I focused our sensors on the last reported location of the closest ship. It couldn't simply be gone. Something that big doesn't vanish that completely. The air should be rushing in to fill the space it had occupied. But the absence of the ships had no more consequences than their presence had.

"If you're looking for the temple ships," he said, studiously casual. "You won't find them. I shunted them off to the nearest parallel dimension."

Rough luck for them, I thought but didn't say. Instead I asked, "How did you do it?"

He flashed a cheeky, billion watt smile. "The ships were ever so slightly out of phase with this reality. I accessed the computer, moved a decimal point in the matrix controlling their dimensional phase-shift regulators."

Some of my colleagues returned to the control room, wondering at our sudden reprieve. He leaned back in the chair, basking in our adoration. Knowing what I know now, it was clearly an act, theatre for our benefit, staged to maximise his heroism. James Bond can't stop the countdown at 300 seconds, and the Doctor can't swoop in to save the day until the most dramatic moment. Having a time machine ensures that he's never late for it.

I began working the recall sequence to open the gateway to Titan when he

froze. His whole demeanour changed as he looked at me. He was utterly unlike a human being in that moment. His expression was not that of the sun going behind a cloud, but of a full solar eclipse, a once in a generation cosmic event that plunges great parts of the world into darkness. In the chambers of my dreams, he is a black silhouette with no features other than flashing eyes and gnashing teeth.

“What. Is. That?” he demanded. He wasn’t looking at me but at something past me.

I turned to follow his gaze and for the second time in an hour, nearly hysterical relief flooded me. “It’s my daughter’s stuffed animal. Her monkey. His name is Monkey.”

His teeth were clenched so tightly that they squeaked. “Not that. In the *bowl*.” Why was he so upset?

“It’s the recall console,” I explained. “It requires an organic component to handle the hyperspace fold computations, but we use vegetable matter to avoid ethical concerns.” I laughed. “One of the newer scientists thought it was a desktop terrarium when he first saw it.”

“I *know* what it is. It’s an organic matrix grown from a fractal seed. You’re running petabytes of data through it every second. Don’t you realise that it will become protosentient in five thousand unshielded exchanges?”

“I didn't know.” I didn't design the system. I'm a physicist, not a technician.

“Your kind never does. You never know what you're doing and you don't care about the consequences.”

What was going on here? Was this a joke? It was too absurd to be real. I was suddenly aware of how frightened I was. The copper penny tang of fear swarmed within my mouth. I realised my hands were shaking as I completed the recall sequence. It was rude to do it while he was talking to me, but I was seized with the irrational fear that I would not be able to complete it if I stopped. “But I’ll address it with the engineers. We’ll figure out some way to shield it.”

“And deny a new race its genesis? *Lobotomise* them preemptively?”

Condemn them to an eternity as your mute servitors? You would commit retroactive *genocide* because the maths are too difficult?!” His expression didn’t change. There was a fearsome, inhuman certainty in his righteousness. Mark would have recognised him before I did, schooled by his fairy tales. The Doctor was the malevolent trickster fairy, happy in an inhuman way, merry, but never joyous. I had just faced the imminent end of the world but it didn’t frighten me like the way the look on his face did.

I still remember that blind, floundering terror. “No! That’s not it!” Even if I understood what he was doing, I don’t think I could have brought myself to act, even though I know now that my inaction would mean the death of my family. I felt as though I was burning up and his stare transfixed me like a lance of ice right through my heart.

He swivelled the chair back to face the keyboard and rapped out a quick series of keystrokes with his left hand without even looking at the keys. The globe of the console came free with a pop and the Doctor scooped it up and held it under his arm.

The transmat didn’t have an alarm, just the bland notification:

CARRIER BEAM LOST

Janet, Mark and April had been reduced to their component atoms by the particle matter transmitter, which sent those atoms across the 1.2 billion kilometres between us at superluminal speeds. The console here used the pattern it received from the transmitter to put them back together. The console that was now disconnected from the system and cradled under the Doctor’s arm.

Okay. Stay calm. This wasn't necessarily the end. They weren't dead. The atoms that composed their bodies were here, but without the carrier beam the transmat didn't have the proper pattern to reassemble them. They were just a jumbled up collection of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen. But they were stable.

Keep them in stasis until we could locate the carrier beam. As long as

nothing disturbed the matter, they could still be saved.

The panel to the Transmat Bay slid open and a fine mist blew free. I smelled it and gagged when I realised that I was breathing in the remains of my family.

“What have you done?” In my memory I roared my demand for an answer, but in reality I know I barely managed to mouth the words.

“Humanity!” The contempt in that word. “You have overstepped your bounds! You have reached for the Fires of Prometheus and they have burned you!”

He stepped into his machine and vanished. I somehow knew that he would taking his capsule to the Titan colonies to “liberate” their vegetable brain. Perhaps he would send the evacuees home, but more likely he would leave them behind as an object lesson. The auxiliary computers would be able to handle life support, which only meant that the survivors would live long enough to starve to death rather than asphyxiate.

I didn’t know what to do. I sent them out there to be safe and I never imagined a future where they were dead and I was alive. It didn’t feel real. It wasn’t really happening.

But it was. I sought about for a dustpan and a broom so I could sweep up the bodies of my wife, my son and my daughter.

I wanted to die. I wanted to join them. But that would be a final victory for him, for this Doctor who played so carelessly and selfishly with life. I would grieve. And I would live. And I would warn the rest of world. I would bring them my message.

My father had been wrong. I was right to be afraid of aliens. I was just frightened of the wrong ones.

The King at Peace

I was great man. I was never a good man. Good men make poor gods

and I am a god before I am a man.

Men cannot peer through an infinity of parallel worlds and find that which aligned with their wishes and then shape their world to reflect these dreams I could have been a tyrant, a terrible dark lord, for who could oppose such a power? Instead I brought enlightenment to my people. Peace spread where my shadow fell. I upended the social order. I imposed my will upon my fellows only to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak. I gave freely of my power. Most saw the value of my gifts, and our legions grew. There was no hunger. Women no longer died in childbirth. There were those who clung to their superstitions, to their rituals, to the right to abuse their wives, and they did not welcome my rule, though, I think, their wives did.

I ruled for twenty thousand years, and in that time, my empire spread across many worlds. Never in a thousand worlds has the Golden Age we raised up been equalled.

It ended, as all things must.

The Poet

My name is Richard Faulkner and as the poet laureate of Earth I'm probably the most famous person you've never heard of. That said, you almost certainly know my work. You can't be part of society in 2030 and not know it. A fragment from my *Lamentations* is printed on the new ten-pound note. You know, the one that begins, "Loss is like a summer's day..."

How is being poet laureate of Earth? Honestly, it's pretty great. I am very happy with my life right now. My poems were my answer to *Crimson Loss*, and under other circumstances I would have mixed feelings about owing my renown to a plague, but I don't even have to feel guilty about that because they're going to announce the cure any day now.

I'm very comfortable in that sweet spot between fame and obscurity. You may be wondering how I can maintain any privacy. Do me a favour. Close your eyes and imagine a poet. Any one. Doesn't matter.

Done? Was it Maya Angelou or William Shakespeare in your mind's eye? Sometimes people pick Poe or Plath, but in general the public has no idea what even the most famous poets look like. Few poets are able to make a living through their poetry alone and almost none of us become famous in the way we traditionally understand fame. I'm not even sure it's the right word for me. I went from unknown to iconic without an intervening period of increasing notoriety.

When there was still interest in the poet (rather than my poetry), *Time* magazine called me a post-modern Banksy, which was flattering to me (if embarrassing to Banksy).

My poems were my way of working through my own feelings about the plague. They weren't even intended for publication, but they got out there in the public sphere (and the story about how they did is almost as famous as the poetry, so I'm not going to repeat it here) and it seems they spoke to other people as well. But we're poised on the cusp of a cure now and I think my works will be remembered as a minor footnote in a dark time for humanity.

People still recognise me from time to time, and I'm vain enough to appreciate the thank yous from a stranger who comes up and tells me how *Lamentations* articulated their feelings so perfectly. They ask me when they can expect to see Volume Two, which is a reasonable question, seeing as I named the first collection "Volume One." I try to be as diplomatic as possible and I tell them that I have something else in the works and we each go our own way, happier for having had the meeting.

In truth, I doubt there will be a Volume Two. That part of me is...sleeping. I was privileged to be able to channel the Zeitgeist, but that time has come and gone and the collective anxieties that led to its composition are no longer there.

I write longhand with a pen and paper at a local café named Sugar & Spice when I want to work. There are fewer distractions that way and writing it out helps me clarify my thoughts. It's tucked away in the corner of our little village, so I seldom have many encounters with fans. They're

lovely and I'm grateful that I was able to touch so many lives, but they do keep me from my work. But people rarely take note of me anymore. For a brief, strange time I was a *destination*. A bus company ran tour groups with the sole purpose of meeting me. I still have the clippings from the advertisements somewhere. I will confess, that was odd. I would occasionally open my door and find two dozen Americans with loud shirts and cameras hoping for a selfie.

I'm nothing special. We all had the same experiences. I don't even think of myself as a "writer" as much as someone making a record of what we're all going through. I'd call myself a "chronicler" if I didn't think I'd come across as unbearably pretentious.

Here's the thing. I like people. I like almost everyone I've ever met. I'm lucky enough to be able see the beauty that exists within the people I meet, and I can write words that aligns that beauty within them with the sublime majesty that is a part of all creation.

And oops, that sounds about a billion times more pretentious than calling myself a chronicler.

I was still nursing my first cup of coffee when I heard them. I was about ready for a break so I closed my notebook and waited for them to come over.

"2030? Blimey! I'll be older than mum by the time I get here."

I couldn't decide if they were a couple or not. The man was lean and foxy and looked to be in his early thirties. She was blonde and buoyant and a good ten years younger. He could be her boyfriend. He could just as easily be her cool young uncle. One thing I did know for sure was that he brought her here to meet me. She had an appealing earthy vitality, the kind of unfiltered zest for life that gets more attractive the older one becomes.

They looked around the room, the man spied me and they crossed to me. He grabbed an unoccupied chair from another table, spun it around and sat backwards in it facing me. Under other circumstances his grin might have been unsettling. He looked like he intended to lunge for my neck at any moment. But his demeanour was so childishly enthusiastic that I couldn't

help but grin right back.

“Rose! This is Dicky Faulkner! 21st century Shakespeare! The People’s Poet! Speaker to the Stars!” Ah, he’s heard of me then. I wasn’t sure until now. “His Lamentations volume one will be remembered for a thousand years. Oh, but volume two! That is what makes him immortal! In the 253rd century, your people will have evolved beyond the need for eyes, but they keep them so they may read his immortal words. Ha! It’s recorded on a golden record on the Traveller Probe. Morgan Freeman does the reading! It’s the first sound from the Earth heard in the Andromeda Galaxy!”

Wow. He’s not the first to come up with a story about my future, but this was more elaborate than most. I think this was their way of feeling a connection to me. I usually smile and nod, say something vague and reassuring and accept their story in the spirit it was given.

“You know those things haven't happened yet, right?”

“Oh, but they will.” Spoken with the absolute certainty of one child assuring another that Father Christmas left those gifts beneath the tree.

I'm not so foolish that I'm going to get into a fight over this. Instead, I smiled apologetically to the girl I took to be Rose. “I don’t know if I’ll complete Volume Two.” She looked at me blankly. She clearly had absolutely no idea who I was. This was awkward for everybody. “But it looks like you don’t care. Um, can I sign something for you? Pose for a selfie?”

When I was looking at Rose, her companion snuck up behind me. I turned my head and found myself nose to nose with him. He grinned madly and before I knew what was happening he had reached down and grabbed my notebook. “Hello! What do we have here?”

“Oi!” I pushed the seat back and lunged for the notebook, but he held it just out of reach.

He flipped rapidly through the pages. “No, no, no! This is all wrong! You’re supposed to be much further along! Where’s the broken teacup poem about your brother?”

I reached again, but he hopped up on a stool and continued paging

through it. I thought maybe answering him would get him to give up the book so I told him, “He’s going to live. He caught the plague, but he’s responding to the cure. We’ve got one more round of therapy on Saturday and Doctor Tygan anticipates he’ll walk out of there completely free of the virus.”

It wasn’t a secret that my brother had contracted Crimson Loss, and it wasn’t much of an leap for there to assume that I’d be writing about it. Still, it felt like an intrusion.

Marcy Owens owned Spice, and she looked out for her people, and that included me. She was not quite five feet tall, but she looked quite in her element as she clambered on to the stool next to him, took the man by the scruff of his neck and told him, “I think it’s time to leave.”

“Ow, ow! That smarts! And mind the hair! I can only get the spray in the 1970s and we’re not due back there for three weeks.”

“Out!” She commanded, marching him to the door.

“This is all wrong!” He insisted as he dug his heels in at the threshold. “There is no cure! Earth First is going to bomb the clinic. His parents catch it next and then his cousins, every one of them, right down the family tree. In two months, he is the sole survivor! He completes Volume Two and he’s found next to it, suicide.”

Marcy looked angrier than I’d ever seen her, but her voice was strictly controlled. “Dorothy, ring the police.” The girl behind the counter picked up the phone and began dialling.

The man turned to me then, as if realising what his own words meant, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. It’s a fixed point. I can’t change it. I want to, but I can’t.” The Rose girl looked equal parts troubled and embarrassed, but the man looked positively stricken.

Marcy hustled them both out the door and made a point of closing it behind them. She came to my table. “Are you okay?”

I nodded, but neither of us believed it.

I couldn’t stop thinking of the man and his final words. He was mad, but

I believed that he was sincere when he said he was sorry.

At least, I believed that he believed it, and that's not quite the same thing.

The King at War

A Champion arrived during our Jubilee.

He requested an audience and it was granted.

One man, he said, may not hold power over so many.

He called my utopia a travesty. A farce. A monument to oppression and ego.

I listened to his grievances and when they became tiresome I bid him depart. He refused.

He threatened to destroy me. I announced his exile and proclaimed that he would be executed should he return. He asserted that I would fall alongside my empire when he next I saw him.

The Poet, Revisited

It came to pass. All of it. Exactly as he said. There was a bombing at the gene therapy facility. Their servers failed, along with all the backups. The research is gone. There is no cure for Mum or Jimmy. Dad has it too now. Lindsay left several messages for me, but I haven't listened to them. Listening will make it real. The best case scenario is that it's just her and not the kids, but I know with a sick certainty that the madman was right about this too.

I haven't slept since his visit. The time I should spend sleep instead passes in a fugue state and when I return to myself I find my composition book filled with pages of poetry written in my hand. It will become my *Lamentations, Volume Two*, I know.

The cure was delayed by six weeks. Eighty million people died in that

time. It is now widely available, and distribution across Europe should be complete by week's end. Too late to save my family. I have my ration and I have procured additional supplies. The difference between a medicinal dose and lethal overdose is quite small.

This is what despair feels like. *Huis Clos*. No Exit. No exit from this despair. No exit save one.

Where there had been darkness, I had hung my words. I bequeath them to the world and to the stars. They did not burn brightly enough to sustain me, but perhaps they will serve to light the way for another.

The King in Exile

He laid waste to the empire to reach me.

Though I was undisputed master the fundamental forces that underlie the universe, the weapons he employed against me were not formed of matter, nor of anything else over which I may exercise control, bottled time and impossibilities brought to life. How can even a god contest with a champion who may force causality to turn upon itself like an ouroboros?

I lost. I was bound in a place beyond the walls of the world. He shackled me with paradox and mocked me in my weakness. He boasted that he would destroy my empire in a year and force me to watch it in that place that was not a place.

And he did. I watched him cast trillions in to barbarism for spite. To make a point. Even after all the time I had to reflect on this, I do not know what I did to offend him so.

When the final collapse had come, time turned in on itself, and I returned to the beginning of that fateful year. For two billion years, I witnessed the ruin of my realm anew.

The river of time flows no faster for a god. Many times I coveted the refuge of madness, but I was the last witness of my people and my covenant with them and I would not let them be forgotten.

The Politician

Before I entered the real world, which is to say back when I was at university, I had been an assistant to Professor White. She was my mentor and it's not an exaggeration to say that she shaped the woman I grew to be. Strict, but not humourless, every semester she would keep a running total of the clichés she found in her writing and composition classes, and she would mark them on the dry erase board for all to see. In the list of clichéd phrases, “It was happening again” was always right near the top. Only “avoid it like the plague” and “It was a dark and stormy night” topped it.

But clichés exist for a reason, and sometimes the boot fits.

It was happening again.

I once said I would follow Professor White to hell. She became Prime Minister White, so I followed her to Downing Street instead and on days like this I think the road to hell would have made for the easier path.

She was the one who organised the tribunal. Although it was not officially recognised by the global community, that certainly wouldn't do, given the circumstances, it had the full support of the world powers. There were now twenty men and women packed into this little conference room in a small grey building in an unremarkable industrial park in Ealing, but each of them was a president or a prime minister or a king. With their aid, PM White could finally reclaim our world from this alien interloper.

She had him dead to rights. (Was that a cliché? Did it belong on her whiteboard?) She saw the pattern. He had a hand in every catastrophe of the last thirty years. He marooned the colonists on Titan. He destroyed the Advent clinics, sabotaged our space program, diverted our transmats. He was prepared to slap us down to the Stone Age because it did not suit him to allow our technology to progress any further than it has. Her evidence was irrefutable, but she did not intend to try him for his crimes. Instead, she argued that Earth should not cede her sovereignty to an unknowable alien,

especially one who was not always here to make good on his promises of protection.

She asked him if he wished to make a statement. He seemed amused at first. “I like you! You’re just so spiffy-spunky!” Then he looked angry. Then he looked bored. Then he said it. It was just like 2008. He ruined her with a phrase. Instead of “Don’t she think she looks tired?” it was “Isn’t she getting a little long in the tooth?”

Her steady leadership was the immortal heart of England and the alien drove a stake through it with nine words.

There was an instant’s eternity of silence followed by pandemonium. The Prime Minister and I were both yelling, “He’s trying to trick you!” “He’s done this before!” but they could not hear us over the din. I doubt they would have listened to us even if they could.

He had done this before. Was it some psychic power derived from his monstrous alien brain? Mind control by way of pheromones or some gene-tailored virus? Did he go back in his time ship at set the stage for this scene? It had to be more than mere words.

The room emptied in moments, with important people rushing off to make phone calls to other important people. A man who I not previously noticed sat dozing in his seat, a Panama hat over his eyes, but soon it was empty except for him, me, the prime minister and alien. The alien sat with his feet on the table and his hands behind his head, mocking us with his smile. The Prime Minister retreated to her office, prepared to stem the flood any way she could. I had never known her to panic and she wouldn’t start now. She knew that she would lose, but she would gather whatever humour and dignity she could and she would go down fighting. He might ruin her, but he would never break her.

As I left the room, I saw the sleeping man raise the brim of his hat. I paused on the threshold and he met my eyes and placed his finger against his lips.

The alien got up to leave, but the stranger spoke to him. “Aren’t you worried she’ll bear a grudge?” His voice buzzed with a slight Scottish burr.

The alien stopped, turning to regard the smaller man. “When I punish someone, I don’t leave them in a position to seek revenge.”

“What do you think will happen to her?”

“She’ll get what she deserves.”

“Like the people in the Daedalus Sea Base?” Life support failed without the vegetable computers to control it.

“They flew too high. Like Icarus. Really should have seen that coming.”

“Or Richard Faulkner?”

“Fixed point. Nothing I could do.” He stifled a yawn. “Sorry. So sorry.”

“Strange how the events you wish to preserve are always fixed.”

The alien grinned. “I do love a good sonnet. But I had to do it. They sometimes need a little nudge in the right direction. You leave them to their own devices and you just wind up with *kitsch*. Without Crimson Loss, Dicky Faulker would be remembered for writing a jingle about cat food. His death made him immortal.”

“Pity he’s not around to thank you. You really think that’s your call to make?”

“I don’t see any other Time Lords here. Do you? Yes, it’s my ‘call’. Someone has guide them back when they stray from the garden path. I know what they need, and I act decisively. I have been heaven’s substitute to recompense the good - now the god of vengeance yields to me his power to punish the wicked!”

“Oh, that’s good. Heaven’s substitute, you say? That’s very impressive. By the way, what do you call yourself? The Physician? The Medic? The Chirurgeon?” The small man rolled his R’s. “But not the Doctor. Because that’s me.”

“Ah...” said the alien.

The small man, the Doctor, began walking slowly about the room. “Your proclamation is from *The Count of Monte Cristo*, unless I’m very much mistaken. It’s very good. Very triumphal. I can tell that you mean every word. You can’t fake that kind of passion. And that’s not the whole of the

passage, is it? There's a bit that comes before it." He spread his arms and his voice filled the room. 'And now, farewell kindness, humanity, and gratitude! Farewell to all the feelings that expand the heart!' You're abandoning your humanity when you pursue these goals."

"I'm not human. And neither of you. It's time to stop pretending that you are."

"Don't be fatuous. I know you met Dumas. Brought him some scones and gave him some pointers when he was working through a bad spell of writer's block, if memory serves. Humanity is not a function of biology. Dumas wrote 'humanity' but what he really meant was 'decency'. That is what you are abandoning."

It was as if the alien hadn't heard. "I remember when I was you, little man. It was so long ago, and for such a brief time. Always spinning plates, pretending that I was as clever as I put on." He stopped, as if suddenly remembering something. "You die afraid and alone. Do you want to know how?"

The Doctor continued his circuit of the room, forcing his counterpart to turn to keep him in sight. "Thank you, no. I'd rather be surprised."

The alien regarded him carefully. "You're far from home. You're not really my past self. You're from a parallel universe, aren't you?"

"Just so. You made quite a mess of thing when you sent those temple ships our way. The ships dropped like stones, two of them right into populated areas. All the covert groups were scrambling to deal with them and to scavenge their technology once they were down. UNIT, the Counter-Measures Group, those sex fiends who drive around with that anagram stencilled on their SUVs, the Forge... It was quite a pile-up. It took a bit of bother to set things right."

I have never seen anyone grin angrily before now, but the alien managed it. The Doctor noticed it too. "You're smiling. But I don't think you're really all that *happy*."

"They're not ready for that kind of technology."

"I'm curious about my future. When exactly do I assume this august

position as supreme arbiter of what is best for mankind? It sounds like quite a lot of responsibility. Tell me, am I appointed or elected to the job?" The alien didn't answer, so the Doctor continued circling and talking. "And let me guess. You're going to come to our world take it from them. And maybe teach them a lesson. And thereby teach one to me as well, for having the temerity to cross over here to confront you."

The grin widened. The alien seemed to possess more teeth than belonged in a mouth. "It's only fair."

The Doctor seemed to get angry for the first time. "Fair? *Fair?! Don't* speak to me of fairness! You posture as a righteous Jacobian demigod as you mete out your infinite punishments for finite crimes, but you are nothing more than a boggart, a wisp, a phantasm of wounded pride and narcissism and cruel, careless malice! You ravaged a world when you dropped four city-sized starships on it without a thought of the devastation they would bring, and you *will not* cause them more pain!"

The alien curled his lip. "Brave words. I have lived your life, you garden gnome. It ended two hundred years ago." As an afterthought he added, "And there were five ships. Did I briefly forget how to count when I was you?"

Inexplicably, the Doctor smiled. "Ah, but you have not lived my life. As you note, we are from divergent timelines. I still have a few surprises. As for the ships, four found their way to us. The fifth arrived at a pocket dimension."

His counterpart narrowed his eyes.

"It took some doing to get in. I met your prisoner, your king in exile. You didn't break him. He wants you to know that."

The alien's half-angry, half-amused mask fell from his face. His eyes widened in the first genuine display of emotion as he took half a step backwards.

"In fact, he wants to tell you in person."

It was shaped like a man, but the resemblance to anything human ended there. There was something about it that my mind couldn't process. It didn't

fit into any of the boxes in my brain by which I categorised the world. It slithered from the shadows, gliding, moving without motion in a wholly uncanny fashion, bleeding power and a terrible, focused purpose.

“Don’t do this! They need me!”

The Doctor spoke. “This is your end. You will be left alone with yourself and your fear and your thoughts and your deeds, and perhaps in time, with your regrets. I will work to undo the ruin you have brought to this place and then I will leave them to chart their own course.”

The shadow reached for the alien. Instead of screaming as I had expected, he simpered “I don't want to—” and then the pair vanished as if they had never been.

I looked for the Doctor, but he was gone. For the first time in my lifetime, I felt like my world belonged to us. There would be more aliens in time. We would struggle and fight and fail, but we would do it on our own terms, as human beings instead of pampered pets. Our decisions might be bad, or careless or ill-advised. They could very well lead to our ruin. But they would be ours to make.

L'AUGURY DE L'AVENIR

by *Alan Camlann*

“The serious magical endeavour and the serious scientific endeavour are twins: one was sickly and died, the other was strong and thrive. But they are twins. They were born of the same impulse.”

– C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*

++ *Continue.*

He cracked his supplejack fingers with a powerful thumb to cover the arthritic tick of the photonic tome's poor abused spine. His breaths were deep and strong, belying the terrible weight of years that had piled atop his shoulders like a sepulchre of bureaucratic scripture. His own people had finally returned him home for good and – to what once have might have once been genuine surprise if he were a younger man – he bowed his head to their demanding corona and accepted his retirement with graceful decorum. No sword to fall upon, no cup of hemlock to swig deep, no lake for his cadaver to disappear beneath when the frost came. No, it had all been civil, polite and above all else – eminently Gallifreyan.

The sheer tedium of the proceedings had left him feeling a great deal older than anything the universe was capable of tossing in his general direction nowtime. N-Space and its closest spatiotemporal cousins had all reached the truest state of harmony he had ever witnessed in his lives. The sutures across time's skin had smoothed to blue-crimson scarring and all the persistent clefts had vanished with the myrillennium.

He ran a finger like a bodkin behind his elfin ears to dislodge the artificial dust – junk data or its closest equivalent, he wagered – and prised the black skullcap from the levitating tabletop, his eyes briefly caught by the sudden

ebb of the dark and the fleeing redshift of constellations on their main vertices.

The Matrix was a microverse of similes. Synesthetic metaphor was reality and homophone an unfortunate cosmological misstep. Everything from the fabric of the clothes one wore to the scraggiest hair in one's willowy beard could be used to serve a vital function. Even attributes such as colour and length could give birth to atto-colonies that lived and died in the quantum intersection of thread and applique's eye.

The book before him was no exception.

Each page had been as exquisite as a Grecian tableau vivant. For recorders, scribes and the occasional bold hacker, it was a vintner's paradise for sensations beyond the purely parochial that tapered into the psychotropic. Far beyond the provincial expectations of their world, perhaps even now in this new age of innovation and interaction.

And one by one, he'd done something extraordinary. He'd torn the pages from the tome and dashed them to the four dimensions of the APC Net.

One he had fed to an adamant dragon, another to a caucus of long extinct fledershews, another to a hungry stream of gelid fire. This would be the third compendium of Matrix projections he had overwritten with falsehoods or just outright destroyed.

The door would only remain open for as long as he remained undiscovered. Speed was giving way to haste. He detested vandalism, even if it was for a justifiable cause and normally, he would have had little reason for such a wanton act of sabotage, but certain powers in the High Evolutionaries had begun to take notice of his elseworld junkets. They'd never been egregious, nor malicious. No, his fellows were simply prompted by good-natured curiosity. All the more difficult to outwit, for his conscience pricked at him since. Their scrutiny had made slipping away from the Homeworld more and more difficult as time went on.

He plied the final page for his session from the book and sealed its atomswept covers with a forceful hand. The missing predictions disappeared into the vacuum within his skullcap as he grappled it atop his

head. He glided silently from the construct and sealed the back-door behind him with his exfiltration worm. The magicks of the sorcerous continuum were curiously florid and he rather enjoyed the theatrics although he'd never outwardly show it. It writhed around the woodwork and sealed it in a globular, almost ritualised display of arcane neon.

And now...

Return. ++

His mind surged back/forth. A rush of endorphins. Time returning his body from the tingling emptiness of a precipice up onto the building earth writhing beneath his toes. A flipbook in reverse. The effusive blanket of warmth out of the clinging digital bits struck him cleanly before anything else as he rose from the interbed and peeled off the linking coronet.

He rubbed his eyes reflexively, trying to grind and reshuffle those predictions inside his isolated psyche. The heady bustle of this, that and the other being just beyond the terrace in the city of Byledge did little to assuage the pocket of living memory –

*Gnigrus RUOLOC – thguobt gnirps – lufyoj raef fo rorret erutan – a rennab
GNIMAERTS dleh hgih – RUOLOC – GNILLAF – gnisir yportne THGIL
cimota edarabc CITSATNAF –*

“Zooterkins...” he cursed uncharacteristically. He stumbled, trying to fold the mathematics like an origami toad, down from his twenty-eight senses into his subconscious where it wouldn't bother him. Yet the more he tried to dissuade it, the more it flew to his surface thoughts. Its soaring flight eventually had him speaking fragments of Old High Gallifreyan aloud. Another curse. All the subtlety of a dilettante shell-snacker! He knew very well that even with his bypast inclusion to the High Evolutionaries, the Powers of Gallifrey still maintained that walls have ears.

Yes... His eyes tarried at the moth-eaten nooks of his quarters. Even for an ageless crank so harmless as him.

He had little choice. He rested peaceably on synthetic furs amidst his auld potpourri of sarlains, begonias and daisies and let the Futures come. *Heat like a furnace spieled–*

—seas of grass capped in the chill of winter, the smell of auburn wood put to the flames and the gentle breeze patting each knight on the back as they will make their way up the mountainside. He would tug tighter at the hardsuit defending him against the increasing crackle of radiation. The geldings and mares will be left far behind them, where the painterly lake of Vasilisa had become a cracked arroyo overnight. It will be the twelfth such instance in the region according to the thopter oiler, Balunicado of Nautica. The white tundra will turn into a mire and the trees shine with a gilded halo of heat. A slurry of uprooted forestry and cackling flames will be all that thrives in the darkness over the persistent tick of their Geiger counters.

In this, the most reiterative interpretation of the augury data, Sir Lancelot of the Lake will likely be the first to speak in hours. The observer would barely hear him over the radio interference as he heaved at the climbing line leading to the top of the slope. “Truly, it is a marvel of devilry.”

“It's certainly nothing to revel at, my friend,” he might answer, rime biting like a granite golem up through his toes into his ankles. “Piteous shoes...”

Balunicado will likely lose his footing and pull himself upward on a deadened trunk with the young knight's assistance. Dusting snow from his spiky red hair, he will ask: “How did they accomplish it?”

“With great difficulty. It's rather like turning the Himalayas into a desert...”

“Yes,” he will affirm impatiently. “But what of their method?”

The wizard's eyes will coast shrewdly to Lancelot. “What does the King say?”

“The High King has many theories, Merlin,” he will cough deferentially. “And I respect his wisdom, but I would like to hear thine. The lore of a sorcerer.”

Balunicado will definitely start. “Sorcerer—? Like—”

“Oh, you would, would you?” Merlin will pull himself up, alight over the rise and stand atop a small half-bubble of calcified magma. He may nod sagely to the huddled cluster of machinery at the bottom. “There lies the immediate fact. The approachable. What we can attend to without

speculation.”

“It's here?”

He will nod. “We have arrived.”

The workings of the contraption would not dwarf, but instead, atomise their size as was the party's significance in relation to the industrial leviathan. It will have all the intimidation of a siege engine with no evident virtue of mobility. Metal and fauna coaxed together like wet clay into an upturned spider-like bowl, small bursts of fire erupting from the smokestacks populating its entropic carapace.

Even from this distance, something in its mammoth bulk will make ever sense in the three men recoil with disgust.

“You were right to say that Bryan should remain with the king,” Lancelot will murmur, reminded of the flaxen-hirsute and sapphire-sighted youth.

“Descended from the Ironfist he may be,” Merlin's nod will be curt and awed. “I fear his training hasn't yet levelled to meet this particular task...”

Lancelot will laugh good-naturedly. “Thank you, I'm sure.”

Unassuaged, Merlin will continue forward until he reaches a retractable pewter gangplank that acts as a makeshift drawbridge. The way is left open for them and that more than anything will worry him. Lancelot will note it in his features and his stride, although the old sorcerer does well to hide it.

Merlin will turn to Balunicado. “Now, worker... You're certain?”

“It wasn't my home, but it felt the closest thing to it. I am coming,” he may take a step forward. “You cannot stop me.”

The sorcerer will look to Lancelot, a gaze that could mean a dozen things to the uninitiated, but to the rarefied knight, he understands his inference all too well. Merlin will nod to confirm and move away towards the arched door. Sleek, like the surface of a mirror. The long, steady decrease of light flattened into an obsidian pool. They will touch it and move through in single file, one after the other. They will enter down a long corridor populated with heaving pistons and clockwork, steam whispering in their ears and drowning the mind in noise. The labyrinth will be long and dark,

their journey down through geometry that would have sprained the mind of Euclid. It will be a location so utterly devoid of senses like smell or sound that their faculties were working overtime to try and fill the absence. Rotting flesh, peeling fruit, engine grease, decaying batteries, oil fires and sandstorms. All these would come to them at once. Wailing, uncomfortable warnings from finely attuned survival instincts, reacting against something they could barely comprehend, let alone abide.

Sentinels would fold out from the walls, tall and rigid, their cephalopodan form uncomfortable to their relative dimensions.

“Watchdogs,” Merlin may say.

“Are they dangerous? / What measure of menace shall I take from them?”

“Lethal.” / “Only if you antagonise them.” / “Poor wretches,” he could answer.

Eventually, they will find – or maybe perhaps will be lead, by the geometry itself – to the foundry. A room that in every prediction, save one, will be belching minor expressions of pain in molten elements far and beyond such base materials as steel or stone. The waves of energy from the matter transference will nearly boil the three in their suits as they stand at its centre before the Caryatid. The title is unfamiliar likely due to safeguards in the auger protocols, but it pricks at a distantly buried memory somewhere in his future self’s subconscious. A thought made aware only through the impartiality of the projection.

“A bargain, yes. A chaffer, perhaps.”

His present self attempted to push further, his only reward being that the memory dug itself deeper into the slough of possibilities. Eventually, it retreated into memories not so long passed, covered in a bramble of paradisaical nowheres and endless interrogations about situes long since passed. He almost despaired at the seeming ubiquity of the grove. Where were his memories of the starlight and planetfall?

His own people had done far worse than sever his memory, they had drowned him in their tedium until it diffused his happy wanderings. He could hate them for that if he chose, he felt he had the right.

On a poorer day.

Out of the twisting entropic storm, something akin to a sentient sulphur will seem to snake its way in through the hermetic seals of their suits in the space between one atom and the next. The Mist's gilded and sickly colour will have the texture a rat's hide. It will make Lancelot and Balunicado's skin crawl with disgust.

WHAT GIBBERING DO YOU HAVE FOR MY MASTER NOW?

Merlin's face will crease into a sneer. "Away with you, the Agreement is sacrosanct even in this dominion."

Its net of nerves will alight around his two companions.

WHAT OF THESE CREATURES? AN EARTH-KILLER AND A SKY-FARRIER.

"Dare you speak so lowly of them!" he will snap.

DARE YOU BRING THE BLADE AND THE LOW TO OUR PROVINCE!

The sentinels will bow towards the floor like predatory owls to strike at impertinent prey. Lancelot's first instinct will be to place his hand on the hilt of his sword, but that choice leads to an empty future. Flesh torn from bone, sinew ripped through a powerful absence of matter no larger than the man's offending fist. In the computations that continue beyond that point, he instead will raise his head to address the chamber and perhaps the Caryatid itself. "Raised in the lentic dimension of Ladies Nimue and Nyvene, I have the rite of understanding and a knowledge of cracked mirror symmetry. Do not think me unwelcome or baffled by what I see here. As for our third," Lancelot will step forward. "I will defend the peoples of this land as is my birthright, of whom Master Merlin and this man are a part. Know this and moreover understand it. Come not between the knight and his sword."

"Waste you more of our time with unnecessary proofs?" Merlin will rumble.

PROCEED... the mist will affirm warily. BUT KNOW THAT I AM HERE.

"As if we could forget," Balunicado may say or think with a trembling hesitation.

“Pray, peace. You are safe,” Lancelot will assure him regardless. “I will defend against any attempt to harm you.”

For the first time since their entry, Balunicado will notice the unwholesome atmosphere around the column dissipate slightly. A profound absence in a place so populated with noise as for it to be unnoticed. It parted in carefully calculated wisps of vapours to show... to –

His mind will rebel as is only natural. Parallel lines that appear to intersect in the immediate rather than the distance. Wholly embellished and otherstarly colours that will seem to pain his eyes the longer he observes them. A four-dimensional maze of conflicting information being observed by a man who can only perceive three. Lancelot will look to him with concern, but little fear. The oiler's mind is strong, weathered and tanned by the frightening void of travel not only through normal space, but its many cousins besides.

“How does he fare?” Merlin will still ask.

Balunicado will wave a hand and resist the urge not to expel onto the floor. “W– Worry not.”

It was a column only in name and it was alive. Its vertices and angles were solid, but folded in within themselves. And out of the horror, out of the noise... Came the face of one from the Seven Worlds. The sallow features of a child, looking forward and backward to what was and what may be. The Eye of the Past a dusty rose like porcelain, the Future an empty socket through which some seething power lashes its unguarded tongue.

And Balunicado will always scream. An earthy human scream. One struck from an animal trying desperately to cling to the small isle of earth as the waves lap against its crumbling shores. The Sentinels will pounce. Lancelot will put himself between his charges and the beast as a glancing blow shears a brassard into molten metal. He will rapidly discharge it from his shoulder and cast it aside, but still refrain from using his sword. In such a place, it will be difficult to tell if it would make any difference in such a fight regardless.

They still had a chance, the probing of their defences while violent had

still been insincere.

Merlin will summon a tenuous net of cerulean static between his fingertips tearing through the open air. A demonstration little more worthy than a magician's act, but enough to give any further strikers pause.

“Peace!” he will bark as the glints peck at the unreal obsidian floor. “We will not harm you!”

Merlin will place a hand against his shoulder and direct his attentions towards the shivering wreck, calming him restfully as if soothing a wailing babe. The hardy oak tree whose roots had sunk so absolutely into the bedrock that neither tide, nor time could sway him as a place of sanctuary.

“Peace... See peace in a little while...”

The Head of Janus will twist on its pedestal to face the sorcerer.

THIS ONE SEES THE ALTERED HISTORY LEADING TO THIS MOMENT. YOU ARE THE FIRST ITERATION AND THE LAST.

“Indeed,” the sorcerer will nod. “Call off your hounds, we hide nothing.”

NOTHING?

Something thrummed and flexed its muscles at the heart of the cyst. It scrutinised him through the predictive algorithms, sifting through to his present observation from Prydos. It attempted to reach across the spatiotemporal divide and cast him through into its own timeframe with little avail. He shifted with discomfort and continued in his reluctant passivity. There was little underestimating this entity's ability.

It seemed to speak to both of him.

YOU SEEK ADVANTAGE THROUGH FOREKNOWLEDGE.

Merlin will feel the uncomfortable scrutiny from the gaunt coterie whose very presence made a mockery of human life. He will step away from the Sentinels and clear his throat.

“You disapprove?” he will ask unperturbed.

IT VIOLATES THE TERMS OF THIS ONE'S COMPACT.

Slavering entropy likely drips on his back. He looks back to the watchdogs like a disapproving tutor.

“Oh,” he will demur. “I don't think so.”

YOU WILL ELABORATE.

Merlin will tighten his fist before him as if to seize a falling object.

“When I am home, I am keeper of the Bibliotheca and custodian to all the lives that have transpired before me. I watch for them, relearn old lessons lost through the epochs and aeons that have lapsed and occasionally I... guide the Past where the situation requires. Time has grown so heavy on my shoulders to be like Atlas—”

ANOTHER OF THIS SOVEREIGN ARTHUR'S COURT?

The wizard will snap his hand dismissively. “No, a primordial being forced to bear the weight of the sky upon his shoulders. Do not interrupt...” His eyes will rove the floor. What comes next will be difficult to admit whether false or true. “I no longer measure how long I have lived through mathematics and my dimension, my time is fortified in peace. I am Merlin the Wise, a title not easily earned, and I have very little Future left.”

The Caryatid behind the Head may make a noise that sounds not entirely unlike the pensive snap of predatory talons.

THAT MAY BE, YET THIS ONE KNOWS MERLIN THE HALE WILL FOLLOW YOU.

“And likely another, but who is to say what will come after that? Millennia. Trifling millennia is all that's left. You are witnessing a man moribund,” he will stoop slightly. It will not be a concession, but it could easily be misinterpreted as such. “With little advantage in knowing what little Time is left.”

It scratched against the wall of Time, trying to see his Present self's thoughts, but the gyre remained resolute. Too far to jump without losing one's place in the fourth dimension. A safeguard imposed by the very first Keeper of the Matrix or perhaps imposed as a physical law by the supercomputer itself. In many ways, it had begun to grow its own mind and formulate its own will. Not unlike the Caryatid in many ways. A kindred spirit.

“Now,” Merlin will say. “Shall we conduct our affairs?”

Its attention turned back to its relative Present, clicking like a praying mantis. Not regretting, nor resenting, but prying all the same. A demon circling. More dangerous than any predatory insect could ever be. Merlin felt his footing slip slightly, almost enough to break the connection, but he persevered against the anomaly.

YOUR REPRESENTATIVE WILL STEP FORWARD.

Lancelot will nod and comply. Another face will stretch through the fourth-dimension, the face of a swan-haired, brine-cured woman and the aspect they identified as the Head of Baba.

YOUR TITLES... ARE FAMILIAR TO THIS ONE... YOUR HISTORY IS... CURIOUS... YOU BEAR... A SIMILARITY AND YET... AN UNFAMILIARITY... TO THE MIND OF THE PURSER.

Its magnetic eyes, sheen white as if blinded by cataracts, will direct towards Merlin.

The sorcerer will likely remain silent for he feels it is not his place to speak.

“Our meeting is unimportant to the task at hand. You need no knowledge of me, I speak for my Lord, not for myself,” Lancelot will say.

Its attentions swung back. YOU ARE... A MENTOR...

“And defender of the realm.”

BY... CHOICE...?

“My arrival to the court was predicted,” the knight will report and Merlin will smile at that. “But I came of my own will and with the intent that I be judged by the actions I wrought.”

AND YOU... CONSIDER THEM HONOURABLE?

“That is for you to decide.”

The same sound of tapping claws from the Caryatid. Lancelot will feel the pressure of the thing's attentions focussed exclusively upon him.

YOU ARE... SUITABLE... FOR THE TASK.

The Head of Janus will merge with hers like melting rubber. Superimposed together their features will make an androgynous third. A

hooked nose with wizened short hair, smooth skin and four warped eyes – the Head of Hephaestus. Its head snaked and slipped from side-to-side, studying each in turn. The four eyes surged with a sudden understanding like a deadbolt suddenly shunted to the side.

THIS ONE SEES...

A final crack against the transdimensional barrier. Sudden. Deadly. A feeling of being trapped inside a crumbling villa during a thunderstorm. Masonry of mind and circuitry pouring about his head. Neon spat and arced like lightning, a forge of amethyst electronic fire. Computer vs. familiar. Two sentient microuniverses collided like lances to shields at a jousting bout. Merlin felt the shock – nay, the temporal momentum – of the grim intrusion as a terrible megrim in his mind's eye.

But he himself remained secure. However barely.

...NOTHING.

The Mist will hiss with displeasure as Merlin sighs with something rapidly departing from relief.

“Release the contents of the foundry to us,” he will instruct. “The bargain has been upheld.”

THE TOTAL CONTENTS WILL REMAIN SECURE. THE REQUESTED ITEM WILL BE RELEASED FROM THE INVENTORY.

“Well, it was worth a try,” Merlin may huff to himself.

Very nearly beyond reach in the empty air will materialise a humble and cautiously crafted object no larger than the palm of the wizard's hand. It will appear to demonstrate no mass, illustrate no momentum and likely exhibit some of the grotesque qualities of its creator. Once snatched from its entry point, it will have a texture that most humans would rationalise as brass and feel weighty as appropriate in the third dimension. Just occasionally, depending on how it is held, the halfflight of the foundry will make it seem two-dimensional and it will make a scraping noise as if rotating silver pins in a complex lock.

“I imagine it was difficult to work to such paltry specifications,” Merlin will nod, pleased and present the Deedbox to Lancelot for guardianship. He

will turn his attention back to its forgers.

MAINTAIN THAT IT REMAINS SECURE.

“We'll keep it safe, yes.”

“On the behalf of the Seven Worlds,” Lancelot will nod his head. “I can say that King Arthur thanks you for your efforts. I as well.”

“We are fulfilled,” Merlin will add.

AS ARE WE. WE SHALL DEPART AS WAS INSTRUCTED.

Merlin will hold up a knotted palm. “Fair travels.”

Shivering in a hunched crouch on the floor with his arms shielded around his face, Balunicado will be eased to his feet by Lancelot and led away from the structure entirely unlike a column towards the beautiful certainty of the outside world.

He will scabble ahead of his fellows, watching the two figures as if they were strangers.

Transdimensionality was a luxury afforded only to the aristocracy and the nobility. He'd encountered the unnoticed preconception once before when his thopter had landed amongst a village who had lost the ability of flight. He was revered, sneered and feared all for a method of travel that had become so commonplace not only on his world, but dozens of others besides.

Was that what awaits us in the margins of the Endless Night? he could wonder. Something so threatening, yet ultimately... Can I even call it such things as “evil” or “good”?

What was space if not a starry night where no suns ever rose? Maybe perhaps creatures like that were the horizons banished into the dark reaches of eternity. If ever there were such a skyline, what would they see in the twilight of deep space? Not a void, certainly.

He will surprise himself when he catches Merlin's elbow as he stumbles. The old man will appear... strange. Off-kilter, like a cave dweller that must reaccustom himself to the blaze of light. Out of that cyst in the landscape, the slurried woodland must have looked like paper cut-outs.

“I understand why I was allowed to come,” Balunicado will breathe. Not without an appropriate touch of resentment. Directed at himself or at Merlin will depend entirely on the iteration that eventually comes to pass. In one future, he will attack him with a clenched fist. In another, he will hug him with open arms. The most likely at the time of recording in the Matrix, he will likely do neither.

Merlin will pat his wrist. “Everyone has their virtues.”

“There's not much dignity in slipping apple over teakettle into—”

“Well, yes, quite.” Merlin will smile.

“I trust the aristocracy about as comfortably as I can spit out a rat, but,” he will steady the wizard. “Hereafter, it will be considered a learning experience.”

“Lancelot did his duty, you may want to thank him,” Merlin will run his fingernails through his beard and centre himself for the journey back down the ravine. By then, the flow of detritus will have ceased, the hungry maw of the complex satiated for its journey up into the stars.

There will be an eruption. Of light, of sound, of feeling, not unlike that of a volcano. The three will clasp their hands to where their ears in the suits against the rising wail of engines as the roots of the upturned bowl snap free into the air in deafening whipcrack. They will seem to twitch, trying to caress the earth its main body was departing from before folding against the underside like the legs of an enormous oily bird.

Merlin will hold a hand over his eyes to shade them from the excess glare as he watches its tailfire soar up into the atmosphere, Lancelot steadying himself on his sword and Balunicado agape with a childlike awe. A departing sun to join the far-off stars.

“Thank you,” Balunicado will say to no one in particular.

“Merlin,” Lancelot will ask without moving his attention from the departing craft.

“I know. It is as I said. The bargain was made and it departed without violence, fear or favour.”

“The King and the Round Table spent weeks plotting what we could have asked of the Caryatid. Firecorns, neutron bricoles, terrible guardians... We were told that it wouldn't accept anything other than something to be used for destruction.”

“True,” he nodded. “It would rake the planet for its foundry and only leave once it had been used to some purpose.”

“So... What did you ask of it?”

The crackling of their Geiger counters would begin to slowly subside. It was there, but as little more than a disquieting whisper.

“Long ago,” Merlin will begin. “In a land you will never know, there lived creatures of prosperity. Their presence stretched like shadows across the desert into many forms across many lives and lands across the enormity of Creation. They grew to extraordinary size, possessed great liberty in the power of flight and landed in many cultures as heralds of indigence and affluence both. They were and selfish, greedy and beneficent. Every depiction were true for that was the power of their influence on this world. They were the Great Serpents and their lives were the product of historical hearsay.”

“Sounds familiar,” Balunicado will murmur.

Lancelot's mind will inevitably rally to a single thought, born of the legendarium of his own people who dwelt within the Long Night.

“You asked for a *dragon*?”

“*The Dragon*,” Merlin will echo and the Deedbox will hum pleasantly against Lancelot's chest.

“An egg,” Lancelot will tick his head towards the object and give a short laugh, impressed. “With so very much to teach it, I'll wager.”

Balunicado will ask: “What will you do with such a creature?”

The Doctor will lower his hand as night swallows the forest in shades of blue and grey. With the far departure of the foundry complex and the restoration of a peaceable quiet, he could hear the air of the mountain dance around their heads and the distant cry of hunting wolves. The slope

would soon be abuzz with curious fauna, seeking to scavenge what they can from the vast morass of a half-digested ecology. A wolf cannot ignore its lower nature, but it can be tamed. Its purpose influenced towards a process of creation rather than abject destruction. A beloved facilitator in the transference of goods that could save the lives of those suffering even in an area as remote as this. It would deliver medicine to the sick and dying, matches for a firelight and alder to aid the shelter of its tamers. And in return, it would never need fear hunger or loneliness again.

Merlin's answer will be simple.

“Wean it from evil,” he will crack his fingers. “After then, we will...”

The memory receded like a bolt from a crossbow, cast off—

—into the deep subconscious of Merlin's mind. Safe from scrutiny, as from discovery. There was the comforting, warm smell of musk roses, the calming feel of upholstery beneath his fingers, the cool breeze from the city and the gentle, almost incognisant slope of the mound on which it was constructed.

Home again, home again...

And yet, something was different... The daybed was unusually curt beneath his frame, its shape was twisted into unfamiliarity. Something was out-of-place...

Cautiously, he opened his eyes to the sun. He tightened his sockets and they rolled up and down. He started, alarmed by the implications of his new situe. Somehow, over the course of his vision, he'd gotten up from the chaise lounge and ended up slumped in a corner in Prydos's foremost agora. Between a Shamanarza ovifruit vendor with her psychoactive stall that rearranged produce in accordance with the purchaser's yens and a Gamley custogelist and its collection of tiny gods, all trapped like pixies in their respective proposal cages. He could hear the chattering of their little faiths just within earshot as he rose and his hand searched the ovifruit stall for a natating apricot. He mounted to his feet and saw the ground stretch away before him, out into the gallery where hominid Gallifreyans rubbed shoulders with their recently returned cousins, the feline Maoren from

Geng-Singh.

He was out-of-place. He must have wandered in a daze from the terrace. Had he spoken aloud? How much had been overheard?

One of the Maoren looked at him curiously, a young woman with large eyes who carried a vaulted lance with a disarmed neutronic spearhead. He held himself high as if he'd just remembered he had somewhere else to be. A curse on himself, even such thoughts of discovery were dangerous in a place like this. The peoples of Prydos had always been more libertarian than their peers, but that wouldn't stop an agent of the High Evolutionaries, one of his irregular minders or even an unfortunate bystander from reading his thoughts and determining his duplicity. What he had here was a failure to obfuscate.

He groaned. And he used to do it so well. Perhaps he really was getting old or worse, he was shrivelling into softness.

A limb waved before his face, a small collection of eyes, shaped like okras winking at him. "Forgive my intrusion into your passage, treasured seeker, but with the greatest regret, you have forgotten to pay for that."

Of course, the Shamanarza. He glided to face her, a finger stretched towards the sky in self-admonishment. "You are... quite right of course. My apologies." He dug around in his robes for any loose paraphernalia, currencies from foreign realms that the Time Lords may have overlooked centuries ago when he was forced into retirement. There was nothing. Not so much as a gold sovereign and he told the poor fruiterer as such.

"Forgive me saying, but you are a Time Lord?"

He weighed his response carefully. He'd not really considered it before now, but that title was no longer necessarily true. Gallifrey was a bygone relic of a less civilised era, the home of a being that had fought for every judicious, truthful and good cause in this dimension and eventually won out against tyranny. It would be a peace that would last, but it seemed such a small place now. There were other battles to fight, other times and places to explore, study and enjoy. Whether such a world – he hesitated to use the archaic word of 'planet' even more so than ever – as Gallifrey still

maintained its relevance to a champion of the next, he was uncertain.

He noticed that she was waiting patiently for a response, uncertain of how humanoids processed speech outside of their traditional bartering system.

“After a fashion,” he replied.

“A noblemen?” her voice was a clipped tableau of various half-overheard accents.

“Long ago of the antediluvian Oldblood Houses. A place of high-birth brought low by... Well, rather a lot, I fear.” He tapped a finger, bittersweet in the amusement of those old memories. “You could call me an illegitimate child.”

“Which Oldblood House?”

“Mine,” he could feel the ache of sadness that tainted his smile. “Long gone now.”

“The people of my Star trade in many things. Trinkets, ephemera, even stories... Have you one?”

He rummaged around his coat with a reserved display of facetious striking, like a carpet beater. There was a note of surprise in the Shamanarza's ocular limb as dust erupted in a cloud from the man's robes. He looked up at it, eyes aflame with the perplexing magic of what had transpired long ago and what was perhaps next to come. Old, weathered, yet rapt with the joy of discovery and mystery. His retirement had struck like hammer unto anvil with the terrible finality of an end, but now more so than ever he realised that the horizon beyond, the macroverse out there beyond the spatiotemporal veil – he'd just barely begun to scratch its surface.

“Stories?” he repeated.

“There are many a tale worn into that tired face, treasured seeker.”

He paused, considered, then smiled.

“Yes, I suppose there are a few,” he decided and held up an attentive finger. “Shall I continue?”

Your Weekend **Saturday**

DR. WHO

In this series of adventures in space and time the title-role will be played by Joan Hickson



5.15

Dr. Who? That's a question that forms the mystery at the heart of this new family adventure series.

No one knows who she is. She is a mysterious traveller from another world. She owns a ship that can travel in space and time. Unfortunately, the ship is damaged and the Doctor cannot control where or when the ship will land. Her fellow traveller is Steven, her grandson, (**Peter Purves**). A young man who appears to be a normal teenager, but whose knowledge and intelligence reveal his unearthly nature.

Playing the Doctor is the film and stage actress, **Joan Hickson**. This will be her first television role. The adventure begins with a chance encounter between the Doctor and Steven and married couple, Jane and Peter Harding. The teachers become involved in the two strangers' lives. Their curiosity leads Jane, (**Joan Sims**) and Peter, (**William Russell**) into many exciting adventures. They do not know where or when their erratic craft will land. They could find themselves in the past, present or future and arrive on Earth or on a distant alien world. Their adventures could take place in an alien city or in England during the Wars of the Roses. The whole of time and space is waiting to be explored.



5.15

DR. WHO

An adventure in space and time
with

JOAN HICKSON

as Dr. Who

PETER PURVES

as Steven

JOAN SIMS

as Jane

WILLIAM RUSSELL

as Peter

The Mysterious Strangers

by A.F.J. **KERNOW**

A young couple meet two strangers.
Who are they? Why are the strangers
being so evasive? Their curiosity,
changes everything and their lives
will never be the same again.

Title music by **RON GRAINER** and the
BBC Radiophonic Workshop

Incidental music by **JOHN DANKWORTH**

Producer, **VERTY LAMBERT**

Directed by **SIDNEY HAYERS**

See page 7

DR. WHO AND THE FERONS!

by *A.F.J. Kernow*

The Mysterious Strangers

It was the end of our working week at the local secondary school and Jane and I were walking back from the cinema. Friday night was our favourite night, we always went out every Friday night. On this particular evening, we were cutting through the park. My torch lit the way as we walked along the path when suddenly, the quiet nightfall was shattered by an extraordinary noise.

“What's that?” gasped Jane. “It sounds like it's coming from over there!”

I pointed the torch in the general direction of the shrieking, grumbling noise. We saw a blue flashing light appear briefly before vanishing into the gloom and walked closer until the torch beam picked out what appeared to be the outline of a Metropolitan Police telephone box.

“That's strange. I've never seen a police box here before,” I remarked.

What happened next was even stranger. Two figures emerged from the box surrounded by smoke.

“Are you alright?” Jane called out in concern.

“Quickly, Steven!” shouted a female voice.

There was the sound of a metallic lock being slammed shut. We walked over to the pair of coughing strangers, sharing in their discomfort from the residual smoke. In the torchlight, I could see an older lady and a young lad of about fifteen.

“Do you mind not blinding me with that thing, young man?”

I apologised and said, “We saw the smoke and wanted to make sure

you—”

“We're fine. Er, thank you,” said the young man who had a studious look about him.

“Are you—?”

“Quite comfortable,” snapped the old woman. “Now if you don't mind. We must be going.

The young man smiled apologetically and followed her into the night.

“How rude,” declared Jane. “We were only trying to help.”

“Some people don't like help. Let's get home, I'll make you some cocoa,” I said taking Jane's hand.

The following day was usually shopping day. Laden down with groceries we were just passing an electrical supplies shop, Raven's Electricals, when Jane grabbed my arm. “Look! Isn't that the boy from last night,” she said.

We stood still and watched as the lad, carrying a large paper bag, left the shop.

“Hello there, are you buying the shop?” I asked in a jolly voice.

He very nearly dropped the bag in shock. He realised who we were and started walking briskly down the street. We caught up with him.

“Sorry. Pete didn't mean to startle you,” said Jane as we walked beside him.

“Yes, sorry. Everything alright?” I asked.

“I'm fine, thank you. Now if you don't mind I must be getting back. My grandmother will be getting worried,” he said politely.

We let him go and watched him walk down to the end of the street and turn left.

“Come on. let's see where he goes,” I said and started to walk after him.

“Pete, we've got all this shopping. We hardly equipped for pursuit,” Jane groaned.

She was right, of course. We returned to our routine and later home. The

afternoon remained largely uneventful until Jane started reading the local newspaper.

“Goodness me,” Jane exclaimed nearly spilling her tea. “It's him!”

“Who?”

“Listen. Police are looking for information regarding a schoolboy. Steven Frost, age 15. Attended Beech Grove School, Shoreditch. The boy was last seen by two of his teachers, Ms Barbara Wright and Mr Ian Chesterton, a fortnight ago walking home from school. Anyone who knows any information please contact the local police on Shoreditch 2386.”

“Well that settles it, we should have gone after him. I wonder if they are still in the park?” I mused.

“I know her from my local history group and I think she teaches at Beech Grove.”

“Are you two close?”

“Close enough for a phone call.”

“Alright, see what turns up.”

Jane nodded and returned ten minutes later with the news. “Well, that was an interesting conversation. Barbara is sure the boy we met is the same boy that's gone missing. She doesn't live far, so I asked whether she could come over for a chat.”

My first impression of Barbara Wright was that she was businesslike, but ultimately rather caring. As we sat down over tea and biscuits, it was obvious she was concerned about her missing pupil. She'd been mulling it over for quite some time, possibly on the way here.

“We, that is Mr Chesterton and me, simply cannot understand why he's gone missing. Steven Frost was the kind of boy that just seemed to fade into the background. Never spoke out of turn, never attacked the other boys. He was a good student. He did make some odd mistakes though,” she said remembering an incident in class.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, how do you explain a fifteen-year-old not knowing how many

pennies are in the pound? Not only that, he said he thought we were on the decimal system.”

“That is rather odd. He could be a fan of the metric system, I suppose,” I suggested.

“Or from abroad,” added Jane.

“I suppose, but there's something else. The address the school has for him, it doesn't exist. It's a junkyard on Totter's Lane,” Barbara said. “We waited outside for an hour or so, but he didn't come back out.”

“Could there have been another exit?” Jane asked.

“No. No, not that we could find. I'd feel awfully silly if he wasn't missing now, you think you saw him on Friday night?” Barbara asked.

“Yes, in the park,” said Jane. “Escaping from a smoking police box with his grandmother.”

“At least, we weren't lied to about that.”

“How so?”

“His grandmother is his legal guardian, although she doesn't seem to take much interest in his work. She's never been to the parent-teacher meetings. Too busy, according to Steven. Some sort of doctor, I think.”

“Doctor?”

“Frost, I assume.”

After Barbara left, we mulled over whether we were going to investigate this further. We decided to visit the park but there was no sign of the police box at all. After the vandalism it suffered, a local constable had likely called it in and had it removed. That was that. File closed. We decided to go to Harry's Café for a consolation coffee.

To our astonishment, they were seated in the café. Jane sat near them, while I fetched our drinks from the front counter. The lady in question was dressed in the clothes of a previous era. A puff sleeved high necked white shirt with a cameo brooch. A tweed jacket and skirt and a dark blue cloche hat completed the ensemble.

“Hello, lovely morning isn't it?” Jane said brightly.

“Yes, I suppose it is,” mused the old woman. “Late autumn brings so few sunny days.”

Jane introduced herself and me with a friendly smile.

The young lad replied, “I'm Steven, we—” I noticed a nudge from the lady that stopped him from saying anything else.

I sat down next to Jane. “Hello. I'm glad you two are alright. Did you report that smoking police box?” I asked.

“To the local constable, now we really must be going. Come along,” the lady said briskly.

The pair got swiftly to their feet and headed for the door.

“Wait!” “You're Stephen Frost, aren't you?”

Heads were turning at the tables around us, the lad stopped but the lady pushed him onwards out into the street. We rushed to the door and saw the pair head down Chapel Street. Harry disappeared into the back to use his rotary, likely to call the police.

“Right, let's go.”

I had a hunch and was sure I knew a shortcut to get there.

After a short run, we came out opposite the Totter's Lane junkyard.

I. M. Frost, Proprietor. Private. No unauthorised entry.

Succinct and dismissive, the words were painted in large white letters on the corrugated iron gates. There was the sound of running footsteps, we hung back and waited to see who it was. Steven reached the gates, looked both ways and opened the padlock. He went into the yard. We waited a couple of minutes, crossed the road and entered the junkyard. The junkyard was as you would expect. A path between the clutter led to that same scorched and now familiar police telephone box. We walked up to it. I tried the door and sensed a faint vibration. There was a noise from the gates. We quickly hid behind the police box. Steven's grandmother entered the junkyard mere moments after him. She walked up to the box and put a

key in the lock and opened the door.

“Did they see you come in here?” we heard Steven ask.

I rushed to the front of the box, managing to get my foot in the door. I pushed past the old lady and tumbled into a living impossibility. I found myself in a large room. It was brightly lit and had a strange machine in the centre of the room.

The lady marched into the room. She looked furious. Jane had just nipped inside before the lady pulled a lever on the machine. The doors closed and the lady pressed some buttons and turned dials. She turned to look at us.

“Your decision to meddle means your lives will never be the same again. Remember that. You have given me no choice.”

No choice? Whatever did she mean? She moved to the other side of the machine and viciously pulled another lever down. The room seemed to shake and then a terrible, shrieking rumbling noise filled the air.

“Grandmother?”

“Something's gone wrong!”

**Next Episode:
KIDNAPPED**

5.15

DR. WHO

An adventure in space and time
with

JOAN HICKSON

as Dr. Who

PETER PURVES

as Steven

JOAN SIMS

as Jane

WILLIAM RUSSELL

as Peter

Kidnapped

by **A.F.J. KERNOW**

Unwilling captives, Peter and Jane are in trouble. Who is their mysterious captor, the Doctor? What is the secret of the impossible police box? A multitude of questions need answers...

Title music by **RON GRAINER** and the
BBC Radiophonic Workshop

Incidental music by **JOHN DANKWORTH**

Kidnapped

The room seemed to shake and then a terrible shrieking rumbling noise filled the air.

“Grandmother?”

“Something's gone wrong!”

The clear, glass column in the centre of the machine was moving up and down. The awful shrieking, rumbling noise had subsided. There was now a low hum. I looked around the spacious chamber as the lady busily checked displays, turned dials and pressed switches. Steven was looking anxious, his arms folded defensively, the central podium between him and us. I moved over to Jane who was sitting on an ornate wooden chair. She got up and gave me a hug.

“Steven, can you check Sector 5 for me?” asked the lady hurriedly.

Steven did as he was asked. Moving to the part of the console nearest to him he checked a paper readout and moved a couple of levers.

“What is going on?” Jane asked. “It was just a police box.”

“I don't know but I'm going to get some answers,” I replied. “Steven, are you in trouble? Are you being kept here against your will?”

“Of course not!” flustered, Steven smiled nervously. “This is my home, the TARDIS.”

I scoffed. “What? It's a police box. You can't live in a police box.”

“It's quite spacious for a wooden box though, don't you think?” Jane laughed.

“It's not just a wooden box. You are in my grandmother's time-and-space machine. I made up an acronym for it, Time and Relative Dimension in Space. Our ship is called a TARDIS,” Steven said proudly.

“Steven, it's impossible. You cannot travel in time.”

The lady looked up from the console. Her ice blue eyes glared at me.

“Impossible? You are travellers in time yourselves. You are born, days go by... You grow up, some of you become parents... You grow older and older as time passes by... You move constantly into the future, but you cannot go backwards through your history,” she paused, a distant look in her eye. “Except perhaps in your memories.”

“Are you saying you can?”

“Just so. Backwards. Forwards. However we please.”

I sat down on the armrest, next to Jane. Bewildered. “So, people only move through time forwards one second at a time, but your machine breaks the speed of light so it can travel through space-time?” I asked in disbelief.

I just couldn't get my head around it. The fact that an old police box from a London junkyard could smash my understanding of the laws of physics into little bits. Jane had more urgent concerns.

“Please, can you let us go?” she pleaded with our captor. “We promise we won't tell the police about you.”

“I'm sorry, but at present, you are no longer on Earth. If you had not interfered in things that were none of your concern, you would now likely be safe at home,” the lady's tone was cold and blunt.

“Do you make a habit of kidnapping people who try to help you?” I snapped at her.

“*Help?* We don't need help from anyone. The only thing I needed were supplies to repair the ship. No local interference, not again.”

“You are attempting to keep us here against our will. We are leaving, now. Come on Jane.” I headed for the door, my hand flicking down the lever I had seen the lady use to close the doors. Nothing happened.

“Unlock the doors, please, Dr Frost,” Jane said, her usually beamish face twisted into a frightened parody of itself.

“What is she talking about? Doctor who?” the lady looked confused.

“You're Dr Frost, aren't you?”

“You're talking nonsense!”

“The gate said that I. Frost was the owner of the junkyard,” persisted Jane. “Ms Wright from Beech Grove School said that you were a doctor. I just added the two pieces of information together. What does the 'I' stand for?”

“Irrelevant. I knew enrolling Steven into that school was a mistake. Two of his teachers followed him home a week or so ago.”

“We managed to lose them by making the ship take a short trip from the junkyard to the park,” volunteered Steven.

“It *was* you,” I affirmed quietly to the old woman.

“Nonsense. Blind like the rest of your species,” the woman dismissed.

Jane did well not to shout at the old woman. “It *was* you. You were rude then and you're being just as unreasonable now. Please, just let us go.”

I had no such qualms “Open these doors at once! Whatever game you're playing in your imaginary spaceship, leave us out of it.”

I tried the door release again, but they stayed resolutely shut.

“Young man, having a tantrum and stamping your foot will get you nowhere,” she teased impishly.

“You think it's funny imprisoning us?” I said.

“Can you please stop arguing? We can't go on like this. Whether we like it or not, we're all in the TARDIS now. Travelling from Earth to anywhere in time-and-space.” The statement had been as casual as if he'd outlined the travel route of a train travelling through West Country, but his earnest face looked wretched. Every so often his eyes would dart awkwardly to the dials on the central console, a slight groan, a wheezing sigh from the machine distracting his attention. “Please? It's my fault anyway, not grandmother's.”

Sensing his dour mood, the old lady's demeanour changed like the sun coming out after a storm. She checked a readout on the console and then said, “My grandson is quite wise in his way. Whether we trust each other or not we must at least try to work together. Let's go and have a civilised conversation and something to eat and drink, *hmm?*”

We followed Steven and his grandmother through a white door, along an equally white corridor and across into a potentially even larger room. It could have been my own grandmother's front room. There were two high backed armchairs, a two-seater sofa and a *chaise longue* placed around an ornate marble fireplace. Assorted objects from a number of different periods in Earth's history lay scattered about and several landscape paintings on the walls including what looked like a Turner.

The lady gestured that we should sit down as Steven went out of another door. "Welcome to my parlour."

"Said the spider to the fly," murmured Jane.

"Some introductions I think first," either the Doctor didn't hear or she had chosen to ignore that slight. "I took over the identity of the junkyard owner so that Steven could attend the sixth form at Beech Grove school. He had some mistaken idea that he wanted to find out how young people on this world lived," she sighed wearily.

"On this world?" I repeated incredulously. "Are you telling us that you're not..." the word died in my throat.

"You can't be. You look just like us," Jane said.

"How typically human. You cannot accept anything to be true unless it fits in with your restricted viewpoint. Thank goodness for the development of your species, that your scientists like Galileo and Einstein, questioned the world around them and challenged their peers," the lady reminisced loftily.

Steven came back into the room carrying a tray. He placed it on the table. Jane asked if she could pour the tea into the delicate china cups on the tray. Steven agreed and he passed around a plate with some digestive biscuits on while Jane poured the tea.

This normal tea party, in such an extraordinary situation, calmed everyone down.

"I think it best if you call me Doctor," the lady announced.

"Just Doctor?" asked Jane.

“Indeed. My real name is unpronounceable and Doctor is how I wish to be addressed. Now you know our names, tell us yours.”

“Well, I'm Pete. Ah, Peter Harding and this is Jane, my wife. We're teachers at Coal Hill Grammar School,” I told her.

“Teachers, indeed? Now then, we had better...” the Doctor was saying when there was a bang from somewhere outside the room. The whole room lurched sideways. The tea tray started sliding to the floor, its contents shattering into a thousand myriad pieces. The Doctor and Steven jumped to their feet, leaving us behind in their quick bustle from the parlour.

We entered the control room just after them to an indescribable sound. The chamber was filling with black smoke. Steven grabbed a fire extinguisher and tried to put out the inferno that had taken hold on one of the panels. The Doctor pulled a lace handkerchief from her jacket pocket. and put it over her mouth, looking at the instruments that were still functioning beneath the extraordinary heat.

She pulled the door lever and shouted as they opened: “We must abandon ship!”

All of us ran for the entrance. Once outside, Jane and I stood still. Stunned by the evidence of our own eyes. We were no longer in a London junkyard. We were in a metallic room. Metal everywhere. Metal walls, floor and a door. Nothing but metal. There was a low persistent thrumming noise. Was that in my head or the city itself? I couldn't think, I couldn't breathe, I could feel panic about to wrap its tiny fingers around my reason. What if it were true? What if that machine were the only way back home? Could it be gone?

My eyes fell not on the Doctor, but on a door at the far end of the room that had suddenly slid open. Beyond it stood our second encounter with alien life. No pretence of humanity, nothing to latch onto. They were thoroughly *alien*.

A clear, gurgling voice barked an instruction: “**DO NOT MOVE OR YOU WILL BE ELIMINATED!**”

**Next Episode:
THE METAL CITY**

5.15

DR. WHO

An adventure in space and time
with

JOAN HICKSON

as Dr. Who

PETER PURVES

as Steven

JOAN SIMS

as Jane

WILLIAM RUSSELL

as Peter

The Metal City

by **A.F.J. KERNOW**

A futuristic city made entirely of metal
A city occupied by an aggressive alien
species. Will the Doctor, Steven and
reluctant travellers, Peter and Jane,
survive? How can they escape with the
the TARDIS out of action?

Title music by **RON GRAINER** and the
BBC Radiophonic Workshop

Incidental music by **JOHN DANKWORTH**

Producer, **VERITY LAMBERT**

Directed by **SIDNEY HAYERS**

See page 7

The Metal City

“DO NOT MOVE OR YOU WILL BE ELIMINATED! WE ARE THE FERONS. YOU WILL COME WITH US,” this machine's voice was deeper than the other machines.

“What if we refuse to go?” I asked defiantly. Knowing them now, I wish I'd kept my mouth shut and just acquiesced to the Feron's order. I had tried to puzzle out their intentions. Instead, I'd incurred their wrath.

“OBEY OUR LEADER! OBEY THE EMINENT FERON!” said a Feron as it pointed one of its arm-like attachments at me. A bright red ray fizzed out and hit my legs, the pain was excruciating. I collapsed and passed out.

I awoke groggily. Jane's concerned face started swimming into view. The room was brightly lit and I shut my eyes again. She tapped the back of her hand against my temple. Gently, but insistently. “What were you playing at? she reproached. “You could have gotten yourself killed.”

“Yes, Mr Harding. When faced with hostile lifeforms, it is not the best idea to challenge them. These Ferons seem particularly trigger happy,” Steven added.

My head was pounding. I opened my eyes slowly and noticed that the Doctor was missing.

“How long was I out? Where's the Doctor?” I asked.

“A couple hours. Grandmother's gone to talk to the Ferons and see if they have anything that will help fix the ship,” said Steven.

“She really *is* very brave, your grandmother,” reassured Jane.

“She doesn't like bullies,” Steven said firmly.

The door swished open. The Doctor was pushed into the room by a Feron. The door closes behind them. I look at the Doctor, her face is pale and drawn. She looked visibly shaken from her encounter. There was nowhere for her to sit, so she stood still like a statue.

“Well, my dears. I'm sorry to report that we are all in serious danger of dying on this planet,” she said quietly.

Steven rushed over and hugged the Doctor. She bristled a bit but accepted his show of affection.

“I was so worried about you,” he said, his voice breaking a little.

“What happened?” asked Jane.

“The Ferons are the most ruthless beings I have ever encountered since leaving our home world,” the Doctor stated. She started to pace around the perimeter of the room.

“The Ferons are not the only intelligent lifeforms on this planet. The Ferons share this planet, Feros, with a race of humanoids called the Skala,” the Doctor told us.

“So, the Skala could look like us?” I asked.

“A head, some arms and legs, warm blood and a well-developed brain, perhaps. But they might have blue blood and blue faces or be covered in orange fur,” Steven said with a smile.

“Steven. Let me continue,” the Doctor said brusquely. “The Ferons are highly technologically advanced,” she continued.

“They have sent radio controlled drones to survey the rest of the planet and discovered signs of life. Since they are unable to leave their metal city, they want us to go and investigate,” the Doctor sighed and managed to manoeuvre herself into a sitting position.

“Of course, now that I'm down here you will have a devil of a job to get me back up again,” she smiled.

A familiar bubbling, metallic voice emitted from the loudspeaker grill on the ceiling: **“OBEY THE FERONS OR YOU WILL BE ELIMINATED. TWO OF YOUR PARTY MUST LEAVE THE CITY TO INVESTIGATE THE LIFESIGNS ON OUR PLANET. THE HUMAN FEMALE AND THE YOUNG HUMAN MALE WILL STAND BY THE DOOR.”**

Jane gave me a bear hug and stood by Steven at the doors.

“Wish us luck,” smiled Jane.

“Don't take any silly risks, my boy,” the Doctor said to her grandson.

The two were escorted out of the room. The door closed again and I was left alone with an alien in a tweed suit. While we waited nervously for the pair's safe return I tried to find out more about the Doctor.

“Why on Earth did you set your infernal machine going? We were safe until you did that,” I told the Doctor angrily.

“I had no choice. I couldn't have you telling the authorities about Steven and myself,” she replied.

“We would have said nothing,” I said gloomily. “Why didn't you trust us?” I wanted to know how this strange alien operated.

The Doctor's eyes flicked away to the far wall.

“I don't trust anyone,” she simply. “I can't afford to.”

“But you did once?”

“Once. A family on Rockaria. We were imprisoned for being so naive and trusting,” she sighed, disappointed. “You see... The family turned us in for the reward money. Foolish really.”

“You make it sound so...”

“Ordinary?”

I almost laughed. “Yes, I guess so..”

There were the slightest of smiles.

“So, what *is* your story?” I asked her.

“There's not much to tell,” she replied. “We left because we had to. Our own planet is far away from us now. We can never return. So, Steven and I wander through time and space trying to find a place we can call home.” It was so matter-of-fact. No bitterness, no recriminations, no self-pity. Just simple acceptance. I was embarrassed at her quiet dignity. I was starting to get some feeling in my legs. Before now there had been only a little sensation in them at all. Gradually, I was able to wiggle my toes. After a while, I could move each leg.

“Doctor, my legs... They're starting to feel better,” I told her.

“Excellent, I am so relieved, Mr Harding,” she smiled and her features which were hawkish and sharp changed. Her expression was that of a grandmother who had just been given a box of her favourite chocolates. Then she gave me a sly wink. “When you are able to walk on them we need to join our minds and think of a way out of here,” she whispered pointing at the speaker grill in the ceiling.

I shuffled closer to her so that we could plot our escape more easily. When I was confident I could walk unaided, we put our escape plan into action.

“*How dare you!*” the Doctor shouted her voice rang out with surprising volume for one who appeared so frail.

“You took us away from the life we knew! You kidnapped us, you old *witch!*” I bellowed.

“You should keep your nose out of things that don't concern you!” I was taken aback when she suddenly catapulted herself towards me, her hands gripping around my throat like a laboratory vice.

“**DESIST! STOP! YOU MUST OBEY!**” the metallic voice ordered us over the speaker grill.

“Help me!” I hissed as the Doctor's hands tried to throttle the life out me. “She's gone mad. She's going to kill me!”

The metal door to the room slid open. A Feron glided in.

“**YOU WILL CEASE FIGHTING. YOU WILL OBEY THE FERONS OR YOU WILL BE DISABLED PERMANENTLY!**” the metal machine barked at us.

“*Now!*” shouted the Doctor. I threw my jacket over the Feron's eyepiece, winding it tightly into place.

“**STOP! MY VISION IS IMPAIRED. ELIMINATE!**”

Red laser fire melted a section of the metal wall in front of the Feron.

The Doctor and I shrank back, a faint glimmer of hope in our eyes. I rubbed my hand against my sore neck. Our diversion had been a bit too true-to-life, but nonetheless effective.

“**YOU WILL BE ELIM-IN-ATED! ELIM—**” the Feron's eyeglass drooped and the metal machine was still.

Cautiously, we moved my jacket off the Feron's pyramid-shaped head. The Feron did nothing. We looked for a way to remove the head. The Doctor found a catch and we lifted the head assembly off the motionless Feron. Suddenly, there was a strange gurgling sound. A pool of metal liquid started to seep from the base of the Feron machine. It twisted and pooled like mercury, except that each motion was deliberate. Calculated. Intelligent. We watched mesmerised as the liquid seemed to flow by itself through the open door and down the corridor. I climbed into the unit and the Doctor put the head on. I looked around the inside and managed to push my feet out through the hole the mysterious liquid must have flowed through to escape. I tried moving the unit with my feet, it was incredibly light so I was able to move it out of the room and into the corridor almost immediately. The Doctor walked in front of me. We moved through the metal city, the Doctor whispering commands she recalled from her previous journey through the city while I had been unconscious.

We managed to reach the city doors, but—

“**HALT. DO NOT MOVE OR YOU WILL BE ELIMINATED!**” the speaker grille by the main door shrieked.

I clambered out of the machine and all four of us managed to prise the door open with our hands, fleeing outside onto the planet's jungle-like surface. We ran through red leaves under an ochre sky, but were stopped in our tracks by a group of figures running towards us. In their paws, they raised their tubular wands towards us. For a moment, I thought I felt the sickening crunch of a bullet beneath my chest. But as I opened my eyes, I saw two familiar faces instead, one of which was already squeezing me tight.

“*Pete!*” Jane yelled happily. “I can't believe it, you're alive.”

“Jane,” was all I could say, I was so relieved.

I smiled and held her tight, my only source of light and warmth in the bleak darkness of this alien world. It was a single moment, but it reminded us how dependent we were on each other in this terrible nightmare. Any

further interaction with the three humanoids who had guided Jane and Steven would never come to pass. We had managed to free ourselves from the city, but the gateway behind us remained open to the creatures who followed.

“HALT. DO NOT MOVE!” the Feron's ordered us. They then spotted the two newcomers. **“YOU ARE THE SKALA! YOU ARE TO BE ELIM-ATED ON SIGHT!”**

We never had the chance to ask any questions. The Skala started to run, but caught in the deadly red light of the Feron's laser guns, they fell to the ground. Their blue faces contorted, the light devouring them from bone to muscle. A scout in the distance caught the final barrage, his orange fur set alight from a grazing blast.

Jane buried her face in my shoulder, but I couldn't turn away and neither could the Doctor.

“YOUR DECEPTION WAS UNWISE, OBEY THE FERONS OR YOU TOO WILL DIE.”

Next Episode: THE BALANCE OF POWER

5.15

DR. WHO

An adventure in space and time
with

JOAN HICKSON

as Dr. Who

PETER PURVES

as Steven

JOAN SIMS

as Jane

WILLIAM RUSSELL

as Peter

The Balance of Power

by **A.F.J. KERNOW**

The Ferons show no mercy to their
enemies... so why do they want the
crew of the TARDIS alive? Do they
require new servants? Servants who
would be expendable...?

Title music by **RON GRAINER** and the
BBC Radiophonic Workshop

Incidental music by **JOHN DANKWORTH**

Producer, **VERITY LAMBERT**

Directed by **SIDNEY HAYERS**

See page 7

The Balance of Power

“YOUR DECEPTION WAS UNWISE, OBEY THE FERONS OR YOU TOO WILL DIE.”

We were frozen to the spot. We dare hardly move, unsure if we should even *breathe*. The Feron executioners turned from their dispatched targets.

“RETURN WITH US,” they intoned dispassionately.

We were too numb with shock to argue. We re-entered the metallic city of the Ferons and the doors clanged shut behind us for the final time. We were trapped, our brief shot of spirit gone. Jane was separated from our group as we passed our familiar cell. She was still shaking from the slaughter outside, too tired to argue.

“YOU WILL REMAIN HERE AS A DISINCENTIVE AGAINST FURTHER REBELLION,” the Feron guard replied. I didn't have any time to speak to her before the cell door closed between us. Steven looked at me apologetically. In her frustration, the Doctor couldn't meet my eye.

The three of us were taken into a large control room. Banks of monitors lined one wall while in the centre, computer terminals with Ferons interfaced directly into their hardware. One outlier held a bubbling conical flask in a claw, presumably taking it to some kind of laboratory.

I saw Steven, his arms held defensibly across his chest.

“Big Brother is watching you,” I joked softly.

He shivered. “War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength.”

A quote, but it could just as easily have been a mantra from the Ferons. The poor boy looked petrified, holding his grandmother's hand as if it were a lifeline at sea. It wasn't fair. A boy, even one from another world, should have been sitting comfortably at home, not scared out of his wits by metallic monsters.

The Eminent Feron had moved into a bay at the forefront of the room, a glass cowl covering its pyramid-shaped head. Its voice was deep,

uncompromising, booming out across the control centre like rolling thunder, **“OUR SCANS INDICATE THAT YOUR CRAFT IS A TIME-SPACE MACHINE. CONFIRM OUR ANALYSIS.”**

“No,” the Doctor turned her head away from the Eminent Feron.

“YOU WILL CO-OPERATE!” the Eminent Feron's voice rose in pitch.

One of the other Ferons pushed Steven with its snaking gun arm towards a booth in the corner of the room.

“ENTER!” it barked.

Steven did as he was told. A transparent door slid down from above sealing him in.

“I will not cooperate with you unless my grandson is freed,” she tried her best to hide the fear in her voice behind her anger. That moment still amazes me. All the confidence and implacable resolve had made her seem more alien than ever, but like her grandson, she was just as, well, human as I was.

A Feron holding a translucent key skittered across the room and plugged it into a machine next to the prism containing Steven. A green glow began to rotate just above Steven's head from a circular emitter. I could hear the faintest of whines, the young boy was attempting to block them out by placing his hands over his ears.

“YOU WILL TELL US WHAT YOU KNOW.”

“I will not,” her tone was hard as diamond, she had buried her fear. “I'm not giving the secrets of time travel to you.”

“EMINENT FERON, THRESHOLD LEVEL 1,” announced the Feron guard nearest to the prism.

The light started pulsating and the whine increased in volume.

“COLLABORATE OR SEE IT SUFFER.”

“What are you doing to him?” asked the Doctor. I was sure this time. It was *fear*. As human and as terrifying as our own when we stole aboard the TARDIS. In that moment, I understood completely. Torn between her

need to protect her grandson and her duty to stop the TARDIS from being stolen away. Perhaps even more than that. To stop it from being used for evil purposes.

“COLLABORATE!”

She looked to Steven. The boy nodded.

“I will *not*.”

“VERY WELL.”

Without warning or explanation, two Feron executioners shepherded the Doctor and me back to our cell and to Jane. She hugged me so tight I thought she was going to crack a rib. I didn't let go until I heard the rustle of cloth at my side.

The Doctor dabbed at her face with an embroidered lace handkerchief with a quiet dignity.

“I'm sorry,” I said.

She looked up at me, perhaps for the first time actually seeing me in her own terms “Thank you, young man.”

“What are we going to do?” asked Jane.

“I don't know, Mrs Harding. I need time to think...” The Doctor shuddered miserably. “Yes, I must help them. Clearly, there is no alternative. I presume you can still hear me? Yes, I agree to work with you wholeheartedly.”

There was a pause.

“AGREED. WE WILL ESCORT YOU TO OUR LAB-OR-ATORY,” the bubbling bass tones of the Eminent Feron boomed out of the speaker, distorting the sound.

There was a crack of noise. I turned my gaze from the speaker to the two women as they were frozen for a moment like a tableau. The Doctor looked astounded, her hand touching her cheek. Jane's pretty face was frozen in sheer panic. Surely, Jane would never actually—

“You're such a cold fish. How could you possibly consider working these evil Ferons,” she snapped.

“How dare you strike me young woman...” the Doctor's voice became sinister and icy cold. “I could decide to leave you here.” You could see behind her blue eyes that she would carry out such a cruel threat. She was frightened. For herself, for Steven, for the ultimate fate of her Ship.

I tried desperately to inject some levity into the tense situation. “Ladies. Back to your corners.”

Taking the remark at face value, the Doctor moved into the corner of the room muttering to herself about interfering humans. I studied Jane's face briefly. She had wiped away the tears, but two small damp trails lead down her cheeks all the same. How long had we been gone? Minutes? Hours? The death of those strangers, the isolation she must have felt would have been extraordinary.

“I don't know how you can be so—”

“I'm terrified. They have Steven,” I said levelly. She squeezed my hand, curling her shoulders inward. It was all the explanation she needed.

“I'm sorry, Pete, I don't know what came over me,” she turned away, still holding my hand for comfort. “And I'm sorry, Doctor, I'm just... so angry at this whole mess.”

The Doctor turned, her piercing eyes studied the rueful Jane and she gave faint smile. Yes, she understood the frustration of powerlessness all too well.

“Well, my dear,” she began softly. “You've had a great deal to cope with. After wrenching you from your own familiar place in space-and-time, your first experiences are to contend with a callous, destructive and I suppose fundamentally alien race. It is I who must apologise to you, perhaps I have misjudged you both.”

“Alright... Alright, what you think we should do?” I asked.

“**THRESHOLD LEVEL 2,**” barked the Feron voice over the loudspeaker startling us.

“Don't help them, grandmother. You know I'd rather die than give the Feron the TARDIS!” Steven shouted as the whining noise of the machine rose even higher in pitch.

“Don't be silly, boy! Feron, stop this at once or you won't get my TARDIS. I can destroy the interior of the box rather than allow my valuable craft to fall into the wrong hands,” she produced a small cube with a button on it to illustrate her threat.

“Really?” I mouthed. The Doctor shook her head imperceptibly.

“Well. What's your answer?” she snapped impatiently.

“REMOVE THE ALIEN THEY CALL DOCTOR AND DESTROY THE DETONATION DEVICE,” the Feron voice replied.

Before the Doctor was taken away, she whispered in a low voice.

“Now, pay attention both of you. At the moment things look very bleak for us, correct? The Feron appear to hold all the power and control over our existence. Once we have outlived our usefulness to them, we are dead. However, we can tip the balance of power into our hands without the Feron realising what has happened and make our escape. Keep alert and follow my lead,” she pointed to the speaker and winked at us.

The Feron took the Doctor back to their laboratory, but there was no sign of her grandson.

“Steven... Where is he?” she demanded.

“WE HAVE SENT THE YOUNG MALE TO THE SKALA.”

“Why shouldn't I be surprised that monsters like you do not keep your promises. Why have you sent him back to the Skala? They won't trust him after what you did to their soldiers,” insisted the Doctor.

“ORG-AN-IC LIFE, UNLIKE THE FERONS, IS UNIMPORTANT,” the Eminent Feron replied.

The Doctor raised her voice in outrage, bellowing at her implacable foe. “*Unimportant?*”

“YOU WILL DES-IST FROM SHOUT-ING. YOU HAVE WORK TO DO,” the Eminent Feron ordered the Doctor. Suddenly, the lights starting fading on and off. The Ferons began to scatter, almost scramble to the various pieces of equipment across the room. The Doctor studied them with a detached interest.

“WHAT IS HAP-PEN-ING?” one of Ferons asked.

“PERIMETER SENSORS HAVE BEEN DE-ACT-IVATED. IN-VESTI-GATE! THERE ARE IN-TRU-DERS IN THE CITY!” the Eminent Feron's voice seemed to slur, power fading from its equipment. It tried to extract itself from the control centre, but there was little power left. It had been a subtle thing but now could no longer escape. Steven and a group of Skala enter the room. One of Ferons raised its gun arm. A Skala pointed a tubular wand at it and suddenly the war machine was rendered helpless, unable fight back in any meaningful capacity. It fired impotently on its assailers, disappearing with a gurgling cry beneath a mound of hirsute Skala.

“Ingenious. A device that disrupts the electromagnetic signals controlling the Ferons battle machine.” the Doctor observed distractedly.

“Grandmother! We must go. The Skala are going to blow up the city!”

Jane looked appalled. “What? We've got to get out of here,” she said the panic showing in her voice.

A blazing wall cut the Doctor off from us, driving her towards the Skala near the control equipment. I was only given a brief glimpse, but rather than smashing it all to pieces as I would have expected, they appeared to be collecting components from it. Looting what they could before it was lost forever. Had this once perhaps been their city? In any case, we didn't have to wait long for our rescuers to act in our favour. We were told to keep back as the door lock was cut away. A badly burned soldier lurched past us carrying a large cylinder into the centre as Steven and his band of Skala soldiers guided us back to the TARDIS, the city buckling and warping beneath us.

We slammed against the box, pounding on the door as Steven unlocked it for us.

“Where is she?” he fretted chewing his lip nervously.

Through the flames outside, the Doctor and a trio of Skala ran into the chamber where the TARDIS was parked, her arm outstretched to shield her face from the blaze. The door seemed to almost spring open off the lock, the Skala dumping all the equipment they could manage on the control room floor, collapsing on their furred limbs around the main console alongside our exhausted selves. When questioned by Jane, Steven said we would make the Skala's journey for them, out towards the city limits and away from the metal city to the safety of their jungle home beyond.

The column rose and fell as we left that world of terror behind us. For the first time since we'd arrived aboard the TARDIS, we felt safe.

First light was dawning on this foreign world and well-rested from her experiences, Jane had been the first to speak up as the Doctor and Steven searched among the piles of components that the Skala had helped the old woman scavenge from the Feron city.

“Been shopping, Doctor?” said Jane.

“Yes, dear. That's right,” the Doctor said absently.

Behind them in the underground cavern, the remaining Skala and I were clustered around a small screen. We were watching what they had called a video feed from a drone camera as a man with a missing eye, Jodral, told me that they were ready to detonate the final explosive charge that would finish off the city of the Ferons, once and for all. An enormous fireball rose briefly across the screen before it went blank and a joyous cheer grew with it, a brief moment of wonder and celebration in an event that had grown so heavy under the weight of their companions' sacrifice.

As we rested among the Skala over those next few nights, we bore witness to what Steven had determined was a rare event. A separate service of remembrance was held for the man who had pressed the detonator switch and annihilated the city, himself apparently perishing from his wounds shortly after his task was complete. He had been one of

the men cut down when we'd escaped the city. The scout I had seen on the rise. Left for dead by the Ferons, but not by his own people who had given him one final task to perform before he expired. The fourth planet in their solar system was to be named Skolos in his honour. He died well and although saddened by their loss, the Skala at the service were devoted to celebrating the achievements of his life.

Bright colours, banners, it was a party by any other name and Jane, ever the optimist, had briefly succumbed to their rising good humour and cheer.

“It's a good job that he wasn't called Cedric,” she said.

The Doctor silenced her with a look, but I smiled at her. Jane found it difficult to keep a straight face when even in the most serious of situations. School assemblies were a nightmare. Whenever the headmaster was lecturing Coal Hill students about bad behaviour there was Mrs Harding in the back trying desperately to keep a straight face.

“This party is rather swell,” observed Steven. “Can't we stay a while longer?”

I looked over at the Doctor, who seemed to be pondering how to break the news of their departure to her grandson. As she moved towards us through the cavern's bright regalia, I decided to do it for her.

“We've stayed long enough. Besides, I think your grandmother is eager to try out your repairs,” I said. “Aren't you interested?”

Steven's eyes glittered distractedly. “Why, yes, I suppose.”

“Well, it's time to go,” she told us. “Steven and I are hoping to be able to return you back to London, 1963.”

“I do hope so, Doctor,” said Jane, joining us at the police box doors.

“Until then, you are no longer strangers,” the key snapped in its lock and a wondrous new world of possibilities opened beyond. “Aboard the TARDIS, you are welcome travellers. Mr and Mrs Harding, shall we?”

Jane and I couldn't help but smile as we put our best foot forward into eternity...

**THE FIRST DOCTOR, (1963-66) JOAN HICKSON.
An actress who had a winning combination of
absent-minded fluff and inner steel.**

Joan Hickson blazed the trail for all future portrayals of the titular *Dr. Who* role. Her Doctor was imperious, acid-tongued and quick-witted. However, as the weeks went on, we saw the love she had for her grandson Steven. She was every bit the fluffy, knitting absentminded grandmother too.

After three years, she retired from the role she loved due to a fear of being typecast. She needn't have worried, her next role after leaving *Dr. Who* was on Broadway. She also played Agatha Christie's detective Miss Jane Marple and was rightly praised for her performance. She completed all twelve stories.

Hickson herself maintained that her roles became better as she grew older because: "I was never really pretty, so for someone like myself it's more useful to be a character actress than a leading actress. In television especially, they want real wrinkles."

She returned to the First Doctor on two occasions. The first in specially recorded scenes with her two successors in 1973. She addressed the other two Doctors with a withering putdown: "So, you're my successors are you? Well, I'm afraid neither of you inspires much confidence, I feel distinctly underwhelmed."

She was delighted to be asked back in 1983. She was pleased to be working with her original TARDIS crew and with four of the five Doctors; the Fourth Doctor, Glenda Jackson, appearing in footage from the lost story, *Logopolis*. She considered it a privilege to play such beloved characters.

Joan Hickson retired from the role when the programme was still at the peak of its popularity. She said she had no intention of retiring from acting altogether. "It's fatal," she recalled. "If you retire you go *pop*."

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