

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

ATTACK OF THE SPACE PETS



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“I don’t think she suffered, you know.”

The Doctor put his arm around his young assistant. The Christmas tree in the corner of the sitting room and the presents piled under it seemed incongruous next to what had happened here.

“The poor woman.” Jo sniffed. “What could have done that to her?”

The Doctor pursed his lips. Earlier that evening, Mrs. Greenacre’s husband had run into the local police station raving about what he found when he came home. Given what he said, it was only natural UNIT was called in. The Doctor and Jo Grant were the first on the scene. They had entered the house cautiously, Jo closing the front door behind them. The hallway they stood in was illuminated only by what little moonlight could make it through the stained-glass fanlight above the door.

In the gloom, they listened for any movement in the old Victorian house. They heard the muffled laughter of a late-night comedy programme coming from the sitting room. The door was ajar. The Doctor nudged it open. The room was lit by the glow of the television and a table lamp in the corner. The Doctor saw the middle-aged woman on the sofa, but it took him a moment to realise what was wrong. He tried to warn Jo—telling her to keep back—but she was only a couple of paces behind him. She saw everything.

If Mrs. Greenacre’s skin hadn’t been an incandescent green, they would have assumed she died of natural causes. It would have looked as though she passed away peacefully while watching television. A cup of cold tea sat on the table in front of her.

The Doctor led Jo back into the hallway and pulled the door shut.

“I don’t know what did this, Jo,” the Doctor rubbed his neck, “but it’s unlikely to be anything from this planet.”

“You mean we’re dealing with aliens?”

“Very probably,” the Doctor confirmed. “Look, Jo, I need to go back in there. I have to examine Mrs. Greenacre more closely. Why don’t you wait out here? I’ll only be a few minutes.”

Jo nodded and watched the Doctor go back into the sitting room. He flicked on the main light and turned off the television. Popping his head out briefly to give her a reassuring smile, the Doctor closed the door. As she stood alone in the dark, Jo tried not to think of Mrs. Greenacre.

* * * * *

The Doctor took out a pocket light and peered closely at the woman's skin. He observed the puncture marks on her wrist. From the colour of her skin and the speed the chemical had evidently worked, he was confident this was an alien infection or poison. He had seen something similar before, but where? What kind of a monster would do this? These questions ran through the Doctor's mind as he turned to investigate the room.

* * * * *

In the hallway, Jo wrapped her arms around herself. It was a chilly night. The fanlight cast macabre shapes on the dark walls and floor. It couldn't take the Doctor much longer to finish his examination, could it?

Then, she heard a scratching sound. At first, she reasoned it had to be the Doctor making a noise in the other room. But as it went on, she could tell it came from somewhere else in the house. The creature—or whatever it was—began to mew. Was it a cat? No, it didn't sound like a cat or any other animal she knew.

"Hello?" she called into the darkness.

The creature seemed to mew back at her. It was upstairs. Jo looked up the staircase. After the first few steps, it disappeared into total darkness. Before she had a chance to stop herself, Jo found herself climbing the stairs. The first step creaked under her foot. The creature went quiet for a moment. She thought of calling out to the Doctor, but if she made too much noise, maybe the creature would take fright and escape. Against her better judgement, Jo continued to ascend.

Reaching the landing, she felt around for a light switch, but the walls seemed to be blank. There it was again, the mewing. Right next to her. Something brushed past her feet. Jo held in a scream.

She felt around again for the light and breathed out as she found the switch. Turning it on, she saw she was alone on the landing.

Jo called out again, aware now how dangerous it had been for her to go off alone. "I'm not going to hurt you," she called. She only hoped it wouldn't hurt her.

Something scuttled in the bathroom, and she made her way over. In the shadows by the sink, she saw something move. It was too big for a cat; too sleek for a dog.

"I'm going to turn the light on now." Jo felt around for the cord as she reached the bathroom. "Don't be afraid."

When she turned the light on, she saw the creature in the bathtub. It fixed her gaze with its red eyes.

"Hey!" Jo breathed a sigh when she saw what it was. It wasn't a murderer. It was just one of those fuzzy little creatures everyone was raving about. People called them 'space pets'.

Jo took a few steps towards the tub and knelt. "I'm not going to hurt you, little fella. It's all right."

The creature sat at one end of the tub observing her. It looked like a cuddly anteater with fur in green-and-black stripes running snout to tail. Jo stretched out her hand, and the creature pulled itself up onto the edge of the bathtub to lick her fingers. It cooed contentedly.

"Who's your friend?"

Jo jumped at the sound of the Doctor in the doorway. She hadn't heard him come in.

"Oh, it's nothing to worry about." The creature jumped onto Jo's lap, and she held it in her arms as she stood. "It's one of those new pets. You must have seen them on the news."

"Never heard of them."

The Doctor watched as the creature nuzzled Jo's neck.

"They're the latest thing!" Jo tickled the creature's chin. "The newspapers are calling them 'Space Pets'. They first appeared in pet shops a few months ago. Space pets are a massive craze, and they're already going to be the most popular present this Christmas."

"Where do these space pets come from?" asked the Doctor.

"Nobody knows." Jo looked down at the now-sleeping creature in her arms. "Probably somewhere far away. Whoever discovered them realised they'd make great pets."

"Somewhere far away is right." The Doctor peered at the creature who briefly opened one eye before yawning. "I've seen lifeforms like this before. It probably comes from near Luyten's Star, about twelve light years away."

"How did it get here?"

"That's a good question, Jo. And it's rather coincidental, don't you think, that we found it in a house where a woman died of an alien infection?"

"But, Doctor, look at it!" The creature wiggled around in Jo's arms to make itself more comfortable. "You don't think this little guy had anything to do with that poor woman's death? He's probably just her pet."

"Never judge by appearances." The Doctor led the way back down the stairs. "We should take it back to my lab. I'll interview it there."

As they passed the sitting room, Jo saw the Doctor had closed the door.

"Interview it?" she asked.

The Doctor opened the front door and turned to Jo. "You never know, this could be a highly intelligent creature from an advanced civilisation."

The space pet gurgled as it looked up at Jo. Unable to believe this creature was anything other than just a silly pet, she followed the Doctor out into the cold December night.

* * * * *

Having knocked on the door to the Doctor's laboratory three times to no reply, Sergeant Benton went inside. The lab was brightly lit by morning sunshine. He was surprised to see a green furry creature sleeping at one end of the Doctor's workbench. At the other end, the Doctor was tinkering away at a black box about the size of a transistor radio. A jeweller's eyepiece in his eye, he prodded away at the insides with a screwdriver.

Benton cleared his throat. The Doctor didn't seem to notice.

"Doctor?"

Still, the Doctor didn't look up.

"Here's a report the Brigadier wanted you to look at."

“My dear Mr. Benton,” the Doctor finally looked up and took his eyepiece out, “I’m afraid I’m terribly busy right now. Whatever it is Lethbridge-Stewart wants me to see will have to wait.”

Remembering the Brigadier’s order that he wasn’t to leave until the Doctor had read the report, the sergeant tried again. “Brig did say it was important, sir.”

“He’s leaving for Geneva now, isn’t he? Won’t be back for days.” The Doctor waved over to the sink. “Put it down there, would you? There’s a good chap. I’ll look at it when I can.” The Doctor turned his attention back to the box. “You know, this really is most fascinating, Sergeant.”

“What is?” Benton held onto the report, uncertain whether to follow the Doctor’s instructions.

“I’ve tried talking to this space pet in almost every language conceivable,” the Doctor pointed at the sleeping creature. “It doesn’t respond to any of them. My theory is it communicates telepathically.”

“So how are you going to talk to it, then?” Benton wandered over and peered at the curled-up space pet. “It’s kind of cute, don’t you think?”

The Doctor put the box down. “That, sergeant, is a highly intelligent creature which may be implicated in murder.”

“Pull the other one,” Benton laughed, “it’s got bells on.”

The creature began to snore.

“We shall know soon enough.” The Doctor indicated the box. “This is a Telepathic Synthesiser, and it will enable us to talk with the space pet. It converts thought patterns into human speech and vice versa.”

They heard a clattering at the door and turned to see Jo Grant run in, holding a microphone in her hand.

“I found one!” she said. “I had to look simply everywhere. Turns out there’s not much call for these things in a top-secret military establishment.”

“Thank you!” The Doctor took the microphone and plugged it into the Telepathic Synthesiser. “Now we can finally talk to our friend here.”

Both Jo and Benton cooed over the furry space pet. The Doctor rolled his eyes. Taking the microphone in hand, he addressed the creature.

“Greetings. My name is the Doctor. I hope you can understand me. I created this device to allow us to communicate. All you need to do is to think the answers to my questions. We shall hear what you want to say. Now, please tell us who you are and why you came to Earth.”

The creature snapped out of its slumber the moment the Doctor spoke. It looked around, scanning the Doctor, Jo and Benton in turn. It glanced at the door and the window as if trying to assess escape routes. Eventually, a voice came out of the Doctor’s machine.

“People of Earth,” the space pet’s voice was high pitched, and Jo noted the creature’s mouth didn’t move when it spoke, “we are but a poor, defenceless species! We have come here only to seek your help! We are from outer space, the last survivors of a war that raged on our homeworld, Pangolia. We can never return.”

The creature whimpered in distress, and Jo stroked its fur to calm it. Eventually, the space pet continued.

“Our ship crashed in an area you know as the Scottish Highlands. We now seek refuge among the kind people of your planet. We desire only food and shelter, nothing more. In return, we understand you humans like to keep pets. We would like to be your pets. If you distribute us to the family units on your planet, we promise to love and cherish our owners.”

“My assistant and I,” the Doctor began, “discovered you in a house while we were investigating the death of a woman. Could you tell us anything about what happened?”

The space pet rumbled its snout. “A most regrettable incident. Unfortunately, I was taking a nap in the other room at the time and have no idea what happened. She had kindly bought me from a pet shop last week, and I cared for her very much.”

The Doctor sat on a stool and stared the creature down. He indicated Jo and Benton should take a step away from it.

“So, you wouldn’t know anything about the alien compounds we found in her bloodstream? Nor would you know that those compounds are only found in the vicinity of Luyten’s Star which, I believe, is where your homeworld, Pangolia, lies?”

The creature dug its claws into the desk. “A coincidence, I assure you.” After a moment, the creature spoke again in a calmer voice. “Please help us. We are a desperate people! Even now, our enemies are coming to find us. They will stop at nothing to see us all dead!”

“What do you mean?” asked the Doctor.

“I have learned telepathically from my brethren that our enemies have sent a spaceship searching for us. It is currently in orbit around your moon. You have to help us—they will kill us all!”

Benton held out the report to the Doctor. “That’s what this is about, Doc! The Brig wanted me to tell you about an unidentified object in orbit around the moon.”

The Doctor took the report and read intently.

“That’s not all,” continued Benton. “A smaller craft left the main one last night and is heading straight for Britain. Perhaps he’s telling the truth, Doctor!”

“I’ve got it!” The Doctor slapped the report on the table. “If you’re from Pangolia, you must be the Kravdar! You aren’t fleeing from a war at all. Your species is famous for invading planets and enslaving their populations through mental control!”

Without warning, the creature made a break for the window. Jo ran after it. Benton got there first and closed it before the Kravdar could jump out. The Doctor ran to the door, slamming it shut and turning the key.

“You can’t escape now!” The Doctor said.

The Kravdar ran under the workbench where none of them could reach it.

The trio circled the table to make sure the space pet couldn’t escape. As they did so, the Doctor explained that the Kravdar’s modus operandi was to arrive on a planet and try to win the affection of the inhabitants. Then, the experiments would begin. The Kravdar would inject test subjects with various chemical compounds to find which one would make them open to mind control. They would then create this compound in their mouths and would inject it into people with their teeth to enslave them. In this way, they could take control of a planet in days.

“You are correct!” The creature confirmed, speaking through the Telepathic Synthesiser. “That woman’s death was unfortunate but unavoidable. She was our final

test subject. I only curse that you arrived when you did—knowing her husband had sought help from the authorities, I was trying to get away. Given only a few more minutes, I might have escaped. Unfortunately, the buildings on this planet are not designed for our limbs. Not yet.”

The Kravdar hissed at them under the workbench before continuing. “I had to continue the humiliation of pretending to be a meek space pet so you wouldn’t suspect me. While you were prattling just now, I used the time to complete work on the formula for the control compound in my head. It will make you all utterly open to suggestion from our thought patterns. Now our invasion begins!”

As the Kravdar stopped speaking, an ear-splitting whine burst out of the Telepathic Synthesiser.

“What’s that noise?” Jo clasped her hands to her ears.

The whine stopped, and the creature spoke. “There! I have transmitted the formula to my brethren. They will begin synthesising it in their bodies, ready to inject it into the humans they live with! There is nothing you can do stop us!”

The creature made another attempt to escape, but Benton grabbed it before it could reach the door. He held the Kravdar up in the air, looking for somewhere to put it. The creature turned its head so it was face-to-face with the sergeant.

“Careful, man!” called the Doctor, but it was too late. The creature sank its teeth into Benton’s wrist. Benton cried out and dropped the Kravdar. As the creature ran back to the workbench, Benton collapsed to the floor unconscious. Jo ran over and checked his pulse.

“Do not concern yourselves with your friend,” the Kravdar’s said. “He shall not die. No, he shall become a plaything of my will. Soon, everyone on Earth will do our bidding.”

“If you’re so all-powerful,” Jo’s voice was angry, “why are you hiding under a table? Why not bite us all and be done with it?”

“Of course, Jo!” said the Doctor. “That’s brilliant! The Kravdar can probably only produce so much venom, and he’s used it all on Benton. We must be safe for a few minutes at least. Grab him, Jo!”

The Doctor and Jo reached under the workbench, trying to get a hold of the Kravdar. It lashed out, hissing. Eventually, Jo got her hands around it and pulled it out. The creature struggled in her arms, but she held it fast. The Doctor took the back off the Telepathic Synthesiser and began fiddling around inside.

“Hold onto the Kravdar a little longer, Jo,” he urged. “You see, this device communicates on the Kravdar’s mental wavelength. If I can boost the signal, it should overwhelm all the Kravdar in the area and send them to sleep.”

“Doctor!” cried Jo.

The Doctor looked up from his work. Benton had risen to his feet. His skin was incandescent green. He was now under the control of the Kravdar.

“Now you shall feel our wrath!” sneered the Kravdar still trapped in Jo’s arms.

Benton grabbed the Doctor by the shoulders to pull him away from the device.

“Come, my brothers and sisters!” the Kravdar called out to its brethren telepathically; the Doctor and Jo could hear its message through the Telepathic Synthesiser. “The Doctor is a threat to our plans! We must attack UNIT headquarters! Home in on my signal.”

The Doctor struggled against the possessed Benton. The Kravdar wriggled free of Jo's grasp and scurried over to the window. Jo grabbed the sergeant's arm and pulled, but Benton swatted her away, pushing Jo to the ground. The Doctor lurched to one side, freeing himself. Benton turned and lumbered towards him. The Doctor dashed around the workbench, trying to stay one step ahead of the sergeant. He looked at Jo who was rubbing her head as she sat crumpled on the floor.

Benton swiped at the Doctor across the workbench. The Doctor dodged. Benton swiped again—this time, he hit the Telepathic Synthesiser, sending it careening across the room. The machine let out a whine which temporarily stunned Benton. From across the table, the Doctor used his Venusian Karate to chop the sergeant across the neck. Benton slumped to the floor. He tried to stand but sat back down and passed out against the wall.

"He should be out for a little while," said the Doctor, dusting off his jacket.

"Look!" said Jo rising to her feet. "What's the Kravdar doing?"

The Kravdar was looking through the window. It turned to face the Doctor and Jo, and folded its arms triumphantly, making no attempt to escape. The Doctor picked up the broken Telepathic Synthesiser and examined the parts.

"Broken," he sighed. "Now we have no way of communicating with it."

"Doctor, come here!" By now, Jo had joined the Kravdar at the window. There was the sound of rumbling coming closer. "What is it?"

"Our little friend here", the Doctor glared at the Kravdar, "has called up reinforcements. We don't have much time. I have to get this thing working again." The Doctor returned to the workbench and examined the Telepathic Synthesiser. "Let me know the moment you see anything."

The Kravdar sat back on its haunches and looked at the Doctor, gloating.

"Doctor! They're here!" cried Jo.

The Doctor joined her at the window in time to see hundreds of Kravdar running across the lawn towards UNIT headquarters. They saw soldiers take up defensive positions. They opened fire, but the creatures were unstoppable.

"How long will they be able to hold them off, Doctor?" Jo winced as she saw a Kravdar bite a soldier. The soldier's skin started to turn green.

"Not long." The Doctor returned to working on the device. "And soon, they'll have an army of zombie soldiers to help them!"

Jo watched as the UNIT troops were overwhelmed by the sheer number of Kravdar. Jo guessed there were now thousands out there. At least two dozen soldiers had been bitten and were now reviving under Kravdar control.

"We have to stop them!" Jo couldn't bear to watch. The few remaining unaffected UNIT soldiers retreated inside, pursued by the Kravdar and their possessed soldiers. Hundreds of other Kravdar began to climb the walls to UNIT headquarters.

"I've almost done it," said the Doctor working on the machine. "Any second now."

The window darkened as Kravdar swarmed across it.

"They're breaking through, Doctor!"

Outside in the corridor, they heard a hammering as possessed soldiers tried to break down the door to the Doctor's lab.

“They know we’re a threat to their plan. They’re trying to stop us.” The Doctor closed the lid to the box and switched on. It emitted a low pulse.

“It hasn’t affected them, Doctor! They’re still attacking!”

The Doctor looked confused for a moment. “Of course!” He snapped his fingers. “I forgot to reverse the polarity.”

He tinkered with the machine again. By now, Benton had revived and was stumbling towards him. The window shattered. Jo stepped back just as countless Kravdar swarmed in.

“It’s too late!” Jo shouted.

The Doctor flicked a switch. The effect was immediate. The pulse was high in pitch, and it immediately sent all the Kravdar to sleep. In a second, the floor was covered with dormant space pets. The banging on the door stopped. Without anyone to control his mind, Benton wandered around lost until Jo sat him down at the table where he, too, fell into a deep sleep.

“You cut it a little fine there, Doctor.”

The Doctor ran a hand through his hair. “We’ve only bought ourselves some respite, Jo. The pacifier is only effective in a two-mile radius. We have to stop all the other Kravdar in the world and, of course, see if we can get Mr Benton and everyone else infected back to normal.”

From above, Jo and the Doctor heard a rumbling. Soon the building was shaking. “And, of course,” he added, “we mustn’t forget that spaceship behind the moon!”

The Doctor led Jo out of the lab. They walked past slumbering Kravdar and zombie soldiers alike and made their way outside.

* * * * *

The Doctor and Jo looked out across the now-empty lawn. In the sky above them loomed a spaceship. Shaped like a silver disk with a spherical cockpit at its centre and with no obvious jets or thrusters, it was coming into land.

“Wonderful!” said the Doctor. “This is of the most advanced design!”

The ship filled the lawn which was larger than a football pitch. The Doctor and Jo approached, walking under the shadow of the disk and towards the underside of the sphere. A hatch appeared in front of them. A space-suited figure appeared and seemed to float down onto the grass. The newcomer looked like any astronaut, except it was nearly seven foot tall.

It held his gloved hand up in what the Doctor assumed was a gesture of peace. Then, the alien put its hands to its helmet and twisted to break the seal. As she saw the head beneath, Jo could see similarities with the Kravdar. This being, too, had a head similar to that of an anteater, albeit with a shorter snout. Unlike the Kravdar, however, this alien walked on two legs, was hairless and had grey skin.

“Greetings, humans,” it said.

“Greetings to you, too,” replied the Doctor, who then held out his hand. The alien clasped it in his. “Am I right in thinking”, asked the Doctor, “that you are the Maasika of the planet Pangolia?”

“You have heard of us?” The alien seemed surprised.

“Yes. There is no race more gentle or noble in the universe.”

The alien let go of the Doctor's hand. "My name is Echidnus. To our shame, we are cousins of the Kravdar. We have come to help avert their invasion of your planet."

"Thank you," said the Doctor.

"We see you have totally pacified all Kravdar in the vicinity of this building. We are impressed with your ingenuity. Unlike you, we do not possess the technology for total pacification." Echidnus bowed slightly. "We do, however, possess the ability to increase the range of your device. If you bring it to us, we shall connect it to our ship. From there, we can boost the signal to cover the entirety of your planet. The Kravdar invasion will soon be foiled!"

Echidnus paused to take a breath of air.

"Your planet is beautiful," he continued. "Ours was beautiful once. That was before the Kravdar learned how to control our minds. They used us as their slaves. They plundered Pangolia and invaded other planets, always using local species as their slaves.

"They were eventually stopped by the Interstellar Police and put on trial. We were set free and, because they are our cousins, we were charged with keeping them within the pacification zones on our planet. There, the Kravdar lived in peace, kept tranquil and non-aggressive by machines similar to the one you created but less powerful. We started to rebuild our planet. Then, a meteorite storm hit and one Kravdar—*just one*—broke free from its bonds. That single Kravdar freed thousands of its fellows, and they stole a spaceship, escaping here. We believe their invasion of Earth was to be the beginning of a new conquest of the universe."

"It looks like you arrived in the nick of time, old fellow," the Doctor made to slap the alien on the shoulder but thought better of it.

"If you help us collect the Kravdar," said Echidnus, "we shall transport them to our mothership and return to Pangolia for trial."

"You have my assurance," said the Doctor. "The authorities here on Earth will give you their full cooperation."

"What about all the people the Kravdar infected?" asked Jo. "What will happen to them?"

"Those subjected to mind control will soon recover," reassured Echidnus. "I myself was once under their control. I returned to full health within a matter of moments of being freed. Only the pigmentation takes some time to fade."

They heard a noise and turned to see Sergeant Benton staggering towards them.

"Ah, Mr Benton!" said the Doctor. "It's good to see you looking better—if a little green around the gills."

"Some Christmas this is turning out to be—HQ's filled with those little blighters, and I look like a Christmas tree!" Benton looked at Echidnus and then back to the Doctor. "I seem to have missed all the action."

"You could say that," said the Doctor. "I have a job for you sergeant. I need you to gather up every space pet in the area. You're probably going to need some cages to put them in. A few thousand to start with."

"To *start* with?" Benton scratched his head.

"At least." The Doctor smiled. "I also need you to get on to the authorities to let them know we'll be collecting all space pets across the country. Possibly internationally."

"I see..."

“While you’re doing that, I’m going to have a chat with Mr. Echidnus here.”

Benton raised an eyebrow, saluted and left. Jo looked up at the Doctor, her thoughts on Mrs. Greenacre.

“I know, Jo,” said the Doctor, reading her mind. “I wish there were some way we could have saved that poor woman, too. Even one death is a tragedy.” The Doctor put his arm around Jo and turned to Echidnus. “We’ll be right back, old chap. We’re going to collect the Telepathic Synthesiser from my lab.”

Echidnus nodded, and the Doctor turned to Jo.

“You know,” he said, “if the Kravdar really were going to be the most popular present this Christmas, there’s going to be an awful lot of people doing some last-minute Christmas shopping!”

“They’re the latest thing! The newspapers are calling them ‘Space Pets’.

Space Pets are taking over the United Kingdom!
This Christmas, everyone wants one of these cute, furry creatures.
Millions are about to be given as gifts across the country.
But when the Doctor and Jo find one at the scene of the death of Mrs. Greenacre,
the Doctor becomes suspicious. With bright green skin, her death cannot
have been a natural occurrence.

Back at UNIT HQ, the Doctor rigs a telepathic synthesizer to communicate with the creature.
At first, it claims the Space Pets came to Earth to as refugees
and that they just want to be our friends. But then the Doctor learns the terrible truth.
Trapped in his laboratory, the Doctor and his UNIT friends
have to race to save the United Kingdom from a very peculiar invasion.

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