

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BEST SERVED COLD

MARLEY'S GHOST

A dark green steam locomotive, Marley's Ghost, is shown in a dark, industrial setting, possibly a tunnel or a large underground chamber. The locomotive is the central focus, with its front end and boiler visible. A bright spotlight illuminates the front of the train from the right side, creating a strong contrast and highlighting the texture of the metal and the surrounding environment. The background is filled with dark, curved structural elements, likely part of the tunnel's infrastructure. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and dramatic.

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The square was full of people. People in business suits hurrying to and from work. Women laden with bags of shopping. Women with small children in pushchairs or being dragged reluctantly through shops. On all sides, tall buildings rose high into the sky, the sun glinting off polished glass and steel. Just another busy day in the heart of London's newly regenerated Docklands area.

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As they went on their way, many of them were unaware of the activities going on far below the ground. The new Docklands development had been earmarked for a station on the Jubilee Line, part of the network of stations on London's extensive Underground railway. Vast tunnels were being bored through the rock for new stations and track to link up with the end of the existing line at Green Park.

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The noise in the tunnel was deafening. At the head of the cave, a massive metal drill was boring through solid rock, creating a round tube which would be shored up as it crawled forward. Whilst the drilling itself was automated, a team of workmen followed behind it to ensure there were no snags or water leaks. They all wore high-visibility jackets and hard hats, their ears covered with protectors against the screeching of the drill bore.

The lead engineer, John Brunel, looked down at his watch in the semi-darkness. It was almost twelve noon – time for lunch and a shift change-over. He looked back at Harry Webb, his second-in-command and motioned that he was looking forward to a hot cup of tea. The other man nodded.

Suddenly the pitch of the drill changed, and Brunel looked towards the front to see the wall collapse and the drill continue to spin through free air. He grabbed his radio, relayed an order, and the drill slowly stopped. As silence returned to the tunnel, he turned to the second man.

“What's going on? I thought the rock was supposed to extend for another half-mile before we reach another chamber.”

Webb consulted the electronic map he held.

“It does.”

He looked forward to the stationary drill.

“Or at least it’s supposed to.”

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The cavern was in total darkness, with no way of establishing how high or deep it was. The two men moved forward, their figures silhouetted against the light from the tunnel beyond the drill. They switched the lights on their hats on and moved into the void. The floor of the cavern was almost at the same level as the bore, and they were able to step down slightly onto solid ground. As they looked upwards, they saw that the ceiling was some eight metres above them, whilst the sides and far end were invisible to the lights from their hats.

Brunel was the first to speak.

“We’d better get some floodlights down here and see how far it goes before we move the drill.”

Webb started to turn back to the tunnel entrance, but as he did so, the edge of the light picked out a shape at the edge of the cavern.

“There’s something in here!” he exclaimed.

Together the two men edged towards the shape, but neither of them could believe what their lights revealed. Stretching some twenty metres long and four metres high, its paint cracked and faded, was a railway carriage!

“I don’t believe it!” Brunel said, and his intake of breath was audible in the silence as his torch picked out another carriage – and then another.

Webb stared at the sight.

“Perhaps it’s a film set? After all, Network Rail hasn’t used this sort of rolling stock in over thirty years.”

Brunel shook his head.

“No. Look at the dust and paintwork. This has been here for a long time. I wonder…”

His voice trailed off as he moved along the train. There were five carriages in all, and beyond them a steam locomotive. Its green paint was faded and the wheels were rusted through lack of use, but the cab and steam funnels were undeniably that of a steam driven locomotive.

Brunel and Webb moved forward to look in disbelief at the sight before them. Their torch lights picked out the name plate, which was covered in grime and rust. Brunel used his sleeve to wipe the plate clean, and they were both able to read the name inscribed:

‘Marley’s Ghost’

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The office was modern but streamlined. An oak desk was set beside a window which looked out over the River Thames in central London. A leather chair was pushed to one side. Despite the modern look of the office, there was one thing missing – a computer. Instead, there were buff folders on the desk, with an open filing cabinet revealing many more of the same.

A tall man stood by the window, gazing out across the river towards the Houses of Parliament on the other shore. Once the home of the Greater London Council, County Hall was now the home of Government Department C19, the department which dealt with anything which threatened the security of the nation. Unlike the more well-known M15, the remit of this section was to deal with threats to the country from outside the Earth. It was therefore here that UNIT (the

United Nations Intelligence Taskforce) came for permission to utilize the regular forces or to inform on operations on British soil. Head of this department was General John Sudbury. Standing at just over six feet tall, with close-cropped grey hair, he had the bearing of a military man – unsurprising as he had been a General in the regular Army before taking on the role after the ignominious downfall of General Finch at the end of the evacuation of London affair.

He turned round and crossed back to his desk. Sitting down, he opened a folder and read the brief report it contained.

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“Operation Pied Piper – September 1st, 1939. As preparation for the forthcoming war with Germany, around 3 million schoolchildren were evacuated from the cities and sent to the relative safety of the countryside in Somerset, Kent and Wales. From mainline stations in London such as Waterloo and Aldgate, children were shepherded onto trains, boxes carrying gas masks hanging around their necks, labels on their coats with their names on, and clothes packed in whatever cases and bags they had. The officials encouraged them to keep spirits high by singing songs such as ‘The Lambeth Walk’ and ‘Run, Rabbit, Run’.”

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General Sudbury stared out of the window, images of the evacuation in his mind as he read. Then he picked up a second folder with only a single sheet of paper inside it.

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The Mystery of Marley’s Ghost

The first train of evacuees to leave Waterloo on September 1st was bound for the small Somerset town of Ipton. Some two hundred children were on board the train. Just after 12pm, the train entered a tunnel on the outskirts of London, but never emerged at the other end. Authorities were sent in to search for it, but there was no trace of train or passengers. The outbreak of war two days later meant that there was no time to follow up with a proper investigation until 1945, when the trail had gone cold. In a similar fashion to its namesake, the locomotive ‘Marley’s Ghost’ vanished into the darkness, never to be seen again.

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He replaced the folder on his desk, and then pressed the intercom. The office door opened, and a man in the uniform of an Army sergeant entered.

“Yes, Sir?”

“Get hold of UNIT for me. I want to speak to Brigadier Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart.”

Sergeant Hewson paused.

“He’s in Geneva, sir. Now that he’s retired, he’s heading a conference seminar for new recruits on the type of threat that UNIT deal with.”

General Sudbury sighed.

“And Colonel Crichton?”

“He’s in the Soviet Union, sir. Bridge building with the new authorities over there whilst investigating a meteorite strike in the Black Sea. He’s not due back until next week.”

“That will be all for now. Dismissed.”

Sergeant Hewson returned to his desk in the outer office. General Sudbury crossed to a filing cabinet and withdrew an instrument roughly the size of a video recorder but with a range of dials on the front and with a sophisticated aerial array at the rear. There was a handwritten sign on the top, the faded writing informing him that it was ‘Only to be used in the event of a national emergency!’ He switched the device on and pressed the red ‘call’ button on it, then returned to his desk.

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The sun was just starting to sink behind the Houses of Parliament when a noise broke into the General’s thoughts. He looked up from his work as a blue shape shimmered into existence in the middle of his office. A sign on the door of the object identified it as a Police Public Telephone Box, but he did not seem fazed by the incongruity of its appearance. Neither did he show any surprise when the door opened and a head emerged. The mop of unruly curls, staring eyes and wide smile heralded the arrival of its owner.

The Doctor, now in his fourth incarnation, emerged from the TARDIS, his red coat and ridiculously long multi-coloured scarf trailing behind him. His loud voice boomed into the room.

“This is getting ridiculous. I know it’s a Police Telephone Box, but I’m beginning to wish I’d gone ex-directory. First Gallifrey and now back to Earth. I hope you’ve got something important for me, Alistair...”

His voice trailed off as he spotted the tall figure behind the desk.

“Don’t tell me you’ve regenerated, Alistair. It doesn’t suit you.”

The General stood up and moved across to the Doctor.

“The Brigadier is in Geneva. My name is General John Sudbury, head of Department C19. I took over from General Finch as UNIT liaison for the regular army. I need your help.”

The Doctor pulled a face.

“Politician, eh? You’ve dragged me three hundred light years to talk politics! No thank you!”

He crossed to the seat behind the desk, dropped himself untidily into it, and leant back with his feet on the desk and his wide-brimmed hat over his eyes, before affecting a bored snoring noise.

Sudbury spoke to the hat.

“I need your help. I’ve got a mystery that needs your special knowledge to solve.”

The snoring stopped, but the hat remained in place.

“A train full of children disappeared fifty years ago. Now it’s reappeared, but the children have vanished. I – and the families – need your help to find out what happened to them.”

The hat moved back onto its rightful place, and the Doctor’s face leant forward, his wide eyes glistening with enthusiasm.

“Now that is a mystery! Where do we start?”

General Sudbury struggled to keep a straight face. He had heard about the Doctor’s mercurial mood swings, but it was still a surprise to encounter them first hand.

“Docklands. The train was found in a chamber beneath Canary Wharf.”

The Doctor jumped up and headed for the door. He flung it open and looked back.

“Well come on then. I thought you said it was an emergency.”

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The chamber was now lit by the glow of floodlights which had been erected along the wall opposite the train. The carriages, which had once been painted in the green livery of Southern Railways, were dusty with the paint cracked after fifty years of inactivity. Inside, soldiers were searching for any clue which might lead to any information as to what had happened.

Two tall figures entered. Clad in high visibility overalls and hard hats, the Doctor and General Sudbury crossed to the train. Whilst the General took in the sight for the first time, the Doctor was looking around the cavern, his eyes taking in every detail.

“Well, Doctor, what do you think?”

The Doctor was silent for a moment, then nodded.

“It’s a magnificent sight!”

General Sudbury coughed.

“I meant, have you any idea what happened?”

The Doctor continued his inspection in silence for several minutes, and then turned back.

“Does anything strike you about all this?”

“Such as?”

The Doctor waved his hands around the cavern.

“It looks too perfect. It’s as though the whole thing has been arranged like this for whoever was to discover it.”

General Sudbury consulted a file.

“One of the engineers who found it thought that it might have part of a film set.”

The Doctor nodded.

“That’s it, exactly. The train might be real enough, but the setting seems to have been created for the benefit of the person who would first see it.”

As he continued his inspection, General Sudbury followed him.

“What about the children?”

The Doctor took a meter from his pocket and waved it around the cavern. A red needle on the screen flickered and stopped at the mid-point of the gauge.

“What is that?”

The Doctor explained.

“It measures emotional energy.”

“What is that?” Sudbury repeated.

“Emotional energy is the aura given off by beings when they are excited or upset by something. It lingers in the atmosphere for a long time.”

“Do you mean like an aura from a ghost?”

The Doctor nodded.

“A crude analysis but that’s the rough idea.”

“Does it help us at all?”

The Doctor finished taking his readings, and then turned back to the General.

“Two hundred children torn from their parents and being forced onto trains heading for the country would create a vast amount of emotional energy. If we could just find out where that energy was focussed, we might be able to trace them...”

He lifted the meter towards the ceiling of the cavern, and the needle crossed to the right side of the gauge.

“What is above us?”

“The new Docklands area of London, and directly above us is the new Canary Wharf Tower, the tallest building in the United Kingdom.”

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Though it was early evening and nearing dusk, the precincts of Canary Wharf were full of people. Commuters from the office blocks were on their way home, late night shoppers were passing through on their way to the West End and many more were flocking to the wine bars and bistros that had sprung up in the newly regenerated area. The scene was completed by the Canary Wharf Tower, a monolith of glass and steel which had been designed by Cesar Pelli and which rose up to a pyramid roof 800 feet above the ground and topped by a flashing light to warn aircraft of its presence.

General Sudbury and the Doctor stood at the edge of the plaza, seemingly unaware of the people milling around them. The Doctor looked up to the top of the building, his mind ticking through various ideas. He turned back to the General.

“Amazing. I haven’t seen a structure like this since I was on Exxilon a regeneration back.”

General Sudbury had been briefed on the Doctor’s name-dropping and references to other-worldly adventures, and so was unimpressed.

“Could this be the focus point for the energy? It has only been here for a few years, certainly not as far back as 1939.”

The Doctor shook his head.

“No. This, like the train, is only a relay, a clue to some other place.” He paused. “Have there been any strange occurrences here since it was built?”

The General nodded.

“In the early days, there were many complaints from television viewers that it was causing interference with the picture signals and reception, but it was just put down to the tower being in a direct line with the transmitters at Alexandra Palace.”

“Anything else?”

“More recently, some of the office workers have reported seeing glowing figures in the corridors, and lights switching themselves on and off in the middle of the night when the place is empty. Sensation seekers claim that the place is haunted by victims of the plague, would you believe. We even had a team of ghost hunters down here one night, but they couldn’t find anything.”

The Doctor glanced one more at the light atop the tower and came to a decision.

“I’d like to see the top of the building. Something about the pyramid and that light bothers me.”

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The sun was almost on the horizon by the time they reached the viewing platform at the base of the pyramid. The sky seemed to be ablaze with orange and yellow hues as the clouds crossed the setting orb. Surrounded by glass and steel windows, the viewing platform was the same size as the tower, and double doors led out to a narrow balcony which encircled the room. On the four corners of the pyramid, metal steps led up to a small area where the light was situated. The Doctor crossed to the door and moved out onto the balcony. He breathed in deeply.

“Just smell that air. There’s not much pollution up here, General. You can see the whole of London from here.”

Though he had been a General in the Army and had faced death on many occasions, height was one fear that Sudbury had never quite managed to overcome. He sidled out onto the balcony, his hands grasping the handrail around it with a firm grip. At the Doctor’s insistence, he looked out. All of London was alight, twinkling lights on all buildings, with car headlights and the red and green of traffic lights on show. He guessed that during the day they would probably be able to see up to sixty miles in all directions.

He was broken from his thoughts by the Doctor.

“I need to get up to the apex, to that light. I need to take a reading to see where the energy is being transmitted to.”

“But there’s only a handrail. If you could wait until I can get an engineer to go with you…”

The Doctor waved his concerns away.

“I’ll be fine. I need to take that reading now.”

He crossed to the nearest ladder and started to climb.

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At the top, the Doctor stood up, oblivious to the gusts of wind that seemed to threaten to tear him off the ladder. He took one more look at the view, and then attached the meter to the flashing light. Satisfied with the readings, he was about to start back down, but he had a niggling thought that he was missing something. Although the light itself was unknown to him, he had a thought that he was missing something important. It refused to form itself in his mind, and so he reluctantly started back down.

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General Sudbury met the Doctor with relief.

“Did you get what you needed?”

He nodded.

“I have the co-ordinates. All I have to do is work out the location and feed them into the TARDIS computer and we can go there tonight.”

“We?”

The Doctor nodded again.

“You wanted to find out what happened to the children. This is the quickest way to get there. Far faster than going by road or helicopter. Come on.”

Wondering what he was letting himself in for, the General allowed himself to be led down to ground level where his car was waiting.

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The full moon moved out from behind the clouds and illuminated the rural scene below. Houses bordered the village green on three sides, whilst a church occupied the fourth. A road ran around the green, with spurs going off on the four corners towards neighbouring villages. Before the clouds obscured its light once more, the roof of one of the houses was revealed to have only been partially completed. With no light to reveal any more details, the scene returned to its silent vigil.

The darkness was broken once more as a flashing light appeared some eight feet off the ground in the centre of the green, and almost immediately a raucous noise rent the silence. The light was joined by a solid blue shape as the TARDIS shimmered into existence. The door opened and two figures were illuminated by the lights within. The Doctor and General Sudbury stepped out onto the green. Switching on a powerful torch, the Doctor smiled.

“There we go, General. All safe and sound.”

For the first time since the Doctor had appeared in his office, Sudbury looked genuinely dazed. He looked back into the TARDIS, then back at the Doctor, then around the village scene.

“It’s all true!”

The Doctor looked confused.

“What is?”

“All the stories I’ve heard about you and the TARDIS. The stories about it being bigger on the inside than out and being able to travel through space. I suppose it moves through time as well?”

“Naturally. A time machine usually does.”

The General closed his eyes for a moment, opened them again and looked around the village scene.

“Where are we?”

The Doctor consulted a hand-held computer screen.

“According to this, we’re in Somerset. A village called Ipton…”

Sudbury looked at him in surprise.

“Ipton, did you say?”

The Doctor nodded.

“Does it mean anything to you?”

General Sudbury explained.

“Ipton has history. It was to have been the location for the evacuees on the train. It was felt that by bringing all the children from that one area of London and settling them in the same village, it would be less of a struggle for them to readjust. When the train vanished, things started to happen.”

The Doctor looked at him, his curiosity aroused.

“What sort of things?”

“Strange glowing shapes started appearing in the fields, like pockets of marsh gas, but there are no marshes around here, only arable farming. There were an increased number of mental health problems amongst the residents, including a number of nervous breakdowns. People started to move away, and the Government feared that the Germans had developed a new form of nerve gas and were deploying it as they had in the First World War. Finally, soon after Dunkirk was completed, it was decided to relocate all the remaining residents of the village to a newly-built estate of pre-fabricated houses about ten miles away.”

Whilst Sudbury was talking, the Doctor had been looking around the area. The moon came from behind the clouds again, and he was able to study the surroundings. True enough, there was no sign of life, and it was clear that the village had been abandoned in quite a rush. However, he had the feeling that someone else was out there, watching them, and his eyes focussed on a shadowy area between the pub and the edge of the houses. But then, the clouds obscured the light, and his attention returned to Sudbury.

“Did no one attempt to track down the source of the phenomena?”

Sudbury shook his head.

“After the war, there was so much rebuilding work to be done that it was decided to leave the village as it was and so, like Imber in Wiltshire and Tyneham in Dorset, it remained deserted.”

The Doctor shone the torch towards the shadows, but whatever had drawn his attention had now disappeared.

“Does anyone come here now?”

“It was declared a no-go area and the military keep patrol over the surrounding roads to ensure that it stays that way. The last thing the country needs is an attack of nerve gas or bacteriological contamination.”

The Doctor suddenly spotted something above the trees behind the church.

“How far does the zone extend?”

“A circle roughly five miles wide outside the village boundary. Why?”

The Doctor pointed in the direction of the trees.

“If no one lives here, where does the light in that tower come from?”

General Sudbury followed the Doctor’s gaze. Above the tree line, they could see the top of a tower. Though it was only a few metres in diameter, there was something strange about it – it was topped by a pyramid, and the pyramid was glowing!

“That’s the Ipton Monument,” said Sudbury. “It was designed as a tribute to those who died during the First World War, a kind of war memorial. It has the names of all those who died in that conflict engraved on stone tablets around the base.”

“Does the glowing pyramid remind you of anything?” the Doctor asked.

“The pyramid on the tower at Canary Wharf!”

The Doctor nodded.

“I think we’ve found the destination of the energy from London. Perhaps there will be a clue up there as to where the children were taken.”

General Sudbury looked at the steep hill up to the monument.

“Shall we go in your TARDIS?”

The Doctor looked at him.

“Where’s your sense of adventure, General? It’s only a mile or so up the hill. We could be there in half an hour. Come on.”

The Doctor set off across the green at a brisk pace, with General Sudbury struggling to keep up.

As they reached the church, a figure stepped out of the shadows beside the inn. Dressed all in black to blend in with its surroundings, it watched the two men disappear into the trees.

“So, Doctor, we meet again!”

The figure laughed softly as it melted back into the darkness.

* * * * *

The Ipton Monument stood in the middle of a grassy clearing on the edge of the Ipton Estate. Owned by the descendants of the gentry who had originally owned the land on which the village sat as well it had been hewn from York stone and turned into a cylinder. It rose up almost two hundred feet into the sky and was just visible over the trees which lined the avenue which allowed access to the estate. A metal gate led into a steep staircase which wound up to a small viewing balcony just below the pyramid apex. The base of the tower was illuminated at each corner by spotlights aimed at its top.

The Doctor arrived at the base of the tower, followed by an out-of-breath Sudbury. The Doctor stared up at the pyramid, which seemed to be glowing with red fire as opposed to the white spotlight beams.

“It could almost be a smaller version of the same pyramid at Canary Wharf,” he told General Sudbury. “What do you know about it?”

Pausing to catch his breath, the General gave him a potted history of the Monument.

“The Monument was built in 1920 to remember all those from the village who died during the First World War. Their names are carved on the stones which surround the base of the tower. In the Summer, it is open to the public, who can climb the steep steps and admire the views from the top. It is said that on a clear day, you can see four counties.”

The Doctor gazed at the tower, his thoughts working over.

“It’s too much of a coincidence that Ipton should have been deserted so soon after the train destined for here went missing. Do you know who the architect was?”

Sudbury consulted his notes.

“Someone called Gerry Hackett.”

“I doubt if that were their real name. If the same person is behind the transmissions from Canary Wharf, they would want to have covered their tracks.”

“So, what do we do now?”

“I need to get inside the tower to find the transmitter. That will lead us to the person behind this mystery, and hopefully to the children.”

“It’s locked.”

The Doctor delved in his pockets and pulled out an ornate device that looked somewhere between a screwdriver and a corkscrew.

“French pick-lock, a present from Marie Antoinette.”

He inserted it into the lock, which sprung open. He bounded up the stairs and emerged onto a ledge at the top of the tower.

“Coming up?”

General Sudbury shook his head.

“I’ll stay down here and keep watch in case anybody is about.”

The Doctor nodded and disappeared from view.

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Inside the small chamber at the top of the tower, the Doctor studied the piece of machinery before him. It was the size of a home computer, with two aerials – one pointed towards London, the other straight up through the apex of the pyramid. As he studied it, he felt again as though he was being watched and, more importantly, as though he was missing something. It was as though he was being invited to a party where he didn’t know the host. He calculated the co-ordinates that the energy was being aimed at, then headed back to the steps.

* * * * *

The General looked round as the Doctor emerged from the tower.

“Did you find what you were looking for?”

The Doctor nodded.

“I don’t recognize the co-ordinates but then again the universe is a big place. I’ll programme them into the TARDIS’ direction finder and see what comes up.”

“A bit like a GPS system, then?”

The Doctor smiled.

“A bit more advanced than that. It will take us to the right planet and then we shall search.”

“You can’t be more precise on a location?”

“I usually leave the little details to the TARDIS. She’s fairly good at these things, you know.”

The General looked confused.

“You talk about it as if it’s a living thing.”

“Yes, I do, don’t I? Come on then, we need to get back to the TARDIS whilst the night is still young.”

Once again, the Doctor strode off leaving his companion to hurry to keep up.

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The full moon moved out from behind the clouds and illuminated the rural scene below. Houses bordered the village green on three sides, whilst a church occupied the fourth. A road ran around the green, with spurs going off on the four corners towards neighbouring villages. Before the clouds obscured its light once more, the roof of one of the houses was revealed to have only been partially completed. With no light to reveal any more details, the scene returned to its silent vigil.

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“There we go, General. All safe and sound.”

Sudbury was not convinced.

“So much for an alien planet! We’re still in Ipton.”

Confused, the Doctor looked at his readings.

“That’s impossible. The co-ordinates have changed.”

“Maybe, but the landscape hasn’t.”

The Doctor looked around the village in perturbation.

“This isn’t the Ipton we just left. Somebody is playing games with us.”

The Doctor started off across the green.

“Where are we going?” asked Sudbury.

“To the pub, of course. Where else would you find the villagers before closing time?”

* * * * *

At the entrance to the inn, the Doctor looked up at the sign which was swaying gently in the breeze.

“The Baker’s Dozen’. Let’s hope that’s not unlucky for us.”

General Sudbury looked at him.

“I don’t get it.”

The Doctor explained.

“A baker’s dozen is thirteen, not twelve.” He paused. “Still, at least it’s not ‘The Slaughtered Lamb’”.

He reached for the door.

“Once more unto the breach.”

* * * * *

The scene in the saloon bar of the inn was similar to that in public houses all over England. Men were talking in groups leaning against the wooden bar, one arm on the top, the other raising a tankard of foaming liquid to their mouth. In the corner, two others were in the middle of a game of darts, whilst card games were in progress at the tables dotted around the room. A buxom landlady was pulling a pint of lager behind the bar. Then the door opened.

Silence descended as the Doctor and General Sudbury entered the saloon. Hostile faces turned in their direction, and the dart player paused mid-throw, the missile held in an upraised hand.

The Doctor smiled.

“Good evening. Nice weather for the time of year.”

There was no response from the locals. He tried again.

“They did forecast rain today, but so far it’s stayed dry.”

Still no reaction. The two men crossed to the bar. The Doctor fished in his pocket and pulled out a crumpled bank note with a picture of a pig on it.

“Do you take Narg at this establishment? Accepted on any planet in the Ninth Galaxy?”

The landlady stared at him.

“American Express?”

Finally, one of the men moved. Dressed in tweed jacket and corduroy trousers, he replaced a peak cap on his head before addressing the Doctor.

“Who are you? Why did you come here?”

The Doctor offered his hand in friendship, but it was ignored.

“We’re travellers. Our – transport – broke down in the woods and we had to continue on foot.”

The jacketed man scowled at them.

“We don’t get many strangers around here.”

General Sudbury thought to himself that, faced with a reception like this, he could understand why. The Doctor continued.

“I’d have thought a few strangers would pick up the trade of an evening. Aren’t we dressed properly?”

The man in the jacket nodded towards a poster on the window looking out onto the green. Sudbury read the message aloud:

“Careless talk costs lives!”

The Doctor tapped his forehead.

“Of course, that’s it! We’re still in Ipton, but the time has changed.”

He looked towards the calendar behind the bar. It read ‘September’ and the date was circled as ‘3’.

“September 3rd – 1939, I expect. As of today, Britain is at war with Germany. These people probably think we are German spies. After all, we’re not dressed for 1930’s England.”

As he was speaking, the Doctor was taking in their surroundings. Something pricked a memory in his mind, and he drew Sudbury to one side. He lowered his tone.

“Do you remember the train in the cavern, and how we thought that it looked as though it had been deliberately staged as if on a film set?”

Sudbury nodded.

“But I don’t see the relevance...”

The Doctor touched his arm. The dominos that made up thoughts in his head started to fall into place – the pyramid on top of Canary Wharf, the feeling of being watched in Ipton and the uneasy feeling that all this had been arranged for his benefit and his alone. And then there was the technology he had examined – far beyond the realms of science in this era. There was also the feeling again that he was being watched from just out of sight even now.

“Watch what happens next.”

He turned to the man in the jacket.

“Pardon me for asking, but could you tell me where that came from?”

The man followed his gaze.

“It was a gift to the pub.”

The Doctor smiled slightly.

“Are you allowed to tell me who the benefactor was?”

The other man paused before replying.

“It was from our mayor, Mr Hitchcock.”

The Doctor nodded.

“Would that be Mr. Alfred Hitchcock by any chance?”

The man nodded in surprise.

The Doctor turned to Sudbury.

“Now things are starting to make sense.”

Still mystified, Sudbury spoke.

“I still don’t get it.”

The Doctor explained.

“Alfred Hitchcock was not only a renowned film director, but he was also known as something else, wasn’t he?”

Light dawned on Sudbury’s face.

“The Master of suspense”

The Doctor explained more.

“The last time I defeated the Master, on our home world of Gallifrey, he escaped in his TARDIS which was disguised as an ornate grandfather clock.”

He turned and pointed to an item on the far wall of the pub.

“Just like that one, in fact!”

* * * * *

Inside a darkened room, a figure moved. Cloaked in dark material from head to foot, little was visible except his eyes. Yellow in hue with black pupils, they reflected the scene in the pub.

“And now the penny drops.”

His voice little more than a whisper, the figure stood up and moved to a door to one side of the scanner screen. He stretched out a wizened hand to operate a control.

* * * * *

Sudbury and the Doctor looked on as the door in the front of the grandfather clock opened, and a figure emerged. In the light from the pub, the full horror of the figure was revealed. Sudbury gazed at the hunched figure dressed in black, its skin blackened with decay and hands that were almost bones with the fingers as slender as the dart held by the player to one side.

Amazingly, Sudbury was the only person to comment on the figure's death-like appearance.

"That's the Master?"

The Doctor nodded.

"But UNIT records have him as a suave bearded man, not this – monstrosity."

The Doctor explained.

"That was how he used to look, until he ran out of regenerations. Not even a Time Lord can cheat death forever, particularly one as bent on destruction as the Master."

Moving his gaze from the Master for a moment, the Doctor noted the lack of reaction from the other inhabitants of the room. He turned back to the figure ahead of him.

"Might I ask why nobody here seems surprised by your presence? After all, with your current appearance, you do stand out somewhat."

The Master smiled, his shrunken lips pulled back to reveal a mouth full of broken and rotting teeth.

"I created a hypnotic trance over the villagers so that they see my more humanoid figure instead of this rotting carcass."

The Doctor nodded.

"And the children?"

The Master gazed steadily at him.

"It was pure hatred that saved me on Gallifrey, with a little help from the Eye of Harmony. I wanted to see you suffer the agonies I feel every moment of my life. How better to draw you into a trap than to set up an unsolved mystery on your home from home."

His gaze never flickered from the Doctor as he explained.

"I needed something that you wouldn't be able to resist. The only thing that surprised me was that it took fifty years for the train to be discovered and your help elicited."

The Doctor repeated his question.

"I was thinking more of their welfare. What can you do with a train full of sixty-year olds?"

The Master laughed, a hollow sound.

"Just because time has passed on Earth doesn't mean that the children have aged in tune with it. They are in the church hall, which in turn is enveloped in a stasis loop engineered by my TARDIS. That is why I brought you here rather than destroying you the first time I saw you in the Ipton of the 1980s."

Fishing for information, the Doctor continued.

"But the technology is far above anything discovered in this age. Has no one come across it by accident?"

The Master shook his head, in itself a disquieting sight as though it was going to fall off his shoulders.

“The booster is attached to the outside of the church steeple, disguised as a lightning conductor. My first action as new mayor was to make the steeple and belfry out of bounds.”

As he explained his actions, he failed to notice that Sudbury had disappeared through the back door of the pub.

* * * * *

Sudbury stood outside the entrance to the church and stared up at the lightning conductor on the steeple. He felt a cold chill at the height, but he was determined to do all he could to help save the situation. He opened the door and headed indoors.

* * * * *

High above the village, a wooden door opened at the base of the steeple, and Sudbury moved slowly out into the open. Keeping close to the edge of the steeple, he looked up at the lightning conductor – to reach it, he would have to climb a ladder attached to the side. He was unable to resist the urge to glance down at the ground, and his vision swam at the distance he was above it. He shook his head to try and clear it, then started to climb.

* * * * *

In the saloon bar, the Doctor was still trading questions with the Master.

“Where is your companion?” the Master asked.

“I’m travelling alone at the moment,” replied the Doctor, trying to stir the conversation in another – any – direction.

The Master’s eyes glinted in hatred.

“Not them. The man you came in with – where has he gone?”

The Doctor tried to appear flippant and unworried.

“I expect he just stepped outside for a breath of fresh air. It is warm in here.”

* * * * *

At the top of the ladder, Sudbury felt precariously close to falling, but reached out tentatively and grasped the lightning conductor. He pulled it as hard as he could, and the effort made him sway on the ladder. The extra momentum pulled it away from the steeple and it broke free with a flash of energy. Sudbury held tightly to the ladder for a moment, then inched his way slowly back to the door.

* * * * *

In the pub, something was happening. Until that moment, the villagers had been silent, listening obediently to the exchange between the Doctor and the Master. At the same moment that Sudbury pulled the lightning conductor free, they seemed to come to life. One after another they looked over at the Master, and now saw him in his decaying form rather than the illusion he had maintained until now.

The man in the jacket was the first to speak.

“What are you?”

The Master turned his piercing eyes to him, but his powers of hypnosis had been reduced by the struggle to maintain the illusion.

“I am the Master, and you will obey me.”

As if they had been freed from a spell, the villagers turned to face the Master. They started to move forward to surround him. Realizing that his powers were fading, he moved back towards his TARDIS. He shot a glaring look at the Doctor.

“You have not heard the end of this, Doctor. Keep looking over your shoulder for I will be there planning your downfall.”

He opened the door of the grandfather clock and ducked inside as a glass crashed into it. Moments later, it faded from the room.

The front door opened, and Sudbury came in, holding onto the lightning conductor.

“I’ve got it, Doctor,” he said. He looked around. “Where has the Master gone?”

As the Doctor related the events of the last couple of minutes, there came the sound of voices from outside. The barmaid headed for the door.

“The children! They must be free now.”

* * * * *

Outside, dawn was starting to break, its pale light illuminating the scene. Dozens of children, aged from eight to fourteen, were standing bewildered on the green. The Doctor looked around at the villagers.

“The children have finally arrived, and only two days later than expected.”

As the villagers moved to comfort the bemused children, the Doctor steered Sudbury towards the TARDIS.

“I think we should leave now. The longer we stay, the more awkward questions we may face, and I was never particularly good at that side of things.”

* * * * *

Back in his office in County Hall, General Sudbury held out his hand to the Doctor.

“Thank you, Doctor, for everything. I can see now why Lethbridge-Stewart talks so highly of you. The Prime Minister and Her Majesty the Queen would like to thank you personally for returning the children.”

The Doctor’s face fell.

“The Prime Minister and the Queen? Must I? Oh, well, I suppose so. You don’t mind if I change into something more formal first?”

He disappeared into the TARDIS, which seconds later vanished from the office, leaving General Sudbury shaking his head with a smile.

“Oh, well, I don’t suppose he would have had any use for an honorary knighthood anyway.”



Digging tunnels for a new station on the London Underground, workers come across a train - but one that went missing in 1939. Of its occupants there is no sign.

Head of C19 - the department of UNIT dealing with the regular Army - General John Sudbury calls on the Doctor for help. They trace a signal to the top of the Canary Wharf tower and set off to find out where it is being beamed to.

They arrive in a ghost town - abandoned during the Second World War - and discover another beacon which the Doctor programmes into the TARDIS computer.

They materialize in a familiar ghost town but this time it isn't deserted. As they confront the villagers, they discover that someone has been playing a game with them, but can the Doctor and Sudbury win the game?

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