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PROJECT

FURY UNCHAINED



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FOREWORD

The Doctor Who Project has been publishing original *Doctor Who* stories for almost twenty-five years; despite this, I'm sure many of our readers aren't aware that just like the classic *Doctor Who* television series, *The Doctor Who Project* has also had its share of lost, and/or unmade, stories. "Fury Unchained" is one such story.

This Seventh Doctor story, by longtime art and story contributor John G. Swogger, has been stored on a CD-RW disc for years, kind of forgotten about. To be honest, I really don't know why this has been the case, and why, the story has never seen the light of day. Don't get me wrong. While the story sat burned on the disc for all these years, it was never my intention to not publish it.

In early 2023, I had been talking to John via Facebook, about some of the artwork he had done for *The Doctor Who Project* over the years when I mentioned to him that I had discovered a bunch of his original artwork in a box while I was doing a clear out of an offsite storage locker I have. I mentioned most of the work I'd found I'd completely forgotten I had – a large percentage of the art had never been used either. John was intrigued, and excited, about this especially as he had lost a lot of his original work due to several house moves over the years, and an unfortunate house fire. I also mentioned that I had found a hardcopy of a story he had written called "Fury Unchained". John was really surprised to learn this, especially as he had no memory of ever writing the story. I promised John I would scan all the art, and the story, and upload it to my Dropbox where he could access all the material for his personal records.

A few weeks after this, John and I were chatting on Facebook again. He'd got the scanned files and was really excited to see all this material after all these years. I asked John if he'd read "Fury" and he told me he had. He had been surprised by how good the story was. I was impressed too. It's a cracking yarn. Neither of us could recall why the story had never been published – I thought maybe it had been intended for an issue of my old fanzine *Jigsaw*, or maybe even *Whotopia*, but John didn't think so. He thought it had been for *The Doctor Who Project*, but I didn't think so. Nevertheless, I explained to John that I really felt the story was too good to go unpublished. I wanted to publish it as a TDWP story. I was thrilled when he said he'd let me release it as a 'Brief Encounter' story.

And now, finally after all these years, here you have it for your reading pleasure.

It's a darn good story, and one I know readers will enjoy reading.



*Bob Furnell
Senior Range Editor
The Doctor Who Project
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Prologue

Victor Ronson swore gently as the thin nylon line nicked the side of his finger. He fluttered the rod, and the line played back into its reel, winding in away from his hands. The Jolly Jess rocked gently, wavelets slapping softly up along the side of the boat. Ronson's patient mood settled deeper with every soft tap of the small waves. Even cutting his finger could not dislodge his mood, despite the sting of the salt in the tiny wound. He surveyed the little artificial bay formed by the collapsed quay fronts and decaying wooden warehouses. Once there had been a thriving little center of seaborne industry here: ships bound for Vancouver down the coast moored here, repair docks hummed with activity, labourers shouted and laughed in the cold mornings. It had been the heart of the St. Elda's island cod industry. Now, like much of the rest of the tiny island, the area was abandoned, deserted. As small local fishing fleets gave way to huge floating factories, the industry - and a way of life - retreated and finally died. All that remained now of a once thriving little hub of marine activity was a ghost town of abandoned sheds and crumbling seafronts.

The mist curled around the empty knot of leaning buildings. Beyond them, out to sea, a tall grey shadow loomed through the mist. It stood on stilts, a great mechanical spider standing silently in the icy water some three miles off shore. Even at that distance, as the sky dimmed into evening, it dominated the horizon - a metal mountain wrapped in fingers of sea shadow. It caught Victor's eye. It too was a dead thing; they had put it there a few years ago, but now it only waited while it was cut up and decommissioned. There had been dreams of oil in the seas up this way, but as they died, the rigs that had been put in to service that dream also died. St. Elda was a place of cold, unspeaking dead dreams; nothing but their empty shells remained anymore.

And the fish, of course. The disused docks and their pilings now provided an ideal environment for a bounty of sea fish: bream, cod, tilling. No fishing fleets, but plenty of fish. Almost every day, except when the rain thundered down too heavy even for him, Victor Ronson tipped The Jolly Jess into the dark and empty water of the hidden cove and dropped his line into the water. Together, he and the little rowing boat merged with the mist and the sea salt, and vanished into those little cracks of time that only contentment can fill. Hours each day would pass, just Victor and the boat and the still, silent water. And at the end of it, there would be in the bottom of the boat, enough fish to have some to eat, some to sell in the St. Elda market - enough to tempt him back for another day.

Victor never compared his life to anyone else's. He could not have said whether others might envy him or feel sympathy for him. His life suited him. It was his, and he had chosen it.

The line looped in, round and round the reel - and then stopped. Something brought it to a taut standstill. Victor clicked the lock on the reel and stopped turning it. He assessed the line gingerly. It was caught - maybe stuck on a rock or sunken lump of discarded rubbish. Victor had found pieces of cars, chunks of rotten boats, and the submerged hearts of machinery in these waters

before now. He frowned and tugged at the line experimentally; he didn't want to break the line if he could help it.

He loosened the catch and fed a little slack down the line; perhaps that would loosen the hook from whatever it had caught onto. Victor assessed the line again. It felt free now. He began to reel the line up again, waiting for any sign that it had caught again. It still felt a bit tight - heavy. Ah, something must be wedged on the line itself, probably an old collection of shredded plastic bags blown in by the wind, or a piece of rubber tire, or -

It was a mass of seaweed.

It bobbed to the surface, suddenly, rolling there as if it had just been released from underwater somewhere. It bubbled and splashed. Victor looked at it, a trifle confused. There wasn't much of the stuff around here - certainly not as much as he saw now. People reckoned it had all been killed off by pollution years ago. But then, the fish were here, so maybe the seaweed was coming back again.

Victor poked the blubbery green mass with the tip of his rod.

From the shore, someone watching would have seen Victor bend closer to the far side of the boat to get a closer look. Then, in a single, quick movement, slide quietly and sinuously over the side of the tiny rowing boat and into the water, leaving the bobbing boat empty.

Professor Caroline McAllistie watched the helicopter disappear off towards the crystal line of the horizon and hugged her arms closer to her chest. Despite the thick parka, hat and scarf she wore, the cold still cut through and down deeply into her. Along with the cold, something else wormed its way inside her: the dull but insistent background sound of the sonic drill-head. It was a familiar sound: not a whine, not a throb; like a faint and insistent heartbeat, somewhere near the top range of hearing. Every rig she went to, there it was, as inevitable as the endless expanse of the sea"

She puffed her cheeks and blew into her gloved hands, cupped over her cold nose: yes, another rig, another job. They all seemed to run into one another after a while. She had been excited by it at first - travelling around the world: Dubai one week, Nova Scotia the next, Edinburgh one month, Marseilles the next. But now the novelty had worn thin. The constant travelling, the constant leaping from one job to the next - it all began to become more tiring than exciting.

It was the people that made the job worthwhile. After a few years, you began to recognize more and more people in these jobs. Like her, the engineers, the trouble-shooters, the surveyors, the specialist technicians all formed a loose band of friends, a disparate union of acquaintances, brought and bound together by circumstance. Over the months, she had grown to know most of them. Now, despite the tedium of the jobs, she looked forward to seeing different combinations of them on each new assignment.

This present job was fairly straightforward. Rig Delta Seven One was being decommissioned. It had been part of a small chain of exploration rigs set out in the north Pacific, prospecting for oil. But as the dream of north Pacific reserves faded, so the lifespan of Seven One came to a slow end. In the past, rigs like this had been sunk at that had been that. But Rig Delta Seven One had become an unwitting focus for a worldwide protest. Instead of slipping silently to the bottom of the northern Pacific Ocean, those protests would now suck up millions of dollars of Delta profit in dismantling expenses and cleanup. Caroline's job was to monitor that dismantling. She was here to run a constant process of checks on the marine flora and fauna in the immediate vicinity of the rig, detailing the rig's environmental presence.

She scanned the deck of the rig from the helipad. For all its technological prowess it was still a fairly crude and simple structure - a big metal frame supporting a big flat landing area, a set of cranes for lading, and a stack of modular rooms arranged on several levels. At the top of the stack would be the bridge, then running down from there the living quarters in several dormitory sections, kitchens, mess rooms and bathrooms, and then generators and the big storage tank.

The rig was empty now - wholly disused. Despite the presence of the decommissioning team, the rig still managed to look like a ghost town. Beside her, a short Asian man with a weasel-like face slammed down a large duffel bag.

"Tchah," Leo Kwouk spat, "It's such a waste. Those stupid environmentalists have gone too far this time. Madness," he murmured sadly, "Madness. This will end up costing me my job"

Caroline scowled at her companion. She had worked with Kwouk for almost six months now - first a land-based startup in Bahrain, then another decommissioning in the Canary Islands. It was a

long time to be stuck with one person and she didn't like him much. He had his eyes too rigidly fixed on his job and seemed unable to see beyond securing raises or promotions. And what was more, she didn't like his politics. He was management; she wasn't. It was her job to minimise the impact Delta Petroleum operations had on the environment - not worry about the price of it all. The whole cost of the dismantling and cleanup of Delta Seven One was not the fault of the environmentalists campaign, nor did it represent the actual physical cost of the destruction and cleaning of the rig components. No, it represented the cost of Kwouk's slack and cack-handed retaliatory actions in the courts against Greenworld, Earth First, LifeForce and the other environmental groups. If he had been a more astute businessman, a better manager - let's face it, Caroline said to herself: a better man all around - he would have never tried to push the rig sinking plan in the first place. She knew that he was being kept on merely until the whole rig situation was concluded; the only thing he had managed to successfully and efficiently dismantle was his career. The problem was, however, that he didn't know it yet.

And so she had to suffer his unending whining and bleating about costs and madnasses. Caroline pulled down the brim of her hardhat and shrugged deeper into her orange parka, stalking away from him, down the gantry that led to the control offices. Kwouk's voice followed her down through the clear sea air.

"And another thing - they're dangerous. Oh I know no one believes me, but they'll try and take over the rig again - just you wait and see. We should have brought in more security guards than this; we'll need them, mark my words."

There were fifteen of them on the rig now: an engineering team of eight taking out the storage tanks and pumping the remaining oil sludge into transportable containers, three electricians removing the control and monitoring systems for reuse in the land-based site, two Delta security guards, Leo and herself. Their principal job was to empty the main storage tanks. This was a dangerous operation that needed to be constantly monitored. Spills of the toxic sludge within the tank could cause havoc with human and animal life up and down the coasts. Kwouk's task was to ensure the entire operation went smoothly; Caroline's was to ensure it did no damage to life around St. Elda.

Caroline resented having to spend time with Kwouk. His obnoxious pettiness had worn thin on the biologist within minutes of her meeting him. She bumped the rig bridge door open with her shoulder. The bridge was a mess. The dismantling operations had left the broad octagonal room strewn with cables, wires and detached metal panels. Several temporary tables had been erected at various points in the room, strewn with tools, toolboxes, bits of control panels and the sad remains of packed lunches. Battered soda cans dotted the room, along with crumpled cardboard boxes, weeks-old newspapers and a dusting of crunched window glass from some broken panes. They were broken still - no one was going to repair them properly now - but the engineers had stretched serviceable transparent plastic over the holes; it kept the wind at bay, but the bridge was still pretty cold.

Caroline stepped over the disgorged wires strewn over the metal floor by the electricians and into the chaos of the bridge itself.

She smiled: Taki was here. Taki Stephanopolous was her idea of someone she could work with: tall, tanned, dark haired, with a rich smile and bottomless eyes. He was half-Greek, or something - one of those exotic homeless men who followed the oil companies for their siren promises of wealth. Taki looked up from his laptop and smiled at her as she came onto the bridge. She smiled back warmly.

"Cold out there?" Taki asked as she crossed through the maze of dangling wires and stacked control panels.

"Cold? No - just fresh. It's so clear out there, you can see for miles." she replied.

Taki smiled gently, "You like the sea - you feel at home in her embrace."

This is what Caroline liked about him - his language. It rolled like honey in his voice, conjuring up dark and mysterious images.

"You English are all the same - truly Mariners at heart. You cannot escape your island heritage. It fills you with a vibrant fertility, enchantment, and a deep wanderlust."

Georgina blushed - she wasn't even quite sure why.

"It's good to see you again, Taki."

The Greek smiled broadly, "And you - we have a lot of catching up to do,"

Caroline felt her cheeks get hot again, her heart raced.

A door clattered. The bushy, bearded face of Myers, another third of the electrical team burst into the bridge, scowling.

"Dave? What's wrong?" Taki asked.

"More security protocols - more locks." Myers tossed his worn seed company cap onto the remains of a desk and plumped his sizable frame down on top of it. He noticed Caroline for the first time, "Hey, Prof - how's it hanging? Nice of you to drop by. " He shook his head in exasperation, "Jeezus - there's more security on this goddam rig than Fort Knox. Why the hell would anyone lock out the goddam refrigerator circuits in the storage tank loop?" He shuffled the block of chewing tobacco around in his mouth and spit contemptuously into a pile of soda cans.

Kwouk sniffed disgustedly from the other door, closing it behind him to keep out the chilly wind, "Because, Mr. Myers, the electrical circuitry on this rig - all of it - is classed as a security concern. Sabotage? Every heard of that?"

Myers scowled at the scrawny man.

Kwouk let the conversation pause, then: "I'll go down and shut it off. After all, I have all the access keys to the storage area." He grabbed a walkie talkie from a rack by the doorway, "This will only take a minute - then you can get back to work Mr. Myers. After that I will commence my initial check on the storage facility." He regarded the small group gathered on the bridge carefully, "The ship comes to drain the tanks in twenty-four hours. By that time, the entire rig must be completely shut down. I trust you will all work as hard as myself to ensure that this operation runs smoothly." With one final contemptuous look, Kwouk left the bridge, clattering down the steps towards the dormitory levels.

Myers shook his head and grinned, "How the hell do you put up with him, Caroline? Boy, I tell you, if I had to spend as much time with him as you do, I'd have tipped him over the side long, long ago."

McAllistie grimaced, "I've wished, Dave - oh, how I've wished." She looked around the bridge, "So what are you two up to?"

Myers jerked a thumb at a big black control panel draped with half-removed circuitry, "Working on the sonic drill-head."

"Is it still running?"

"Yeah - it's in 'wait 'mode. We can't switch it off until all the rest of the electricians are shut down. That's why we need Kwouk and his access codes - unfortunately."

Taki nodded to Caroline, "Does this mean you will have to do some survey work?"

Caroline nodded, "If the drill's been on, then yes, I'll have to take a boat out and pick up some samples from the island and scoop some from the bed around the rig." She looked sideways at Taki,

"I'll need someone to help sail the boat."

Taki raised an eyebrow.

Myers grinned, "Hey you two - It's too cold out there to be foolin' around in a boat. There's plenty of empty cabins on the rig you know!" He smirked and jumped off the table, sweeping his hat onto his head, "I'll, er - just go and check on - well, something else. Later!"

He banged out the bridge door.

Caroline smiled and caught Taki's eye, and his own smile. Perhaps this wouldn't be such a bad job after all.

The outboard motor on the rubber dinghy whined and coughed at such a volume as to drown out the sound of the slapping waves and the roaring wind. Caroline pulled her fur-edged hood up closer around her face. Ahead of them, the shoreline of the island of St. Elda slowly resolved into view out of the mist.

Caroline tapped Taki on the shoulder and pointed wordlessly to a long finger of dark rock sticking out from the mainland. There. That was where she wanted to do her tests. Taki nodded and edged the motorboat towards it.

They moored the boat at the end of the finger, where the black barnacled granite split into a tumble of enormous boulders. It was like a natural sea-break. On the leeward side, Caroline could see a small knot of tumble-down wooden buildings and crumbling concrete piers. No doubt an old fishing port. The sea mist was still quite thick here, despite it being the late afternoon. It hung in an interrupted bank along the granite ridge and around the curve of the coast.

She and Taki hauled her bright yellow sample case from the boat, and Caroline emptied it of a small field-testing kit - test tubes, forceps, small datalogger.

"I'll just go up this side of the ridge and down the other," she said to Taki, smiling, "I won't be long - I can't imagine I'll find much."

Taki nodded, "Be careful - these rocks are slippery. I'll just top up the oil on the motor and then I'll join you."

"Fine."

Caroline shouldered her kit and set off down the rocks, gingerly stretching from one to the other. She could see some dull emerald patches of beached seaweed in the near distance; she'd test them first.

The mist soon swallowed Taki and the boat up behind her. Caroline stepped carefully over the huge, cracked chunks of broken granite. They were coated with a salty slime and encrusted with grey colonies of barnacles. Small clusters of mussels clung to just below the tideline, sharing the nooks and crannies with tiny crabs. It all looked fairly good; no obvious signs that the rig had made any adverse impact on the local environment, anyway. It was perhaps a little early to turn that initial impression into an official report, but Caroline felt sure that she wouldn't find anything untoward.

She jumped lightly down into a small irregular bowl formed by the jutting together of three particularly large granite boulders.

It was then that she changed her mind: something within the local environment was not right - not right at all.

It was obviously a body - a body of a middle-aged man, probably a fisherman. But it was not the body of a man who had died from drowning or falling onto the rocks. It was the body of a man who had died under exceptional and grotesque circumstances.

He was coated in seaweed - not just coated, but wrapped up tightly. It bit into every inch of exposed flesh, cutting deep into the clothing and the flesh. It was like looking at a mummified body, but one embalmed by some natural perversity of the seaweed. Caroline bit back a startled scream, she had seen dead bodies before, but nothing like this.

She looked closer, bending down next to the corpse. If she had thought the entanglement of the seaweed around the body unusual and remarkable, then what she next saw she found almost frightening. Her first observation on the seaweed had been that it was wrapped around the body tightly; her second was that it seemed to be merging with the skin of the corpse. Somehow - and she wasn't sure how - the seaweed and the body seemed to be combining, almost as if the weed were burrowing into the human flesh. But that wasn't possible - was it?

"Disturbing, isn't it?" came a voice.

Caroline jumped and looked up. From out of the mist, a short figure stepped carefully into view, as if an actor making an entrance onto a stage. He was short, slightly going to rotund, and wrapped in a shapeless cowl of an old wooden-toggled coat. He wore a heavy straw hat encircled by a paisley hatband, and carried a dark umbrella. Underneath the old coat, Ernie could see he wore a somewhat threadbare but superior quality tweed suit, plaid waistcoat and paisley tie. Ernie watched the stranger's face as it parted the mist. It was an older face - but worn as opposed to just being aged. The eyes were crisp clear blue-grey, thinning to silver near the edges of the iris. It was framed by a careless tumble of greying, curled hair that just reached the collar. The voice was eccentric - English, maybe?

"What? Who are you?" Caroline asked.

The man knelt down and pointed at the body, "The two cellular structures have become merged; they're joining together, aren't they?"

Caroline nodded, in spite of herself "Yes - yes they are. What on Earth could be causing that?"

"What's your theory?" the man asked back.

Caroline shook her head, "I couldn't say - I couldn't even begin to guess. Perhaps the seaweed is exuding some sort of acid, and its eating its way into the flesh, but... I don't know, that sounds pretty far-fetched."

"You're from the rig?"

"Yes, but how did you -"

"You'll have the necessary facilities there to look at this properly, won't you?"

"I've got a small lab, but -"

"Then I suggest you take the body there at once. You can't afford to ignore this." He was peculiarly insistent. Caroline felt herself agreeing with him, almost without knowing why. His very voice seemed to carry with it a strong overtone of command.

"But wait - wait a minute," she insisted as the man stood up, "Who are you? Are you from St. Elda? Are you a scientist?"

The little man raised his hat politely and smiled, "I'm known as the Doctor - and no, I'm not from around here as such - I travel quite a bit." He pointed down at the body again, "It'll be dark soon. Don't you think we should get going?"

Caroline nodded, a little confused, "Yes, er... yes. I'll just - I'll go and tell Taki."

The three of them wrapped the body in a tarpaulin and carried it back to the boat, then pushed free of the natural sea break and roared out into the water.

Taki looked back at the Doctor as they neared the rig, "I'm not sure what Leo will say when he sees you - he's obsessed with security."

Caroline frowned from within her hood, "Oh don't worry, Taki - I'll take care of it. The Doctor's with me - I need his help in analyzing what's happened to this poor guy."

The Doctor said nothing, but sat as still as a stone, his unblinking eyes staring at the enshrouded head of the dead man. He could feel a presence in the air, in the sea - an electric sound that hummed across his memory and spoke to him of past times and other lives. He was about to come face to face with something he had left unfinished - once again, his past was racing to catch up with him.

"What do you mean, you haven't seen him?" asked Caroline, puzzled.

Meyers shrugged and repeated himself, "I mean what I say - he went down to check out those refrigerator circuits and he ain't come back up. I can't say I miss him all that much." He glanced at Taki and Caroline's worried looks, "Oh Hell, he's not in any trouble - what can happen to him down there? He's probably just making himself feel all important by checking and rechecking all the circuits he can lay his hands on - don't worry about it!"

Caroline shrugged, "He can spend his time like he wants to, I guess. Taki - the Doctor and I are going to have a look at that body more closely. Let me know when Kwouk comes back - I want to have a word with him." She led the Doctor from the bridge.

Meyers waited until the bridge door closed, then turned to Taki, "Who's the old guy?"

Taki leaned against the window, watching Caroline and the Doctor descend the stairs to the crew cabins they'd turned into a laboratory, "He's some beachcomber we picked up on the island.

Caroline seems to think he can help her out with this body."

"Huh. Leo'll have a fit when he sees him."

Taki nodded, "You're right there. Still, I guess some help figuring out what happened to that man wouldn't hurt, no matter where that help comes from."

"How did the guy die?"

"Caroline says it's something to do with the seaweed. She's worried that it might have something to do with pollution from the rig."

Myers frowned, "Don't see how that's possible - after all, the storage tanks aren't leaking - and that's the only place anything toxic could have come from."

Taki shrugged, "Well, it's her job - I guess we just let her get on with it. "

The Doctor smiled and sipped gratefully at his cup of coffee, "Thank you," he said simply. Caroline smiled back.

They looked at the dripping form on the table. They had spent the last hour poking and cutting at the seaweed, Caroline taking samples and notes as they went along.

"What do you think, Ms. McAllistie?" the Doctor asked.

"Caroline', please Doctor. I'm not sure - you were right about the union. Every plant cell that's in contact with a skin cell has merged - literally fused. There even seems to be a sharing of cellular matter - or at least was, until the whole died. "

The Doctor nodded over his coffee, "He did drown - at least, that's what killed him. Presumably the merging of the seaweed and flesh cells stopped when the body died."

"Yeah - that's what tr think, too. I wonder what would have happened had the man not drowned? How far would the merging process have gone?"

The Doctor looked as if he would reply, but kept quiet.

Caroline noted the aborted answer, and watched him. She sipped her own coffee.

"Tell me about this rig," the Doctor asked.

"The rig? Not much to tell," Caroline shrugged, "It was set up a few years ago when sonar tests reported large oil reserves out here in the North Pacific. But those reports were soon found to be grossly optimistic: reserves dried up within three years, and once they stopped producing oil, the rigs stopped being useful."

The Doctor nodded, but said nothing in reply. Silence.

"Doctor," Caroline asked finally, "Just who are you? Are you one of the protesters?"

"Protesters?"

"The environmentalists - are you a member of Earth First or Greenworld or something?"

The Doctor shook his head, "No. I have a great interest in the ecology of this planet, but I'm not a member of anything. My interest in this is purely independent. Why do you ask?"

Why had she asked? Did it make any difference? Caroline wasn't quite sure what this body implied about her own job. Was she looking at a seaweed mutated by toxins from the rig? Or was this a natural phenomenon? She had never come across anything like this in all the time she'd been with Delta, and wasn't sure what to do next.

She didn't get a chance to answer. There was a knock at the door, and Myers put his head round the corner.

"Kwouk's back." he said.

Caroline set her mug down, "And? What did he have to say?"

"Not a lot. He just came in, handed me a bunch of reports and a timetable for getting the drill-head shut down, and then went off to his cabin."

"Did you tell him about the body and the Doctor?" Caroline asked.

"Yeah. He didn't seem too concerned, to be honest. I guess you were lucky this time!" Myers grinned, "Dinner's in five, by the way: microwave pizzas all 'round!" He shut the door.

Caroline turned back to the Doctor, "I've got to go and finish off my check of the inlet pipes before I have dinner. We'll have to talk about this more later on this evening."

Night crept in around the rig. Caroline barely noticed the dark cloak spread over the flat nothingness outside. In the level three monitoring station, a single light surrounded her desk with a

pool of yellow-orange light, casting the legs of a long shadow of her and her microscope like a giant spider scuttling across the walls of the small room. The darkness moved quickly, suddenly capping the rig with a black shroud of velvet and stars. Caroline finished taking samples from the feeder pipes and packed her last case. She left the station and stepped out onto the gantry outside.

It was crisp and clear out. As evening gave way to night stars wheeled and winked above. It was so beautiful; so peaceful. Her work took her away from all this too much. Sure, she was a Delta Petroleum Biologist - but this is what biology was really about, all this: the night sky, the stars, the darkness of space beyond - the wide and unending Universe spread out in all its majesty. She sometimes felt so confined by the parameters of her position - she only looked at things that Delta wanted her to look at, and despite her alleged independence, she knew full well that she only said the things she thought Delta wanted to hear. The job often felt unreal to her. Her mind drifted back to the body she and the Doctor had been looking at. How did that fit into the biology she knew? It didn't - not yet. How did that fit into the Delta view of things? What would Delta make her say about this?

She shook her head. She was being unjustly cynical. There was no reason to suppose that poor man's death was anything to do with the rig at all. The seaweed itself couldn't possibly have anything to do with petroleum toxins - as Myers pointed out, there weren't any leakages coming from the tank in any case.

As she leaned on the railing, she did not hear Taki come up quietly behind her. Suddenly she felt his gentle hand on her shoulder. She started, and turned to see his smiling face in the shadows.

"Caroline and the stars - what a combination," he whispered. Caroline blushed once more, her face hot in the darkness. Her breath caught in her throat - she felt like she was waiting for something, but didn't dare say to herself what. She shivered.

"You're cold," Taki said, touching her cheek briefly. Caroline bent her cheek to feel the solidness of his fingers against her. "No," she replied, "I'm not cold... I'm..."

"Perhaps," Taki whispered gently, his face moving close to hers, his words warm in the night air, "There is little more that we need to say to each other."

Caroline closed her eyes as Taki bent his lips to hers. Warmth flushed through her. Taki's hands travelled to her shoulders, holding her tight.

Rig Delta Seven One lurched. A sound, a screaming, tearing sound like the cry of a mutilated animal, rent the still night darkness. Caroline screamed and grabbed at Taki. In the confines of the small crew cabin, Taki was thrown against the wall, bedclothes flapping like disturbed ghosts. The scream came again, a blood-chilling shriek, wailing through the rig from somewhere in its belly.

Taki slammed his hands against the wall, steadying himself. In the half-dark he could see Caroline sitting up naked in bed, half sprawled against the desk next to it, her face welded in a mask of terror. Even he was sweating. The sound - the chilling sound that tore through the walls, coiling through the room - it was unlike anything Taki had heard before, like nothing he could imagine. It was beyond mechanical, beyond animal - beyond human. The shriek subsided. Now it was a bubbling, painful sound, oozing like the scrape of fingernails down a chalkboard through the mind more than through the ears.

Taki scrambled out of bed, scrabbling around for his clothes.

"What - what was that?" Caroline sobbed. Taki shook his head, long dark curls waving against his broad shoulders, "I do not know. Get dressed, quickly. There may be trouble."

They eased the cabin door ajar, both wrapped in sweat suits, their parkas, and hurriedly laced boots. Taki felt for the light switch here. Nothing.

"No power out here either, he whispered"" He spun the beam of a flashlight up and down the empty corridor, "The bridge - we should get there."

He crept out into the black hollow of the corridor, Caroline behind him. They stole slowly down towards the door that led out to the gantry. Caroline listened at the doors as they passed. There were no sounds, but then this dorm block was supposed to be empty - that's why they'd come over here instead of going to either of their own rooms. The soft but insistent icy chattering of the muted scream still scratched through her ears. It seemed to come from everywhere. It was like the sound of pain, the sound of anguish molded into unbearable form.

Taki and she reached the door. He stole a look at her, quickly, "Are you ready?" Caroline nodded. Taki eased open the door that led outside.

Fog. Thick wraps of sticky sea mist clung with oily persistence to the rig, swaddling it in a blanket of glowing shapelessness. Somewhere inside the mist, lights were still operational: glowing balls hung suspended within its grey belly.

Caroline shook her head, "It's not possible - it was completely clear an hour ago; where has this come from?"

Taki shrugged, "This is no ordinary fog It smells."

It did. Like gas; like an excrescence from a distant chemical dump.

"Is it smoke?" Caroline asked; she felt a lurch of panic within her, "Have the tanks caught fire or something?" It was possible; rig disasters weren't unknown.

"No, not smoke - not fire. Something else, though - something dangerous," Taki murmured quietly, then his voice dropped down even lower, as if talking only to himself, "Something evil."

He shook his head suddenly, as if expunging a thought, "Come - quickly, let's get to the bridge: that must be it over there, where the light is."

They quickly crossed over the gantry and began to climb the stairs. Caroline fought to see through the solid wall of the fog. The sound was stronger out here, but different Muffled by the walls of the dormitory, a new sound could be heard below the undercurrent of the screaming. It's base reverberations were distant and hidden, but clear enough. It was a pulse, a rhythm - a repeated thump, like machinery... like a gigantic heartbeat.

She grabbed Taki's arm, "Do you hear it? Can you hear that, Taki? What is it?"

The Greek said nothing, but drew Caroline closer to him. They stopped on the landing and listened.

THMP-thmp THMP-thmp THMP-thmp. The sound echoed through the mist. The more they listened, the more solid the sound became. It moved with the fog, filling it with motion and light. It pulsed with the pulse, throbbed with the grotesque heartbeat; THMP-thmp THMP-thmp THMP-thmp. The fog moved; the fog became the sound. The screaming, the swirling soup around them, the enveloping beat, it all became one, and moved.

It parted. The roiling sound and light and fog bubbled and split in half below them, and something shuddered out of it, stumbling up the stairs. It might have been a man - once. It was vaguely humanoid, vaguely bipedal, vaguely upright - and vaguely still human. It's surface glistened and rippled, as if part liquid. Stuff flapped around it, tendrils of dripping yellow-green, grey-brown that were blistered and pockmarked. It stank of the chemical smell that saturated the fog, and oozed a sticky foam that splattered on the metal stairs.

And it screamed. A broken tortured sound exploded from it, borne by the fog. The heartbeat moved it forward, step by misplaced step, and it screamed as it moved - insensate sound, pain given voice" As it screamed, it turned the lumpen thing that might have once have been a head upwards to face the pair on the landing above it, and for one dreadful second, the screaming face of Leo Kwouk, eyes roving in some unimaginable Hell, stared out at them from the pulsing mass of weed.

Caroline's scream joined with it as Taki hauled her up the stairs, his own cries of terror mingling in the fog into one cacophonous paeon of horror. The pair dragged and scraped their way in a panicked tangle across the gantry and through the bridge door, slamming it shut behind them, throwing fragments of disassembled bridge components at it with bleeding fingers.

Caroline collapsed against their makeshift barricade in the darkness of the bridge; there was no power here either - the lights had come from elsewhere. Taki dropped to his knees beside her, his breath hoarse in his chest. They clutched each other. They wanted to know, they wanted to ask questions, they wanted to understand - but they wanted to forget as well.

They heard something move against the blocked door behind them. The screams and the heartbeat wound on and on, over and over through the fog, through their minds.

Then suddenly - it was quiet.

The absolute silence hit them with a frightening physicality. It was as solid and as unreal as the sound itself had been. But below the silence there was yet another sound. This one was more like a feeling - a sensation of ice brushing close against the skin: hot, cold, sharp, dull with pain. Caroline

recognized it at once - it was a feeling so familiar to her that she barely registered it under normal circumstances. It was the drill-head; the dull, insistent intimacy of the background sonic presence of the active drill-head. But why had she only just noticed it?

Caroline suddenly became aware that she and Taki were not alone on the bridge.

She turned her head slowly and peered around her in the darkness.

There, a small dark figure stood in the gloom.

Caroline tapped Taki on the shoulder and pointed to the figure.

There was a soft click, a faint rising hum, and light fizzled on the bridge; the power was back on.

Caroline blinked in the harsh glare of the lights, staring at the figure. She had expected some new horror, some additional thing of terror to be standing there.

What she did not expect to see was a short man in a worn duffel coat politely raising his hat to them: the Doctor.

"Doctor!" she cried, "What is that out there? What's going on?"

The Doctor's face was grim, "That, Caroline, is your seaweed - the stuff that coated the body of that fisherman. You wondered what would happen as the weed merged more with human host? Well, you've just seen the result."

"No," Caroline whispered, "It's not possible - seaweed can't absorb someone..."

"The Fury is no ordinary seaweed, Caroline..."

Pain. Torment. A race divided in two, soul torn from body and the two thrown through the dark and merciless gulfs of empty space.

They had no name for themselves. What race did? They lived with one mind and one purpose underneath the four blood red suns that kept the World in perpetual crimson twilight. Under the quadripartite solar gaze, the Race scratched their way first to evolutionary success, then ecological superiority, then unrivalled dominance. The Hives of the Race stretched under the skin of the World until all places were linked. Birth chambers, wells, the chambers of the Queens, nurseries, food gardens all packed into the dark amber earth of the planet's crust. Throughout the fungus forests, no other creature rivalled the Race for dominance over the planet, and with that dominance came Sentience.

A species became a culture. Now the Hives of the Race were Cities. Aesthetics, science, mathematics, politics - all the fruits of developed racial intelligence were now cultivated by the Race. They raised temples - complex spirals of broad stone ovoids that captured the image of the Primality; they maintained academies, created a sonaric poetry, erected telescopes and electrostatic relay computational machines. Over the millennia, the Race grew. They discovered the nineteen worlds beyond their own, built spacepods of steel and malachite, and established colonies beyond the World. These other Worlds had names: cttt;tt;rr;t;;k, lt;;rr;r;rrtt, qr;;;qttt;rr;q and others. These colonies in turn established the pattern of their culture on these new worlds and then flung out pods of their own, travelling greater and greater distances each time. Experiments in electrostaticity led to the theory of the Quantum Descant, and then the Darkness Box. TransSpace was opened, and the urge of the Race to spread itself throughout the explorable universe was now without chains.

Pods were scattered throughout the cosmos, falling like rain upon any world they encountered. Some landings were destroyed on impact, some occasioned on planets were the Race died within seconds. Some landings created new colonies, and some landings fell between these two stools.

"In every case, to minimise the destructive effect of their drive mechanics, the consciousness of the Race - their mind, soul, life-force, call it what you will - was extracted from them before they began their voyage. In each Pod, two distinct groups of entities travelled: the insectoid bodies of the Race, and their amorphous, physically separated consciousnesses. Separated, the two halves bore little resemblance to their symbiotic whole. the body was a lumbering, mindless arthropod, the mind

a voracious parasitical pseudo-bacterium, filled with intelligence and will, but devoid of decent physicality."

The Doctor paused, peering distractedly into the darkness and mist beyond the bridge windows.

Caroline watched him, a blank look saturating her face.

"Aliens?" she asked in a quiet, incredulous voice.

"Come, come, Ms. McAllistie," he said, forgetting his earlier instructions, "I thought you would have appreciated an introduction to exobiology - or don't you believe me?"

"What? No - no. I guess I do believe you... I think. It's just - well, it's a lot to take in, you know."

The Doctor nodded sympathetically, "But I have a feeling it's not beyond you," he said, smiling.

"Well, I don't know - no, I guess it's not. But..." Caroline asked quickly, "How do you know all this? You implied you encountered all this before - you even gave it a name: the Fury."

A sadness crept over the Doctor's face, "It was fairly recently - but it seems, oh, several lifetimes ago" Another refinery - a weed that infected the human population, turning them into mindless monsters: a visitation by a formless, unseen Fury. It wasn't until much later that I learned of the connection between the weed stuff and the Race -"

"The weed stuff being the manifestation of the infestation by the disembodied consciousness?"

"Well no, not exactly. The seaweed is simply a host. Like any other form of life on this planet, it has the potential to carry the pseudo-bacterium consciousness."

"But the seaweed is not a perfect host?"

"It's searching for something better, yes. I saw a parcel of this consciousness released into the sea off the coast of Greenland in the 1940s, and separated forever from the bodies it travelled to this world with. I saw some of it infect humans there. There must have been more landings, though. There must be another ship close by, and the consciousness is loose once more, and now at last has discovered away of gaining access to more suitable, human hosts again -"

"Through the medium of oil rigs."

"Mmm. I'm fairly certain some of it got to the fisherman we found. But taking the odd fisherman isn't exactly the best way to secure access to the bulk of humanity - but attack them on the little metal islands they stick out in the seas, and you have them."

Caroline shivered, "Is that its intention - to infect the whole human race?"

"Oh I don't think so - a human body acting as host for the parasite has a very limited lifespan. No, I don't think that's its intention at all. And given that it's an alien species, it might be a futile exercise trying to fathom its intentions in any case. No, I think any intentions regarding the appearance of the Fury here on this rig might be more decidedly human in origin."

"Human?"

"Well - it's a good starting point, I think."

Taki shouted through their exchange. He sat against the wall of the bridge, holding his head in his hands, "No, no - wait. Caroline, listen to what you are saying: this is madness! Alien infestation, parasites from other planets - it's insane!" Caroline put her hand on his shoulder, but Taki brushed it aside, "You're both in league - you're those environmentalists Leo was talking about: you want to destroy the rig, sabotage it!"

"Taki, please! You know that's not true," Caroline said, trying to calm him.

"This story of aliens - it's all a trick to try and demoralize us! You want to destroy all of us, send us all mad!"

"Taki, that's ridiculous - you saw the same as we did: this isn't a trick, this is true!"

The engineer threw her to one side, "No - I won't listen!" He lunged for the door, but the Doctor was there, suddenly appearing in his way.

"You can't go outside, Mr. Stephanopolous: it's not safe," he said quietly.

Taki growled and gripped the Doctor by the shoulder, preparing to throw him aside also. The Doctor quickly raised his hands to Taki's neck and pinched at the flesh around the tendons. The tall man suddenly crumpled, and the Doctor lowered his unconscious body to the floor of the bridge.

Caroline looked at him in alarm, "What's wrong with him? What have you done?"

The Doctor felt for Taki's pulse, "He's in deep shock, Ms. McAllistie - he hasn't the mental reserves that you obviously have. His mind is unable to cope with what he's just seen. I've put him to sleep for a while - he'll rest, and while he does, his subconscious will work on the shock. He'll be alright."

Caroline wiped her forehead, "What do we do now, Doctor?"

The Doctor tapped his nose, "First things first. Now, the Fury - that is, the weed-like symbionts created by the infection of a human host - are very sensitive to sound."

"The sonic drill-head!" Caroline realised suddenly, "I thought I heard it." She frowned, "And you switched it back on?"

The Doctor nodded and pointed to a panel in the wall of consoles. An area of switches was draped in slime and flecked with fragments of seaweed. "It had been switched off I suspect it was powered down deliberately. "

"By Leo," Caroline murmured.

"Before he became completely taken over, and too sensitive to the sound of the drill to be fully affected."

"When you say the Fury creatures are 'sensitive' to sound, you mean you can drive them off with it?"

"Indeed," confirmed the Doctor, indicating the drill-head panel, "And by reactivating it, I drove off the infected Leo Kwouk out there."

Caroline stared at the closed bridge door, "Leo. He and only he had access to the power circuits for the drill-head: they're all coded."

"Precisely. Now the weed is intelligent, but not overly familiar with human operations and procedures. Whoever is helping the Fury knew enough about the rig to realise that Leo Kwouk was the only person who could undo the codes locking the power to the drill-head. Once Leo had deactivated the drill-head, the rig would be vulnerable."

"But who would help the weed? What would they gain from it?"

The Doctor shook his head, "I'm not sure. Not yet."

Caroline looked down at Taki and stroked his hair from his face.

"What about the rest of the crew, Doctor?" she asked softly.

The Doctor looked away, "I think you and your friend there are the only two to have escaped so far. Unless they were incredibly lucky, I suspect the others, too, might be infected as Leo was..."

"So what do we do? Is there any way of stopping the weed?"

"We need to know first who or what is helping the weed."

"And how do we find that out?"

"I suspect, Ms. McAllistie, that the answer to that is perhaps more obvious than we suspect."

"What do you mean?"

"Where did Leo go when he left the bridge?"

Caroline frowned, "Down to the storage tank level, why?"

The Doctor smiled grimly, "Because I suspect that's where we'll find our collaborator..."

Pain. Torment. The agony of a thousand parsecs of tens of thousands of hours spent in the torture of separation. The pain was overwhelming. A mind was dying, and its death spelled nothing but the frustration of release once again. A new host was needed; a new body must be found. The pain lifted through consciousness, destroying the old host, and dissolving the bonds that maintained the physical connection. Hurry. Hurry. There was no time to be lost. Soon there would be ending the contact, flowing outwards from the dead host. The leokwouk being would be abandoned, having

served its purpose. All around, a sphere of sound embraced this island in the sea where the leokwouk had been found. The force of the sound ached within it, exacerbating the pain of separation. It ran.

Others joined it, heading with it now to the sanctuary that had been prepared" I:lere a being aided them; the sanctuary was insulated from the sphere of sound. They entered the sanctuary. The presence of the sound was removed. Now all that remained was the pain of being two instead of one. That would end soon.

It stood in the sanctuary. It perceived the others around it - molded mounds of green-brown matter, erupting from the wounded and dissolving bodies of their hosts. The leokwouk being twitched, its surviving consciousness becoming aware of others around it, other human creatures it had once known.

A vibration in the air. In the middle of the sanctuary, an object was taking shape. It could not see the object, but it could sense the thing extending into real space from elsewhere, like one of the ships of the Race. The object materialized and acquired mathematical solidity. A being emerged from it. This was their ally. This being was to deliver them what they required. Union; blessed Union.

Soon, the torment of Separation would be ended, and this parody of life abandoned forevermore.

The inner compartments of the rig were dark. The power came and went fitfully, draining away suddenly and leaving the corridors through which the Doctor and Caroline moved in impenetrable blackness, a night in that artificial space broken only by the hot beams of light from their torches. They paused at a junction. The Doctor pointed the beam of his flashlight down towards the floor. "Look." Gobbets of seaweed clung to the metal plating.

Caroline pointed her own torch towards the right, "Down there. There's an access hatch to the storage tank about ten meters down. It's used for visual inspection of the tanks."

They turned right, creeping slowly down the corridor. The lights flickered on, their wire protective cages sending warped grids of shadow down the hall. They flickered, and stayed on, seemingly this time for good. The pair switched off their torches.

The inspection hatch was just ahead. It was a door that opened inwards into the corridor, a door that gave access to a window. But it was ajar, and they could both see that beyond it, the thick, toughened glass of the window was shattered. Seaweed strands clung to the edge of the broken glass. A heavy, chemical smell saturated the still air. The Doctor hoisted his umbrella and, with the point, eased the door open.

It creaked on hinges stale with damp secescence. Caroline and the Doctor peered through.

The storage tank beyond was a huge, multi-chambered vault of thick steel-reinforced concrete, lined with a fibreglass and glass coating. It was designed to hold hundreds of gallons of crude oil, awaiting transportation. It was empty of that oil now. What remained, highlighted by the shaft of electrical light beaming down into the tank from the open hatch, was a thick, viscous grey-green sludge that coated the walls in heavy streaks, and pooled in the distant bottom of the vaulted space. Somewhere below, the slime bubbled and heaved. Gaseous mist roiled upwards, carrying with it the acrid stench of the seething Fury. Down below, the protoplasmic intelligence of the Race boiled within the sanctuary of the storage tank, insulated from the keening of the sonic drill. An inspection ladder snaked down the inner face of the tank, descending into that living blackness. The Doctor pointed towards it.

"Down we go, Ms. McAllistie."

"Down there? Are you mad?" she hissed.

The Doctor glanced back at a locker opposite the hatch. He prodded it open with a toe, and produced two pairs of thick, heavy rubberised gloves and two pairs of heavy rubber boots, "Wear these - I don't think the weed will be able to penetrate."

"And if it does?" Caroline whispered.

"We have to go down there. I have no doubt that the answers we need are waiting for us at the bottom of this tank." He shot her a glance, "ff you really don't want to come with me..." He let the question dangle.

Caroline drew a deep breath, "No - of course, you're right: how could I not go down, having come this far?" she asked rhetorically. In silence they slipped on their boots and gloves.

The Doctor led the way. A locking mechanism opened the frame that had held the window. Pushing it inwards, the Doctor swung around to the ladder and began climbing down. Caroline followed.

They descended into Hell. It stank of Sulphur and ozone, smells that curled around them like solid tendrils of stench. Under their gloved fingers the grey-green sludge oozed and slid with a life of its own, skittering and retracting, quivering with liquous pseudopods that groped blindly out at them. Their lights bounced over every slime-coated surface, beams breaking and shattering on the twitching morass of intelligence that slipped and pulsed around them.

There was sound, too. Beyond the wall of the storage tank, the background line of the sonic drill could no longer be heard. Instead, there was only the relentless alien pounding of the obscene heartbeat sound that powered the intelligence - the grotesque mind-beat of the Fury. THMP-thmp, THMP-thmp, THMP-thmp, THMP-ttunp. It rocked through her head again, peeling back sanity to expose the threads of horror latent there. She clenched her teeth and concentrated on climbing down, one step at a time: step, grip, step, grip, step, grip.

Below her, a faint voice called upwards, "Are you alright, Caroline?" called the Doctor.

She nodded, then more strongly: "Yes, yes - I'm okay. It's just the sound... "

"Concentrate on climbing - the beat will fade."

They climbed. The babbling dark space travelled with them. Then, suddenly, they were on the floor of the storage tank. Caroline let go of the ladder, her arms trembling with the after effects of the effort. She took a step backwards, casting her torchlight around, following the arc of the Doctor's own flashlight.

They stood within a blank circle. The oozing slime of the Fury had retreated from a wide space on the center of the storage tank bottom. Caroline stood there next to the Doctor, slowly spanning the empty surface of the vault with her flashlight beam.

It was not empty. At some prearranged distance, the slowly moving sea of the Fury had collected, and at this shore, to which, for some reason, the intelligence had retreated, stood figures. They stood in a circle around her and the Doctor, around the edge of the cleared space. They stood, seeming to wait. It was the crew. Caroline had not known them well, but could recognize in the glancing stream of her torchlight faces among the walking dead. Each figure was a pile of glistening seaweed, and protruding from each bulk were the vaguely discernable features of members of the decommissioning team. She shuddered, quickly flicking her beam of light away; she did not want to see more than she had to. The Fury had taken them. It had infected and inhabited them, and was now using those bodies as hosts. They would not last forever, and soon, the bodies would corrupt and fail, unable to support the life of the parasitical organism within. Then the Fury would seep out of them and flow away, unless it could find another host. If it were still trapped in the sea, it would find the weed, and use that primitive life form as host until something more intelligent came along.

The Doctor patted her on the arm, "Brave heart, Ms. McAllistie - brave heart."

He nodded towards something else in the darkness, "I think that's what we've been looking for. "

Caroline frowned. What was it?

Her own flashlight beam lanced to join the Doctor's. They converged on a tall object sitting in the center of the clear space. Caroline blinked. She had expected - what had she expected? Not this. Not the tidy, ornate object which stood before them. It was a grandfather clock. Unmarked, unsullied, as clean and carefully maintained as if it were standing in the front room of an ancient house; a little dusty perhaps, but still as elegant and trim as any grandfather clock should be. The surreality of its presence was jarring - terrifying, somehow. It's innocent appearance harboured a strangely horrifying air of menace and foreboding, as if it represented all that should not be, but yet was. Caroline could not understand why or how this object was where it was. The Fury, the weed -

she could somehow understand that; however unpleasantly, it still fitting into her own understanding of the biological universe. But this... this did not.

"Doctor - what is it?" she whispered, her voice quivering.

The Doctor's eyes narrowed, clean and cold, fixing the clock with a glaze that was silver in its own fury. He spoke at last: "Evil."

The clock opened.

The front of the clock slid apart, and from the interior of the mechanism, at all, dark figure emerged. Light streamed from behind the opened clock door, and the figure was framed in that light.

It was a man, and Caroline could see his features quite clearly in the slanting white glow from the clock. His face was chiseled and elegant, with high, patrician cheekbones, a clear forehead and a sharp, hawk-like nose. A crisply groomed black beard touched with silver graced his chin, and his dark hair - also streaked with white - was carefully combed back from his face. It was an arrogant face; a sneer that seemed permanently etched creased the man's top lip. One eyebrow was raised sardonically as he regarded the Doctor and Caroline across the space. He wore a black, high-necked suit and black gloves, like a surgeon of darkness. If the Doctor had meant him when he had said 'evil', his description could not be more accurate. The man seemed manifestly an angel of malice, a dark sorcerer suddenly appeared in this Hadean chamber.

He spoke. "Doctor - you join us at last. "

Caroline glanced down at the little man, "You know him?"

The Doctor nodded, "Oh the Master and I are old friends..."

The man the Doctor now referred to as 'the Master' spoke again, "I believe you know my acquaintances?" he asked in a mocking tone, indicating the standing figures with a broad stroke of his hand.

"I do, yes," the Doctor replied.

"Ah, then introductions are not necessary."

The Doctor shook his head, "What's all this about?"

The Master folded his arms, "And what makes you think I'm going to give you the pleasure of unfurling my plans in front of you?"

"I take it there's to be no last-minute gloating then, before your plans bear fruit?"

"Ha, ha! An excellent metaphor, Doctor, if only you knew. No - I am not interested in sharing my plans with you this time - I am much too busy -"

Something beeped. The Master glanced down at a small device attached to his wrist.

"Good - good; they've arrived." He looked up at the Doctor, "I'm afraid, my dear Doctor, that I must be going." He turned back towards the clock, "I'm sorry our meeting has been so brief, but time presses - ha, ha!" The Master glanced around at the storage tank and the throbbing Fury, "I know - why don't you all get better acquainted, eh?" He laughed again, a cruel chuckle. "Goodbye, Doctor! I shan't miss you!"

The clock panel closed behind him.

Caroline stared, "What is he going to do in there?"

The Doctor shook his head, "I'm afraid I know only too well..."

The clock vibrated. Its image shook. In the midst of the heartbeat of the Fury, a new sound blared out: a roaring, crushing sound. It whirled out from the clock, enveloped it and beat in time with the pulsations flowing through the image of the clock itself. Within seconds, the sound and the pulsations of the image had roared into a crescendo which gradually faded. Then, the clock was gone. Caroline gaped. It had gone - vanished. Both the clock and the Master had faded into thin air, like a cheap magic trick.

"Doctor - Doctor!" she gasped, "They've - I mean, it's - But how?"

"No time, no time for that - not now!" murmured the Doctor, "We've got trouble, Ms. McAllistie - real, real trouble."

The Fury was moving. The vanishing of the clock appeared to have been a signal. From all sides, the grey-green mass was rippling, rolling towards them, a pulsing tide of death. The wobbling figures of the crew moved inwards also, and the circle began to collapse towards them. Caroline trembled. Death moved on bubbling slime to engulf them.

"Doctor - what do we do now."
 But the Doctor didn't reply. Even he had no answers now.

The Master strode from the bridge into the night air. A cargo helicopter had landed on the helipad. A group of balaclava and combat fatigue wearing men and women stood around it, watching the rig carefully. They held pistols and powerful flashlights.

As the Master descended the ladders towards the landing area, a trio detached themselves and approached him. The lead raised his hand in a fist salute.

"LifeForce ready, Captain Masters - just tell us where to plug in, and we're all set."

The Master surveyed the small group and the helicopter, "Very impressive, Mr. Brown. Your 'LifeForce' group appears to be extremely committed."

"Anything to bring people to their senses, Captain Masters. If direct action is what it takes, then direct action is what people like Delta Petroleum are going to get."

The Master nodded, smiling, "And several gallons of highly toxic crude oil sludge dropped into a Delta Petroleum board meeting is direct action enough by anyone's reckoning."

"They do it to the rest of the human race every day, it's time they had a taste of their own medicine."

"Well - it's all yours. The outlet valve is valve C47-A, just behind where you've landed. Fill your cargo container from there - but do be careful, the sludge is highly toxic, remember. There's a dinghy moored down below on the landing jetty - the rest of you can take that to the nearby island and make your own way back to the mainland."

"We won't forget your cooperation, Captain Masters."

"Oh indeed - anything to help the cause. The best of luck on your endeavors, Mr. Brown." The Master returned Brown's fist salute. He watched them from the foot of the stairs. They plugged their pipe into the outlet valve and began to fill the container in the belly of the helicopter. In ten minutes time they would be ready to go, and that container - filled with sludge and the Fury - would be bound for the board room of the Delta Petroleum building on the mainland. The infection, once started, would spread without end. Nothing and no one would be safe. Humanity was doomed to extinction, and in its place would arise a race who owed the Master everything: a race that would serve him, not out of fear, but out of love. A race to whom he had given new life would give to him in return their undying loyalty.

The Master smiled. And all he had to do was sit back and watch.

He laughed. Sometimes things could be so simple.

The Doctor took off his hat and handed it to Caroline along with his umbrella. The young biologist took them, looking at them curiously.

"What are you doing?" she asked, confused, "We have to get out of here!"

"No. I have to try and end this."

"End this? What do you mean? How?"

The Doctor took a deep breath, "The Master has somehow aligned himself to the Fury, and, if I'm right, is even as we stand here concocting some means to use it against the whole of humanity.

I have to try and stop that."

"But how?"

"The Fury is intelligent - perhaps I can reason with it."

"You can't - can you? How are you going to communicate with it?"

The Doctor looked over at the approaching mass of green gel and shrugged off his duffel coat. Caroline grabbed it.

"In the only way I can," he said, and stepped into the seaweed expanse of the Fury.

Caroline choked, unable even to scream. A broad ripple of the seething film flowed upwards over the Doctor. Within seconds, he was gone - unrecognizable beneath a boiling cloak of alien biology.

Caroline was alone.

Consume, divide, live. Existence as pain, torment and separation. Never-ending. Ceaseless. Union desired, life desired; to live is to be one. This is not life, this is bare survival.

Wait.

Pause. Uncertainty. Something is not absorbed. Various tiny flickers of consciousness exist within: surviving fragments of the human creatures containing memories that fade fast. Leokwouk remembers dancing with girls in a faraway city. The shard of its memory flashes through. leokwouk remembers the access codes to the sonic drill circuits. The sliver dances through. Other memories spin through consciousness: davemeyers remembers riding a two-wheeled mechanical device through an arid desert region of the planet. The memory flickers.

Wait. Listen"

This is more than a flicker of memory. What is this?

Wait. Listen. I must speak with you.

It is an invasion. We are unity - there is no Individual. What is it that speaks as a separate piece, apart from the unity.

Wait. Listen. I must speak with you; I am the Doctor.

The Doctor. You seek contact with us. You resemble the Master.

I am of the same race.

Why do you contact us? The Master has offered us new life. We are moving towards that life now. What do you want with contact?

I would like to present you with a new offer...

The LifeForce member by the outlet valve looked up and signaled with a thumbs-up to Brown. He nodded and turned to the Master.

"That's it - the container is full. Next stop: Delta House."

The Master smiled quietly, "Your actions will not be ignored this time, Mr. Brown."

The LifeForce commander turned and headed for the helicopter.

"Okay everyone," he shouted at his troops, "Let's -"

A sound pierced the air. A shrill sonic explosion, tearing through the upper reaches of hearing. It pulsed, rippled, almost shredding the eardrums of the LifeForce team gathered around the helicopter.

The rig shook.

A seismic tremor gripped the structure, shaking it like a leaf caught in a storm.

The Master tumbled to one side, then regained his balance, clutching onto the gantry handrail.

"What's happening?" he shouted uselessly into the screaming air, "What is this?"

Now the sound erupted, and the bridge above the Master splintered into an outrush of metal and glass. The explosion knocked him to his feet, and showered the helipad below with debris. The rig continued to quiver and shake. The LifeForce team collapsed, grabbing onto anything they could. A new sound rushed around them: a distant rumble, a far-off thunder that increased and expanded, getting louder, getting nearer.

Then the sea exploded.

A roar of water gushed skywards, blowing spume across the rig, shattering windows and ripping parts of the rig into ribbons. The helicopter stuttered across the landing pad, twisting its wheel struts so that it collapsed onto its belly with a grinding crunch. The LifeForce team scattered.

The Master hung onto the handrail in abject confusion, unable to find a cause for the destruction he saw around him.

Then he saw what caused it.

The thunder rolled away, and a pulsing heartbeat of a sound filled its place. The rhythmic hum emanated in a cloud outwards from the thing slowly rising above the level of the water. It was a sphere, a faceted sphere well a hundred meters across, made of some translucent material. It pulsed red and blue, a glowing ball of living fire. Behind its translucent walls, shapes skittered and jerked - strange, insectoid shapes that walked on spiked and stilted legs of baroque complexity.

The sphere moved towards the rig and hovered over the debris-covered landing pad.

There was a wrenching, tearing sound, and the center of the landing area fell downwards, as if sucked into the bowels of the rig. Below was the storage tank, and now from it seeped up, out of the dark void, a weaving, dancing cloud of grey-green thread-like strands. Each strand coiled and pulsed in time to the glowing of the sphere, each one reaching upwards towards the translucent shell poised above. Their tips touched its surface, and continued to travel, surging inwards, merging with the sphere, being drawn inside. A cracking sound came from the helicopter, and similar threads spun outwards from the broken cargo container. The Fury, rising from confinement, sought the sphere.

The Master watched the scene below, his face contorted in anger.

"No!" he shouted, "No! It's not possible!"

"I'm very glad to say that you're mistaken," came a calm, steady voice from above.

The Master looked up. Descending down the ladder from the wreckage of the bridge, came the figure of the Doctor, followed by Caroline who supported a bewildered looking Taki.

"What have you done?" the Master hissed, "What have you done?"

"I simply made a better offer than you, that's all."

"The sound - what was that sound? It should have killed it!"

"Mm. A bit like electricity," said the Doctor, thoughtfully, "Too much can kill you - but just the right amount can restart your heart."

"Restart...?"

The Doctor poked the end of his umbrella in the direction of the sphere.

"The pitch of the sonic drill-head was enough to shock the consciousness of the Race into action, but not the bodies. The Fury itself got dragged up into the storage tank of the rig, where it had to stay, hiding from the merciless sound of the drill. And when you discovered it, it was extremely glad to accept your offer - feed on the world, live again in the bodies of the human race. Not a perfect life, but one that could be endured."

"I was giving them what they needed!" shouted the Master, "The Race would have refound their greatness and their glory, and been reborn!"

"And you would have been content to pay the price, I know: the life of one race for another. And the Race would have been grateful enough to serve you forever?"

"My offer was welcome enough..."

"But my offer was even more welcome," snapped the Doctor, "You told them that their ships were irreparably damaged, and that there was no power on this planet that could revive them. You were wrong, and you knew it. Altering the pitch of the sonic drill-head was all it took: at maximum output, the vibrations would be enough to reactivate the bodies - bodies which you well knew lay buried underneath the rig. "

The Master snarled wordlessly.

"You deceived them - deceived them for your own, petty ends. Your mind is still warped by dreams of conquest and destruction, but dreams are all they'll ever be." The Doctor folded his arms in quiet triumph, "I've won, Master, and you've lost. The Race is united, and you have nowhere left to run."

The Master laughed hollowly, "Oh I may have lost this time, Doctor, but I am far from running out of place to run!" He pulled a thin, hatpin like object from his sleeve, "Goodbye, Doctor. I'm sure we will meet again under more favorable circumstances."

The object vibrated.

A fluttering roar, a shimmer in the air; where the Master stood, the grandfather clock suddenly faded into existence, and then, with the Master's laugh echoing on the wind, faded away again, taking the Master with it.

The Doctor shook his head.

Caroline looked up at the glowing sphere. The Fury had drained from the rig and the helicopter, and had been pulled in its entirety into the ball of light. The insectoid shapes looked more solid now within, more concerted. The pulsing heartbeat was stronger, more purposeful.

She put her hand on the Doctor's shoulder, her voice weary but somehow full of life, "Is it over, Doctor?"

The Doctor looked around him. The rig creaked ominously as the impact of the sphere's rising took its structural toll. The LifeForce team were scrambling for the landing jetty and the dinghy below, abandoning their crippled helicopter. And above, the sphere, with its joined Race, hummed and glowed with renewed energy.

There was a strange winking, collapsing event in the air as the Darkness Box within the sphere opened TransSpace, passed into it, and was gone.

A chill winter wind blew across the silent, empty rig.

"Yes, Ms. McAllistie," the Doctor replied, "I think you can say it's over."

Epilogue

Vancouver. The city rose in a bustling ziggurat from the glimmering ribbon of the coast. Like a gem, it sparkled in the darkness of the evening, alive with flashes of light. Each spinning car headlight, each glowing streetlight gathered, like an orchestra, bringing the body of the city into a symphony of vital life.

Towering in the heart of the city: Delta House. Its steel shaft towered upwards out of the knot of skyscrapers below to blossom into a phantasm of glass and mirror. It was sleek and pristine: the crystal heart of a fat and bloated multinational corporation whose tentacles engulfed the world. The summit of the building was crowned with a great circular chamber whose glass roof let in the starlit expanse of the night sky above. Here, in this room, the thrones of power were arranged. Here, the directors of the corporation met to decide policy and progress. For Delta Petroleum, this room was the very brain and soul of the company. In that room, power and money flowed in an endless, crushing cycle. There, countries and governments, people and communities were all reduced to figures on a balance sheet. As the wind and the snow whipped across the glass roof it would have been difficult for most observers to register the enormity and the power of that place.

Caroline McAllistie and Taki Stephanopolous stood in the chilly winter street outside and looked up at the towering glowing shape of Delta House. Around them, cars and pedestrians rolled in an endless stream of noise and hurried through the snow, slush, and ice.

Caroline sighed.

"But it's not over, is it?" she said quietly.

"What do you mean?" Taki asked, looking at her curiously.

She stared up at the building, and then looked into the face of the man next to her.

"I mean it's not over. None of this is. This is just a pause."

"A pause?"

"Yes. Delta still goes on, doing what it does as if none of this had ever happened, LifeForce will still fight against them, fighting injustice with violence, other parts of the Race still linger in the seas, waiting for other opportunities to escape their exile, the Master still plots and schemes, and the Doctor..." She sighed, "Was it worth it? Was anything actually accomplished?"

Taki smiled, "You are thinking too much. What will be, will be. There is good enough in the Universe to fight all that evil."

"You think?"

"I am certain. You have done your part. Now, you are here. Who knows, perhaps there will be other opportunities in the future to fight the evils of the universe and to rail against its injustice. But tonight..."

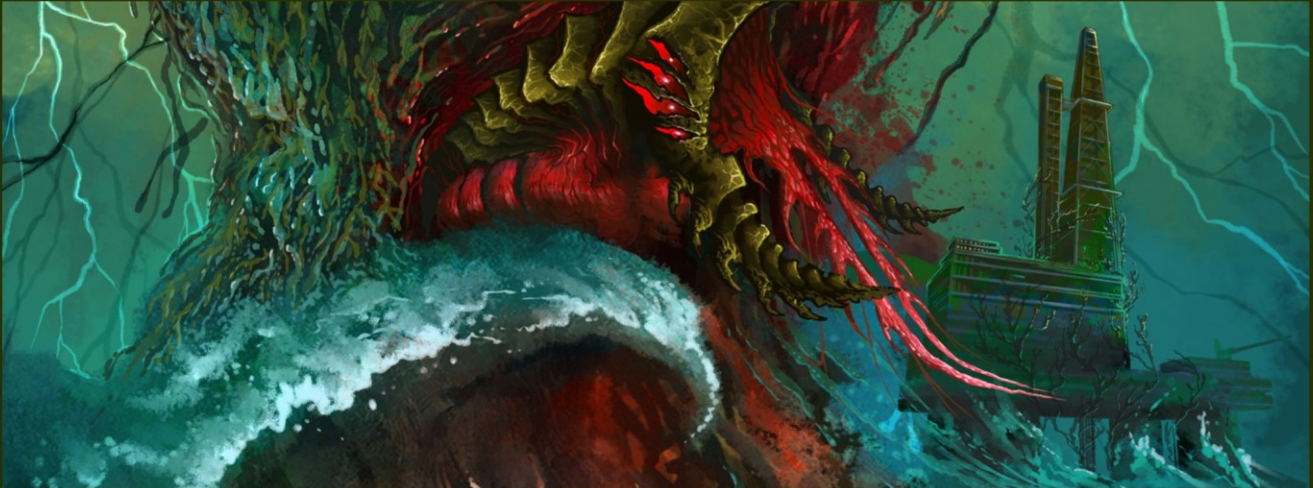
"Tonight?"

Taki wrapped his arms around her, and squeezed her through their parkas, "Tonight, my English rose, we have only to think of each other."

He kissed her warm lips in the freezing air.

And Caroline smiled.

*This story draws inspiration from the original television story "Fury From The Deep",
as well as the BBC audio adventure, "The Island of Lost Souls" by Mark Gatiss*



**“The seaweed and the body seemed to be combining,
almost as if the weed were burrowing into the human flesh.”**

The TARDIS has landed near a disused oil rig off the western coast of British Columbia, Canada. There the Doctor meets Professor Caroline McAllistie and her crew who are helping to decommission the oil rig. Strange things have been happening in and around the coast where things are about to get even stranger.

They discover the body of a dead fisherman who has been covered in an unusual type of seaweed - a seaweed that seems to be sentient.

The Doctor and Professor McAllistie must work together to defeat an ancient evil that has risen from the depths of the ocean.

This story features the Seventh Doctor as played by Sylvester McCoy

