

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

One Final Requiem



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Past Relative

At last, she was trapped!

The Doctor wiped the ash off his face. He placed his handkerchief back into the pocket of his jacket. He stood and brushed himself off. A noise caused him to turn around. Jamie was lying on his back, having some difficulty standing. The Doctor helped his companion to his feet.

“Thank you, Doctor,” Jamie said.

Fools.

Jamie and the Doctor turned as one. They stared at a small cube on the ground. It was filled with a black, swirling substance. A miniature storm raged inside the cube.

Do you think this is the end?

“Do you hear that?” the Doctor asked, pointing around. There was no sound. In fact, there was nothing at all, a void. “That silence? That’s your requiem.”

Laughter.

No. I’ve had many deaths, Doctor. Many Requiems. This will not be the last. I am eternal.

“Oh yes, yes, yes,” the Doctor chided. “I’ve heard it all before.”

The swirling in the cube increased its intensity.

No! I will destroy you! I will destroy all life!

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “I’ve told you; I’ve heard it all before. You’re great behind the scenes, aren’t you? Instilling fear: whispering to Zodin, Salamander, the Daleks... but when it comes time to show your face, you’re no better than they are; power hungry, paranoid, bent on universal domination... and inevitably impotent.” The Doctor approached the cube as he spoke. He placed a small device beside it.

What are you doing?

The Doctor looked at the cube. “Sending you back from where you came. Oblivion.” The Doctor activated the device. A small hole opened up beneath the cube and swallowed it. Before the hole closed itself, they heard a voice from a far distance:

I am forever...

Then there was silence.

“Is she really immortal, Doctor?” Jamie asked.

“Very probably,” the Doctor answered.

“Is that the last we’ll see of her, then?”

“Very improbably.”

The Story of Pyre Em Ket

“The Beginning of all beginnings. Two forces; only Good and Evil. Then Chaos, Time is born. Matter. Space. The universe cries out like a newborn. The forces shatter as the universe explodes outwards. Only echoes remain. And yet somehow, somehow the Evil force survives. An intelligence. Pure Evil...”

100,500,000 TL

General Vang watched as the medical technicians scanned Captain Strell’s body. The machine hovered over his prone form once, twice, and a third time. The technicians turned to look at the monitors. Vang could make nothing from the readouts, but the technicians were obviously worried. The lead technician turned to Vang and shook her head. Vang stepped forward, his helmet still tucked under his arm, his metal boots clanging with every step. He looked down into the face of Strell. The man’s eyes were wide, his breathing shallow and rapid. There was no sign of life in his expression.

“What did you see? Captain! What did you see?”

Vang felt a hand on his shoulder; he jumped. It was the lead technician. “He cannot answer you,” she said. “His mind is shattered.”

“No!” Vang yelled. His voice reverberated around the small med-lab. He had waited too long. Waited and wondered what was in the vast beyond. He would not be denied that information! He turned his attention back to Strell. He got close enough that their noses were almost touching. “What did you see?” he whispered.

Strell’s eyes fluttered slightly. The Captain stared up into the face of his general. Vang could see nothing but terror in those eyes.

“It was so cold,” he said, barely audible to Vang despite his proximity.

“What was cold? What was cold, Strell?”

Strell stared at Vang, unseeing.

“The dark,” he gasped. “And the things that live there.”

251 TL

Rassilon stared out over the City. His City. His People. A world that he had spent all his life building and protecting. And now it was threatened by a force he never thought could have existed. A force that seeped into his universe through a hole that he had created. Great shadowy demons from a universe of pure darkness. Pure malevolence. And now they threatened Gallifrey. Gallifrey!

“I know what you’re thinking,’ said a voice, bringing Rassilon out of his reverie. “But it’s all the same, in the end. All born of the same beginning.”

Rassilon turned. “But they should have never come together. They should have lived without ever knowing the other existed,” he said, walking up to his friend. The leader of Gallifrey towered over the little man. “My arrogance created this.”

“You give yourself too much credit,” the little man in the blue robe said. “Without you, it would have found another way. This is something that cannot be stopped. Time is like that.”

“We cannot stop it?”

The little man looked across the City. “You’ll find a way...to try. As will others. I fear I myself may have to take up arms against this enemy in the future. Difficult to know.”

The two old friends stared across the peaceful City in silence. A great terror was coming. But for now, they enjoyed the view.

10,680 TL

“Are you there, Almighty One?”

Yes, Tlotoxl, I am always here.

Tlotoxl, High Priest of Sacrifice, knelt before the sacrificial altar. It was extremely late, and it was very dark. The others were asleep in the village. He slowly raised his head but kept his eyes diverted from the small black globe that was swirling on the altar.

“What is your bidding?” he asked.

You have not yet defamed the doppelganger Yetaxa.

“It is difficult, Almighty One,” Tlotoxl explained. “Autloc believes she is Yetaxa reborn... And the old man, the one called the Doctor, interferes.”

You must destroy the shaman called the Doctor, and all of his companions. Yetaxa must be defamed. Do you understand, Tlotoxl?

“It shall be done.”

14,950 TL

The city streets were empty. Everyone was in their homes with doors bolted and windows shut and locked. Out of the mist, she came. Floating on the air. Statue-still; inhuman.

The Queen.

She floated over the streets of her city. Her arms crossed over her breast; hands tucked into her robe. Her face hidden behind a hideous mask; a replica of a human face, bare, unfinished. Sharp edges shot out from the face of the mask, making it look as if it was a grotesque image of the sun. She was still as she floated. No one dared look at the Queen. No one had ever seen behind the mask. If indeed it was a mask. She floated soundlessly above her streets. Ever watchful.

She glided back to her temple. A huge cathedral twisted and dark. She entered and hovered in a large empty space inside. On the cold floor before her sat a young boy, not yet twelve cycles. He looked up at her with his blue eyes. Eyes full of fear.

Yes, my child. The boy heard her say in his head. *You know me. You know Fear.*

The boy began to cry. He heard laughter in his head.

The huge chamber was suddenly filled with equipment, equipment well beyond the scope of this world's technical capability. It grew out of the air and the floor. It surrounded him; wires and cables and equipment the boy had never seen before. Some of the cold metal reached out like a snake to touch him. He recoiled in terror.

And everywhere was the Queen's laughter.

The metal touched him again and took hold. He could not escape. It dwarfed him and suffocated him. He drowned in a sea of mechanical abomination. He became part of it. The Fear changed then. He embraced it. He tried to look down at his body, but his vision was blurred. It seemed the metal had become part of him. Suddenly all went black.

Arise my child. My dear child.

He stood up in the center of the empty space, and slowly raised his head. He was now wearing a hat and the bells on it jingled lightly. A smile appeared on his newly painted face.

“My Queen,” he whispered.

Now (from a certain point of view)

The Spaceport of Lucias Prime was known by travelers as one of the only places in the galaxy you could get anything you wanted, provided you had the means to pay. They called it ‘Trade Town’.

Trade Town was located on the outskirts of Earth Empire space. The three-hundred-year war with the Sarons had ended, and it was a time of prosperity. Humans, near-humans and aliens of all types gathered at the spaceport to buy, sell, and trade. One of the hotter items, the flavour of the month so to speak, were the Virtual Fields. Hologram, trans-mat, and virtual-reality technology brought together in a mishmash of sensation. It was relatively new technology but that hadn’t stopped forty-five Earth Empire colonies to ban the Fields outright. The technology had skipped the testing stage, and this had got a lot of people jumpy. It excited the rest.

The Virtual Fields were confined areas, generally large buildings, set up as a virtual-reality holo-forum. A patron could enter the area and interact in a number of pre-programmed scenarios; scenarios that could adapt to the actions and wishes of the patron. All this was done without the need for any sort of eyewear, headgear, or implant previously needed for any virtual-reality technology. The Fields would read the thought patterns of the patron and configure the program accordingly. Investors advertised it as “the beginning of a new age in sports, entertainment and pleasure.” The Virtual Fields were operated by a company known as VirTech.

Inside the Lucias Prime offices of VirTech, it was business as usual. Execs were busy in holo-net meetings or setting up ads across the Line. Dalyne Rhone was head of PR, or damage control, or programming, or any other number of positions depending on who you talked to. She was a short woman, barely five feet tall, with fiery red hair cut in a bob. She was unconventionally attractive and was quite young to hold such a prominent position. She sat behind her desk, her hands pressed together in front of her, and stared at her two guests.

“We’ve had inspectors before,” she told them again. “I can assure you there is no danger with VirTech’s programs. We’ve tested them ourselves time and again, and everything falls within the safety parameters set up by the Empire. The government is worrying over nothing. I guarantee the technology will be officially approved within the year. For now, we’re complying with the regulations and will not spread our wings until then. So you see, I don’t understand why you’re...”

“We’re here,” the Doctor interrupted, tapping his fingers across the handle of his umbrella, “to ensure your preliminary reports are accurate. Safety is one thing; honesty is something entirely different.”

Rhone sighed.

“Yeah well, it’s all there right?” Ace said, unconsciously pulling at the cuffs of her fancy suit jacket. “We have a job to do. You’ve been given the official documentation. I suggest you let us get on with it.”

“Very well,” Rhone said, finally giving in to the Inspector and his haughty assistant. “My secretary will give you all the help you need, and I will see that he personally gives you a tour of the Fields tomorrow morning.”

“Excellent,” the Doctor stood, tipped his hat to Rhone before placing it back onto his

head, and he and Ace left the office.

Rhone stared after them. When the doors closed, she pressed a button on her desk.

“You were listening?” she asked.

Yes.

“It was unavoidable. I suggest we slow the process until they are satisfied and leave Prime.”

No! The process will continue. I will deal with any problems that arise...

“Was there anything else?”

That man. There is something familiar about him...

* * * * *

Early the following morning, Ms. Rhone’s assistant led the Doctor and Ace to the Virtual Fields. He was talking about the system as he led them up a flight of steps inside a large VirTech building.

“At the top of these stairs is a doorway. A doorway into another realm. I think you will be impressed. This is really cutting-edge technology. Technology that will lead us into the twenty-ninth century and beyond.” He really did look quite excited.

Ace looked at the Doctor with an amused look on her face, but he remained solemn. They arrived at the top of the stairs, and the man used a small key-pass to open the door at the top. They stepped into the building.

Inside was a large, empty room. It looked like a warehouse of some sort. It wasn’t very impressive.

“Oi, what a rip,” Ace stated.

“Looks can be deceiving,” the assistant said, looking a little upset. “This entire area contains hidden VirTech equipment. State of the art, cutting edge.”

The man pointed towards the center of the room. After a moment, the Doctor and Ace moved over and stood where he had pointed. “I’ve set up a special program for you. You’ll be able to see various aspects of the technology and will find numerous avenues in which to interact. The program will last two hours. The scenario is an Earth carnival circa the late 1960’s. Enjoy.”

The man closed the door behind him, and the Doctor and Ace were alone in the warehouse.

“What now?” Ace asked, looking extremely unimpressed.

“I don’t know,” the Doctor replied. “I suppose we wait.”

They waited. Their breathing was loud in the empty space. After a few moments, they could hear some clicking and humming as if machinery were being turned on.

“Ready?” the assistant’s voice sounded over a speaker.

“Ready,” the Doctor said.

They were suddenly outdoors, standing in the middle of some sort of carnival or fair. All around them stood tents, stalls selling cotton candy and drinks, and dozens of people. Children ran around wildly from tent to tent, pulling on the hands of their parents. Music, laughter, voices and the sounds of rides could be heard in the night air.

“This is well impressive, Professor,” Ace said. “It even smells like a fair. Food, dirt, sweat. Benny doesn’t know what she’s missing.”

The Doctor took in the noises. It was very impressive indeed. They began to walk; past a

hot dog vendor, past a sword-swallower, past a line up for a Ferris-wheel.

“Ello, ‘ello, ‘ello! Step right up! Finest act in all the state I should say. You two look like you could use a good show! Step right up! Greatest magician in all the land!”

The Doctor was all smiles. “Oh, I love a good prestidigitator!”

The Doctor and Ace followed the voice to a man standing on a large box outside a blue tent. They walked past the announcer and through the entrance flap. Inside were some chairs and a stage of sorts. A short man with a tall black hat was standing on the stage. They sat down. There was no one else in the tent.

“Not much of a crowd tonight,” the magician said, in a young voice that did not match his face. “Oh well, I like the look of you two, so I’m going to put on a show you won’t be able to forget!” The man removed his hat and began fumbling inside.

“Abracadabra, hocus pocus, and a little Harry and Hermione... and voila!”

The magician pulled a dead pigeon out of his hat.

“Oh dear,” he said, looking at the dead bird. “Died of starvation, poor thing. I knew I forgot to do something. Oh well, live and learn. And I’ve lived a long, long time, so you think I’d have learned more.”

Ace sighed. The Doctor fidgeted. It wasn’t a particularly good show.

“For my next trick...pick a card, any card.” The diminutive magician stepped off the stage and held a fanned deck of cards out to Ace. She picked one. It was a joker. The magician smiled and stood back. “Does your card look anything like... this?”

The magician reached under his chin and pulled. His face peeled away, and his clothes dropped to the ground. A jingling could be heard as the skin pulled away to reveal a boyish clown, his jester’s cap ending in tiny bells.

“What kind of a lame magic show is this?” Ace asked.

The Doctor’s expression remained serious. “Who are you?” he whispered.

The boy-clown just smiled. Then everything went dark.

* * * * *

Dorothy stood at the back of the school. She could still see her friends running across the field, making for the fence. Between her and their rapidly diminishing forms stood Alex Krieger and Pippin Smith. Alex had that sneer on his face. Pippin was rocking side to side on his feet, giggling.

“Dorothy Mc-Stupid!” Pippin laughed.

“Shut it!” Dorothy said, but there was fear behind her voice. She could feel the tickle of tears on her cheeks.

“Give up girly-girl,” Alex said. “You ain’t so tough now are ya? You still like to talk big though, don’t ya?”

“Dorothy Mc-Shame on you for being so stupid!” Pippin sang.

“Nice one,” Alex said.

“I said shut it!” Dorothy said and ran at Pippin. Pippin was totally caught off guard and Dorothy plowed into the smaller of the two boys. She knocked him over and landed on top of him. Pippin gasped for air as the wind was knocked out of him. Dorothy suddenly felt a pain in her side and rolled off the boy. She landed on her back and looked up into the black eyes of Alex. He kicked her again for good measure.

“Why don’t you go crying to mummy?” he sneered.

Dorothy was crying and the tears stung her eyes. She looked up into Alex's face and watched in horror as it began to change. A hat slowly appeared on his head. A hat with dangling bits ending in bells that jingled lightly. His face was now covered in white make-up.

"Cry-baby! Cry-baby!" the jester taunted...

...and Dorothy was older now. She was standing outside the haunted house, outside Gabriel Chase. She could feel her legs shaking as she stared up at the manor.

"Ace," a voice whispered loudly from somewhere behind her. "What ya waiting for?"

Ace looked down in her hands and saw the can of accelerant. Without turning, she walked up to the front door of the house and opened the door...

...Fenric was waiting for her. He looked like a beautiful man, then a horrible monster, then a boy-clown. She dropped the cans of accelerant, only they landed too softly. She looked down at a body in a cream-colored suit. She looked up from the body into the eyes of the Doctor. Unblinking eyes. Dead eyes.

And then she screamed.

* * * * *

The Doctor looked down into his hands. Old hands, yet young. They were stained in blood. He turned around and looked across the sunny plain. There were bodies strewn everywhere. When he tried to focus on the faces, they became blurred. In his mind he could hear the sharp pang of a Dalek gun. Then he felt a dull pain across his hearts, and he fell to his knees. A woman lay in front of him. He knew her, but he couldn't focus on the face. Too late. He was too late.

Time shifted. The Doctor's hand grew young, yet older. He was kneeling in front of another body in a field now. Echoes of a massive explosion reverberated across the plain. He looked at the young, lifeless body. Again he could not focus on the face, but he could see gold. A shattered gold pedant.

"No..." he whispered.

Too late. Again, too late.

The future. Another pain across his hearts. Another companion lay before him. A scarred Adjudicator's armor. Again, no face. No face. Too many faces. Too many...

"No!" the Doctor shouted. "This isn't real..."

The sun disappeared, replaced by shadows and a cloudy night sky. The jester was standing before the Doctor.

"Oh, but it is real," the boyish clown snickered. "What could be more real than memories? What else is so tangible? Not reality. At least not as the universe knows it. Reality is only played out once, but memories last a lifetime."

The jester laughed. The Doctor screamed.

"Ah, unadulterated emotion; fear, loathing, anger, hatred, love, jealousy, compassion. Exquisite!" The boy-clown danced as he spoke, hopping from shadow to shadow. The Doctor tried to block out the sense of loss that was assaulting him from all sides. "No need for monsters or aliens or weapons of mass destruction. All you need is a simple memory to bring a man to his knees. Tell me Doctor, how many have died that you have loved? How many have you killed? How many have you let die? So concerned with your own agenda. How many times were you too slow to act?"

"No," the Doctor whispered. "I couldn't save them all. I tried. I tried."

"The excuse of the weak," the boy-clown stated. "I tried."

The Doctor concentrated. He called upon every last drop of his remaining energy. "This is how she will.... come... back,' he stammered. "She's feeding off the emotions you generate from the people using this... technology."

The diminutive jester stopped dancing. He leaned in close to the Doctor. The Doctor could smell the paint on the clown's face. "The Phoenix from the flame," he whispered.

The Doctor cried out, finally overwhelmed with the emotions. He fell to the ground. The last thing he heard was the jester's cackling.

* * * * *

The Doctor awoke. He was strapped to a tall chair. Metal bands held his arms to the chair, and similar devices held his legs to the floor. He tried to look around, but there was a strap holding his head in place as well. He strained to his left and could just make out Ace, sitting in a similar chair. She was unconscious. There was sweat on her face and she was mumbling.

"She's still in the system."

The Doctor turned back and saw the boy-clown, no less frightening in the control room of the virtual-fields. The clown was sitting on a console, looking at the Doctor. The Doctor closed his eyes. The memories had stopped. He felt drained.

"The Queen wished for you to witness this," the jester said. "So I took you out of the fields. I thought it rather touching that your young friend here would provide the last bit of energy for the Queen's escape."

"I trapped her once before," the Doctor said. "I can do it again."

"Brave words, but I highly doubt it," another voice said, a female voice.

"Ms. Rhone," the Doctor said. Dalyne Rhone stepped into view. "What has Pyre Em Ket promised you? Riches, power?" the Doctor asked.

"The Queen has promised me everything I desire."

"Of course she did. And you believe her?"

"Why shouldn't I? She arranged for all this. She has already given me more than I would have ever attained on my own."

The Doctor sighed. "You're blind. She does this for herself, don't you see? She needs to escape, and once she does, you will no longer be of any use to her."

"She has more things on her mind," Rhone said. "She'll let me have what I want."

A tremor was felt throughout the control room. A deep murmur began somewhere far below.

"It's begun," the clown whispered, eyes wide.

They all looked to a small cube that had appeared on an empty table beside the clown. It began to glow. They stared in silence, the Doctor fidgeting with his restraints, though he knew it was pointless.

The cube was blinding now. Rhone and the clown stared at it in awe. The Doctor strained to look at Ace. She didn't look good, and the Doctor got the impression if he didn't get her out of the system soon, she would die. He would be too late...again. No, he couldn't think like that. He wouldn't!

The light shot out of the cube and the rumbling rose to an unbearable crescendo. Rhone moved in close to the cube, drawn to it; mesmerized. A ray of light shot through her and she screamed. The jester jumped up and down and clapped like a madman.

"She's coming!" the clown yelled. "The Queen returns!"

Rhone was lifted off her feet. Her screams died suddenly, and she hovered above the cube for a moment. The rumbling died down, as did the light from the cube. Soon the cube was nothing more than a charred shell. Rhone slowly descended to the floor. Her head was bowed, her red hair falling in front of her eyes.

The Doctor looked at her with utter disgust. Rhone lifted her head and stared at the Doctor. Her new eyes, blood red eyes, bored into his soul.

“Pyre Em Ket,” the Doctor whispered.

“Time Lord.”

“What now?” the Doctor asked. “Take over the world? Destroy the universe? Scare some cats? That sort of thing?”

Ket smiled. “I see the fear behind your words, Time Lord.” She looked at the Doctor’s companion. Ace’s head was slumped, her breathing shallow. “I’ll leave you to feel the anguish of her death. But I will see you turn to ash. On that day, I will sing.”

There was a gush of wind, and Pyre Em Ket and the boy-clown were gone. The door to the control room crashed open and Benny entered the room accompanied by an Ogron.

“Ace... quickly,” the Doctor said.

The Ogron tore the restraints off Ace, then the Doctor. Benny helped Ace to the ground, and the Doctor checked her pulse. He lifted her eyelids and looked inside.

“Will she be all right?” Benny asked.

“Yes,” the Doctor said. “But we need to get her to the TARDIS.” The Ogron lifted her into his arms, and they headed for the exit.

“Who’s your friend?” the Doctor asked Benny as they made their way out of the building.

Benny looked at the Ogron. “That’s a long story.”

“I’ll just call him D. E. Machina.” The Doctor said, as he opened the TARDIS doors and they all scrambled inside.

Future Relative

The black maelstrom swirled within the cage; a cage forged of a child’s innocence. All around it was pure whiteness. Nothingness. A void.

Why do you persist?

“Why do you?” the Doctor asked, pulling his frock coat back on.

You amuse me, Time Lord.

“For all your diabolical genius,” the Doctor sighed. “You know nothing.”

The Doctor watched the swirling. He looked at the entity within; evil. It had gone by many names and by none. There was one name in particular that the Doctor had known it by. A name he had heard on his adventures far too often. The Doctor tugged his cuffs down and wiped his sweaty hair from his forehead.

“It’s time we ended our chase once and for all,” the Doctor said.

There was a very brief pause.

What do you mean?

“I won’t fight you any longer.”

Won’t you?

The Doctor began to pace slowly around the cage. “There’s a story in ancient Earth mythology that says at the end of time, the Devil will be so weakened by goodness that he will be bound, not by leagues of iron chains, but by a single rosary.” He smiled. It was the first

truthful smile he had enjoyed in a long, long time. “I rather like that tale.”

What are you saying, Time Lord?

“I’m saying that I will not be afraid of you any longer. You’ll meet your end with or without me. But for now, you’ll go on. I’ll go on. I put my faith in Time.” The Doctor turned and began to walk away from the trapped energy. “I choose to forget you.”

The energy exploded in anger. It shot curses at the Doctor as he departed, but he didn’t pay any heed.

And he never thought about Pyre Em Ket again.



"Evil since the dawn of time."

Pyre Em Ket, an ancient being of pure malevolence, and a foe the Doctor has faced too many times for his liking. Centuries have passed since he last dealt with Ket, almost long enough for him to have put the memories to rest... almost.

Lucias Prime, a planet in the waning days of the Earth Empire, and home for the headquarters of VirTech, a company leading the universal industry in virtual reality technology. The Doctor has heard rumours of something malevolent controlling VirTech. He and Ace pose as Earth Empire officials to investigate.

Entering a sample virtual reality program, the Doctor and Ace find a world controlled by Pyre Em Ket. A world where even the virtual can kill!

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