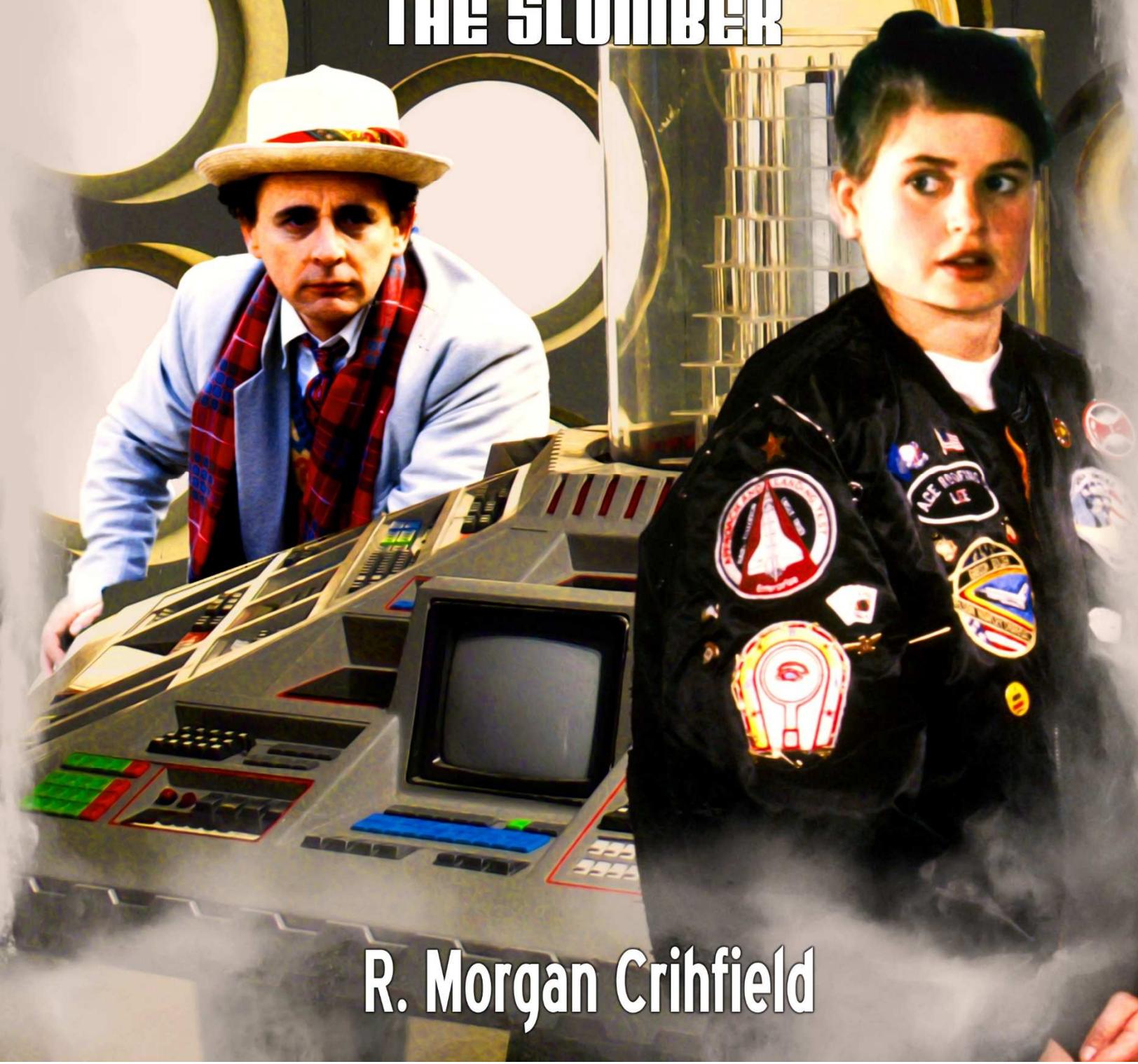


BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

THE SLUMBER



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Published by Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, BC, Canada

First Published October 2020

Editors Bob Furnell, Richard Peevers

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A TDWP/Jigsaw Publications E-Book

Cover designed by Robert Carpenter
Interior Design by Bob Furnell

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Typeset in Corbel, Century Schoolbook

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The Doctor was confused. Ace recognized the expression when his mind was churning out possibilities. The Doctor always stood taller than his height by sheer weight of his personality; currently he adjusted his worn panama hat on his head with his umbrella hooked onto his arm. He had blue eyes, currently squinting, and dark hair. He wore a paisley scarf around his currently stained, damp blazer and used a matching paisley handkerchief to wipe away moisture and grime from the monolith he was currently inspecting.

Ace was getting bored. Her flight jacket, covered in military patches, hung on a nearby outcropping of rock as soaked as the rest of her. Her dark t-shirt, skirt and leggings were covered in grime and only her feet remained dry thanks to her black polished combat boots. Her dark, wet hair was pulled back and she was smacking rocks across the cavern with her trusty baseball bat; much to the irritation of the concentrating Time Lord. Bored was something that rarely happened when traveling with the Doctor. More often it was mortal danger and running, but they had been through so much that Ace had grown a deep affection for the kindly man.

The rocks echoed across the ancient cavern with a sharp and regular “CRACK!”. The climb down from the TARDIS was a long trek. As usual, Ace did not quite know where they were or even why they were here. She just knew she was on some wet, stormy planet in some ancient galaxy in some time period she had no reference for. Ace knew the monolith, surrounding structures, and ancient machines were important. She just didn’t quite know why, and cared less with every passing moment. Ace was an intelligent young woman, but her attention was usually only occupied by her own interests. Talking with the Doctor reminded her of talking with someone’s grandparent. She more or less knew what he was talking about- but something was always lost in the translation.

“Oi, Professor! Doesn’t usually take this long to figure out writings- doesn’t the TARDIS just spell it out?” called out Ace across the cavern.

“Hmm? Yes. That does seem to be the trouble, doesn’t it? You see, Ace, these markings are either so old the Time Lords have no knowledge of this language or it’s

not a language at all.” said the Doctor while gesturing to the runes with the tip of his umbrella.

“If it’s not a language then why are we staring at it for hours? Better yet, lets either take it with us or a quick photo and poke at it from the comfort of the TARDIS?” shouted Ace, the strain beginning to show in her voice.

“We, or rather I, happen to be staring at it for hours hoping that a pattern emerges. Like the Rosetta stone of Egypt, if one can decipher a pattern then you may assign concepts, names, letters, numbers or something to start with. But here is the thing: usually a site like this, the meaning or its use at one time is fairly obvious. Something like a tomb, village, work site, or what have you. This site was banned by Rassilon himself. Curious...why would a man who could harness the nucleus of a black hole and tame the time vortex itself, fear this place? Its only recently that the Time Lords have even allowed scholars to return to these beacons: what they, somewhat dramatically, refer to as the *Primeval Ruins*.” The Doctor offered.

“Wicked...so what happened to your friend the Time Lady? Electra, was it?” Ace called while walking over across the canyon, gravel crunching underfoot.

“Alexanontevalus, or Alexa for short. A pity. We were quite close, in fact, at one time. Her notes make little sense as her investigations into the ruins progressed. She theorized these conduits running throughout these ruins, are not machinery in the strictest sense.” He said gesturing to the different looking markings and machinations. Unfortunately, it’s not clear what any of these relics are for or how they work...” mused the Doctor while scanning his sonic screwdriver over a conduit, red emitter at the top humming as the Doctor manipulated the stainless base.

The Doctor stood upright and continued gesturing around at the cavern itself, “There are no obvious entrances or exits. No obvious power source. No means for a species to interact in any productive way...yet these sites emit bizarre energies across the cosmos that are almost too subtle to detect. Alexa’s earliest theory was that cultures that could detect these energies would come and study them. Eventually they made no progress and abandoned their efforts; hence, the different machinery from different cultures from different periods. Her later notes were less, well...clear. She seemed to experience an episode before the end”

“So she went crackers?” said Ace, arriving by the Doctor’s side. Her boots crunched in the wet gravel.

“Essentially correct. She did indeed seem to experience a dissociative; perhaps even, psychotic episode. She stopped reporting a few days after her excavation began, and the Time Lords sent an envoy to check on her. When they found her, she was in a psychotic state. Only brief periods of consciousness and she was terrified. The only coherent thing she kept repeating was ‘Slumber’. She finally slipped into a deep coma and died a few days later. For some reason, she didn’t regenerate. A pity...such a great mind and kind hearts, Alexa. She will be missed.” The Doctor said, voice somber and wavering.

“I’m sorry Professor, maybe we can find something that will make her death mean something?” said Ace, suddenly seeming very tired standing in the rain.

“That’s the most frustrating thing. There is nothing. Alexa may have been bang on correct. Whatever created this place harnessed and projected these energies without physically building or interacting with these Primeval Ruins, which makes this unique to the best of my knowledge.”

“So they, the builders, don’t work like we do.” Ace surmised.

“Whatever created these ruins, these...*beacons* may simply be too complex for us to investigate properly. They don’t seem to interact with the galaxy the same way as you and I. No machines, no engines, nothing: just the signal. It may well be that we probably couldn’t even communicate in any traditional sense. Our minds too different, our very existence too far removed...”

The Doctor seemed very tired all of a sudden and stared into the distance as if the answer were floating just out of reach.

“Professor?”

“Yes. Sorry,” the Doctor smiled then turned and began the climb to the TARDIS “we are far too tired to make any further progress today.”

“Can’t argue with you there, Professor. I’m knackered!” She called out, grateful for an evening away from the drizzle of the unsettling ruins.

The Doctor stood at the TARDIS control console examining the subtle energy patterns diffusing from the Primeval Ruins. His tired eyes burned from the strain, and while Time Lords typically didn’t need as much sleep as other species- the Doctor was far more exhausted than usual. Maybe it was his grief from the loss of Alexa or how hard he had pushed himself, but he was starting to grow very weary.

Just then he heard a CRASH which emanated from the hall leading out of the control room. Glancing at the control console, the TARDIS detected no intruders and the doors were sealed. The Doctor ran towards the hall to find Ace stumbling across the threshold of her quarters wrapped in her robe, fresh from her shower, only to collapse onto the corridor floor.

“Ace!” The Doctor screamed as he ran to her side. Her breathing was labored, and her eyes darted back and forth beneath her eyelids frantically. The Doctor checked her pulse: rapid. “Hang on, Ace! Can you hear me? Wake up!”

Just then her eyes opened wide and she gasped while pointing “BEHIND YOU, PROFESSOR!” The Doctor quickly spun to see a dense black fog with a vaguely humanoid shape cover his mouth and nose with its noxious hand.

“Slumber...” thundered from the center of the smog as the Doctor’s eyes rolled back in his head and he felt like he was free falling through the floor. He landed on the corridor bulkhead, legs and arms rapidly heavier until they no longer obeyed him. The Doctor’s neck no longer answered his desperate plea to move away from the putrid smog. He was paralyzed, burning eyes closing as his thoughts began to drift...

The Time Lord blacked out for a moment, plummeting into the inky void before recovering and springing to his feet. The steady thrum of the TARDIS remained but the control room had changed. The roundels emanated a pale blue light in the absence of main power and the time rotor in the center of the control panel was still. The Doctor looked desperately for Ace, but she was nowhere to be seen. It was cold. The Doctor could see the condensation in his breathing as the chill set in. The stillness was unsettling as he walked to the console to check the readings. Panic set in as he checked the monitor jutting out from the ancient console. It was gibberish: random numbers, letters, runes, glyphs, and markings in a dozen languages in no discernable order. He looked to the monitor across from the door to find the same nonsensical jumble. Fear began to creep over him as his mind raced to understand what this could mean. He could not find Ace, he could not control the TARDIS, and he was not alone. He heard the tell-tale whirring of servo motors with soft beeps.

“Master?” spoke the tinny robotic voice as it rolled from the corridor to the control room. K-9 was a sentient supercomputer created in the year 5000 to be a personal aide and friend. He was built on a solid block of super dense, light weight armor plating with a vaguely dog shaped head protruding complete with red eyes, rotating sensor dish ears, and laser nose. The Doctor had fitted him with a collar with a matching color scheme from an old scarf of his fitted with a transponder. A tad patronizing in hindsight.

“K-9? Is that you?” managed the curious voice of a surprised Time Lord.

“Affirmative, Master. In a sense.” answered the old friend while rolling slowly into the pale blue light of the console room. Red eyes creating a tracer effect in the dim ambiance.

“How is this possible? Where is Ace?” the Doctor replied, stepping slowly backwards as an ominous feeling overwhelmed him.

“It begged our communion, Master. Now it *Slumbers*” K-9 responded in its typical clipped, robotic tone.

“I see. For whomever or whatever I now address; please take careful note that I don’t enjoy being toyed with and take the safety of my friend as paramount. If anything were to happen to her, then I will be extremely cross. And that is something you don’t want if you know anything about me.” replied the Doctor, voice lowering and becoming more measured.

The regal accent of a Time Lady rang out from the opposite corridor, “if it slumbers and seeks contact then why, pray tell, does it struggle so? Come now Doctor, you are being ever so stubborn...”

From the corridor stepped Romana, the first incarnation, with soft highborn features and dark delicately waving hair. She wore a wisp of a gown, seemingly unaffected by the cold as she was silhouetted in the pale light of the roundels. She breathed the same noxious smoke the Doctor encountered earlier which wafted away from her nostrils and mouth as she spoke. She approached with a causal grace and resolve opposite of K-9, boxing the Doctor in and cutting off any avenue of escape.

“The Master does not understand; it isn’t connecting deeply enough. The Doctor must *Slumber*.” K-9 announced as it quickly approached.

“Hush now, Doctor. It must *Slumber*, do try to get along, hmm?” whispered Romana.

The Doctor moved to climb across the control console and bolt away from his pursuers who were but steps away, but his legs became dense and non-responsive as his head began to become light. He fell forward onto the console, barely catching himself with his quickly fading arms. He began the slow slide to the floor of the TARDIS as K-9 and Romana stood above him.

“I see now. I’m already asleep, aren’t I?” managed the Doctor, struggling against himself- raging against the pull of paralysis.

“Affirmative, Master. It *slumbers*.” chimed the synthetic voice of K-9.

“Hypothesis: you induce a hypnagogic state in those in your radius, also known as sleep paralysis.” croaked the Doctor eyes becoming heavier and burning fiercely.

“Top marks, as usual Doctor. Be a dear and hush now, shhhhhh...” Romana purred while kneeling down and taking his face into her hands, black smoke pluming from her lips. The Doctor fell downward into the void.

Ace awoke to a familiar smell; dust and the hint of something burning. Adrenaline hit her system as her unconscious mind recognized her surroundings. She scrambled to her feet as she found herself standing at the base of the stairs in Gabriel Chase Manor; the mansion Ace once burned to the ground but still evoked panic at the thought. As it always did, the wound opened when she thought of her friend. Her teeth gritted and fists clenched as a lump appeared in her throat; years of practice kept the tears at bay. Before aliens and intrigue so common with the Doctor, it was just an aching sense of injustice. Hints of smoke wafted into the lower level underneath the doors. Somewhere, the manor was burning.

“Well, well, dear girl. About time you reestablished yourself upright and racing...” came the eloquent and masculine voice of Sabalom Glitz. He was a tall man bearing several weapons and a trademark layered shoulder guard attached with a bandolier. He wore a dark, thick, curly beard with matching hair and an expression of cold calculation and amusement. One Ace was simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by. Glitz was a bounty hunter, a sociopath, and ill-fitting companion when the Doctor needed him.

“I know my nightmares, and you aren’t in this one, mate.” Ace seethed.

“If you would gather yourself for a moment; these answers would come running. This face was chosen because the intensity of feelings helps focus you to the *Slumber*.” he said, black smoke fuming from his nose and mouth as he spoke.

“Too right! You’re in my bloody head; it’s not the first time one of you lot have tried this! You are forcing me to remember a friend I lost, in a place I hate, with a man I despise!” Ace spat at the image of the man.

“Dear Girl, you and the eternal one who called itself ‘Doctor’ asked for communion, now you *Slumber*. Why, if you would please enlighten us, open the

pathway and then fight the bonding?" Glitz asked, exasperated while marching forward towards Ace. Its voice becoming menacing and ethereal.

"You first! If you know so much then: what are you? I certainly don't remember inviting you in!" Ace said while slowly backing towards the stairs, ready to make a break for it at the first sign of attack.

"We, don't...*name*? Is that the term? We *slumber*. And the one known as Ace is not deep enough to bond and answer all your questions...and all of ours." the Slumber in the form of Glitz spoke in broken words, voice alternating between that of Glitz and an ethereal, distant tone.

"No thank you, I don't kiss on the first date and you have made one whopper of a mistake..." Ace intoned after finding herself cornered from the Slumber's advance. A wave of fatigue struck her.

"Mistakes aren't likely in this place; but do go on..." Glitz jabbed with an infuriating smirk.

"It's my dream!" Ace shouted while her bat appeared mid-swing across the Slumber's crown.

The Slumber fell back, shocked at the sudden onslaught. It billowed noxious black smoke as it issued a boiling scream. The doors to the room splintered from the heat as Ace struck the Slumber again and again, its form becoming less substantial with every strike. Ace coughed and her eyes teared and stung as the smoke from the fire mixed with the heavier black smoke of the Slumber. She turned towards the one door not set ablaze and slammed her shoulder against it again and again until she finally broke through and was falling towards nothing as she felt the world slip out from under her.

Ace awoke on the TARDIS control room floor dressed in her bathrobe, hacking out plumes of black noxious smoke from her lungs. It coiled and swept itself away somewhere in the room. Nearby, the Doctor lay semi upright with dark noxious smoke playing across his nose and mouth as his breath became irregular and his eyes would flutter open, unseeing, before closing again. Ace, still coughing, laid her hands to check his pulse. His hearts were beating slow and irregular. He was dying.

The Doctor found himself seated at a heavy dark oak table in the TARDIS library. Laid before him were various tomes, scrolls, and datapads with the same gibberish and random letters and symbols on every parchment, page, screen, and holoprojector. He was dressed in his usual attire, his sweater vest adorned with question marks slightly ruffled and panama hat laid upon the umbrella leaning against the table.

The TARDIS library was chronologically locked; meaning that various manuscripts, books, and data existed at different times yet accessible at any time by maintaining different time fields within the same chamber. So the Black Tomes from the Vatican, the Worshipful and Ancient Law of Gallifrey, and the Sontaran Clone Banners all exist in the same library yet at different times in order not to keep them from being studied by other civilizations. This was arguably the Doctor's favorite

room in the TARDIS and his thirst for knowledge left him intimately familiar with this chamber - which is why he knew something was wrong.

He could not read the bindings of the visible books from the shelves. The size and locations of the tomes would shift as he looked away then back again. There was only darkness beyond his eye line in what should be the most well-lit room the TARDIS maintained. Conclusion: this was not the TARDIS library. Hypothesis: this was his memory of it, a subconscious projection. As the old saying went: "*when there is smoke there is fire*", and the Doctor definitely smelled smoke. It was the same putrid gray/black smog which fumed from the apparition in the control and the specter of Romana. It was here.

"Ah, yes. I suppose we are here. And you are correct of course. This isn't the TARDIS library. I think it's high time for a proper sit-down, don't you? Pardon the pun, of course. One of our favorite new concepts; the pun." came the response to the unspoken questions. The voice that rang out was a familiar voice from the Doctor's own past, often associated with teeth and curls.

Stepping into the light was the face matching the voice. A tall figure with a pronounced nose and a shock of curly brown hair matched with a knowing smile and wild eyes. A countenance as familiar to the Doctor as his own face, which of course it was at one time. This was the Doctor's fourth incarnation except for black smoke issuing from his mouth as he spoke. His attire was altogether garish and jumbled. Wrapped around the imposter's neck was an over long scarf, but brightly colored like a rainbow unlike the subdued colors he remembered. He wore a crushed red velvet jacket with a lapel on one side of a cat and the other fresh celery. The apparition wore grey checkered trousers from his early lives and leaned upon a familiar spiral cane.

"My, my. This is a first. Can't say I approve of the attire. Too many fashion statements simply become noise; I have always found. Now then: to business." the real Doctor exclaimed, swinging his feet onto the desk and crossing them in one smooth motion. "Three questions: who or what are you? What have you done with Ace, and what do you want? I find these questions could have been answered simply without assaulting my companion and intruding in my mind."

"You summoned the Slumber, and you are indeed deep enough now to have a proper chat, don't you agree?" the false Doctor said while sliding into a seat across the dark oak table.

"The Slumber? Is that what you call yourself?" the Doctor inquired.

"We have no such need for concepts of self or even names. That is a delightful trait of your people and other similar species. The Slumber is what your mind labeled the process of our communion. But I do venture you may address us as the Slumber if it makes things easier for you." it replied.

"That partially answers the first question. Now, and answer carefully since this may well determine our relationship from here on out and you don't wish me an enemy I assure you, where is Ace?" the Doctor's voice lowered and his face became deadly serious as he dropped his feet to the floor and leaned across the table.

"Ace, what a delightful and willful example of her species! Yes, yes. She is well...for now. Giving us quite a fight I'll have you know. So much harder to

assimilate her perceptions as she fights in ways we didn't know possible." the Slumber said smoke wafting from his mouth.

"Now, to address the final question: what is it you want?" the Doctor said bracing for confirmation of his suspicions.

"We, the Slumber as you so enjoy calling us, are explorers. We exist in another; I dare say altogether different plane of reality. We are embarking upon a new frontier, it's terribly exciting. We cannot exist here in the conventional sense; our own perceptions cannot even interpret your Cosmos." Smoke plumed through the toothy grin as the Slumber continued. "We project ourselves through this substrate, which you for some reason perceive as smoke, waiting for a species to explore our beacons. Then we invoke the Slumber, our bonding to assimilate your knowledge to add to our own. This is more efficient the deeper the subject sleeps. And, not to flatter you, this has been our most successful venture."

"You have certainly learned enough from me to be evasive. These species you contact, they are not assimilated- they are DIGESTED! You drag these poor souls deeper and deeper into their own subconscious until they reach a comatose state! Then you devour them for the sake of your precious insights! You are not explorers, you are murderers. Invading hapless species against their will to satisfy your curiosity! What right have you to have killed my friend!" the Doctor accused, eyes fierce in his anger. He stood upright and straightened his coat while donning his signature panama hat. "And...I'm dying...even as we speak, aren't I?"

The Slumber stood at its full height, throwing a length of rainbow-colored scarf over its shoulder as charcoal smog wafted from its mouth and nose. "I'm afraid you are. Interesting how you have so little regard for the species your people dissect in the name of science yet become ever so indignant when do a bit of cutting ourselves. Perhaps we haven't assimilated the difference yet. Oh well, are you prepared for your final rest? This last layer will be it for you I'm afraid. Take some solace that your immense knowledge will be treasured for eternity. Come along, there's a good chap. Best to not make too much of a fuss. Let's take our final moments with some dignity."

The Doctor smiled. Then he began to laugh. The Slumber became visibly unsettled by this.

"We are new to humor. Have we missed something funny?" The Slumber asked.

"Something Alexa used to say from her days in the military: 'If you can't be brave, be fast!'" The Doctor sprinted in the direction of the only door he could see. A terrifying, boiling roar came from the Slumber as the brackish smoke choked the library. The garishly dressed specter of the Fourth Doctor grabbed the heavy table and slung it effortlessly at the fleeing Doctor narrowly missing and smashing a towering rack of books sending it crashing into the next, causing a chain reaction. The Doctor was thrown to the ground just short of reaching the doorway. He spun to reach for the handle when he was pulled into the air by his throat, legs dangling. The Slumber held him effortlessly and smiled a toothy grin as smoke tendrilled from his mouth enveloping the Doctor.

"Your companion already used that trick on us. I'm afraid it won't work twice, not to brag but we are a quick study..."

The Doctor felt his limbs grow heavy once again as the gagging smoke forced itself in his nostrils and throat. He drifted away, falling seemingly endlessly from the grasp of the Slumber.

Ace screamed as the Doctor's hearts stopped. She could see the wisps of the Slumber at the edges of the control room, waiting for its chance to drag her down once again. She could tell by the thrum of the TARDIS that it was in flight in the space/time vortex to whatever destination the Doctor had programmed before the Slumber overcame them. Ace's panic and adrenaline screamed in her blood as she dragged the Doctor to the control console. She could see the noxious smoke coalesce into a humanoid of dense vapor in the corridor make its slow march towards them. She pounded compressions on the Doctors chest and screamed at him to wake up.

The Slumber, while still reforming, lurched forward towards the pair. Ace dragged the Doctor towards the console, feeling that at any moment the smoke would consume her and drag her down again while the Doctor died beside her. Step by agonizing step she dragged the Doctors dead weight until she reached the console. Wrapping the Time Lord in a flexible power cord attached to the Time Rotor as well as bracing herself; she placed her hand on the door controls and turned towards the Slumber.

"Oi, Slumber! Sorry, but there's no smoking!" she yelled as she slammed the doors open to the TARDIS in midflight. The TARDIS materialized in the center of the Time Vortex and poured out atmosphere into the void. Ace and Doctor were lifted, held fast by the power conduit against the impossibly strong gale force sucking everything out into space/time. She could not hear the screech of the Slumber, but its mouth laid open as layers of the noxious smog was pulled in long strands of vapor out into vortex. Ace screamed into the howling hurricane of atmosphere as the Doctor began to slip and her grip began to weaken on the TARDIS controls.

The Doctor was at peace. This was one of his favorite dreams; he stood at the edge of the White Cliffs of Dover, as they will one day be called. He liked to visit millions of years before the dawn of man to ensure he would not be disturbed. In this particular dream, it was a clear day and he could just make out the coastline of what would one day be France. The elusive English sun had made a rare appearance, and the sound of the water crashing 400 meters on the rocks below he found to be soothing. He knew why he was here. This is a place he used to come after a major loss in his lives; Katarina, Adric, the Brigadier; all those whose funerals he attended from afar knowing all things must end and he always carried on. But no longer, it seems. Then the Doctor smelled smoke.

“Are you ready, Doctor? We are eager to finish our consumption.” the Slumber spoke in its hollow, ethereal voice. No longer bothering with the pretense of wearing the Doctor’s memories; it stood as a vaguely humanoid mass of charcoal smoke.

“You can’t read in dreams...did you know that? This is true in almost every species. It was my first clue. I could not decipher the TARDIS readouts nor the manuscripts on the library. It’s because the analytical portion of the mind is dormant. I imagine that is why you choose to consume your victims in this way. Their defenses are down; you can digest their subconscious far easier for your precious insights. But its more than that, isn’t it? You enjoy it. It’s not exploration: its murder, make no mistake.

“Yes. We do. And you have been most difficult and the most...succulent. So, are you ready?” the hollow voice admitted.

“You know what else you must never do in a dream?” The Doctor asked.

“Do tell us Doctor” the Slumber answered.

“Die. Don’t trouble yourself, I’ll show myself out.” the Doctor tipped his panama hat as he stepped backward off the cliff.

The Doctor could hear the screaming of the Slumber as he fell until he landed on the jagged rocks.

Ace’s grip was slipping on the door controls and she refused to let the Doctor go. They would die together it seemed, flying into the vortex. The Doctor jolted awake and lurched forward out of her grip to grab the controls. The Slumber, mouth impossibly wide as it screamed, was finally flushed into the void. With agonizing effort, the Doctor and Ace slammed the controls forward and the doors closed as the seal reengaged dropping them to the floor. Ace grabbed the Doctor and hugged him too tightly. They had done it again.

“There, that should do it. I have placed warnings in all time periods with the TARDIS translation matrix to keep away from the beacons.” The Doctor announced while working at the console some time later.

“Let’s hope that’s the end of that, good riddance” Ace remarked, savoring her cup of tea.

“Perhaps, but with my knowledge they may find another way back. Or worse, the Vortex may not have killed it, if it even can be killed. It may simply have dispersed it into the time stream, and for all my calculations I have no clear answers. We can only hope and remain vigilant.” The Doctor mused while savoring his own tea.

“Where to now, Professor?” Ace smiled, ready for the next adventure despite her exhaustion.

“To bed, Ace. To sleep and perchance NOT to dream” the Doctor smiled.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS



In a far-flung corner of the galaxy lies the Primeval Ruins where a thousand cultures have come to study the mysterious signal which emanates from these bizarre structures with few real answers. When a Time Lord scientist falls ill and dies during her studies- she only has one word of warning- Slumber.

The Doctor and Ace arrive to unravel the mysterious site and the cause of the Time Lord's demise but only find more questions. What is the Slumber? Why did Rassilon long ago forbid the study of these ruins? And why can't the TARDIS translate the runic script?

The answers and mortal danger lie when the Doctor and Ace close their eyes..

This story features the Seventh Doctor as played by Sylvester McCoy

This is another in a series of original fan authored
Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project

ISBN 0-918894-28-X

