

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

The Trap



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THE END

TARDIS Control Room, 2683 AD

The void seemed endless, a vast chasm of nullity populated only by stars, tiny pinpricks of light shining away in the night.

The Doctor tapped away at a control panel on the TARDIS console in an attempt to move the camera mounted on top of the police box, but got no response. He grimaced and slapped the controls with the palm of his hand; finally the old girl replied with a few high-pitched beeps and whistles before the camera shifted. He sighed and rolled his eyes. So temperamental, the Doctor noted to himself. Add that to the list of fixes and repairs.

The TARDIS scanner, embedded in the wall and surrounded by roundels, fed back the images as he manoeuvred the camera this way and that until finally he found what he was looking for.

The space station *Kujdestar* held a geostationary orbit above the planet Njohuri. The cigar-shaped station's silver-tinged hexagonal panels twinkled as light from the systems nearby orange dwarf star reflected against it. Viewed from here, the planet almost entirely eclipsed its sun and stood out as a gigantic black mass set against the star field beyond.

Starlight highlighted the outer edge of Njohuri, making the purples and shimmering turquoise colours of the land and oceans of the world visible in one colourful arc; solar prominences looped away from the surface of the star, all bright and wispy.

Time passed. The Doctor sensed Ace standing beside him and he turned and smiled. "You're looking at the planet Njohuri, home to the Galactic Library: the greatest collection of information and data your species has ever known."

"Library, eh? Wicked," she said with mock enthusiasm.

"Oh, Ace," he chided gently.

The *Kujdestar* silently tumbled through space. "What's that?"

"An orbital defence platform, fully stocked with an array of fusion bombs, combat swarms, masers... very nasty." The Doctor flinched at the thought of humanity's innate ability to destroy itself and flipped a switch. The scanner screen faded to black.

Ace walked around the TARDIS console and stood opposite him. "What's the story?"

"We've been picking up a signal from Njohuri for quite some time. I think there's something interesting going on down there."

His companion pulled a face. "In a library? Doubt it."

"Well then," he replied, enthusiasm bubbling up, "let's find out."

Ace groaned as he worked the console, pushing buttons and flipping switches.

Njohuri, 2683 AD

The Doctor and Ace had crossed the surface of the planet quietly, the silence only broken by the crunch made as their feet connected with the purple gravel beneath them. He had used his umbrella as a walking stick and in doing so had managed to maintain a brisk pace.

But something was wrong. They should've been amidst a thriving city, surrounded by cloud scrapers and giant mushroom-shaped arcologies, not standing in a vast ocean of gravel and clumps of jagged waist-high rocks jutting awkwardly from the ground. Forget the library; an entire civilisation appeared to be missing.

"Is this it?" Ace asked.

The Doctor scanned the empty horizon. Yes, something was definitely wrong. "It would appear so."

"Where's the library?"

He removed his Panama hat and looked around. "I don't know."

She idly kicked at the gravel. "And what about the signal?"

"Signal? Ah, yes." The Doctor toyed with the ground using the tip of his umbrella. "Its point of origin is down there, deep beneath the surface."

"An underground city?"

"Perhaps."

A harsh wind brewed up and swept across the desolate terrain and so the Doctor placed his hat back on his head.

Ace hugged herself and blew the air out of her cheeks. "I'm *freezing*, Professor. Why are we standing out here when –"

Some distance away the sky crackled with energy; the hazy bronze expanse broke apart and fragmented into small iridescent tiles. The effect rippled out and consumed a vast swathe of the firmament before collapsing in on itself and vanishing without trace. It was over in seconds.

"Some kind of quantum distortion," the Doctor replied to a question Ace hadn't asked. "Absolutely fascinating."

Then he saw something else, the faintest glimmer of light in the sky, right where the quantum distortion had first bloomed. It flickered and grew in size before taking the form of a horseshoe-shape with the same iridescent quality as the tiles. And then it began to move towards them.

The curl of light appeared to lose all rigidity and started twisting itself into a new form. It raced forwards, swimming through the air in an elegant serpentine movement.

His hearts sank. "Lightform."

"What?" Ace asked, never taking her eyes off it. She shifted her stance, ready to turn and run.

"An entity from the ancient Gallifreyan myths," the Doctor replied. "Nightmare fuel for children."

The whole sky suddenly lit up like an elaborate fireworks display as more lightforms appeared and twisted their way towards them. The lead lightform was already so close and had moved at such a great speed... the Doctor knew it was pointless to try and escape. He'd have been exhilarated to discover that these impossible entities *actually did exist* after all, if it weren't for the fact that he and Ace were about to be shattered into trillions of tiny pieces of quantum-diced mass. The Doctor's eyes narrowed. There had to be another way.

Ace turned to run but he hooked her bomber jacket with the handle of his umbrella and pulled her back. "We can't outrun them."

She slapped the umbrella away and stumbled backwards, falling onto the gravel. "We have to do something!"

The Doctor stepped forwards. He was a Gallifreyan, a Lord of Time, no less. The evils from Gallifrey's ancient past should be running *from* him. And if they didn't? Well, he hoped they'd be satisfied devouring his quantum structure, and leave Ace alone. He opened his mouth to speak but the lightforms flashed through the air and were on top of him before he could say anything.

The Doctor's blood ran cold as the entities passed through him. He felt their intangible presence as they invaded his body and rooted around inside his mind. Others simply swirled about him in a swarm, flares of iridescent light before his eyes.

He was still alive. They hadn't diced him.

It could only mean one thing. He must've had his reasons and the Doctor was fine with that – after all, you had to trust your future self.

After a few moments it was all over. The lightforms darted away up into the sky and, just like the quantum distortion that had preceded them, vanished without trace.

He turned back to Ace to find her cowering on the ground, arms covering her face. "We're leaving," he declared as he offered her his hand and helped her up. "There's nothing to see here anyway. Not now."

She brushed herself down. "But we only just got here."

The Doctor knelt down and grabbed a handful of the purple gravel. He rolled it around in his hand before dropping it on the ground. A fine dust coated the palm of his hand; he stuck out his tongue and tasted it with the tip.

"Professor?"

"We Time Lords have a highly developed gustatory perception. Very useful. You can tell an awful lot by how something tastes." The Doctor wiped his hand clean on the arm of his jacket. "We'll return. About three-hundred years ago."

"Eh?"

He placed a protective arm around Ace and they strolled back to the TARDIS.

Njohuri, 2382 AD

The TARDIS rematerialized on the flat roof of a building on the outer fringes of a city. They both exited and wandered over to the edge before looking out over the sprawling metropolis below. The roads and single-storey prefab buildings that formed the core of the city were all coated in a thin layer of snow, like icing sugar sprinkled over a cake. Clumps of cloudscrapers were dotted here and there, the gigantic steel and glass monstrosities stretched up into the clouds and out

of sight. The city blocks were awkwardly broken up by rows of arcologies; the impressive habitat-in-one hyperstructures utterly dwarfed the surrounding prefabs.

"I'm *really* cold now, Professor." Ace stamped her feet and rubbed her hands together.

"Quiet. I'm concentrating." The Doctor scanned round, looking for the Galactic Library building. A light sprinkling of snow began to fall from thick, heavy clouds.

He could just make it out, half-shrouded in the grey mist, sandwiched between two cloudscrapers. The library stood amongst rings of well-maintained, orange-leafed trees. The architecture of the building was unusual, with its twisting carbofibre spires, glass walls and plastishell towers. It looked like three different artisans had designed three different medieval castles, all built with obscure materials from far away worlds, and then fused them together to form one single abstract construct. He nodded his approval. It was exactly the kind of building the Doctor himself would've designed.

Nearby, a tram made its way across the streets, engines whirring away. He spotted only a handful of pedestrians out and about. "Awfully quiet, isn't it?"

"Probably a Sunday. Or a Tuesday afternoon," Ace replied.

They both looked at each other and pulled faces at that. He never could get the hang of Tuesday afternoons.

The sky to the south-east suddenly turned a dazzling white. It quickly faded away, leaving behind a smear of silky light surrounded by the usual bronze expanse. Then the horizon lit up with half-a-dozen gaudy orange columns. One after the other they rose, just visible through the snowy haze.

"Nukes." The Doctor hissed through gritted teeth. "The other cities are being nuked."

Ace looked as if she was about to vomit. "Who would do that?"

The building shook with a low bass rumble. "Blastwave," remarked the Doctor, steadying himself. "Good job we aren't any closer."

He sensed an atmospheric disturbance and looked up. Hundreds of silver dots, perfectly arranged in a square grid, rolled overhead amongst blankets of wintry clouds. Occasionally one would disappear in a brief flash of light, breaking up the pattern. Then the formation stopped moving and the dots began to enlarge. "They're landing."

"Wh-what?" Ace sputtered.

The dots became cylinders, then cylinders covered with spikes, then cylinders covered with spikes and six little landing legs. The few people left out on the streets quickly made their way indoors. The ships descended amidst the cloudscrapers, blowing grit and debris everywhere and blasting out windows as they went. They landed across the entirety of the city block, cracking roads and pavements as their landing legs made contact with solid ground.

"We've got company," said the Doctor over the whine of engines.

Ace hauled herself up and grabbed the Doctor's arm. "Professor, let's get out of here."

"Don't worry. It's the library they want."

A landing ramp lowered from the ship nearest the library, down which came dozens of multi-legged and multi-armed beings encased within chrome armour. They walked upright and carried heavy pieces of equipment with them. Weapons, presumably. The Doctor didn't recognise the species. They approached the library, legs quickly scrabbling over the frosty concrete ground.

The air above these armoured soldiers crackled with energy, breaking apart and fragmenting into small iridescent tiles. As before, the effect rippled out and consumed a chunk of the sky before collapsing in on itself and vanishing. The beings below all stopped and raised their weapons, and for a moment nothing happened. Then the lightforms appeared. The creatures on the ground opened up; brilliant red balls of light boomed from their weapons in rapid-fire bursts. The lightforms easily evaded the incoming fire and swarmed the armoured soldiers, reducing them to fine clouds of purple dust upon contact. Some tried to run while others stood their ground and continued firing; whatever, the outcome was the same. It was a massacre, over in seconds.

Some of the ships began to take off, firing their hull-mounted energy weapons as they ascended alongside the cloudscrapers. Those that didn't disgorged more troops. The lightforms weren't fussy and devoured the landing craft just as readily.

One of the silver cylinders bobbed up in front of the Doctor and Ace and loomed over them imperiously. It hovered for a moment and then swung round. Spikes twitched, as if weapons were being readied and aimed. Ace fumbled in her backpack and suddenly hurled a canister of Nitro-9 at the ship. It bounced off the top of the craft and then exploded in a ball of orange and red flame. The explosive energy bloomed as the Doctor and Ace collapsed backwards onto the roof and covered their faces with their arms. The blastwave washed over them, the force so strong it pressed them against the roof.

They stood and looked down as the damaged ship spiralled away, leaving a thick dirty-grey plume of smoke in its wake. It crashed onto the road below and fell apart in a burst of flames and billowing smoke before half-a-dozen lightforms swooped in and finished it off.

Amidst all the carnage an AVboard swept up the road. The giant floating advertising billboard crackled with static as it moved forwards. It stopped, rotated itself to face them, and then a slightly pixelated image of the Doctor's face blinked into existence. He doffed his Panama hat, to which the actual Doctor reciprocated.

"Good day," the giant video image of the Doctor said, battle still raging all around. He had a twinkle in his eyes and a broad smile on his face. "You've watched it happen. Now make it happen." The AVboard display dissolved into random blocks of colour and returned to static.

"How odd," the Doctor said.

Someone behind them cleared their throat loudly. "Doctor?"

He turned to see a young woman kitted out in bulky charcoal-grey body armour and a helmet that covered up half of her face. Again he doffed his hat. "How do you do." He didn't recognise the bits of her he could actually see, but he'd lived such a long life that it wasn't unknown for him to forget a face. "Have we met?"

She stepped forwards, piercing blue eyes alert all the time to the surrounding chaos. "It's me, Adelina. Don't you remember me?"

The Doctor shook his head. "I'm afraid not."

"My brother sent me, in his infinite wisdom." She crossed her arms and rolled her eyes. "I'm a graduate of Titan College and he's using me as a glorified... courier! But he said he needed someone he could trust, so here I am."

"Who's your brother?" Ace asked.

Adelina scrunched up her face. "The Viceroy. He said it would all make sense, eventually. Here." She unfastened a compartment built into her armour and pulled out a small piece of paper. "He asked me to give you this." She handed it over to the Doctor.

"What is it?" Ace asked.

He unfolded it. "A letter."

"Who from?"

The Doctor read it, digested it, and then folded the letter up and put it in his pocket. "Myself." He tapped his chin with his finger. "Interesting."

"I don't understand," Ace said.

Adelina nodded. "Yes, you're not the only one." She removed her helmet, revealing short auburn hair and angular features, and gave the Doctor a hard look. "Do you really not remember me?"

He found himself gazing off into the middle distance. "Time... can work in mysterious ways."

He clicked his fingers. The lightform nearest the Doctor twisted round and then flew towards him; with one swift movement he plucked it out of the air with the handle of his umbrella, clasped it tightly with his free hand and then popped it into the pocket of his off-white coloured jacket. "Come on, Ace, we're leaving. I've seen enough."

She stared at him aghast.

The Doctor chuckled under his breath. "We can trace it back. Back to where it all started." He turned to Adelina. "Thank you. I understand now. Where would you like me to drop you off?"

THE BEGINNING

Praegressus, 2,000,000 BC

A trio of man-sized beetles slowly emerged through the undergrowth. Each beetle had eight legs and a hardened chitin exoskeleton coloured with swirls of black and yellow, along with fat abdomens that dwarfed their antennae-laden heads. They clambered over rocks and malformed plant life and through tall raspberry-red grass, little legs furiously working away.

The Doctor nodded towards the beetles and nudged Ace with his elbow. "Over there, can you see?"

"Yeah. Are they dangerous?"

"Very," he replied, grimly. "Don't worry. They don't know we're here."

Ace grinned easily at him. "Aren't you going to ask me to blow them up?"

He frowned. "It's almost as if you have no interest in natural history at all."

"Funny that."

The three beetles continued to advance through this wooded area and down a slight incline.

"What exactly are we doing here, Professor?"

"Observing evolution."

Ace pulled a face.

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "Just watch."

A fourth, lighter-coloured beetle popped out from behind a tree trunk close to the other three, paused, twitched its antennae and then scuttled away. No chance, thought the Doctor, the twin gods Mutation and Natural Selection have failed you. The darker beetles quickly turned themselves around and held their legs in an awkward position. There were three popping sounds, one quickly after the other, and then three streams of noxious, boiling hot chemical liquid spurted from the beetles. The bursts arced through the air and splattered the escaping beetle along with patches of surrounding woodland. Covered in the deadly liquid and completely helpless, it scabbled around in a circle as its exoskeleton burned away. Eventually it stopped moving, legs finally at rest. The exoskeleton had been destroyed revealing charred and blackened insect guts.

Ace held her nose with her hand. "It stinks, Professor!"

At that the three beetles rotated towards them. They both ducked further down behind the rock, hoping to stay out of sight. After a while the Doctor raised his head and peeked out in time to see the three beetles scoot away.

He and Ace wandered over to the lightly smoking insect remains and vegetation. "Careful where you stand. You don't want to get any of it on your shoes." The Doctor knelt down and poked and prodded the burnt innards with the tip of his umbrella. "Two reactant chemical compounds, stored in separate reservoirs and secreted by specialist glands..." he trailed off. "Didn't stand a chance."

Ace kicked at the beetle carcass. "Boring."

The Doctor furrowed his brow. "What would you say if I were to tell you that there's a new threat emerging, out here on the edges of Mutter's Spiral?"

"Is that where we are?"

"Yes. And this is where it all began."

"Where *what* began?"

"There's a warfleet, out there. The evolutionary descendants of these creatures took to the stars. What we just saw, back on Njohuri –"

"Spaceships piloted by giant beetles?" Ace said incredulously. "Pull the other one, Professor."

"I'm serious," he said, his tone of voice dropping. "And they threaten not only the survival of the human race, but of all other forms of life in this galaxy."

His young companion looked at him wide-eyed. "Are we going to stop them?"

"Yes." *The Doctor pulled his Long-range Time and Space Visualisation Scope – a name he'd come up with himself (and was rather pleased with) – from his jacket pocket.*

Ace examined the Doctor's homespun handheld tech closely. "What's that?"

"Oh, just something I put together out of various bits and pieces. It's amazing what you can find at the bottom of drawers and at the back of cupboards. Why, do you like it?" asked the Doctor, pleased she was taking an interest.

"Nah. Looks like you've stuck a portable TV onto half of a microwave oven, or something."

He tutted and then considered that for a moment. "Well, you're not far wrong."

The Doctor watched the screen of the device as the warfleet, represented as hundreds of blinking green dots, left its home star system. He turned the scope's dial and tapped buttons and the visualisation changed, showing him that the nearest populated planet was... Njohuri.

"What's the plan, Professor."

"He spelt it all out for me... and he was right. Well, I was right. Will be right." He had half-hoped for that not to be the case.

"Huh?"

"Time to lay the groundwork."

Galactic_Library>Research>Oral_history>Stellar_development>Marina_Tetteh

"I'd just left full-time education. This would've been the summer of '48, I think. Anyway, I'd just left college and had got accepted on a graduate scheme. Awful contract, but I wasn't picky. I

mean, we weren't exactly in Great Recession territory at the time, but things were rough if you didn't have the right connections. Hell, they still are.

So, I'd just started with Frontier Ventures in their exploratory division. Back then they were the major players in stellar development. They would identify prime development worlds, option them for settlement and then – usually – sell those options on. Occasionally they dipped their toes in settlement themselves, but that was rare. The capital returns on rapid industrialisation in the economy as it was then just weren't there.

My job was to assist the planetary science boys. They were the ones who would go through the multi-trillion terabytes of data we'd receive from every survey of an unexplored star system. Did you know that each system gets spammed with hundreds of probes and satellites and landers and drones? It costs so much to get this equipment in system that they figure every credit has to count; they leave nothing to chance and survey every inch of every planet, moon and rock. Unless there's something worth seeing – which wasn't very often – they'd never go back, you see. Anyway, back then I was doing some of the number crunching for those guys. Usually pretty dull stuff, but just occasionally....

One day I got chatting to one of the boys from finance. His girlfriend was way up in logistics. I mean, close to head honcho. Maybe assistant head honcho. Or assistant *to* the head honcho. Apparently, there'd been cutbacks. Little trims off the hardware budget. Y'know, times were tough. High-end parts for the unmanned interstellar freighters – the things they used to get all that survey equipment into each star system – were being replaced with cheaper off-the-shelf alternatives. This went for the survey equipment, too. Inevitably, hardware failure rates went up. Drones malfunctioned, landers crashed... Sometimes, those interstellar freighters never came back. This was all on the down low, obviously.

He told me about this system, out in the galactic boondocks. Four planets orbiting a yellow dwarf, each planet having just the right atmospheric mix for human settlement. No domes would be needed and very little tweaking of the air required. They'd got themselves pretty hyped about it. The team I was on hadn't worked that system, unfortunately. For us it was usually just dead rocks.

But there was a problem. This system was already inhabited by a spacefaring species. This was real Bug Eyed Monsters stuff: intelligent insects! Well, intelligent to a point. But they had been able to colonise the other worlds in their solar system. That wasn't all. These insects were incredibly aggressive. The second wave of probes picked up multiple nuclear detonations. They were having their own dirty war and nuking the hell out of each other, right there and then! The survey was about two-thirds of the way through before these BEMs turned their guns on our hardware. Obviously, at that point, the survey was over and everybody calmed down. No one was going to be getting rich off of these planets. The problem was, they lost contact with the interstellar freighter, too. You remember I said sometimes those things never came back? Well, that's what happened here. Each freighter was fitted with an automatic self-detonation mechanism in case contact was lost. The thinking was, we don't want any random xenos getting their claws on interstellar travel technology. Well, this guy told me that as a way to cut costs, the self-detonation system was removed from all vessels coming out of the shipyards. Can you believe that!

So, think about this. Somewhere out there is a highly aggressive xeno species, armed to the teeth with nukes and god knows what else, and in possession of an interstellar freighter. If these guys mastered the concept of reverse engineering...

Well, it doesn't bear thinking about, does it?"

Njohuri, 2381 AD

The Doctor and Ace stepped out of the TARDIS to be greeted by the sight of tens of heavily armed and armoured security personnel all pointing big, bulky weaponry at them. If the Doctor were to be entirely honest, he'd have to admit this was a fairly standard greeting most places he travelled.

"Plasma rifles," said the Doctor.

"What?" Ace replied. Unsurprisingly, she sounded rather distracted.

"Their guns. They're pointing plasma rifles at us. Oh, and I see a few kinetic autoguns and beamers, too. They have all the firepower required to incinerate us before blasting apart the remains into hundreds of tiny pieces."

The troops all exchanged looks with one another.

"Are you trying to make me feel better?" Ace asked.

They were standing in a brightly-lit hall with a high ceiling embellished with dazzling crystal chandeliers. Beyond that, the Doctor couldn't see anything due to the mass of armoured men and women standing around them. Nevertheless, he doffed his Panama hat.

"Don't move!" called out one of the guards. The rest all stiffened and straightened their guns.

"How do you do. My name's the Doctor, and this is my young friend, Ace."

"Shut up! And hands where I can see them!"

Ace's hands shot up.

"We're here for the Viceroy. Is he home?"

"I said shut up!"

The Doctor sighed. "Hired goons always make such boring conversationalists."

"Hands up!"

Ace nudged him in the side and the Doctor reluctantly raised his hands above his head. "You're not going to let us see the Viceroy, are you?"

The guard's eyes narrowed. "No."

The Doctor jumped backwards into the TARDIS, then reached forwards and grabbed Ace before hauling her back inside.

"Fire!" The security guards opened up. Ace closed her eyes as brilliant flashes of light and beams of weaponised energy splashed against the TARDIS Defence Force Field.

The Doctor laughed before closing the TARDIS doors and working the console. This simply wouldn't do; he had to find a connection, a way in. A temporal link with the Galactic Library's datastore smartware was quickly established and the Doctor worked his way through entries related to Viceroy Ardian Kapllani of the Extrasolar House of Zogu: political legacy, honours and awards, assassination attempts, ancestry and the March 3 attacks. He sensed Ace peering over his shoulder at the graphical display built into the console.

"March 3 attacks?"

“Yes,” the Doctor replied. “I think we’ve found our way in.” He opened up the entry and a wall of text rolled up the screen.

“Revolutionary Front,” she said, reading from the display. “They sound like a bunch of fascist... *bilgebags*.”

“Very colourful. And accurate.”

“So what are we going to do?”

He turned to Ace. “How many canisters of Nitro-9 have you got left?”

Earth, 2352 AD

Magic tricks. He’d asked for magic tricks. The Doctor thought a boy in his early teens would’ve been a bit old for that, but Ardian was quite insistent.

Perhaps it was a comfort thing. After all the child had been through tonight, it was understandable.

So he obliged and pulled rabbits from hats, produced coins from behind ears and performed an endless number of card tricks.

He’d seen what would happen if he didn’t do this, what would happen if no connection was made. He’d tried his best to prove his future self wrong, but, frankly, he didn’t much fancy getting shot through the chest with a high-powered plasma rifle. So, here he was, acting the clown. He thought he was above this sort of thing now. Well, evidently not. It almost disturbed him how easy it was for him to slip back into the role.

Magic show over, the pyjama-clad boy got up from the creaking leather couch and made his way over to the glass wall of the conservatory. A crackle of lightning illuminated the side of his face as sheets of angry rain began to fall. The Doctor stood beside him.

“They were going to send me to the academy, soon. Io dome. If you want to leave Sol, that’s the place to be.”

The Doctor turned to him. “And you want to leave Sol?”

“Yes, Doctor!” Ardian’s red raw eyes lit up. “I’ve seen the vids. There’s dozens of untouched worlds out there... we don’t have to repeat the mistakes of the past. We can create something new.” The boy sniffed and tears began streaming down his face again. “There’s not much keeping me here now, anyway.” He rubbed at his eyes. “Baby Adelina is with Granny on Titan. And after what happened tonight... no, Doctor, there’s nothing for me here now.”

He didn’t seem to talk like a normal teenager, although the Doctor reasoned that was probably because he *wasn’t* a normal teenager, what with being one of the privileged few; not that the Doctor knew much about adolescent humans. And anyway, given all that he’d been through tonight, his strange behaviour was hardly a surprise.

The night sky lit up with dozens of blue flashing lights.

“It’s time,” said the Doctor.

“Time?”

“Time for me to go. They’ll take care of you,” he said, nodding towards the oncoming lights.

“Will I see you again, Doctor?”

“Once more, many years from now. I just need you to do one thing for me.”

“You saved my life. Anything.”

“Remember me.”

The Doctor left. He walked back through the mansion, over shattered glass and past bloodied corpses wrapped in tight body armour. His stomach felt heavy and his chest tightened. The manipulations, the deaths; perhaps this is how it had to be from now on.

Some rooms and corridors had been destroyed so severely they'd been reduced to blackened and smoking ruins. Well, that's Nitro-9 for you.

Ace was waiting for him by the TARDIS door. They acknowledged each other with a quick look before entering the old police box.

Galactic_Library>General>Text>Society_and_Politics>March_3_attacks

The March 3 attacks (also referred to as March 3, March 3rd or 3/3)[1] were a series of five co-ordinated shooting and bombing terrorist attacks launched by the far-right terrorist group Revolutionary Front upon the Outer Metropolitan Zone in Nord-Norge Region on Thursday, March 3, 2352.

30 Revolutionary Front terrorists infiltrated the Nord-Norge Region security zone using stolen and hacked IDchips.[2][3] Once inside they divided into groups of six and targeted: the Western Palace and Tower hotel, Gdansk Cafe, Central Hospital, the Greenleaves Estate (a high-wealth residential area), and the Metro Holocinema.[4]

On the morning March 4, Nord-Norge Region's Internal Security Division (IS9) conducted Operation Red Hurricane to flush out the remaining attackers; it resulted in the deaths of all but two of the attackers and ended all fighting.[5]

The attacks, which drew widespread galactic condemnation,[6] killed 287 people and wounded at least 498.[7]

Two unidentified individuals are widely believed to have thwarted the attack on the Greenleaves Estate. Eyewitness accounts state the terrorists attacking Greenleaves Estate first surrounded and then broke into a mansion. Gunfire was heard and then three loud explosions in quick succession.[8] IS9 Chief Magne Hoseth asserted that when his troops arrived, all of the terrorist attackers were dead, and that eyewitnesses reported that one man and one woman were seen in the grounds of the mansion.[9]

Valentin Adler, one of the two attackers captured alive, cited the rise of solar corporations and loss of national sovereignty as motives for the attacks.[10]

Njohuri, 2381 AD

The Doctor followed the path of the fast-moving watercourse as it fell away down a series of short, sharp waterfalls, before twisting its way further through the jagged landscape below. It flowed past spires of blue-grey rock formations that poked up from the ground, looking like ancient sculptures crafted by a long-lost civilisation. Small patches of sunlight broke through a

cloud heavy sky here and there, illuminating the scene in a weird natural light show of shimmering amber and bronze phosphorescent haze. Off in the distance and the planet's first cloudscrapers stood tall, gleaming towers of steel and glass that disappeared up into the clouds.

Ace was elsewhere, no doubt enjoying the sights and sounds Njohuri and its burgeoning cities had to offer. She'd grown up so much since they'd first met on Iceworld.

"You've got to love Njohuri and her atmospheric," said Viceroy Kapllani. He was a stocky man approaching his later years, wore a finely tailored navy-blue three-piece suit and had a head of slicked back grey hair. In short, he looked like a typical politician, which was exactly the type of person the Doctor required. He'd changed a lot since they'd last met.

"Quite a sight," the Time Lord lied. The grey sky remained full of pollutants from nearby heavy industry, with clouds tinged that familiar awful vomit-orange, and he knew there were far prettier vistas to be had elsewhere in Mutter's Spiral, but on Njohuri this was about as good as it got. Besides, it would do no good to insult Kapllani's beloved home. He needed him.

"My friend, it's been too long."

"Time got away from me," the Doctor said, which rather amused him.

Kapllani raised an eyebrow. "You wanted to talk?"

The Doctor could barely hear him over the roar of the turquoise-hued water as it tumbled away across the desolate terrain. "Yes."

They peered out over the turmoil beneath them. The Viceroy's retinue of bodyguards, all suited up in full-body combat armour and cradling various hi-tech killing tools, remained ever watchful.

The Doctor looked up at Kapllani and fixed him with a hard stare. "What would you say if I told you an aggressive alien warfleet was on its way to this system?"

The Viceroy suddenly went pale. "BEMs?"

"The very worst kind." The Doctor dropped the glare and smiled. "But I can help you."

"How?"

"Usually they would ignore a planet like this and move straight for the strategic core."

Kapllani stiffened. "You mean Sol?"

"Yes. But you're going to entice them here instead."

"A trap?"

"The perfect trap. I'll arm you. I'll upgrade your orbital defence platform and restock it with the galaxy's finest weaponry. They won't know what hit them."

The colour slowly returned to Kapllani's face and his demeanour loosened. "How?"

"With a library. But not just any library. You need to build the greatest repository of information the galaxy has ever seen. Knowledge is power."

"And they'll come?"

The Doctor nodded.

"But a library?"

"They won't be able to resist."

"Good," spat Kapllani. "Let the xeno bastards burn." He placed one foot on a nearby rock and almost seemed to strike a pose. "I'll be a hero."

The Doctor sniffed the air. It was all quite pathetic, really. "Yes. I suppose you will. And we'll build civil defence bunkers, vast subterranean habitats in which the people can live, safely, while the battle rages." A thought struck him. "Underground cities, if you will."

Viceroy Kapllani placed both his hands on the Doctor's shoulders. "You've already done so much for me... and now this. How can I ever repay you?"

The Doctor batted that away with his hand.

"Will the *Kujdestar* be enough?" the Viceroy asked.

The Doctor rooted around inside the pockets of his jacket and found, in order: a silk handkerchief, a box of matches, a pair of spectacles, a deck of playing cards, a carefully folded letter, a pink toothbrush and two crumpled UNIT passes. "Where are you," he said under his breath, "I know you're in here."

Suddenly he could feel the lightform writhing around against the back of his hand. His skin tingled and his pulse quickened. The Doctor grabbed the snake-like quantum entity and hurled it up into the air.

Immediately the Viceroy's bodyguards raised their weapons and levelled them at the lightform. Their weaponry powered up with a series of ominous humming noises. The entity simply circled a few dozen feet above the ground.

The Viceroy cowered and the Doctor threw up his hands. "It won't harm you."

"What is it?"

"The weapon that will win you the battle. It'll multiply, and when required, thousands of them will swarm the skies and destroy the enemy warships. How does that sound?"

Kapllani nodded dumbly. "Yes."

"Now then," said the Doctor. He pulled the letter from his pocket. "Where do you keep your AVboards? And isn't it about time you introduced me to that sister of yours?"

"Sure. But you're hardly her type."

The Doctor frowned as the Viceroy guffawed.

TARDIS Control Room, Somewhere in the Space-Time Vortex

The Doctor struggled with the calculations. All he'd wanted to do was recharge the Emergency Storage Cells using the energy emitted by a star going supernova. It should've been a simple transcendental equation, but he couldn't do it. The symbols and numbers and letters all collapsed into a single line of jumbled up gibberish.

He slowly rubbed his temples with his fingers. It seemed an effort these days to do even the simplest of things.

The Doctor sensed the Cloister Bell would soon be sounding. Sometimes, a Time Lord just knew. But he had one final thing to do before then, one last planet to revisit.

He had to lay the bait.

Njohuri, 2500 AD

The TARDIS hurtled down through the thermosphere, passing within layers of ultraviolet radiation, then further through the tiny crystals of water ice that formed the noctilucent clouds. Charged particles originating within the magnetosphere were being pulled into the atmosphere

by Njohuri 's magnetic field. They collided with each other, causing the dark sky to glow with quiet arcs of shimmering red and green in a spectacular aurora light show.

A continent rolled away slowly into the dawn. The phosphorescent new light glittered across a turbulent, crashing sea of turquoise that enveloped the land from three sides.

The TARDIS slowed as it approached solid ground. It stopped, aligned itself with a wide open service tunnel, and slipped inside.

The Doctor turned away from the scanner screen and set the TARDIS down.

He stepped out of the old police box into an underground tunnel of carbofibre panelling and strip lights that flickered on and off in random bursts. Narrow metal tracks ran beneath his feet, part of a transportation system that had been gouged out of the metamorphic rock of Njohuri's crust, connecting the various subterranean habitats to one another.

He'd watched it being built. Vast underground cities, each housing three quarters of a million people. And the library. He could see it in his mind's eye standing majestically as the snow fell.

He'd had a plan, a trap. And it had worked. What's more, human casualties had been non-existent. Well, nearly. A few volunteers had to stay above ground to maintain the illusion. Sure, Njohuri's surface cities had been destroyed in the fighting, and the ruins then consumed by ravenous lightforms and reduced to purple gravel, but that was a price worth paying for the survival of all other life in the galaxy. He wrestled with that for a moment. Was it a price worth paying? The deaths, the blood, the destruction... it was all on him. Back then, it all seemed so clear – but those days were long gone.

The colonists hadn't stuck around for very long after that, unsurprisingly. They'd quickly left in their starships.

It struck him suddenly, the realisation that he'd been trapped in a paradox of his own making, a trap he'd never been able to free himself from. The road was mapped and no deviations were possible.

But why had he come here in the first place? The past had long since dissolved into fragments, momentary flashes viewed through the fog and haze of time. He often struggled with it.

There had been a signal. Oh, yes – he was here to lay the bait.

The Doctor pulled the old SOS transmitter – long ago salvaged from the wreck of an interstellar freighter – from his jacket pocket. He held the small grey box with the blinking red and amber lights tightly and then hesitated. Carefully he pushed the transmitter against the wall; the grey box's little attachment legs extended and clung to the carbofibre panelling. The Doctor took one final look round before shuffling back to the TARDIS.



It's The planet Njohuri is home to the Galactic Library, the greatest collection of information and data mankind has ever known.

The TARDIS receives a signal from the planet, so the Doctor and Ace set out to investigate. But something is wrong.

Instead of the thriving city they expect to find, the surface of Njohuri is a desolate wasteland.

For the Doctor and Ace, an adventure across space and time awaits.

This story features the Seventh Doctor and Ace

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