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PROJECT

BLACK MAGIC



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Black Magic
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Palm Trees, sandy soil. The faint smell of poverty stricken cooking wafting across the lifeless breeze. In the distance two villagers made their way down a dirt track on a single battered bicycle. The Doctor stood at the door of the TARDIS thoughtfully adjusting his sunglasses. Haiti, 1965. A place where Christianity was uneasily vying with voodoo for the simple people's souls. A place where, according to the TARDIS scanners, psychic energy was hovering around 7.9 on the Vantala scale - enough to tear Haiti and much of the Caribbean to shreds for centuries in either direction. The kind of power needed to generate that order of disturbance wasn't usually associated with mid-level subsistence farming. Tamara finally appeared at the door, clad in a light cotton dress - psychic energy or not, she had decided a nice, sunny Caribbean island was just the spot for an overdue sunbathing holiday. She stood in the doorway, scrounging through her raffia shoulder-bag, checking that she had all the necessary bits and pieces for a day at the beach. Suddenly she snapped her head up, concentrating.

"Can you hear that, Doctor?"

The Doctor was listening too, playing with his sunglasses as the high-pitched whine built up in the distance.

"Yes, it's like electricity. High-voltage electricity lines, but it's far too loud, and where is it coming from?"

Tamara eyed their surroundings cynically. The mounds of rubble looked as though someone had been halfway through making a cement village when they changed their mind and bulldozed the lot. No sign of anything more high-tech than a handheld axe. The humming noise abruptly stopped, leaving deafening silence.

"Well, whatever it is, it's stopped. I'm sure it wasn't important, Doctor, or someone else would have noticed, wouldn't they? Are you coming to the beach?"

The Doctor shook his head, still listening hard and scanning the horizon for the source of the noise.

"Well, suit yourself. I'll meet you back at the TARDIS in a few hours, OK?" Tamara strolled off towards the beach as the Doctor locked the TARDIS and set off towards a small town crouching on the horizon, his mind almost fully occupied with psychic energy, humming noises and their possible causes. Something here wasn't adding up.

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The Doctor's mind was so occupied that he didn't hear a woman's screams of terror a few moments later. Tamara, strolling along the beach, did. Suddenly in surveillance mode, she dumped her raffia bag and raced silently towards an outcrop of black volcanic rock in the direction of the scream, cursing herself for not listening to the Doctor - of course something was wrong, there was always something wrong. She reached the rocks and stomach-dived onto the sand. On the other side of the rocks she could smell fire, and hear people chanting in a language that the TARDIS telepathic circuits could not, or would not, translate. Working her way around to the seaward edge of the rocks, she risked a glance around the side, near ground level - she still had enough spy skills not to stick her head straight up over the top, where anyone looking in her general direction would see the skyline change. From her vantage point she could see a group of Haitians standing in a wobbly circle, with someone in the center. Okay, voodoo, nothing Tamara Scott couldn't handle. Near the edge of the sand was the most ancient, battered car Tamara had ever seen - something with curves, which had probably once been blue under the heavy layer of rust. Tamara thought about a powder-blue Jaguar, which would be about 6 months old by now, and realised for the first time how alien Earth could be.

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Tamara's attention was snapped suddenly back to the circle - an old man was advancing towards the young woman in the center of the circle, holding some kind of ceremonial knife. Does voodoo include human sacrifice??? Tamara remembered the Doctor's lectures about not changing history, especially before 1963. She wondered whether to leave them to it, or jump out, get chopped up neatly if she was right about the human sacrifice thing, or make a fool of herself if she was mistaken. She left them to it. She winced and turned away as the blade sliced through the woman's throat.

After she covered over the hole she'd dug in the sand just in time to be sick, Tamara turned back to the sacrifice with a morbid fascination. The Haitians were sitting in a tight circle around the body, chanting. Suddenly the woman in the center - the dead woman - sat up and screamed, thrashed around on the sand before coming to rest lying on her side, gasping for breath but undoubtedly alive. Tamara turned away. Too freaky.

Hours later. Whatever the humming sound had been, it had stopped, and the Doctor couldn't find the source, or even anyone else who had heard it. He sat on a log by the side of the road, mentally reviewing the scant information he had gleaned from the villagers. Despite his current incarnation's naturally amicable nature, it had taken all of his tact and more than a little bribery to gain the trust of the suspicious Haitians. Those who had spoken to him had given garbled reports of friends or loved ones disappearing, being murdered, or being swept up in a bizarre new wave of voodoo sweeping the already tormented island. The Doctor thought of one old woman, whose son had vanished after witnessing one of the rituals of this new voodoo. She had heard him rising in the night, screaming of faceless monsters, driven almost mad by the things he had seen. Eventually she had found him in the small temple which no longer

officially existed, begging Baron Samedi, the spirit of the dead, to come and take him away. The next night he vanished.

In a ruined hovel on the outskirts of the town, the rumours were circulating. Old Babeta had come to Ali with tales of a strange man, a white man, wanting to know about the new ways. He had appeared, she said, at her doorway, with the voodoo night sky itself upon his chest in the middle of the middle of the Christian day, the constellations rearranging themselves as her eyes followed. Ali gazed up from the battered bicycle he was repairing, nodding and smiling. After all, wasn't this old, mad Babeta? Who had suffered from midnight madness even before the new ways had surfaced? Whose own son had been taken by the New Gods, or Baron Samedi, or the Ton Ton M'acoute.

Ali had little faith in anything Babeta told him, but was still intrigued by this mysterious white man who seemed to care about their Ways. He thought about his family, father and mother and sister. He remembered his father had returned shaken to their home, claiming to have seen a creature beyond imagination, conjured up by worshippers of the New Ways. He thought of his sister's disbelief and his mother's concern. He remembered the night the creature had visited them, a gentle whispering shape like the hand of Samedi himself. He had peered out the window to see a vague darkness approaching the house, and had fled in terror. Of all his family, only he had not vanished. Gathering away his tools, he left Babeta to her ramblings and set off towards the town.

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Tamara scrambled around to the other side of the rocks as the Haitians disbanded their ceremony obviously over. Most of them just strolled away innocently towards the village, but two - the old throat cutting man and the obviously not really dead after all woman - took off in the ancient car as though it was a late model limo. They were obviously important in some way, and Tamara decided that resurrection trick needed investigating. She sneaked up behind the car - fairly easy, if it ever had rear vision mirrors, they were long gone - and watched as it laboured away. She followed.

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As Ali trudged over another rise in the road, he saw the man Babeta had been talking about. He almost fitted Babeta's description, but Ali could see even from this distance that the 'night sky' was only a piece of printed cloth, with small stars all lined up like a like a.....

The Doctor rose as he saw the young Haitian approach. About seventeen, the Doctor guessed, slightly malnourished and more than slightly unloved. He sighed - he had seen too many young people in this condition - and took off his sunglasses.

As the man took off his funny Western-style glasses, Ali saw his eyes clearly for the first time. They were strange and deep, like..... like.....

Ali suddenly realised the man was scrutinising him as closely as he was the man.

"Hello."

Ali started as if a spirit had spoken to him.

The Doctor wasn't all that surprised when the boy jumped at the sound of his voice - apparently the few visitors to the island kept their contact with the locals to a minimum. When the boy seemed suitably recovered, the Doctor tried again.

"Hello."

"Uh... Hi." Ali's pulse was racing - talking to strangers was becoming so dangerous, and this strange man could be some new kind of Ton Ton M'acoute for all Ali knew.

"I'm doing a little research into the local customs."

"You went to see Babeta, huh?" Ali's heart was still pounding, but he was starting to trust this strange white man with his strange eyes and strange manner.

"You went to see Babeta - the old woman. Her son was... Her son disappeared."

"Yes. I'm the Doctor. I make things better." The Doctor extended his hand, and Ali shook it tentatively, as if it could sprout tentacles at any moment.

"I'm Ali. I hear you want..." Ali could feel salt behind his eyes as he poured out his story.

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The car pulled up beside a hut on the outskirts of the village - one the Doctor would have recognised. The old man led the woman up to the door and called inside.

"Babeta! Come! We have new host to prepare."

"Luke - where have you been? You promised to tell me before our next recruitment." Tamara, crouched in an unoriginal but adequate hiding place behind the car felt a tinge of mild revulsion in the proprietarily way Babeta stroked the young woman's cheek. The bizarre trio entered the hut, Tamara sneaking around the car until she could watch them through the doorless entryway. The three sat around a low table, handling objects Tamara couldn't make out, nor would she been able to make sense of if she had. Luke threw his head back, a low humming groan escaping from his throat. Babeta copied his growl a second later. The young woman started from one to the other in astonishment, a look of terror and realisation on her face. Then her whole expression changed, her head lolled back and she, too, growled.

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Inside the temple, the air was thick and cool. At night, flaming torches would illuminate the cave, casting flickering lamplight and smoky haze over the lovingly rechalked symbols on the walls and floor. Now, in daylight, the cave was abandoned as the populace turned to their daytime religion, leaving the voodoo spirits well alone. The sunlight didn't reach the back of the cave, and the Doctor had to squint to make out the outlines of the carved statues and talismans of Haiti's night time religion.

"This is where your father saw the monster?"

Ali nodded. He had been initially amazed at the Doctor's ready acceptance of his seemingly impossible tale, but the Doctor was so serious and sincere that Ali never doubted him for a second.

"He said it appeared over there." Ali gestured towards the darkest corner of the cave, "and it came over..." Ali trailed off as he realised the Doctor was no longer listening, but staring intently into the darkest corner of the temple, in the general direction of Ali's gesture.

"Are you listening? Look, it came... Doctor?" Ali followed the Doctor's gaze, peering into the darkness. He whispered,

"I can't see anything, Doctor."

"Mmm", the Doctor mumbled pensively. He suddenly indicated fiercely towards a section of the wall in the corner. "Look!"

Ali gaped. A circular section seemed to have been neatly removed from the wall. It had been replaced by a swirling, opalescent mass, an ever-changing rainbow of emerald swirl on water. When Ali finally spoke, there was awe in his voice.

"What is it?"

The Doctor didn't reply. He had cautiously approached the corner, and was now humming and flapping around a small metallic device wedged behind one of the newer statues.

"What is it?"

"This," the Doctor waved at the device, "is controlling that," he indicated the heaving vortex in the corner, "which is a time link. The link allows free travel between two points otherwise divorced in time and space, in theory anyway. In practice, it can be a particularly nasty piece of crude technology."

The Doctor stopped for breath, and finally succeeded in freeing the control unit. To Ali it looked ridiculously small, no bigger than a cigarette packet. The Doctor held it aloft, and tutted to himself, or the device,

"Well, well, well - what are we going to do with you?"

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Tamara kept watching the growling trio, sneaking closer to the doorway under the dubious cover of bushes as her prey seemed to enter a deep trance. By the time Tamara reappeared from behind a misplaced oleander the three Haitians were lying slumped on the floor, silent, like puppets with their strings cut. Tamara decided she was sick of sneaking around - this was supposed to be a damn holiday - and walked in as though she owned the hut. Luke snapped upright, eyes wide and alert. He stared at the woman who had just trespassed on his territory. He noticed her well made Western clothing and confident bearing, her 'official' posture, and quickly made assumptions.

"Ton Ton! Babeta, Kiata, get up! The Ton Ton M'acoute is come for us!"

Before she could blurt out her sad cover story about being a lost tourist, Tamara collapsed under three angry Haitians.

* * * * *

Three damn hours. Being mobbed and tied up by three people who couldn't decide whether they were dead or alive was bad enough, but being locked in a room full of useless looking bits of anti-technology for three hours while her jailers practiced their growling, that was more than

Tamara was prepared to stand. She had soon worked her way out of her bonds, but the walls of this inner room were made of a plastic-like, and as far as she could tell, unbreakable substance that shouldn't really exist in 1965.

Tamara had messed around with a few of the bits and pieces, initially being careful in case she pressed some alien button and blew the sun up, or whatever it was this week. Now she was bored, hungry and wanted out, and was investigating the possible door-breaking capabilities of the stuff lying around. She had tried a brass stick-thing with some LED's at one end, which did nothing she could see besides flash and beep like a kid's toy. An arrangement of cast-iron coils and levers like a prototype difference engine clanked, before sending out an improbable spray of sparks. Tamara couldn't work out how it did that, and couldn't make it do it again. A sudden humming noise, like an ancient machine warming up, caught her attention. She turned, half expecting the grisly trio to come walking through a wall. It turned out to be something Tamara had assumed was a mirror. Traveling with the Doctor should have taught her that a flat glass panel in a frame which you saw your reflection in wasn't necessarily a mirror. A bulb was flashing at the bottom of the frame, beside a round thing curiously like an old radio tuning knob. Playing devil's advocate, Tamara turned the knob, staring as she picked up a range of different, full colour video images from around the village. This was highly advanced closed-circuit technology, even if it was disguised as a mirror. She racked her brain - colour television was new and expensive, so what were a bizarre set of Haitian spies doing with the mother of all TV sets? Tamara twisted the knob again, and managed to pick up faint, tinny sound over the image of people, mainly men, running from hut to hut, gathering - weapons? Why was nothing ever simple?

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Rumours spread like wildfire though the small town. Soon the word was spreading that Ali, the boy who had suspiciously escaped when the rest of his family had disappeared, had taken a Westerner - someone who didn't, couldn't, understand their Ways - down to the temple. The usually peaceful people were already being affected by the scent of tension in the air. Where they may, previously, have let this transgression go unpunished - Ali was always needed for his mechanical skills - now it simply couldn't be allowed. Within minutes a group of men, teeth sharpened in true warrior style, were setting out for the temple armed with decommissioned rifles, axes, spears, and blood-red hatred, the most dangerous weapon of all.

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"This thing is, like, a doorway between here and somewhere else, right?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

The Doctor sighed melodramatically, and dusted off his trousers. Then he snapped his attention back to Ali, and flashed him a sudden grin.

"I was afraid you were going to ask that."

Ali's jaw dropped to near floor level. "You mean you don't know?" Ali spluttered - the Doctor was supposed to know everything, wasn't he?

"There's not a sign, a label on it? some way of telling where it goes?"

The Doctor shook his head, gazing at the control unit.

"One of the nastier parts of these things is that you don't actually know where you're going until you get there, by which time it's too late if you happen to arrive inside an erupting volcano, or in deep space." The Doctor turned the unit over in his hands thoughtfully.

"Space?" Ali couldn't hide the incredulity in his voice, "like, up in rockets, like the Americans?"

"Hmm", the Doctor rumbled. "Shh!" He was suddenly alert, ears pricked, eyes darting around.

"Can you hear that?"

Ali slowly met the Doctor's gaze. "Voices."

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The only entrance to the temple was a long, narrow corridor of natural volcanic rock. The attacking hordes shoved and cursed their way onwards, blindly, poking each other with weapons - accidentally or on purpose - and generally getting psyched up for the kill.

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Millions of miles away, the darkness fed.

The men burst into the temple, waving makeshift weapons and chanting curses ancient and modern. Ali stared at them, but anger and passion had twisted his friends' faces until they were barely recognisable. He dragged his attention back to the Doctor, who was closely examining the link.

"Doctor! They're going to kill us!"

"Hmm? Oh, I very much doubt that."

Ali couldn't understand the Doctor's calm confidence, until he realised that he was edging closer and closer to the link. As the first of the Haitians fell upon them, the Doctor calmly stepped in.

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In the hut, Tamara heard a strangulated gasping from the next room. The 'mirror' fizzed plaintively, its screen fading into static before going dark. The door swung open. As Tamara headed for the door, she heard the Doctor's electrical humming noise echoing through the village.

Ali swung round. Behind him the link rippled hungrily, a tiny Doctor-shaped speck rapidly vanishing into the swirling emerald mass. Before him his friends were preparing to kill him. Ali swallowed hard and made his choice - possible death or certain death? He dived, terrified, into the link.

There was another gasp from the floor. Tamara poked her head cautiously around the door, and then stepped out quickly, remembering how tightly the door shut last time - she didn't come all this way to get neatly bisected by a door. There was no more sound from Luke, Babeta and their friend on the floor. They looked even more like puppets now, or dolls. Dolls with flat batteries...

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"Wormholes are interesting things, so I've heard."

Ali couldn't believe it when he fell against the Doctor, who seemed to be taking things in his stride considerably better than Ali. All around them the walls of the link swirled and churned. The light was as if seen through green cellophane, except here the light was tinted by the emerald walls. The Doctor knew there could be no light here, in this twisted section of space time; he knew this was no more than their minds trying to make sense of the scrambled messages being sent to their brains. But it was still beautiful. Ali realised that the 'walls' were closing in, the thin, gelatinous membranes pressing against them. Ahead he saw another circular area, swirling more violently than the rest of the link, which was drawing him and the Doctor nearer. There was a sudden blur of light and noise, before the Doctor and Ali found themselves in a bare concrete bunker, the grey monotony broken only by the swirling entrance to the link, through which they had just fallen. The Doctor had landed, catlike, on his feet and was now gazing around with the air of a tourist on a mystery tour. Ali, who found himself sprawling face-down on the cold concrete floor, clambered painfully to his feet and stared around.

"Doctor, where are we?"

The Doctor looked around and shrugged. From down the corridor there came the sound of hurried footsteps.

"I suspect we're about to find out."

The security system lit up like a Christmas tree when it detected the unauthorised use of the link. In second guards had been formed and dispatched to investigate, the security system watching dispassionately through their eyes.

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The Doctor grinned at the approaching guards, and then glanced to where Ali was pressed against the wall in panic, eyes like saucers. As the Doctor calmly chatted to the guards who were trying, with some bewilderment, to arrest him, Ali felt a cold sensation in his stomach. He realised he was trapped in a concrete hole with a madman.

"Come along, Ali." The Doctor seemed inordinately cheerful for someone who had just been arrested by alien guards. He looked closely at Ali, then muttered between his teeth,

"Don't worry Ali, I've not gone mad. We don't know where we are, or what's going on. The easiest way to find out is to be arrested and have everything explained to us."

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Tamara took a last look at the three bodies before, deciding as fishy as this was; she'd go somewhere else to look for clues. Someplace where huts were huts and mirrors were mirrors. She was supposed to have met the Doctor back at the TARDIS hours ago, and she doubted he would hang around waiting for her - she'd have to mingle until she found him. Tamara wondered for the first time how well the Doctor really understood these exotic alien races he spoke of so easily. He was in his element everywhere, but wherever he went, disaster and chaos seemed to follow. Tamara wondered whether the Doctor would be able to live a work/eat/sleep/work/eat/sleep 'normal' life, or whether this constant war zone habitation was addictive, a kind of deadly designer drug. She filed the thought away for future consideration and left in a hurry.

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The chamber was as bare and empty as all the other rooms and corridors had been. Ceiling, walls and floor were all made from a single piece of seamless concrete. The Doctor sat cross-legged in the middle of the floor, pondering a vague black shape that rippled around the ceiling. The guards here were different from those who had arrested him - they seemed to be little more than extensions of the shapes will, and stood frozen around the walls, as if forgotten. The Doctor guessed that the nonexistent decor was to give the place an air of Spartan elegance. Unfortunately the overall effect was like sitting on the bottom of a Cornflakes box.

"You are known to us, Doctor." The shape's voice didn't seem to come from any particular part of the room, but it was so voice-like that it took the Doctor a while to realise that it was communicating telepathically. He quickly shut the parts of his mind he didn't want strangers nosing about in, and tried to learn something about this place, this shape.

"You would seem to have the advantage over me, then."

"You don't know of us, Timelord?" There was a hint of mockery in the voice. "We are the Gisb." The finality of the statement made any further questioning seem ignorant and futile. The Doctor fought down a sudden, Ace-like desire to say 'so what?' and tried to form a question that would make the Gisb tell him what was going on.

Ali was getting suspicious. He didn't understand the culture of this strange, barren place, but he had seen enough of the Ton Tons to work out how 'law enforcement agencies' operated. Lock him up, beat him, sell his soul to Baron Samedi, at least then he knew where he stood. Ali was eating with the guards in a massive concrete mess room, apparently at liberty, with no sign of the hostility the guards had shown earlier. They called themselves Functionaries of the Gisb. Ali had never heard of a spirit called Gisb, but the name conjured up images of darkness and despair and his family's faces. Ali shook his head, and the visions passed - he was back, sitting with over a hundred hungry men in a concrete box. The air was thick with men's voices, coarse jokes and the smell of greasy food. Around him his acquaintances - he still couldn't think of them as friends - were laughing and joking about something called a 'morph'. From what Ali had heard, it was an initiation ceremony of some sort. He realised the man beside him was talking.

"You've been morphed in your time, haven't you?"

Ali thought quickly, but decided he didn't know enough about this place to bluff.

"No."

"What!" The man snorted into his lukewarm coffee "Big kid like you? They must go easy on kids where you come from."

"Yea," snuffled another, "Wait until they're a bit more, how do I say this, grown up?"

Ali felt himself flushing beneath his dark skin.

"Okay you - who're you calling a kid? I bet I could do this morph with one hand tied behind my back!"

* * * * *

Tamara passed a group of bewildered men as she made a hurried-but-discrete exit from the hut. Her hair was hanging in dreadlock-like strands from her adventures on the beach; her cotton dress was dirty and sweat-stained, with a decent sized rip on one sleeve from Luke's rough handling. With a kick of humility, she realised she now really looked the part of the poverty-stricken, overworked peasant, and the men didn't spare her a second glance as she walked away. She was walking in the opposite direction to the men when she found a small pile of weapons, lying haphazardly as though someone had dumped them in a hurry. She remembered the image in the spy-camera screen, and wondered what kind of mess the Doctor had found for himself. She picked through the pile, failed to find anything halfway useful and kept strolling towards the beach, doing her best to be inconspicuous.

This place was getting to her - a backwards island in the early 60's, and she was more out of her depth than on any far-future alien planet. She sat on the Doctor's log, rummaging through her raffia bag for some kind of inspiration, as though the answer to all this may be found tucked in the lining. All she found was a stringline 2-piece swimming costume, a towel printed with a cartoon whale, three interesting shells, about a cupful of sand, and the brass-stick doodad from the hut. Hang on... Tamara didn't remember taking anything from the hut, particularly something as noticeable, and useless, as the magic wand. She realised someone must have planted it there just as the back of her neck prickled - someone was coming up behind her. Tamara swung around in time to catch Luke a blow on the chin with the raffia bag. He didn't seem to notice. He seemed unsure what to do now, as though he hadn't expected confrontation. Tamara used his hesitation to run for her life.

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The Doctor gazed up at the Gisb, deep in thought. He realised he had a cramp in his neck, so lay spread-eagled on the floor, still looking up. All the better to see you with. Despite his calm exterior, the Doctor's mind was in turmoil. The Gisb had explained itself very well indeed, and now it made so much cold sense that the Doctor felt numb. For as long as he could remember the Time Lords had been fighting an ancient and malignant enemy. Although during the Doctor's lifetime the war was kept low, rarely discussed or broadcast, it had always been there, simmering away quietly in the background. That the Gisb were involved was unsurprising - most sentient species had at some stage played a part in the great, slow chess game, but few

probably knew who exactly they were fighting, and why. Even the Time Lords' information was sketchy. Such was the nature of the Enemy. That the Gisb had discovered a means of overcoming the Enemy, and had the resources and initiative to implement their scheme was monumental. The Doctor's mind wandered among past events and childhood dreams. It could mean the end of the war.....

The Doctor's mind snapped back to reality, focusing his attention on the rippling Gisb, formless above him.

"You realise what you are doing is unethical?"

"Doctor, this coming from you? A Timelord, one who would be as glad as any to see the end of the war?"

"The end of this intergalactic soap opera is one thing - but surely there is another way? One that doesn't involve...", the Doctor's voice dropped, his eyes hardened, "human subjects?"

The Gisb above him rippled with impatience.

"Doctor, you surely must have noticed that the human animal possesses an incredibly high level of latent psychic energy." The Gisb paused for effect. "We have the power to change things only if we have access to this energy, we cannot ourselves produce it."

"Why Haiti?"

"These humans already have a complex series of rituals which increase the output of Arton energy we need. It was simple to slip inconspicuously into the existing culture and harvest immediately. Our other experiments, starting from scratch with human converts, were not as successful."

The Doctor thought of the various cults which had appeared, would appear, Heaven's Gate, the Turtle, Koresh. He felt conflicting emotions rising within him, and frowned at the Gisb.

"But you haven't been inconspicuous, have you? The people of Haiti can feel the changes you're producing. Haiti already has trouble, Gisb, dictatorships, famine, they don't need any more."

The Gisb was darkening, waves of blackness threading along its mass.

"Do you consider one poverty stricken island on one planet more important than the resolution to a centuries-long conflict?"

But the Doctor couldn't answer.

Ali was starting to wonder what he had gotten himself into. He stood on a raised dais in the center of yet another concrete room. This room, however, was circular and dark, smelling of incense and citrus. The rough walls were covered with ideograms, chalked, painted or daubed on with a brown/red substance Ali hoped wasn't blood, but knew probably was. The other men were chanting a strange, complicated mantra. If he wasn't so scared, Ali would have been getting bored. The chanting went on and on and Ali was idly wondering what was so important about standing semi-naked while madmen chanted at you. He opened his mouth to ask if something was supposed to happen, but his muscles refused to form words. He suddenly realised that the men, the chanting, even the room suddenly seemed so very far away. His own personal space, the bit of him his mind inhabited, was simultaneously so much bigger and so much smaller. While he pondered these new developments, he felt the world blur as the morph began...

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Tamara thought the cave entrance would have been a good way to lose the pursuing Luke, who wasn't showing his age as he bolted after her across sand dunes and rubble. She thought the superstitious villagers probably avoided the cave, fearing spirits who lived inside. As she passed more abandoned weapons by the entrance, and saw the painted symbols on the walls, she realised she may have miscalculated.

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The Doctor lay quietly, as he had for a long time. It was an unusual experience for him to not know which way to turn. As he got older he had learnt that life was never black and white, but made up of a million conflicting shades of grey. Who could say how many people had died, would die, at the hands of the Enemy? How many lives could be saved if the Gisb's plan was allowed to continue? Then the Doctor thought about an island stuck in the Caribbean - invisible on a world map unless you knew exactly where to look. What about the lives of those people? The Doctor still stood by his earlier comment - Haiti had enough problems without aliens harvesting the populace's leftover Arton energy. He gazed up at the Gisb, who had been waiting for his reply, its edges gyrating gently.

"No." The Doctor whispered. "Never. I will not allow the people of Haiti to be used as martyrs in a war that has nothing to do with them. I shall not help you."

The Gisb managed to look smug despite its lack of face or features.

"We shall see, Timelord, we shall see."

* * * * *

The morph was underway. Ali felt his body twisting, changing, growing. It was like being pushed and pulled around by a group of monkeys, except the pressure was coming from within. His mind was clouding and blurring, his brain seemed to be filled with cotton wool. He dimly realised he was turning into a demon, but found the thought slipping away into the thick, sugary darkness. An image floated before his eyes. His father. Had his father seen a being like that which he now was? The Doctor had spoken about time travel, something about the link between a worm and a hole... Was he the thing his father had seen? Had he killed his own family?

The Doctor stood, slightly dazed, in an endless corridor outside the Gisb's chamber. After his eventual refusal, the Gisb had abruptly ordered the guards to remove him. He had been roughly dragged upright and shoved out into the corridor. Looking around, he could see nothing to indicate where to start looking for Ali, nor any sign of an exit. The Doctor licked a finger and held it up, nodding as he felt a near-imperceptible breeze. With no better leads to follow, he set off towards the source of the wind.

Ali stood in the corridor near the doorway to the morph room. At the end of the ceremony he had been given clear instructions, and now he had nothing to do but wait for the

right time to act out those orders. His augmented hearing picked out distant footsteps approaching. The new Ali moistened his fangs in anticipation.

The Doctor spun around on his heel, looking into corners, checking the ceiling for cameras - he had the distinct feeling someone was laughing at him.

Ali could now hear the breathing of the approaching victim, and the bizarre double thump of his hearts beat. Scales slid across one another as new muscles tested themselves and flexed experimentally. It had been a simple task to program Ali to kill the Doctor - just a few minutes' worth of hypnotic suggestion, linking the Doctor to the death of Ali's family. Ali himself, however, was unaware of this. He was unaware of all but one thing, and soon he would be within range...

The Doctor couldn't shake the feeling that he was being watched. He rounded a corner, and jumped back as he ended up face to fang with the thing that had been doing the watching...

Ali stopped. Some small, unchanged part of his mind told him to stop, to not attack the Doctor. Growling with the mental strain of confusion, Ali poised mid-strike.

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The Doctor peered closely at the creature who sat before him, hoping it would sit dazed for a few more minutes. Images of gargoyles leering from the roof of Notre Dame sprang unbidden into the Doctor's mind. Behind the scales and claws there seemed to be something horribly familiar.

"Ali," the Doctor whispered, gently reaching forward to stroke the ebony scales. Ali growled in reply and snapped at the outstretched hand with his newly-grown hooked beak. The Doctor stepped backwards, looking around for some means of communication. Nothing. Bare concrete walls, barred doors, fluorescent strip lighting. Lights... The Doctor withdrew his sunglasses from his pocket, and tried to reflect the light from the ceiling into Ali's eyes. Flick, flick, Ali? Ali? The Doctor reached out again, and this time Ali lowered his head, allowing the Doctor to rub his scales.

"Come on, Ali," the Doctor whispered, "We're going home." The Doctor felt guilty. When was he going to learn that allowing people to accompany him was to sentence them to death or worse?

"Oh, Ali," the Doctor whispered again, "It's okay now, we're going home."

* * * * *

The room housing the entrance to the link was now unguarded and deserted. The Gisb, the Doctor realised, now considered him dead and Ali as good as, and was no longer concerning themselves with security. The Doctor pondered how such a very complacent species had become involved in the war in the first place. He glanced behind to check that Ali was still following - and saw the guards. Clearly the Gisb were not quite so complacent as he had tried to convince himself. He grabbed Ali - no mean feat since Ali was now so much larger than the Doctor - and for the second time that day, launched himself into the unknown.

In the village, the humming whine reached a peak, and then died away into silence.

Tamara had reached the temple, deep within the cave. The walls were easily signposted with symbols and amulets - voodoo dolls, for heaven's sake - but Tamara still wasn't sure how she was going to find her way out again. She considered hiding in one of the apparently-ignored tunnels leading off from the main entrance, but decided she'd rather be captured by Haitian voodoo practitioners than starve to death lost underground. Now she was hiding painfully behind a statue of a particularly nasty-looking chap, hoping Luke's eyesight and/or the light from the solitary smoking torch was poor enough for him not to see her. Had she risked a glance out from behind her statue, she would have seen that Luke wasn't looking for her anyway. His attention was fixed on the Link, swirling moodily to itself.

* * * * *

In Haiti, meanwhile, the villagers knew nothing of what had befallen the Western man and the boy mechanic since they had conveniently disappeared. In the sunshine, a world away - literally - from annoying boys and strange men, it all seemed incredible, and the Haitians were all secretly wondering what all the fuss was about. Sitting outside the cave, it was hard to believe that these people had, only a few hours ago, been contemplating murder.

"This new wave, Rico," commented a shrewd little man, smoking one of half a packet of genuine American cigarettes, stolen from a wealthy tourist, "what do you reckon, my friend?"

Rico thought for a bit. "Haiti already has enough spirits. Baron Samedi and Ogoun and Damballah looked after our parents, and their parents - we never met these new spirits before. My grandmamma was a Guede initiate, and she never mentioned no Gisb or Sykik or Arton. I reckon it's all a bit strange, and I reckon I need a drag on your flash Yankee fag to help me sort it all out."

His friend handed over the diminished Lucky Strike with a grin, saying "I reckon it's garbage, nothing more." He retrieved his smoke. "But some people, old Luke and Babeta, they believe it, all right. More fool them."

With this cynical comment hanging in the air as tangibly as the blue smoke, the last thing they expected was the Western man to walk out of the cave, accompanied by a demon and the strange woman. But that was what they saw, before they decided to run for their lives.

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Tamara had listened to the bizarre noises Luke made as something apparently very interesting happened. She risked sticking her head out from behind the statue, and then crawled out completely when she saw the Doctor. He was standing beside a swirling thing she hadn't noticed before, with Luke unconscious at his feet and some other horrible statue beside him. The 'statue' chose that moment to move slightly, preening scales back into position with a flick of a hooked beak. Tamara glared at the Doctor, desperate for an explanation. He put a finger over his lips, moved Luke gently into a corner, away from Ali's clumsy hooves, and led them out of the shrine.

The Doctor, Tamara and Ali wandered out into the sunshine. The Doctor gazed in bemusement at two men, running madly into the distance. Then he turned back to Ali, and realised why they were running.

"We need to hide Ali until tonight. The last thing we need now is mass panic."

Tamara nodded back towards the entrance to the shrine. "What about down there? Surely we've frightened everybody away, now?"

The Doctor frowned. "Somewhere less, erm, central, would be better, but..."

"Well don't even think about finding a friendly hut to put him in," Tamara fumed "Trust me; you're safer in that cave than in the village."

Tamara told the Doctor about her experience in the hut, and the brass wand Luke had planted in her bag.

"Are you still carrying it?" The Doctor seemed more interested in Luke's toys than Tamara's ordeal. She pulled the wand from her bag, just as it decided to bleep and light up an LED or two.

"Ahh!" The Doctor was hooked. "A prototype sonic screwdriver." He turned it over and over in his hands, then snapped it open and rummaged in its innards. "But how does it work? The circuitry is mostly redundant - this is more a toy than a tool or weapon."

"Did it cause that humming noise you heard when we arrived?"

"No," the Doctor scanned the horizon melodramatically, "but it's true owners did."

* * * * *

They returned at midnight. Most of the inhabitants from this part of the island had gathered in the shrine for mass. Chickens were slaughtered. Rituals performed. Coals were walked on and chants were chanted. Crammed into a gap between a large carved rock and the cave wall, the Doctor and Ali watched silently through a haze of darkness and smoke from flickering torches. The Doctor briefly caught the eye of Tamara, standing in a natural rock crevice, where the torch light didn't venture. So far, all was well. The same things had happened as had happened at so many voodoo masses for so many hundreds of years. Finally, as today became tomorrow, something new was happening. Luke was standing in the center of a ring of people, who clapped and stamped to keep rhythm. He chanted a strange, new chant varying eerily from the soprano to the baritone as he cried in a long forgotten tongue of a distant planet. The Doctor couldn't help noticing that the crowd was, apparently randomly, migrating towards their bolt hole. No, he thought, not yet, he couldn't show Ali to these people until the Gisb was present, if he wanted to avoid bloodshed. The link, just out of the Doctor's line of vision, was now glowing fiercely, a darkness forming at its heart. For while it was stationary, neither growing or shrinking. Then Tamara watched from her nook as it began to grow exponentially as Luke's chanting became more frantic. Babeta and Kiata, clapping and stamping with the best of them, now burst from the ring of people, and joined Luke his otherworldly chant.

Tamara watched nodding to the Doctor as the Gisb was vomited through the link in a flurry of darkness and green light. This Gisb was smaller than the one which had earlier interrogated the Doctor, but, since all Gisb were the Gisb it shared its bigger sibling's thoughts and memories. So it knew, by tasting the energies of those in the room, that the accursed, death

defying Doctor had escaped their pet, and was now skulking behind the stone idol, Gisb-made, containing a psychic energy amplifier which broadcast the Doctor's presence as surely as an advert in the Times.

"Emerge, Doctor."

The Haitians, who had been expecting words of great wisdom from this visiting God, all turned, and, under the gaze of many outraged and psyched up Haitians, the Doctor emerged.

For a long moment there was silence. Nobody moved. Nobody spoke. Nobody breathed. And ominously safety-catchish click broke the spell of the moment, and the Doctor found himself beneath many more Haitians than he could possibly fight off. In the time needed for Ali to remove his lumbering bulk from his hiding place and Tamara to fight through the wall of bodies to the Doctor, he had been subdued, and was now lying semiconscious, tied to a rough stone which served all too well as an altar. Now Tamara tried to stop various enraged villagers stabbing him, while Ali struggled out from behind his rock. He finally succeeded, tipping the rock over as he stretched to his full, demonic, height.

There was another long moment's silence. Nobody did any the things they didn't do in the last ominous silence. This time, however, the spell was broken by a woman's scream. All hell broke loose. Ali and Tamara managed, with some difficulty, to prevent anyone from harming the Doctor. Most of the Haitians ran in blind panic, not knowing or caring exactly who Ali or the Gisb were, and not caring, just wanting them to go far, far away, and never come back.

* * * * *

The Doctor woke up properly. He had been labouring under the misapprehension that he had passed out, and was dreaming, but no, there really was a gargoyle trying to protect him from panicking black people who had tied him to an altar. He looked around. The only people remaining in the temple were Luke and Babeta, Rico and his friend, himself, Tamara, Ali and the Gisb.

"Okay, then," the Doctor stared hard, straight at the Gisb, somehow managing to look halfway dignified whilst tied prostrate to a rock. "Show yourselves, Gisb."

The Gisb rippled around the ceiling, mingling with the smoke and fear in the room, then rippled a bit more violently, the Gisb equivalent of shrugging off the Doctor's accusation.

"I know you have some helpers here, Gisb." That had come as a surprise - the Gisb couldn't possibly have given anything away! Before the Gisb could reply, Luke and Babeta shuddered and convulsed before falling lifeless to the floor. Two more Gisb drifted upwards, fusing seamlessly to their cohort, forming a single, larger, entity. The Doctor, who had been largely bluffing, was as surprised as any of the other witnesses.

"What did you do to them?" He indicated, with difficulty, the bodies of the man and the old woman he had visited earlier that day.

"It was necessary, Doctor. In order to establish our ceremonies, we needed preachers."

"So you killed innocent people, used their position to spread this mad idea?" The Doctor felt sick - he had thought, briefly, of helping the Gisb - "What was it all in aid of? What have you achieved?"

"We have achieved, Doctor," the combined Gisb was growling now, angered and rising to the bait, "the beginnings of our grand scheme. These creatures accepted us unquestioningly into their culture."

"Really? Ask them. Go on."

Rico suddenly realised that all the attention in the room was focused on him and his friend. He was about to go down on hands and knees in supplication, saying Oh yes, Oh great Gisb, I believe, when he thought of their conversation earlier that day. It seemed a lifetime ago. He thought about the conversation he had heard - this thing wasn't a benevolent God, it was using him. Rico looked at the Gisb. The Gisb, in its impossible way, looked at Rico. The alien was silent. The man spoke.

"No - you look like so much smoke to me - Clear Off!"

This came as a massive shock to the Gisb. They had forgotten that, unlike the Gisb, one human's belief does not guarantee all humans' beliefs. By establishing themselves as a God, they began to assume that they knew the minds of every little human they sought to control. The realisation that they did not had now come, in a particularly obvious form. The Doctor looked around, but Rico and his friend had taken their own advice and made themselves scarce. Nobody remained but a Timelord, Tamara, a boy/gargoyle, and a Gisb with delusions of Godhood. It was the latter, at last, who spoke.

"I hope you're not happy, Doctor. Your actions here have prevented an end to the longest running of conflicts. For what? A handful of dirt poor islanders who will die in a few years?" While the Gisb was speaking, it drifted closer and closer to the link. By the end of its speech, it had vanished. Soon the link itself followed. The Doctor felt someone tugging at the ropes. It was Ali - the real, human Ali. The energy the Gisb had been expending to keep him in his monster form had been needed to seal up the link.

* * * * *

The TARDIS sat on the side of the road, where it had landed yesterday. Was it really only yesterday? pondered the Doctor. He would like to say that he had changed things, made things better, like Doctors were supposed to do. But he hadn't. All he could do sometimes was prevent things from getting worse.

"What will you do now?" The Doctor was genuinely concerned for the boy who had accompanied him through the Link.

"I dunno. Nothing, I think. I still have my shop."

The Doctor looked puzzled. He suddenly realised how little he really knew about Ali.

"Shop."

"Yea. I fix things. Bikes mainly. And cars, but there aren't many around."

The Doctor smiled. "I'll have to come and see you next time the Old Girl needs some repairs."

He patted the TARDIS affectionately, and grinned. Ali grinned back. The Doctor fished in his pocket for the key, but found the control unit instead. He gave it to Ali.

"What do I want this thing for?"

"Oh keep it. A souvenir. Use it for spare parts, perhaps. You never know, it might come in handy."

Then he was gone.



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