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PROJECT

MERCURY 237



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Episode One

The Doctor pushed the remaining wires back under the TARDIS' console, leaving only a thick cable running from the underside of the hexagonal control centre to the Wheel of Fortune standing next to it. The Wheel of Fortune differed from your standard Wheel of Fortune, in that instead of playing cards or numbers, the different segments were made up of LED displays that showed the name of some randomly chosen planet in the universe. The Doctor had wired up the wheel to the TARDIS' historical database, and 64 randomly chosen locations would populate the spaces on the wheel with each spin. The other important bit of wiring that the Doctor had done was to attach the TARDIS' navigational circuitry to the little rubber flipper that went clickety-clickety-click as the wheel spun. The part that was extremely clever was that when the wheel finally came to rest upon some planet or other, the TARDIS would automatically dematerialize and make its way toward the lucky destination.

"There, that should do it," said the Doctor aloud, though there was not another living soul in the TARDIS. "This will add a bit of fun for the companions." He stopped. What companions. He hadn't had a single companion with him since he had regenerated. And before that? Well, Liz had traveled briefly in the TARDIS, but only for the space of one adventure. In fact, he hadn't really invited anyone to come aboard since Ace had left. Ace. Had left. Was that right? "Ace," he asked. "Ace, where are you?"

The Doctor's hearts began to race. He couldn't for the lives of him remember where he'd left Ace. Fenric. The Master. Then there was some kind of fight. Then he was alone for a long time. Why couldn't he remember?

The Doctor stood there, motionless, for what might pass for hours and when at last he looked up in resignation he had not remembered a single detail surrounding Ace's departure. He made up his mind and, ignoring his new attachment, proceeded to set the controls manually. The familiar wheezing and groaning sound filled the still air. While the TARDIS was in flight, he went to one of the many closets and pulled out a nice warm coat.

Om mane padme Om
Om mane padme Om

Ee-arch mane padme Om
Om mane padme Om
Ee-arch, Ee-arch
Ee-arch mane padme Om

Step. Mane Padme Om
Om mane padme Om
Step. Step. Step. Step.
Step Mane Padme Om.

Mmm Mane Padme Om
Om mane padme Om
Mmm Click Step Click
Om Mane Padme Om

Step Mane Padme Om
Step Mane Padme Om
Step step step step
Step Mane Padme Om

Knock Mane Padme Om
Om Mane Padme Om
Knock knock knock knock
Knock Mane Padme Om

Om mane padme

The great wooden door of Det-Sen monastery opened.

"Hello," said the Doctor, "I'm sorry to disturb your meditation, but I was a friend of Padhmasambhava and I were wondering if you could help me?"

The Monk who had answered the door said nothing, but simply gestured for the Doctor to come inside. The Doctor removed his shoes and followed the young man into the prayer hall where he took his place among the Buddhist Monks. The Doctor shaved his goatee and then his head. He joined the brothers in their meditation and prayer, and many hours later the Doctor found himself seated at the dinner table eating the simple meal of rice and lentils that is so common in that part of the world.

"I don't know how long I'll be staying," the Doctor said as the Monk, who had identified himself as Hu-ee, showed him to his room.

"Stay as long as you need to," replied Hu-ee.

"Thank you," said the Doctor. He walked into the tiny room that contained nothing but a small wicker prayer mat. The Doctor took off his jacket and laid it on the floor near the door. He went to the mat and sat down cross-legged. He had found himself unable to meditate properly in the great hall. He was still too agitated over not being able to remember Ace's departure. He

began to breathe deeply, slowing his heart rate below even its normally low Gallifreyan rate. He cleared his mind of all thoughts and repeatedly chanted the mind-clearing mantra that had been taught to him many years ago by the late Padhmasambhava.

Om Mane Padme Om.

He did not know how long he was there. Days had gone by, that was certain. The Monks had come to check on him from time to time, but they were not strangers to the concept of fasting, and when they heard the Doctor chanting quietly, they left him in peace.

It was on the twelfth day that the Doctor made contact. On the twelfth day the Doctor's mind touched another. The other mind was confused at first. How could this be?

"Padhmasambhava," said the Doctor with his mind.

"Doctor," asked Padhmasambhava. "How can this be?"

"I am contacting you from a great distance," the Doctor explained. "I need your guidance."

The Doctor was not quite telling the truth. Certainly the two men were separated by a great distance, though not one of space but rather one of time. The Doctor had managed to cast his mind back decades, perhaps centuries. He knew that his friend and mentor was being controlled by The Great Intelligence, who would be vanquished in 1935 by the Doctor, but he feared that if he came directly in contact with his mentor that the Great Intelligence might somehow glean the information of its own defeat from the Doctor's mind. With the chasm of years now separating their two minds, the Doctor would be able to control what information the Intelligence would be able to 'download' from his mind.

"This is a most amazing experience," said Padhmasambhava. "What is it that you seek from me?"

"There is something that I cannot remember," answered the Doctor.

"Perhaps you do not want to remember," suggested Padhmasambhava.

"But I do," protested the Doctor. "I've been trying for days to remember what happened to my friend Ace, but I can't recall the circumstances of her departure."

"You may think that you want to remember, but there is a part of your mind that wants to forget."

"But why?"

"Perhaps it is too painful a memory."

"I... I want to know what happened to her. No matter what."

"Doctor, you have always traveled with companions. Can it be that this is the first time that one of them has met an unfortunate fate?"

"No," answered the Doctor. "I've seen close companions die in the past, but Ace was special."

"Your mind will allow you to see the truth when you are ready to accept it. Concentrate on your current companions Doctor; they are relying on you to guide them on their journeys."

"That's another problem," said the Doctor. "I haven't traveled with anyone at all since Ace. I didn't notice it at first, but over the last year there have been a number of occasions where I have met a young man or woman who, in the past, would have been exactly the type that I would have invited into my TARDIS to accompany me on my journeys. I suspect that

somewhere in my subconscious I just couldn't bring myself to invite them, knowing that their lives might be in danger."

"Perhaps you are right, Doctor," said Padhmasambhava across the ages. "Until you find out what has happened to your companion, your soul will not be at peace. You must retrace your steps. Journey down the path of your life until you meet people who knew you both. People who might remember the two of you. People who might know what happened."

"Thank you," said the Doctor. "I'm not sure where to start."

"Wherever you start will be the beginning of your journey. Each step will bring you closer to the end of your quest."

"Thank you wise teacher."

"Fare well, friend Doctor."

The Doctor sat silently as the mind of Padhmasambhava faded from his thoughts. It was like waking from a dream. He let it happen naturally. Slowly. He got up, put on his jacket and joined the Monks for their morning meal. He then thanked them and said his good-byes. He walked around the side of the monastery to his snow-covered TARDIS. He could see footprints in the snow where the Monks had stood to examine it.

Pinned to the door of the TARDIS was a salmon coloured envelope. He unpinned it and examined the sealed envelope. There was nothing written on it. The Doctor noticed the crest of snow on the roof of the TARDIS. It looked like it was planning to fall onto him. Quickly pocketing the envelope and the thumbtack, the Doctor unlocked the TARDIS door and raced in before the snow on the edge of the roof collapsed across the doorway.

The interior of the TARDIS seemed sterile and gaudy after the plain simplicity of the monastery. He almost made the decision to go back to the monastery. To leave his old life behind forever.

"Not today," he said. He grabbed one of the metal pegs of the Wheel of Fortune and gave it a mighty spin. The LED's on the wheel flickered. The metal pegs clacked and clicked as they swept past the stiff rubber flipper. The power indicator began to rise and fall. The TARDIS began to groan and wheeze. And then the lights went out.

Episode Two

The Doctor fumbled his way around the console until he found the door controls. The doors opened. So, the power failure seemed relegated to the lighting system only. No light shone through the open TARDIS doors. The Doctor made his way cautiously to the door and stepped into a darkened room. He could hear blues music coming from somewhere close by. He walked right into something that felt like a heavy curtain. The Doctor felt his way along and noticed that there was some light coming through a slit in the curtain. He parted the curtain a little and saw that he was standing backstage. On the stage a man with dark brown skin man was singing into a microphone while another man accompanied him on a piano.

The Doctor's eyes had started to adjust to the darkness and he noticed a flight of steps to one side of the stage that led into the audience. He closed the curtain, and stepped cautiously in the direction of the staircase. His hands felt a doorknob. He opened it and saw that it did indeed lead to the short flight of stairs. He descended quietly, scanning the darkened room for an empty seat. He found one and made his way to it as unobtrusively as possible. He must be on Earth, he thought. Nineteen-Twenties, most likely. Perhaps a nightclub in Harlem. Twenty minutes later the lights came on for intermission and as the Doctor rose to mingle in the lobby with the other concert-goers, he realized that he had made a slight mistake. There among the brown and pink-skinned humanoids that could easily have passed for Earthlings; he saw dozens of different alien species.

The lobby looked fairly old and rundown, but would not have looked out of place in Nineteen- Twenties Earth. Perhaps this was Earth, but in the far future. He looked at the price list at the bar. Credits. Okay, so it might be Earth or a Federation planet. Twenty Eight Credits for a beer. Perhaps early Twenty Ninth century. Depending on how far out in deep space they were, of course.

He purchased a cup of coffee. The cup was a recyclable plastic. The beans smelled real. He located himself beside an interesting looking woman, took a sip of his coffee, and said, "Quite wonderful, don't you think?"

"Yes," answered the woman, turning towards him and smiling. She was wearing a powder blue cloth coat. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a bun. Her face revealed her to be in her early fifties. Assuming she was from Earth, of course.

"Are you from Earth," asked the Doctor.

"Yes," said the woman. "Are you?"

"Well, not originally," replied the Doctor. "How long have you been here?"

"About six years," she answered. "You?"

"About twenty minutes," the Doctor answered. She laughed.

"I'm the Doctor," he introduced himself.

"THE Doctor. How lucky for us," she smirked, but she did not seem to mean it in a bad way.

"Yes," he said. "And what do you like to be called?"

"Professor Virginia Reimer is my name, but most people call me Ginnie."

The Doctor extended his free hand. "Nice to meet you, Ginnie. By your accent I'd say you were from London."

"Yes," she affirmed, "I can't quite place yours though."

"I've been all over the place," said the Doctor.

"England, though, right?"

"Most definitely. So what do you do here?"

"I'm working for the Mercury Mining Corporation, of course, on some top secret stuff."

"Top Secret," exclaimed the Doctor with mock seriousness. "You can tell me, I'm the Doctor."

"Well, it's gotten me into some trouble in the past," said Ginnie. "Oh, here's my partner. Rebecca," called Ginnie. "Come meet the Doctor."

A blonde woman in her early thirties approached the pair. "This is my partner, Professor Rebecca Kartz. This is The Doctor." She put a sarcastic stress on 'The Doctor.'

"Hi," she said extending her hand. "Nice to meet you."

"I was just telling the Doctor about our work."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "She told me everything."

Rebecca laughed. "Oh, yes. Everything?"

"You know," said the Doctor. "Top secret. Hush hush. Big job for Mercury. All that."

The two women laughed. "You're a very amusing fellow, Doctor," said Ginnie. "Just what is it that you do?"

"Oh, I dabble. This and that. Top Secret. Hush hush." He grinned.

"Are you a scientist," asked Rebecca.

"Quite," said the Doctor.

"And what do you specialize in," asked Ginnie.

"Practically everything. Biology. Chemistry. Physics. Aeronautics. Temporal engineering"

"Temporal Engineering," said Ginnie and Rebecca simultaneously. "Are you serious," asked Rebecca.

"Yes, why, do you know anything about it?"

"Well, sort of," said Rebecca cautiously.

"It's what got us into trouble before," whispered Ginnie.

The Doctor looked at them both for a second before whispering, "Kartz and Reimer. Not THE Kartz and Reimer."

"Well, yes," admitted Ginnie.

"What year is this," he asked.

"That's an odd question," said Rebecca.

"Well, your operation was shut down in 1986, and unless you're both a lot older than you look, I'd say you've got some temporal explaining to do."

"Well, that's how we escaped, you see. When we heard that the CIA were involved."

"Who said that the CIA was involved," asked the Doctor.

CIA was the initials of the Celestial Intervention Agency, a secret organization that operated beneath a blanket of secrecy on the Doctor's home planet Gallifrey. He had had a few dealings with them in the past, and had even worked for them for a brief period of time in exchange for <CENSORED>.

"We heard things," said Virginia in response to the Doctor's question. "And then there was an indication that a TARDIS had landed on the space station. We didn't want to imagine what the Time Lords would do to us, so we simply used the device we were working on to propel ourselves a few hundred years into the future. We've been here six years now and the Time Lords don't seem to know we're here."

"We do keep a low profile," added Rebecca.

"Yes, I can imagine. There was quite a mystery surrounding your disappearances, if I remember correctly."

"So you've heard of us, then."

"Well, considering my interest in Temporal Physics, I've done a lot of research into stories that might indicate work being done in that field. I'm hoping to find work in that area myself, and as you know, with the CIA nosing about all the time, it's quite difficult to make the appropriate contacts."

A tone sounded to indicate that the intermission was coming to an end.

"Are you really any good," asked Rebecca, giving Ginnie a meaningful look.

"Ask me anything."

"We've got an opening for an assistant, why don't you come by tomorrow and we'll give you a little quiz, check your credentials, the usual," said Ginnie. "We might find a place for you within the Mercury Mining Corporation."

"That sounds like exactly the kind of break I've been waiting for," said the Doctor. "It's been very nice meeting both of you."

As the three of them returned to their respective seats, the Doctor thought, "I've got to find out what this Mercury Mining Corporation is up to. Either they've gone too far and they'll wind up with the CIA on their doorstep or they haven't gone far enough and they'll end up destroying the cosmos. Either way, it looks like I've been elected to look in to the matter." The Doctor smiled. It was so nice to be needed.

"Well, Doctor Smith," said Virginia, waving the Doctor's exam papers in front of him, "It seems your knowledge is first rate, but your credentials are a little on the ephemeral side."

"Well, Ginnie, I've been out of the loop for a long time, and, if you must know, I'm a little bit temporally displaced myself, but it's a long story."

"Oh, but one we'll get to hear some day, I hope," said Rebecca.

There was a knock on the door and a tall man walked in. He looked to be about thirty-five with dark black hair. His complexion was unusually pale for a human of this time period. "Kartz. Reimer," he said, by way of a greeting.

He strode in and extended a powerful hand to the Doctor. "Smith, I've heard good things about you." His voice was deep and booming. It reminded the Doctor of someone he had once met, but he had met so many people, and once was a long time ago.

The Doctor took the hand and was surprised by the strength of the man's grip. He returned the grip with all of his Gallifreyan might. If he was impressed, the man didn't show it.

"This is the Mercury Mining Corporation's Controller," said Ginnie. "Ryszard Cyba."

"Czechoslovakian," asked the Doctor.

"Polish," replied the Controller. "On my father's side. So, you'd like to work for the Mercury Mining Corporation, eh?"

"Yes, I would," said the Doctor.

"The nature of the work here is top secret. I wonder how you found out about the position to begin with," he asked, looking at Rebecca and Ginnie.

"Oh," said the Doctor, diverting attention away from the two women, "I recognized their names from some of my files. When they refused to tell me about their work, I suspected they were working on something like this. So, I told them about my knowledge on the subject and they invited me to come in today. Judging by the questions I was asked, I think my assumptions were correct."

"Yes," said the Controller. "Welcome aboard. For a trial period. Two weeks. Take care of the administrative details, won't you," he said to Rebecca. He left the room without another word.

"I'll show you around the building," said Rebecca... "The parts of it that aren't off limits, of course."

"You mean there's stuff going on here that's even more top secret than Time Travel," asked the Doctor.

"You never know," laughed Ginnie. "I'll see you two later." Ginnie returned to her laboratory while Rebecca showed the Doctor around the building, got him his security pass, and filled out the required forms for the payroll office.

"This is your electronic pay id," said the payroll clerk. She waved a wand over the Doctor's security pass. You can take it to any bank in the system and have your pay transferred to your accounts. You can have it automated too, if you like, but that's between you and your bank. We don't want the administrative overhead.

"Very efficient," said the Doctor.

"Yes," answered the clerk emotionlessly. "Goodbye."

"My," said the Doctor as they left the payroll offices. "They're making robots more and more lifelike."

"She's not a robot," said Rebecca, shocked.

"She could have fooled me," said the Doctor, grinning.

Rebecca laughed. "I thought you were serious."

"Come with us," said Rebecca. "We usually go for a drink after work. There's a seedy little pub at the end of the street, but its close by, and I don't think they get much better if you walk further."

"Sounds fine to me," said the Doctor. He accompanied the two professors to the Silver Moon Pub. He'd seen worse, but there was a distinct lack of refinement in the manners of most of its patrons.

The Doctor spent the next couple of hours trying to get as much information about the Mercury Mining Corporation out of Professors Kartz and Reimer. Apparently, the company had made it big in the mid 24th century with an extremely lucky gold claim. The company had acquired a couple of sectors of space that were generally considered worthless, but suddenly struck it rich when a large asteroid, some said a planet, made almost entirely of gold drifted into its territory. By the interplanetary salvage rights, the uninhabited planet belonged to them.

Within fifty years, the company had acquired a number of properties, all thought to be fairly unprofitable, but somehow they had managed to turn a profit from even the smallest deposits. Unlike the other mining corporations which continually sought out the big strikes of the fancy minerals like taranium or duralinium, the Mercury Mining Corporation made its money from the standards from the bygone era of mining: gold, silver, titanium and platinum.

It seemed odd that a company that seemed determined to avoid the glamorous metals and minerals would be doing research into time travel. The Doctor decided that a bit of snooping would be in order, but first he would try to get some more information out of the locals.

"Well, I think we're ready for bed," said Rebecca, as she and Ginnie got up.

The Doctor got up and helped them on with their coats. "I'm going to stick around a while longer," said the Doctor. "I still haven't quite adjusted to the local time." They trio said their good-byes and the Doctor watched the two women leave. He picked up his drink and moved from the small table at which they had been sitting to a bar stool with an empty seat on either side.

He tried to overhear some of the conversations going on in the bar. He was about to pick another seat when he overheard a phrase that piqued his interest. "Time Lords." He turned his head slightly to try and determine where the words had come from.

A tall woman rose from her stool and covered the distance to the Doctor's stool in a couple of massive strides. She towered over him. The Doctor put down his drink and swivelled his stool to face her. As he opened his mouth to say something, the woman grabbed the Doctor by the lapels of his coat and lifted him off of the bar stool. She pulled his face next to hers and scowled at him. "You hear something interesting," she asked, as her other hand snaked behind her back.

Episode Three

"Uh, yeah. You said Time Lords." He put his hand gently on the side of her face and looked deep into her eyes. "And I've met one or two of them."

She looked back at him and then let go of his lapels. The Doctor remained hanging in mid-air. She stepped back, surprised. The Doctor was kneeling on his barstool. He hopped off, grabbed the woman by the arm and pulled on her as he swooped towards the table from which she had risen.

"My name's Johnny," said the Doctor, extending his hand to the other five men and women sitting at the table. He pulled the woman's chair out and held it for her. She took it. The Doctor grabbed himself a chair from a nearby table and pulled it up next to the woman's. "What's your name," he asked her.

"Taia," she answered. The rest of the table introduced themselves. "Now what do you know about Time Lords, Johnny."

"Well, I know they like their secrets to remain secret and they don't get out much, but the ones that do are right bastards. Oh, and they like to pick themselves poncy nicknames like Doctor and Master and Rani.

"I've heard of the Master," offered one of the people at the table.

"I've met him," said the Doctor. "It was about ten years ago, I was working on a freighter when this guy comes on board with a couple of Ogrons. Next thing you knew, the Captain was letting him run the ship and order us around. Two weeks later we ended up right in the middle of a war with Draconians on one side and Daleks on the other. Luckily the Draconians and the Federation managed to figure out that the Master was playing them both against each other, but I lost a lotta friends in that damn business and nearly lost my arm." The Doctor held up his left arm and wriggled it around a bit as if testing it to see if it still worked. "Now what do you guys know about Time Lords?"

The small group didn't reveal too much at first, but after three or four rounds the Doctor found out that they were waiting around to hear about a big job of some kind that involved salvaging crashed space craft. The word on the street was that a Time Lord craft had crashed nearby and that they were looking for a crew to help with the salvage effort. A couple of hours

later the Doctor had convinced them that his services were for hire and they had taken him on board their crew.

A couple of hours of additional drinking went by and the Doctor wondered if these people would ever go home. Suddenly, the group went quiet. An alien was approaching the group. He was about one metre tall with olive green skin. He had black hair, but was balding at the front. The alien was wearing a matte silver suit that looked quite comfortable, but also could have doubled for a space suit with the proper attachments. The group obviously knew him. No introductions were made. The Doctor noticed a small blue tattoo on the alien's neck, just above the collar. It looked like a clock with a single hand pointing between the two and the three. If it were a minute hand it might be pointing at thirteen.

"It's time," said the alien when it reached their table. Before he knew it the Doctor was on board an old rickety scavenger ship hurtling through space with the rest of his new crew. The green-skinned alien appeared to be the liaison between the crew and whomever it was that was paying for this mission. He gave a few orders when they first took off, feeding the coordinates to the navigator, and then sat silent for the rest of the half-hour voyage.

The Doctor chatted with Taia while they raced towards their target. Apparently the crew went on one or two such missions per month, always with the hope that a time-capable craft had been shipwrecked, but always finding that the sensors had been misled by a simple garbage scow or age-old relic that had drifted in to the net. To his horror, the Doctor realized that there was some kind of an electronic 'fish net' that had been spanned across a wide area of space in the hopes of trapping a time-capable ship. The Doctor's horror did not abate as they arrived at their destination. The ship on the screen was most definitely a TARDIS.

"I think we've got one," shouted the green alien. "Activate the Artron sponge."

"Artron sponge," thought the Doctor. "That doesn't sound good."

The Artron sponge turned out to be just that: a device that seeped the Artron energy out of the trapped TARDIS. Two long, thin probes snaked out from the scavenger ship and came to rest on the surface of the TARDIS, which had reverted to its natural form of a black cylinder. Against the blackness of space, it was nearly invisible, even with the bright light shining on it from the crew's own ship. The net, as it turned out, was designed to detect Artron energy and then set up a reverse-polarity field to snag the Artron-laden target. The Doctor watched as the TARDIS' life energy was slowly drained from it. "How much energy would they drain," wondered the Doctor. "Surely the TARDIS' defence mechanisms would have been disabled by now."

The Doctor watched the readings visible to all beside the external monitor. They were draining too much. It looked like they were trying to drain it dry. Suddenly, the TARDIS popped like a giant kernel of corn. The insides exploded outward in random directions, roiling like intestines, expanding into the empty space around it. The Doctor couldn't help but think of the scene in Star Wars where the Tauntaun's guts are sliced open with a light sabre. The TARDIS' innards expanded into the vacuum. Control room. Corridors. Swimming pool. Roundels. Sleeping quarters. The Crew. Bodies!

Twenty-seconds later, the entire TARDIS that had previously been packed neatly into an alternate dimension was littered across space.

Before the Doctor could even get over the shock he was handed a space suit. He put it on, as did the rest of the crew, and the green alien gave them each a device. "This works like a Geiger counter," he said. "Anything that gives a reading: put one of these on it." He held up a little tab no larger than a coin. "These will stick to anything." He passed out little bags of the 'coins' to everyone and the crew made their way to the airlock. Shoosh. The Doctor was floating through space. He played with the propulsion controls for a couple of seconds to get the hang of things and then started to manoeuvre his way towards the remains of the slaughtered TARDIS.

He could see the others measuring and marking various pieces of equipment. His main goal had to be the crew. He was well out of sight of the ship by the time he found them. It was an entire class from the Academy: twelve students, a teacher and a T.A. He found a large cabinet that contained clothing from various time periods. He tore out the clothes and began to pack the unfortunate bodies into the cabinet. Three of the students had never overcome the shock. They had just regenerated again and again until they were nothing but a gray slime. The teacher must have been old, since he too was dead, but the slime was black, the sign that he had fought it until the end. There were three white cocoon-like casings which reminded him of the Watcher, an intermediate stage that he himself had once experienced. These ones would be safe from the cold, he thought. The rest looked like frozen corpses. There was no way to know what state they were in. As he floated one of the frozen bodies into the cabinet it began to regenerate. The unfortunate student opened his eyes for a brief second, his features changed, and then he froze again, a new face now locked in ice.

When the bodies had been loaded he put one of the homing 'coins' on the cabinet and hoped that they would not be stored in a cold airless space for much longer. He spent the rest of the time looking for additional crew, while tagging any time-related equipment he saw, but found no one else. Some of the equipment he tagged had emitted Artron signatures, but he knew that they would be useless to anyone trying to make a time machine. The food machine, for example, would be pretty much useless, but he tagged it. The more stuff they had to go through, the more time the Doctor would have to thwart their plans.

A quiet ping in his ears told the Doctor that the crew were being recalled. He could see the tractor beams already towing in the marked objects as he floated back to the ship. Two hours later, he was back in the bar with a credit chip in his hand. Even the others were too tired to continue drinking, and the Doctor said his good-byes and made as if to head home. In reality he made his way back to the spaceship. The ship had landed in the back of the bar: a huge tract of undeveloped land on which sat what appeared to be junked spaceships. When the Doctor rounded the back of the building he saw that a number of other workers, wearing MMC jumpsuits, were loading the artefacts onto lorries.

A series of lorries with the various items loaded onto them streamed past the Doctor through the chain-link gates and onto the street. As the last one passed by him, the Doctor leaped on the back and hitched a ride: all the way back to the rear entrance of the Mercury Mining Corporation.

The Doctor crammed himself into one of the artefacts on the back of the lorry and waited patiently in the freezing cold metal container as he was unloaded from the truck and loaded into a warehouse-like room. He didn't have a plan, but he didn't want to risk the

possibility of Rebecca and Ginnie not having access to this part of the building. He waited until the noise had stopped and the great outer doors had been sealed before making his move. He got out of the unit and found that the lights came on as soon as his movements had been detected. He froze for a second, thinking that someone might see him, but the place was deserted. The Doctor quickly found the cupboard containing the unfortunate crew of the TARDIS and laid the bodies out one by one on the floor of the warehouse. The Doctor discovered to his dismay that all but three of the people were dead.

The three Gallifreyans who had formed a protective white cocoon around themselves were still alive. The Doctor found some equipment to generate heat and surrounded the bodies. While they were warming the Doctor laid his hands on them and tried to make contact with the occupants telepathically. Eventually he succeeded in pushing the three hibernating Time Lords into regenerating fully. The first to regenerate was a young man only about two hundred or so. He was probably the TA, thought the Doctor. The next was a young woman about the age Romana had been when the Doctor had first met her. The third was a complete surprise. It was a girl who looked to be about twelve years old. She opened her eyes and smiled at the Doctor.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," responded the Doctor. "What's your name?"

"Parambalatremar," said the girl.

"Can I call you something shorter than that," asked the Doctor.

"Sure, how about Parambalatre," suggested the girl.

"I was thinking more along the lines of Para," said the Doctor.

"Oh. Well, okay."

By this time the other two Time Lords had awakened.

"Parambalatremar," asked the TA. "What's happened to her?"

"Something's gone wrong, hasn't it," asked the Doctor.

"Yes," said the woman. "She's the same age as me."

"And how old would that be," asked the Doctor.

"One hundred and two," said the woman. "Who are you?"

"I'm the Doctor."

The TA's eyebrows shot up. "THE Doctor?"

The Doctor grinned. "The one and only."

The woman giggled. "I'm still at the Academy, so I haven't picked a title yet. My name's Ginavandella and yes, you can call me Gina."

"I'm Torborosha," said the young man. "Where are the others?"

"All dead, I'm afraid," said the Doctor.

The two looked shocked.

"Who's dead," asked Para.

"The other members of your class," said the Doctor.

"My class," she asked. "I'm only twelve. I'm too young to go to school."

"You're twelve," asked Gina.

"Yes," answered Para.

"What's the last thing you remember," asked the Doctor.

"Mother and Father and I had come up here to ice-boat. I was investigating some caves and I got a little bit turned around inside. I remember sitting down on the cold ground and it was getting cold. My torch started to go dim and I didn't know what was going to happen next."

"And then," prompted the Doctor.

"Then I woke up here."

"I think she's regressed to her childhood from the trauma," suggested Torborosha. "She's recalling another incident involving intense cold."

"Yes," said the Doctor. "I think you're right. But we've got more important things to worry about right now."

The first thing the four Time Lords had to do was get rid of the bodies of the other Time Lords. It was a horrible job, but they had to make sure that there was no Gallifreyan DNA for the Mercury Mining Corporation to get their hands on. The four Time Lords laid their hands on each of the bodies one by one and forced them to regenerate again. With no remaining regenerations the bodies consumed themselves until nothing was left but a thick black sludge. This the Doctor gathered into a container and poured down the sink in the corner of the warehouse, running enough water to wipe away the evidence. Then, they needed to figure out how to escape. The Doctor had his pass. He wondered if he would be able to get OUT of the restricted area.

The Doctor found that neither the large main door nor the small side door would open. There was a fire exit, but that would set off the alarms. So, he tried the door that would lead them into the building. Once inside, they would either have to find their way out the front door, or they would be trapped. They couldn't even leave the door to the warehouse open because the alarm activated automatically if the door was left open for more than a minute.

The four Time Lords cautiously entered the main building. The building was designed like a wheel, with an outer hub of rooms and six hallways leading to the central shaft which contained the elevator. There were three ways to go: left and right along the outer hub or straight ahead down one of the spokes that led to the elevators.

"You and Para go left," said the Doctor to Gina. "Torborosha and I will go right. We'll meet back here in five minutes."

Para and Gina tried a number of doors with no success. "So, why can't I remember coming here," Para asked eventually.

"Well, Para," began Gina. "You've got amnesia."

"Why, did I hit my head?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking. Our TARDIS crashed."

"TARDIS," asked Para. "How come we had access to a TARDIS?"

"Well, we're students at the Academy," explained Gina.

"I'm not old enough to go to the Academy," countered Para.

"That's the weird thing, Para. You and I are the same age."

"What do you mean?"

"You've lost over one hundred years worth of your memory."

Para stood wide-eyed for a few seconds. "But I don't look that old," she finally said.

"You've regenerated."

"Regenerated," she exclaimed. She was shocked. To have lost a life at so young an age. It was bad enough to die at 100, but to her, she was only twelve and she'd already died once. It was horrible. She hadn't had to face death at all in her twelve years on Gallifrey.

The Doctor and Torborosha made their way along the gently curving corridor. The doors were far apart. The Doctor imagined each room was as big as the warehouse they had arrived in. Most of the doors were simply locked, but they came upon one that had its own security access panel.

"In a way, this is simpler to get into than a locked door," said the Doctor. "If only we can pick the lock."

"Let me try," said Torborosha. He pulled a device from his pocket. It had a few wires sticking out of one end, but the other end was the same shape as a security card. He slid the card-end into the security door. A few lights on the device flashed and then there was a click. The door was open.

The Doctor looked at him. "Where did you get that," he asked the young Time Lord.

"I like to come prepared when I go on these field trips," he answered, stepping in to the lab and holding the door for the Doctor to follow. The lights inside the massive room came on automatically.

"A little more prepared than I remember my teaching assistants at the Academy being," remarked the Doctor.

"You never know when you're going to get locked into some kind of an alien construct or other," answered Torborosha. The Doctor couldn't help but think that the young man was trying to hide something.

Torborosha had moved forward to the largest object in the room. It was quite obviously a massive gun. It stood several metres tall and from where the end of it was affixed to the solid platform to the end of the metre-wide barrel it stretched at least twenty metres.

"A plasma cannon," said the Doctor. "But what's that," he asked, indicating the metal device attached to the front of the barrel. It was a pincer-shaped attachment.

"Maybe it's for some kind of focusing lens," suggested Torborosha.

"Yes," agreed the Doctor. "But why not incorporate it into the design?"

"Maybe they bought the cannon from someone and are just trying to modify it."

"You could be right," said the Doctor. "Let's take a look at this thing."

He booted up the targeting computer and saw that a number of pre-set galactic coordinates had been defined. To his horror, one of them looked familiar. Earth! 1985! If someone chose that setting the plasma cannon would destroy the entire planet nearly 1000 years in the past.

Suddenly, the two men heard an almost imperceptible sliding noise. They turned towards the door. No one was there. The Doctor looked around the room. "There," he suddenly

shouted, pointing at a spot near the ceiling. Torborosha looked. Coming from a vent in the ceiling were dozens of orange creatures. Some of them were sliding along the ceiling, while others were making their way down the wall to the floor. The Doctor could see that the creatures had tentacles. They resembled octopi, but with some kind of cybernetic enhancements. He could see silver lines of metal running the length of each of their eight tentacles, and some kind of central processing unit affixed to the body of the animal.

The Doctor and Torborosha backed against the cannon. There was no way out of the room without going through the five or six octopus creatures that had already made it down to the floor.

"We should make a break for it," said Torborosha. He started to run but two octopi from the ceiling dropped onto him. One wrapped itself around his face while another quickly engulfed his hands in a writhing mass of tentacles. He began kicking at the air in front of him, the odd blow landing on an octopus. The Doctor realized he was trying to clear a path for him. He looked up to gauge the positions of the octopi that clung to the ceiling. Two on the floor were getting very close to him. He made a run for it, springing over the one nearest him. It reached out and a tentacle made contact with his leg, but the Doctor shook it off violently.

As he passed Torborosha, the TA began to scream. The Doctor realized that the octopus was engulfing the man's hands with its mouth. Suppressing the urge to retch, the Doctor sidestepped another octopus and barrelled through the door. He grabbed the lock-picking device from the security console and slid it with as much force as he could muster down the hallway in the direction that Para and Gina had gone. He turned back to the door. He must distract the creatures from the key. He rushed back into the room, picking up one octopus on each leg as he did so. He slammed the door shut, sealing himself and Torborosha in with the frightening creatures. He could see that Torborosha was now covered with the creatures, and the one on his hands had swallowed them up to the wrist. The man was twisting and turning desperately trying to shake the creatures from him. The Doctor felt one of the creatures climbing up his back and saw another wrap itself around his hands the same as the one on Torborosha's hands.

Suddenly, Torborosha's wild spinning made him collide with the plasma cannon. He lost his balance and fell, instinctively putting his arms out in front of him to stop his fall. He fell directly onto the octopus creature that held his hands together. It let out a squeal as the full weight of the Time Lord threatened to squash it. It closed its mouth and bit off Torborosha's hands. As the Time Lord began to scream, blood rushing from his arms, still held together by the tentacles of the beast, the Doctor felt the creature on his head push its mouth against his skull. He felt a prick. Wetness. He started to feel dizzy. He got to his knees, carefully, so as not to injure the creatures that covered his entire body. He couldn't even hear Torborosha's screams any more. He lost consciousness. He fell.

Episode Four

Gina and Para had heard the sounds of the struggle echoing through the hallways. They had approached cautiously and watched from a safe distance as the unconscious bodies of the Doctor and Torborosha were carried away on stretchers by a team of MMC security personnel. They saw no further signs of the little orange creatures, and assumed that they had returned to their place within the locked room.

Gina had seen the pass-key lying on the floor during the whole incident, and had hoped that the security people would not spot it. Now, with the hallway clear, she retrieved the pass. It looked a little scraped up, but hopefully it would still work.

"Well, it looks like we'll have to rescue them," said Para.

Gina looked at her classmate. She had found it odd in the past, adjusting to a friend or teacher's regeneration, but Para's youthful appearance and manner were very unsettling.

"I guess we'll have to," said Gina. Para put her hand out. Gina blinked for a second, unsure of what Para meant by it. "Oh," she thought. She took Para's hand and the two of them walked down the spoke of the building towards the elevator bank.

The Doctor awoke to the smell of antiseptic. He opened his eyes. His head cleared remarkably quickly. He found himself lying in a hospital-type bed. Standing over him was Ryszard Cyba. "Doctor Smith," said the controller of the Mercury Mining Corporation. "Imagine my surprise at being awakened at 3:30 in the morning by a call from the security computer."

"I can see how that would be unexpected," quipped the Doctor, sitting up. He noticed Torborosha in the next bed over from his. He was unconscious and his two injured hands lay on the covers of his bed. Both had been replaced by cybernetic hands.

"Our people do fast work, Doctor," said Cyba. "Sadly we could not save his hands, but I am told that these robotic hands are better than the originals." He smiled.

"What about the octopus creature?"

"Ah, yes, the Octo-bots."

"Octo-bots," said the Doctor, bemusedly.

"You'd prefer Robo-Puses," asked Cyba.

"I guess not."

"That poor creature went into shock. It had to be destroyed," said Cyba with a hint of sadness. "The other ones have been re-programmed not to bite off peoples' hands." He almost smiled. "Now let's get back to the main reason I stayed around here instead of letting my security people handle everything: What is my newest employee doing in a restricted area in the middle of the night?"

The Doctor wondered how much Cyba knew. This town was owned by the Mercury Mining Corporation. It was possible that Cyba knew everything. He decided to tell as much of the truth as Cyba could possibly verify.

"I was at the Silver Moon pub," said the Doctor. "I was just about to go home, when I happened to see a number of vehicles being loaded with equipment. Now normally I wouldn't think anything of it, but I thought I saw a TARDIS console. Now this would help us greatly in our work, so you can imagine how excited I was. When one of the lorries came past me I jumped in the back, hid in one of the pieces of equipment, and ended up here."

There, that sounded believable. If Cyba knew that he had been a part of the salvage crew, he would simply claim that he held that information back because he didn't know how MMC felt about moonlighting.

"I see," said Cyba. His expression gave nothing away. "And how did you come to be in a locked room with this man," he asked, indicating Torborosha.

Now comes the time to lie, thought the Doctor. Torborosha was asleep. He assumed that Cyba hadn't questioned him yet. Well, that was the chance he'd have to take. At any rate, it seemed like Para and Gina hadn't been captured, so best not to mention them at all.

"When I heard the big door close, I figured I was in some kind of warehouse," the Doctor explained. I extricated myself from the equipment I had hidden in, and found myself in a big, well-lit room. I saw the MMC logo all over the place, and realized I was probably back in this building. Then I noticed this character, snooping around. He didn't see me, so I kept my eye on him and I could tell he didn't belong there. He was looking around at things. Testing the doors, that kind of thing. I figured if he was spying on the Corporation that I should make sure he didn't get away with any company secrets."

Cyba smiled. I've got him, thought the Doctor.

"So I followed him. He went out of the big room, down the hall and tried all of the doors. Eventually he went into one of the rooms. When I got there, I opened the door and at first I didn't see him. I went in, and that's when the Octo-bots started attacking us. I tried to run, but they got me."

"Yes," agreed Cyba. The Doctor wondered how talkative the Octo-bots could be. Would they be able to relate the whole story to Cyba? He wondered if the slight differences in his story would be discovered.

Gina and Para had found a map of the building near the elevators. This, along with signs along the way, led them to the administrative offices. The pass-key let them in and they turned their attention to the computers.

"You're the expert," Gina said. Para looked at her for a second, and was about to disagree, when she realized that she did have a great deal of knowledge about computers. While she began the job of hacking into the system, she asked Gina "Is this what I was studying at the Academy?"

"Yes," said Gina. "It was your best subject."

"Oh," said Para. "I like computers."

Within a half-hour they had entered themselves into the employee database and issued security passes for themselves and Torborosha.

"Now," said Gina. "Let's see if we can find the Doctor." She got up.

"Wait," said Para. "I think I can get into the security system from here." Gina sat down. To her delight Para was able to do just that, and they found the feeds from all of the security cameras in the building. The building was almost completely deserted, except for the cleaning staff and the handful of people in the infirmary. Pinpointing the Doctor's location on a map, of which they printed themselves some copies, the pair set off for the top floor of the building, to the medical services area. When they got there, it sounded like a man was being tortured.

"Aaah!" The sound came from Torborosha. Cyba turned his attention away from the Doctor and to his other captive.

"And what's your name," said Cyba.

Torborosha looked at the big man. He looked around the room disorientated. He looked at his hands. He was dumbfounded. That's when the Doctor noticed the little tattoo on the inside of Torborosha's right forearm. It was the same "13 minutes after nothing" tattoo that the little green alien had!

"What's your name," Cyba repeated, in a louder tone.

"I'm not telling you anything," said Torborosha finally.

"How did you get into a locked room?"

Torborosha said nothing.

Cyba tried to get some more information out of him but the Gallifreyan remained silent. The Doctor thought it odd that Torborosha was such an expert at avoiding interrogation. He wondered how serious Cyba's interrogation techniques were going to get.

But, before he could find out, Cyba said, "Okay, put him into one of the detention cells. We'll get the police here in the morning. And as for you," he said, turning towards the Doctor. "I'd like to keep my eye on you for a while. There's a cot in the lab. Why don't you sleep there tonight and I'll look into your story a little further."

"Sure," said the Doctor. He followed Cyba through the corridors until they got to the lab the Kartz and Reimer shared. Cyba opened the door for him and pointed towards the little side-room that doubled as an office. "I'll see you tomorrow," said Cyba.

"Yes, definitely," said the Doctor, grinning. "Good night," he called cheerily as the door clicked shut. He could hear Cyba programming the key-pad for a few moments and then he heard the echo of his footsteps which gradually receded. He tried the door. It was locked. He was under house arrest.

He pulled out the little cot and was just about to try to get some sleep when there came a knock on the door. He went to it. "I can't open the door," he said. "I'm locked in."

Gina and Para tried their security passes, but they didn't work. They tried the pass-key. The door opened. "Here, Doctor," said Gina, pushing Para through the door. "Take care of her; I'll be back in a little while."

Before the Doctor could say anything, Gina was off down the corridor.

While they had been in the hallway outside of the medical area, Gina had recognized Cyba's photo from the personnel files that she and Para had skimmed. He was the number one person in the organization and she had memorized the location of his office. It was on the same floor as the medical area, two floors up from the Doctor and Para.

Para had filled the Doctor in on their end of things and the Doctor had done likewise. She ended with, "So Gina's going to try and break into Cyba's office to see what she can find out."

"What," said the Doctor, "What if he's still here?"

Para looked alarmed. "We thought he went home after he locked you in here."

The Doctor looked equally alarmed.

Gina took out the security pass that she had made for herself and slid it into the slot in front of Cyba's office. A green light came on. She heard a little click. She pushed at the door. It didn't open. Suddenly, she realized that someone was standing right behind her. She turned. It was Cyba.

Episode Five

Gina was not a short woman, but Cyba towered over her. The big man reached into his pocket.

"You'll need this," he said pulling out his own pass key.

He slid it into the lock and it opened with a click.

"I don't like people cleaning my office unless I'm present," he explained to Gina, "so I had the lock changed to disable the cleaning passes."

He looked her up and down. "I don't recognize you," he said.

"Uh oh," thought Gina.

Cyba stood motionless for a second. "Oh, yes. Gina Vandella. Place of Birth: Earth. Age: Twenty-nine Earth years. Hired last week, while I was off-planet. Cleaning staff Top security clearance. Previous work: IMC. You seem to have a thing for mining companies," he smiled, holding the door open for her.

"How on Gallifrey did he know all that," thought Gina. She had only entered that information into the employee database a couple of hours ago.

On her way to Cyba's office, Gina had picked up a cart in the cleaning closet at the end of the hall. She pulled it through the door and decided to start by emptying Cyba's wastebasket. Cyba stood in the doorway for a moment. "What's a girl like you doing in a job like this," he asked. "You don't seem the usual type."

"I have my reasons, but they're personal," she answered. "Oh great," she thought. "Now he thinks I'm hiding something. Brilliant."

He looked at her for five full seconds without saying anything.

"I might as well finish up some work while I'm here. Just work around me." He strode to his desk and sat down in the expensive leather chair. Gina finished emptying the wastebaskets and decided to dust next. She got the duster from the cart and made her way around the perimeter of the room while Cyba worked at his computer. The first thing she did was clear her mind of all thoughts and concentrate on Cyba's mind. As he typed his password into the computer, she grabbed it from his brain. She was not extremely telepathic, but this was a little trick she had learned at the Academy. The neat part was, that the person didn't really notice that their mind was being read because they usually did not think about what they were doing. When someone types in a password that they've typed in a hundred times before, a completely

different part of the brain takes over the task. Cyba did not even pause when she did it. He was none the wiser.

Cyba's password was: The War of the Worlds

The reference meant nothing to Gina.

Cyba quickly established a phone link through his computer.

"What," Gina heard the voice coming from the speaker. "It's the middle of the night."

"Sorry," said Cyba. "I need to find out about someone, Ranson. I'm e-mailing you the man's photo now."

"Got it," said the voice of Ranson after a couple of seconds. "I assume you need this immediately?"

"It can wait until morning," said Cyba. "He's not going anywhere."

"Okay, g'night."

"Oh," said Cyba as an afterthought. "There is another." Cyba pulled up the photo of the Doctor that he had taken earlier while the Doctor was unconscious. "Let's see what you can find on this man."

"No problem. Goodnight, Controller Cyba."

"Good night, Ranson."

Meanwhile, in the lab, the Doctor and Para were doing their own work with the computer. With Para's skills, the Doctor had managed to pull up a schematic of the plasma cannon.

"This isn't just some kind of fancy drill," he said to Para. "There's enough power here to destroy an entire planet."

"Bad," said Para.

"Bad," agreed the Doctor.

"And do you see what I see," said Para. She pointed at the area in front of the gun where the Doctor and Torborosha had seen the attachment. In the schematic, there was indeed a lens placed in front of the gun. The Doctor double-clicked on the lens and brought up the specifications.

"Holy Rassilon," said Para. "That lens has the ability to send the plasma beam back through time!"

"Yes," said the Doctor. "This weapon could be used to destroy a planet millions of light-years away and millions of years in the past."

"We cannot allow this," said Para.

"You took the words right out of my mouth," said the Doctor. The Doctor looked up at the clock. It was almost time for people to start coming in to work. The door opened and Gina walked in. She told the Doctor and Para what had happened.

"The War of the Worlds," said the Doctor. "Interesting. Mercury Theatre. Mercury Mining Corporation."

Neither Para nor Gina had any idea what he was talking about.

"Well, that Ranson won't find anything about me," said the Doctor, jumping to a different subject. "I think. What about Torborosha? Do you think he'd be in anyone's database?"

"He's been on a lot of missions," said Gina. "He might have been photographed somewhere."

"Well, we've got some more important work to take care of. You and Para see if you can get some sleep in here. I'll introduce you to Virginia and Rebecca when they come in. But don't let on we're Time Lords, they don't trust us. Yet."

Within the hour, Professors Kartz and Reimer had arrived for work. The Doctor introduced Para and Gina as his sister and niece.

"They can't stay here," said Virginia. "They shouldn't even be here now."

"Sorry," said the Doctor. "You two go back to the hotel. Meet me in the lobby at lunch time."

Gina agreed and she and Para left the lab.

"So, Doctor," said Rebecca. "Time to get some real work done today."

"I'm ready to go," said the Doctor, rubbing his hands together. "What do you want me to work on?"

Rebecca grabbed an extra white lab coat from a hook and handed it to the Doctor who pulled it on over his waistcoat. Rebecca noticed the pattern on the waistcoat reminded her of the space ships going into hyperspace from Star Wars.

"We are trying to build a lens that can send a beam of light back through time," explained Rebecca as the Doctor buttoned up the lab coat. She walked over to a long table with a laser beam at one end and a slot similar to the one on the end of the gun positioned half way down the table.

"What I want you to do is measure the chrono-refractive index of a number of different alloys that we've developed." She cut open a box in which lay hundreds of glass lenses, each about a decimetre in diameter.

She gave him a book to log the results and showed him how to use the temporal diffraction metre affixed to the other end of the bench.

"I've used one of these many times," said the Doctor.

"Good," said Rebecca.

The Doctor worked in silence for the better part of the morning, stopping only to get a drink of water or use the toilet.

Gina and Para walked into the Mercury Mining Corporation building. Gina nodded at the receptionist and walked past her as if she belonged there. She could see out of the corner of her eye that the receptionist had returned her attention to the book she had been reading. Gina and Para got to the elevators and were about to use their security passes to call the elevators when one arrived and opened up for them.

They quickly returned to the floor with the cells, and found that they had to use their passes to get through the security doors on that level. As they approached the cells, they worked out a plan.

Lou was getting ready for lunch. There was still an hour to go, but he hadn't had time for breakfast that morning. The Corporation had called him in early on account of this prisoner

who had apparently been found in a restricted area that morning. Some of Lou's co-workers might have taken the opportunity to taunt the prisoner, but Lou didn't care. He ignored the guy and watched the little television he had brought with him.

"Excuse me, sir."

Lou turned his neck to see a little girl standing in the doorway. He pulled his massive bulk out of the wooden chair and walked to the door.

"What can I do for you," he asked.

"I'm lost," said Para. "Do you know where the Day Care Centre is?"

"Sure," said Lou. "Come with me." He took Para's hand and led her down the hall. Gina slipped into the room and, using the master pass-key, she unlocked the cell and released Torborosha.

"I was just about to get my lunch," joked Torborosha.

Gina was running out the door, but Torborosha stopped her. "Wait," he said. "We've got to take care of the guard or he'll sound the alarm when he gets back."

"We couldn't think of a way to subdue him without hurting him," said Gina.

"I have a way," said Torborosha. He twisted his belt buckle and it came off in his hand. The two of them hid on either side of the door, and when Lou came back, Torborosha aimed his belt buckle at Lou's face and pressed down on it. A spray of gas shot out of the belt buckle and Lou lost consciousness immediately. Gina caught him and laid him gently on the floor.

"How long will that last," she asked.

"Five or six hours," answered Torborosha.

"You're full of surprises," said Gina as the two of them started back towards the elevators.

"So," said the Doctor abruptly, looking up from his notebook. "How did a couple of twentieth century Earth girls end up working for an alien scientific research facility?"

"I was a Professor at Cambridge," replied Virginia.

"And I was one of her students," continued Rebecca.

"My best student," said Virginia. "Rebecca is the most intelligent person I've ever met. She's brilliant. I got her working on my research team as soon as possible."

"And the aliens," asked the Doctor.

"It was such a strange thing," said Virginia. "At first, we were approached by a gentleman and asked if we'd like to work for a private company in our spare time. Well, the money was so good and the equipment was everything we could hope for, and more, that eventually I quit my job and Rebecca quit school and we began to work full time for the company."

"And then, one day, they told us that they were aliens," said Rebecca.

"Just like that," asked the Doctor.

"Yes," said Rebecca. "And it didn't take much convincing, because we had already thought that something was a little bit strange. Anyway, we had mentioned that working in a

zero-gravity environment would help one of our tests, and that's when they told us they were aliens and moved us onto the space station. We worked under Mr. Dastari from then on."

The Doctor thought of Dastari and about forty other scientists, dying at the hands of the Sontarans. He shook the sight of the rotting corpses out of his head.

"What are you two working on," asked the Doctor, changing the subject.

"We're trying out some of the new alloys for the next batch of lenses," answered Rebecca.

"I think the Beryllium ones are showing the most promise," said the Doctor, looking at the notations on his pad.

"That's what we thought," said Virginia. "And we thought the sulphur/bromine compound was a likely candidate as well."

"Yes," said the Doctor. "Combined with the Beryllium, it is showing some good signs, but only up to a certain intensity. If I'm not mistaken, the final version will be channelling something a lot more powerful than this little laser." He looked at the women.

"Well," said Virginia, "I guess we can tell you now what this is for. We hope to attach this to a plasma cannon that's used to drill into the rock."

"I thought it was probably something like that," said the Doctor. "I'm not sure what the point of the Time Travel is, though."

"It's a safety concern," said Rebecca. "The crew can get extremely close to the area they want to blast. Then the beam goes back in time and by the time the present arrives, the dust has cleared and the heat has dissipated."

"Oh, very clever," said the Doctor. "But they're changing history every time they use it."

"That they are," answered Virginia, "But the Corporation is developing strict guidelines regarding the use of the cannon."

"And the time-distortion will be extremely localized," said Rebecca.

"Relatively speaking," added the Doctor.

"Yes. But the universe is a big place," said Rebecca.

"I hope so," said the Doctor. "Listen, I've been thinking about the heat problem. What if we pepper the lens with Titanium Tetrachloride?"

"That could diffract the beam too much," said Rebecca.

"Not if it were in a controlled matrix formation," countered the Doctor. "Then we could calculate the diffraction and compensate for it with a fluctuation in the lens curvature."

"Let me do the numbers," said Rebecca. She went over to the computer and started working out the calculations.

"While we're waiting for her," said the Doctor to Virginia, "maybe you can tell me a little about the targeting mechanism."

"We have a working copy right here," said Virginia, opening a cabinet and pulling out the small computer terminal. She hooked it up the little laser that the Doctor was using for his experiments.

"May I have a go at it," the Doctor asked.

"Be my guest," she answered, going back to her work.

It was just like the one he had seen on the cannon. The Doctor fiddled with the device for only a few minutes before figuring out exactly how it worked. The targeting computer could be fed the co-ordinates of any point in space-time, information that could be gotten from any of

a dozen real-time on-line services in the galaxy, and then would calculate the relative positions of that particular point throughout any time in the universe's history. The Doctor picked a spot on Earth and watched the monitor screen display a visual of the events taking place at that very moment in Piccadilly Circus. He then put in a time of 500 years ago. A second later the image changed and the Piccadilly Circus of the 24th century appeared. Another 500 years. People were walking around with top hats and riding around in horse-drawn carriages.

The Doctor had seen some equipment lying in pieces all over the place. These were bits and pieces of time machines that had been brought in from who-knew-where for Kartz and Reimer to study. He cobbled together a small device no larger than a yo-yo. On the top was a rudimentary interface for entering co-ordinates and a time delay. What the Doctor hoped to do was make a device that fooled the targeting system into thinking that it was homing in on Earth, when in fact; it was actually homing in on the device the Doctor had fashioned, fooled by the false reading given by chronoton particles and artron signatures into thinking that it had found its target.

The Doctor programmed into the beacon the co-ordinates for Piccadilly Circus in 1850. He reset the targeting scanner. In seconds it had homed in on the little beacon that the Doctor had constructed.

He reprogrammed the device again, to a very simple set of co-ordinates; one that would be easy for any of the four Time Lords to remember. The Doctor's plan was for one of them to get back into the room with the plasma cannon and re-program the targeting computer to seek out the beacon.

"I think it will work," shouted Rebecca from the next room. She came out and showed Virginia and the Doctor the results of her calculation.

"Yes," said the Doctor. "That's what I thought. Combined with the Beryllium and the Sulphides and Bromides, I think the lens will stand up to the heat of a plasma cannon."

"I'll send the specs down to the boys in the basement. We should have something to test by morning."

"That's pretty quick," said the Doctor.

"The Mercury Mining Corporation has given this project top priority," explained Rebecca.

"It's almost lunch time, Doctor," reminded Rebecca. "Your sister's probably in the lobby waiting for you."

"Oh, thanks," said the Doctor, taking off his lab coat and heading for the door. "See you after lunch."

Rebecca noted the pattern of silver spots on the back of the Doctor's waistcoat. It looked like the Milky Way.

"Cyba," he said, answering the phone.

"Ranson here," came the reply. "I found out about one of the guys. Smith is a cipher, but the other guy is called Torborosha. He's a Time Lord. It looks like he's some kind of TA at the academy. He shows up with different little groups of students all the time."

"A Time Lord is not good, no matter how innocuous his presence here might be."

"But there's more," added Ranson. "He's rumoured to be working for a <CENSORED> known as <CENSORED>. All I've got is the name. I'll do a little more digging on them."

"Excellent," said Cyba. "Call me as soon as you have something."

Cyba logged out of his computer terminal and headed for Torborosha's cell. When he got there and found Torborosha missing he let out a yell. "Where is he," he shouted. He picked up the unconscious guard with one hand and threw him across the room. He strode over to the guard and tore the walkie-talkie from his belt. "The prisoner has escaped," he shouted into the device. Seconds later an alarm sounded within the building.

The Doctor, Gina, Para and Torborosha were sitting in the Silver Moon pub. The Doctor had filled them in on the details he had learned. He had managed to construct three more beacons before lunch. He put them onto the table.

"I want you and Gina to take these beacons and find a way to that fish-net in space. I want you to plant a device in each of the field generators. When they test the plasma cannon, the beam will home in on these beacons and destroy the artron net.

"What will you do," asked Para.

"I'll have to sneak into the restricted area and re-program the targeting system to seek out the co-ordinates of the beacon no matter what the test site is," answered the Doctor.

"I think it would be better if I did that," said Torborosha. "If you get caught, then we've lost our man on the inside. If they catch me, they'll just put me back in my cell."

"He has a point, Doctor," said Gina.

The Doctor considered Torborosha's argument for a second and then agreed.

"Okay, I'll go with Gina and disable the artron net."

"What about me," asked Para. She seemed hurt that she was being left out.

"I was thinking of asking Virginia and Rebecca to look after you this evening."

"Aw," said Para.

"It'll be too dangerous for you," said the Doctor, "but do you know what you can do? You can try and break in to MMC's computer again, and download their entire database onto this." He handed her a data disk.

"I can do it. Do you think the Professors will let me use their computer?"

"Maybe, but don't let them see what you're doing," cautioned the Doctor. "If they don't let you use it, maybe sneak down at night while they're asleep."

"Got it," said Para, happy to be part of the team.

"Now, Torborosha and Gina," said the Doctor, "Can you get us a spaceship by this evening?"

"Do you mean rent one or steal one," asked Gina with a sly grin.

"Whatever it takes," said the Doctor.

The Doctor returned to the lab with Para.

"I'm sorry," he said to Virginia and Rebecca, "but my sister had to leave the planet in a hurry. I can't just leave her in the hotel."

"There's a place she can stay," said Rebecca. She showed the Doctor where the Day Care Centre was and they left Para there with children who were far younger than her apparent age, never mind her real age.

"I wonder if I could ask a big favour from you," he said to the two women when he and Rebecca returned from the Day Care Centre. "Is there any chance that you would be able to look after Para this evening?"

"We'd love to," said Virginia, grinning.

"She can spend the night in the guest room," added Rebecca.

"Great," said the Doctor. "The thing is, I've got to leave the planet too. Our father is ill and I've got to join Gina. He probably won't last the night."

"I understand," said Virginia.

"See you in the morning, sweetie," said the Doctor, giving Para a big hug. He had gotten hold of a razor and had removed the two-week's growth on his face, leaving only his familiar goatee. Para briskly rubbed the extremely short hair on the back of his head.

"Bye Uncle John," said Para, giving him a wink. "Say hi to Mommy for me."

"I will," said the Doctor.

"See you tomorrow, Doctor," said Virginia, noticing for the first time the vertical zigzag pattern of stars on his waistcoat.

"Have a safe flight," said Rebecca.

"Nice ship," said the Doctor, admiring the lithe cruiser to which Gina had led him. It was a small ship with only enough room for at most four people.

"Thanks," said Gina. "We've got six hours before they notice it's missing."

"Perhaps I'd better not ask," said the Doctor, climbing the short ladder into the cockpit. "Where's the pilot," asked the Doctor.

"It doesn't look too hard," said Gina, climbing into the pilot's seat. "I thought I'd give it a go."

The Doctor grinned as he strapped on his seat belt. He reached for his helmet. "What exactly did you specialize in at the Academy," he asked.

"A little of this and a little of that," she replied. Her hands flicked over the switches and the engines roared to life.

"Quiet," commented the Doctor.

Gina spoke into the microphone of her headset, quickly getting clearance from the tower. A moment later the cruiser was shooting upwards at an incredible rate. The Doctor's head was pushed back against the seat. He tried to turn his head to look out the window so he

could get a glimpse of Mercury 237 as it receded into the distance, but the G-forces kept his head glued in one place until the familiar sensation of weightlessness overcame them.

As soon as he could move again, the Doctor fiddled with his headset. "Can you hear me," he said.

"Loud and clear," answered Torborosha.

"Where are you now," asked the Doctor.

"I've made it back into the restricted area. I'm just about to see if my pass-key will still work in the door. Yes! I'm in. So far no sign of Octo-bots. I'm at the targeting computer."

The Doctor stepped through Torborosha the process of breaking into the computer. There were a couple of extra levels of security to crack, but eventually they were able to hack in. Torborosha's job was to re-write the targeting software so that no matter what co-ordinates were fed in, the gun would always aim for the co-ordinates the Doctor had programmed into the beacons. If all went well, the next time the gun was fired, the plasma beam would aim for the four beacons and take out the entire artron-net with it. If all went well.

Eventually, Torborosha was left to work on his own, and the Doctor settled into his seat and tried to make out some of the stars that were visible through the windscreen. The brief flight towards the artron-net was uneventful, and as they approached the edge of the net, the Doctor began to look for the telltale signs of an asteroid or space station that might house the generators. The Doctor had re-modulated the scanner to look for the tell-tale signatures of the net.

"I think there are probably four different generators, one in each corner of the net. Unfortunately, it's so dark we'll have to try and find it by radar."

They flew through the pitch-black of space, knowing that they were close only by the flicker of the net on the monitor and the occasional blip from the radar. Eventually the Doctor saw a radar-reading that seemed probable. He directed Gina to manoeuvre towards the radar blip. As they approached, the bright arc-lights of the ship highlighted a small satellite hanging in the dead of space. The Doctor donned his space suit and edged his way carefully towards the small metal sphere. He took one of the beacons out of his pocket, set the timer for one hour, and attached it to the side of the sphere and returned to the ship.

As soon as the ship had approached the satellite, an alarm had gone off on Cyba's pager. He raced to his office and called up his security chief on the computer screen. "Someone's at the net. Saboteurs, I think. Get after them."

"Right away sir," answered the security chief.

The Doctor and Gina had easily found two of the other three satellites and affixed a beacon to each of those as well, but as their ship approached the fourth beacon, Gina suddenly pointed to the radar screen. "Doctor, we've got company."

The Doctor looked at the screen. "I don't think I can make it to the beacon and back before they get here."

"Then let's get out of here," said Gina. "Three out of four should be enough."

"All right," said the Doctor. Gina laid in a course for Mercury 237 and the ship began to accelerate. Five minutes later, they passed near the other ship. Gina expected to be hailed, but the radio remained silent. Then, suddenly, the other ship fired a shot from its plasma cannon. Gina pulled the ship into a turn. The shot missed the cruiser, and the two ships now faced each other, as if each were daring the other to make the first move.

"Doctor," came Torborosha's voice over the headset. "I've done it. I..." He broke off. "I hear something,"

"Mister Torborosha!" It was Cyba's voice. "What am I going to have to do to keep you out of this room?"

Episode Six

"Would you like some more pie," asked Virginia.

"Okay, one more small piece," answered Para. "Do you have any coffee?"

"Are you old enough to be drinking coffee," asked Rebecca.

"That's what they tell me," replied Para.

"Okay, three coffees it is," said Virginia. She started the water running and held the kettle under the stream.

"We don't have anything like Strawberries on Gallifrey," said Para. "Most of the fruits are a little on the bitter side."

Rebecca and Virginia had stopped moving. Virginia turned off the tap and put down the kettle.

"Gallifrey," asked Rebecca.

"Uh, oh," said Para.

Gina pulled the trigger on the cruiser's guns. A small beam of laser light shot out of the barrels, bouncing harmlessly off the bigger gun-ship's hull.

"I don't think this ship's designed for combat, Doctor," said Gina.

"Then we'll have to use something else as a weapon," said the Doctor, forgetting about Torborosha for the moment. "I'll set the timer on this last beacon for twenty seconds and put it into one of the cruiser's probes." The Doctor put the beacon into the probe and launched it towards the warship. Suddenly, a plasma blast appeared out of nowhere, tore through the rear of the warship and blasted the probe, melting it to slag in a picosecond.

"Let's get out of here," said the Doctor. As they raced back towards Mercury 237, they could see escape pods being launched from the warship. "We've got to get back before they realize something's wrong and send another ship," said the Doctor. The entire way back, there was only silence from the headset. What had happened to Torborosha?

They made it back to the planetoid quickly in the fast craft and were back on the streets of Mercury 237 within twenty minutes.

"The Doctor told me not to say anything because he didn't know if you were involved in the killings," said Para.

"What killings," asked Rebecca.

"The Time Lords that were killed yesterday. My whole class except for Gina. That's what they tell me, anyway. I've lost my memory. It seems we were flying through the vortex when we hit an artron-net. A trap laid out by the Mercury Mining Corporation. When their salvage people got there, they drained our ship of energy. The plasmic-shell lost its stability and the TARDIS exploded. They left us in space to die. If the Doctor hadn't come along and tried to rescue us, I'd be dead too."

"I can't believe this," said Virginia. "Are you sure they were working for the Mercury Mining Corporation?"

"They brought all the TARDIS pieces back into that building that you work in. They sneaked it in the back way in the middle of the night."

"This is outrageous," said Virginia. "How could they do such a terrible thing?"

"The Doctor says they've been doing it to a lot of ships."

"Oh my God," said Rebecca. "All those so-called salvaged parts they've been bringing us."

"From ships that have been captured. Their crews left to die."

The two women went pale as Para filled them in on all of the additional information they had discovered since the night before.

As Gina and the Doctor walked down the one main street, the sky lit up as three massive explosions erupted in space. Then, between the three blobs of light, a flickering yellow pattern of light where the artron net had been shimmered briefly and then disappeared entirely.

"Good job, Doctor," said Gina, taking his hand in hers.

"Good job yourself, Captain," he said to Gina. The two strode hand in hand in the warm night air, trying to figure out what their next plan of attack should be.

Back at Virginia and Rebecca's house the three women sat around the kitchen table. Three empty teacups sat in front of them.

"The Doctor wants me to try and download MMC's database," said Para, heading into the living room and sitting down in front of the monitor. "May I use your computer?"

"I suppose," said Virginia with a sigh. "Do you need my password?"

"No," said Para with a smile.

"I thought not," said the woman, looking decidedly older than she had done the day before. "We'll be upstairs. Give us a call if you need anything."

Para didn't answer. She was already engrossed in her work.

"He's late," said Gina.

The Doctor and Gina had been at the pre-arranged meeting place for ten minutes and Torborosha was nowhere to be found. The pair waited for another fifty minutes, and then had to come to the conclusion that Torborosha had been captured and was likely languishing in the MMC prison.

"We should go in and try to rescue him tonight," proposed Gina.

"Yes," agreed the Doctor. "There's no telling how brutal Cyba's questioning techniques will be this time."

They got into MMC and went up to the security area. The Doctor's pass didn't have enough clearance to get them in, but Gina's was high enough. They had come up with a cover story to tell the guards, but there were no guards on duty.

When they got to the holding area, the doors were wide open and the cell was empty.

"That's odd," said the Doctor.

"They must have taken him somewhere else," said Gina. The Doctor took Gina to the lab and he got back into the computer system. They looked for the better part of an hour for references to Torborosha but found nothing at all. Even Cyba's private files had no references.

"Look at this," said Gina while they were looking through Cyba's history files.

"There's a gap between 6:00 pm and 7:30," noted the Doctor. "Something's been deleted."

"Whatever Cyba's done, he's covered it up."

"We'll have to ask him ourselves," said the Doctor. "I want to wait until after the test tomorrow, though. I don't want MMC sending someone new from headquarters to take over the project if the High Council decide to take Cyba into custody."

"All right," said Gina. "Let's get back to Virginia and Rebecca's house."

"I'm locked out," said Para suddenly. "They know I was in. They've terminated my connection."

"Can they trace it back to us," Rebecca asked, worried.

"No," Para reassured her.

"Good," said Rebecca.

Para pulled out the data disk. "I'll clean the evidence off your system," she said. "In case they come looking at your system."

"I thought you said they couldn't trace it," said Rebecca.

"Well, when they can't trace it, they might suspect the Doctor, since he's their newest employee, and by association, you'll be suspected."

"Great," said Virginia.

"I don't know how safe your jobs are anyway," said Para, matter-of-factly. "There's no telling how the Time Lords are going to react when they find out the Mercury Mining Corporation are experimenting with Time Travel."

"Maybe we'd better find ourselves a new situation, Virginia," Rebecca said to the older woman.

"I wonder if the Doctor's the same Time Lord who ruined our last gig," sighed Virginia. "I was tempted to stick around and see who they sent, but our exit from the twentieth century was rather hasty."

"Don't know," said Para. "Just met him yesterday." She pressed a key "There. It'll take a few minutes for your cache to be purged and they'll never be able to prove anything."

"Thanks," said Virginia. "I think."

Suddenly, the air was filled with a familiar wheezing-groaning sound.

"It's a TARDIS," said Para.

Virginia and Rebecca stood back as a blue police box materialized in their living room. The door opened, and out stepped a figure in a dark-purple hooded cloak. Para stepped forward. "Did they send you to help," she asked the figure.

"No," came the whispered reply. Para felt the familiar brush of a Time Lord's mind.

"Doctor?"

The figure reached out and plucked the data disk from Para's hand.

"That's the Mercury Mining Corporation's database," explained Para.

"I know," said the man.

He turned and re-entered his TARDIS. It de-materialized almost immediately.

The three women stood there motionless, stunned at the strange incident.

"Did he just steal the information," asked Rebecca.

"I do believe that he did," answered Virginia.

"Who just stole the information," said the Doctor. He and Gina were standing in the doorway.

"I thought I heard a TARDIS," said Gina.

"You did," said Para. "I think that was the Doctor."

"Who was the Doctor," he asked.

"In the TARDIS," answered Para. "It was a Time Lord. He came out and took the disk from me and left again. It felt like you," she said, looking at the Doctor.

"What did he look like," asked the Doctor.

"He was dressed all in purple," answered Rebecca.

"It was reminiscent of a monk's habit," said Virginia. "But somehow more sinister looking."

"I don't remember anything like that," said the Doctor. "Maybe in the future..." he trailed off.

"Did you see his face," he asked.

"No," said Para. "It was completely covered."

"Your future self, then," said Gina.

"I suppose," said the Doctor, dumbfounded.

"Well whoever this unknown Doctor is," said Para. "He's taken our only copy of the MMC's database. We've been locked out of the computer system."

"So what happens now," asked Rebecca. "Are you still coming to work tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes," said the Doctor. "I want to see that plasma cannon in action."

"And what about the database," asked Virginia.

"I guess I'll have to try and download it again from within the company."

"Not from one of our computers, please," begged Rebecca.

Suddenly, the front door was smashed in and a Mercury Mining Corporation Security Team flooded through the opening. The head of the Team stepped forward and announced, "This site is under control of the Mercury Mining Corporation. We have reason to believe an act of sabotage was committed from these premises. Do not move. You will all be searched, as will this building."

The five of them were thoroughly searched, both by hand and with electronic devices. The entire house was combed. The computer was examined by an expert who found nothing, as Para had promised. He spent a great deal of time looking through all of the data disks on the desk. The Team Leader was getting more and more anxious as they failed to find any evidence that the data download had occurred from this location. Finally, the Team leader turned to the five suspects.

"We have not been able to find what we were looking for. Please do not leave the planetoid without the express permission of the Mercury Mining Corporation." He did not say it with malice or with an air of superiority. It was simply a fact.

As his crew filed out the door, he was the last to leave. "Sorry about the intrusion," he said. "Your door will be repaired tomorrow. A guard will be posted at your door tonight to ensure your security." He left.

"Well," whispered the Doctor. "Whether he meant to or not, the Unknown Doctor has done us a favour."

The Doctor arrived at work early the next morning. Virginia and Rebecca were already there, testing the new lenses.

"We couldn't really sleep," explained Virginia. "We came in at six. The lenses arrived shortly after. Doctor, you're a genius. These lenses work perfectly."

"Oh, thank you, Professor Reimer," said the Doctor, bashfully.

Cyba walked through the door. "Good morning, Doctor," he said. He made no mention of the previous nights activities. "I'm going to test the cannon myself," he announced.

"What, now," asked Rebecca.

"The lenses work, don't they?"

"Yes, but," began Virginia. "We really should do some more tests."

"We can test them in the field," his booming voice echoed in the large room. He strode over to the bench and put the lens they had been testing back in the box and picked up the entire box. "I will conduct the test at 9:45."

"When will we know if it's been successful," asked the Doctor.

"We'll be able to view the test-site via closed circuit television," explained Rebecca.

"Where's the test going to take place," asked the Doctor.

"The cannon will be loaded onto a special barge that will be taken up into space. There is a smaller planetoid nearby where the tests are conducted." Rebecca walked over to the monitor that hung near the ceiling and touched the on/off button. The screen sprang to life and the

Doctor could see a platform hanging in space over a very small planetoid. The planet was peppered with little plasma blast holes.

The Doctor looked at this watch. He had only forty minutes before the cannon was to be tested. Would that give him time to snoop around Cyba's office? "I'll be back shortly," he said and slipped out the door. Gina had given him her pass key, but, as before, it would not open Cyba's office. He was sure that Torborosha's key would work, but he had simply disappeared off the face of the planetoid. The Doctor found another terminal and tried logging in, but found that the entire system had been re-written early in the morning. He could access nothing. He could find nothing that was of any use. There was nothing to do but make sure that the plasma cannon test went off without a hitch and then take the two Time Ladies back to Gallifrey and file a report.

At precisely 9:45 Cyba was in position, the cannon and its barge having been affixed to the floating platform. The platform was stabilized with gyroscopes and thrusters to keep it from moving from the cannon's recoil. Throughout the building, employees with a high-enough security clearance could watch the test on the closed-circuit television. The Doctor had called Gina and Para to come and watch the test with him in the lab. Virginia and Rebecca did not object to their presence.

Cyba could be seen activating the power source of the giant Plasma cannon. Through the speakers, the assembled viewers could hear the whining of the engine grow ever more high-pitched. When it reached its zenith, Cyba depressed the firing button. A plasma beam shot out of the cannon, through the lens, and split into four beams. The four beams disappeared into space. For a few seconds nothing happened. Then, the Titanium Tetrachloride heated to the activation temperature and instead of a few grains of black in the lens, the entire lens became a mirror and the plasma beam reflected back into the machine itself. Cyba began to run to his ship. The cannon's screams became louder and more high pitched. The cannon began to glow white-hot and then, the last image the viewers saw, was the cannon ripping itself apart and shards flying in every direction. The explosion knocked out the camera and then there was only static on the view screen.

"Oh my God," said Virginia. "What happened?"

"The Titanium matrix became reflective," explained the Doctor.

"Oh," said Virginia. "Do you think Cyba's all right?"

"I guess we'll find out when he comes back to fire us," said Rebecca.

"Then I guess we really had better start looking for other work," said Virginia. "You Time Lords are really starting to piss me off."

"I'm sorry, Virginia," said the Doctor in a calming voice, "but that cannon was going to be used to destroy the Earth in 1985. You would have been killed before you ever left Earth."

"That's right," said Rebecca. "Which would be some paradox, don't you think? I mean, if we were killed before we could make the lenses, then the lenses wouldn't get made and the cannon wouldn't work and we wouldn't get killed!"

"Wrong," said the Doctor. "Your selves in the new time line would be killed, but your old selves would still have made the lenses and still have contributed to the destruction of Earth. Just because a time-line ceases to exist doesn't mean that the actions of the people in them can't have a lasting effect. It's only a paradox if both things continue to exist simultaneously. There'd be nothing paradoxical about you destroying the Earth. You'd still end killing yourselves. You'd just end up dying before you did it."

"Now you're just trying to be obscure."

"I'm a Time Lord. I've sworn an oath to be obscure."

Rebecca smiled. Virginia's scowl diminished somewhat.

"Do you know anyone who needs a couple of twice-busted scientists," asked Rebecca.

"I'll let you know," said the Doctor. He turned to Para and Gina. "Shall we go?"

They said their goodbyes and followed the Doctor back to the theatre where he'd left his TARDIS.

"That's exactly what the other TARDIS looked like," said Para.

"The Doctor's TARDIS is legendary," said Gina as the Doctor held the door open for her to walk through. "It's stuck in the shape of a Martian Telephone Booth."

"Oh," said Para as she stepped through the door as well.

"It's a Police Box, actually," corrected the Doctor, following them in. "And it's from Earth."

The door shut and the TARDIS dematerialized immediately thanks to a little trick that it new.

A couple of days later, the Doctor, Para and Gina had been de-briefed by the High Council. They had refused to tell the Doctor what action they planned to take against the Mercury Mining Corporation.

"Well can I at least put in a good word for Kartz and Reimer," he asked.

"They've been on our most wanted list for several centuries, Doctor," said the Cardinal who was in charge of the de-briefing.

The Doctor gave her a pleading look.

"All right," she said resignedly. "I'll see what I can do."

The Doctor grinned and gave the Cardinal a hug. "Thank you."

She pulled back with horror at the breach in etiquette. The Doctor hugged Gina and Para in turn and said goodbye. He left the Panopticon without turning back and made his way back to where he had left his TARDIS. "I wonder if I should check in on Leela. Or Romana," he said aloud. He stopped by a fountain and thought about it for a moment.

"Doctor," said a voice. A creepy voice, thought the Doctor.

A wiry man appeared from the shadows. "It's been far too long," said the man.

The stars on the Doctor's midnight-blue waistcoat were all huddled together in a grapefruit-sized circle on the Doctor's back, as far from the strange man as possible.

"Ranson," said the Doctor. "It hasn't been long enough."

"Oh, come now, Doctor. You've regenerated six times since I last saw you. And don't tell me you didn't like having all that freedom while you were working for us."

"I ended up exiled to Earth in the end anyway," countered the Doctor.

"Yes, but for all those years you were working for the CIA, you were free to travel where you pleased, while doing only the smallest of favours for your friends." He smiled without showing his teeth.

"I think I earned my keep," said the Doctor. "What do you want?"

"We want you to do something for us," said Ranson. "For old time's sake."

"I don't think so," said the Doctor. "That is to say, no!"

"Doctor, please reconsider. There is a threat to the very security of Gallifrey. We could use someone like you. A man of the universe. Someone who gets around. Hears things."

"I'm thinking of retiring," said the Doctor.

"Very funny," said Ranson.

"Is that all," asked the Doctor.

"That's all," said Ranson.

The Doctor turned to continue on his way.

"I'll be in touch," called Ranson.

The Doctor said nothing and continued back to the TARDIS. He put Ranson out of his mind and started to run a diagnostic to make sure that the power problem he had experienced the last time he had used the Wheel of Fortune would not re-cur. He made himself a cup of tea and sat in his easy chair. He let out a long sigh of relief. There were still so many unanswered questions.

What had happened to Ace?

What had happened to Torborosha?

How were the people with the strange tattoos connected to one another?

Why did the Mercury Mining Corporation want to erase Earth from history?

Who was the Unknown Doctor, and why was he working against the Doctor?

And what did the bloody CIA want with him? Ranson. After all these centuries.

And there was something else too. Some little thing at the back of his mind, but he couldn't quite remember it.

The Doctor got up and went over to the Wheel of Fortune. He grasped one of the wheel's spokes in his hand took a deep breath and gave a mighty pull.



The Doctor stumbles on a plot that has far reaching consequences.

Realizing for that he cannot - for the lives of him - remember what happened to Ace,
the Doctor begins a search through his own past.
He finds himself on planet Mercury 237 - acquisition 237
of the Mercury Mining Corporation.

There the Doctor encounters a familiar pair of scientist who is still
working on uncovering the secrets of Time Travel, as well as,
a bunch of mercenaries whose mysterious employers are
collecting derelict space ships with the sinister intention of salvaging
equipment that can enable them to travel through time.

The Doctor discovers a horrifying plot that could lead to the death
of billions of people, but what he doesn't realize is that this is only the beginning.

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