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RED SPOT



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Red Spot
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"I'm not sure I want to know what on Earth that is." Tamara eyed the pulsating reddish mass on the scanner screen with a disdain verging on repulsion. An unintelligible mumble issued forth, apparently from the TARDIS console. Tamara peered around, saw a familiar pair of grey trousers sticking out from underneath.

The Doctor wriggled into view, bits of circuitry clamped between his teeth, wires tangled in his hair. Still lying on the floor, he pointed at the scanner. "Aff's nob ehff, ifs oopi'ah." The Doctor gazed into Tamara's bemused eyes, removed a clouded liquid-crystal circuit from his mouth, sat up, and tried again. "That's not Earth, it's Jupiter. A close-up view of a section of Jupiter's surface, in fact. I'll zoom out again..." The Doctor trailed off dreamily into silence, staring forcefully at the murky chip. He shook himself back to reality, realised he hadn't finished his sentence, "...when I find one of these that's working."

Tamara frowned at his retreating back as he wandered off, deep into the TARDIS interior, looking for a replacement chip. She thought she'd figured out the Doctor, thought their time travelling together had taught her to recognise his moods, but this sudden vague spell was out of character. It disturbed her.

There was stuff everywhere. The Doctor hadn't realised the workshop was such a mess; various bits of semi-functional electronics and abandoned experiments lay about on benches, mingling with bits and bobs picked up on his travels, to create a general air of clutter that was, suddenly, deeply annoying. He didn't know where to look. He had a feeling that something wasn't right, but a dull throb behind his ears was making it hard to think. He had to find a replacement liquid crystal circuit, or something that would do the same job, to fix the scanner. He had to fix the scanner so that he could... he could... zoom out, zoom out and see what... see what... Something was wrong. If only it wasn't so hard to think...

Tamara couldn't settle herself to read. She balanced her slowly disintegrating secondhand paperback on the growing mound of detritus on her bedside table, and decided to

let hot water wash away her worries for a while. There was obviously something interesting happening, or about to happen, and the Doctor could take who-knew how long to find a replacement doodad. Over and over the Doctor's strange behaviour played in her mind. She was worried. The Doctor usually knew what was going on, what to do. She trusted him. She needed him. What was she to do if he suddenly became unreliable in a crisis? The hot water wasn't working very well...

Tamara wandered down the corridor, squeezing water out of her hair. The metallic pings of irregular drips hitting the floor heralded her arrival before she stuck her head around the workshop door. The Doctor was asleep. She hurried over to him, huddled up in a fetal position on the floor, shook him gently by the shoulder. "Doctor, Doctor. Hey, wake up, would you!" The Doctor rolled onto his back, mumbled indistinctly, opened his eyes. He wore the same dreamy expression as he had in the console room earlier. He blinked rapidly, sat up in alarm.

"What happened?"

"Don't ask me. You came in here to look for a replacement circuit - bluish yellow thing about an inch square - and when I came in you were asleep on the floor." The Doctor nodded silently, deep in thought.

"I can't find another circuit - will you help me look through this lot?"

Tamara scanned over the piles of equipment. In about twenty seconds her eyes lit on a shoe box filled with various bits of circuitry. She rummaged through, pulled out a sticky Zygon nodelette and half an antique Aptiva motherboard before she found a bundle of liquid crystal squares, held together with a fuzzy purple hair-tie. "These?"

The Doctor nodded. Tamara looked back at him, still sitting on the floor. "Doctor," she paused, trying to judge her words. "Is something wrong?"

He looked up at his companion, a haunted look in his eyes. "Can't you feel it?"

The reddish mass was still waiting for them on the scanner screen when they went to the console room. Now that the Doctor had told her about it, Tamara fancied she could feel an ever-present rumbling call nibbling away at her own brain. She had to get a grip on herself. Agency tests had proved she had no residual psychic ability; that had acted in her favor when she'd been recruited, and it could help her now. Tamara could still think.

"The TARDIS has telepathic circuits, doesn't it?" She didn't wait for the Doctor's reply, wanting to get the train of thought out before it was lost, "Can't you turn them off? Or.." She saw the Doctor's horrified expression, tried to think of another option, "...turn them down, filter them, reduce their volume, something like that?"

The Doctor thought for a moment, then pounced towards the console, eyes shining. "Yes! If I can.." The Doctor's voice trailed off, not because he was lost in thought but because he was suddenly crouched under the silver mushroom of the console, his head immersed in its inner workings. His hand reappeared, fumbled around, found one of the two panels Tamara had seen the Doctor press when he wanted to 'talk' to the TARDIS. He pressed for a moment. The lights flickered, and when they returned to normality, the room seemed colder. Not physically colder, but a sudden emotional void, as though a friend had just abandoned her at a party, surrounded by strangers.

The Doctor reappeared. "I've sent the telepathic circuits to sleep until the signal stops."

He glanced over at Tamara, unconsciously pulling her coat more tightly around her, flashed her a reassuring grin. "Now then....." The Doctor dived back into the console, wriggling further under until only his feet were visible. A muffled metallic clink was followed by a nasty sounding electronic sizzle, then Tamara's stomach lurched as the image on the scanner screen zoomed outwards with a sudden, sickening motion. Finally it stabilized, showing a whole planet, totally red, the surface boiling impossibly.

"That's not Jupiter, Doctor."

The Doctor reappeared, sucking a singed finger. "It is. Apparently. The King of the Gods isn't quite himself, is he?"

"What's wrong with it?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Good question. I'm getting some very strange readings - whatever's signaling the telepathic circuits is interfering with the other sensors, too. We can't tell from in here - if we want to know what's happening down there, we'll have to go and look."

"So we materialize on Jupiter." Tamara stopped as her high-school science kicked in. "Jupiter. Gas giant. No surface - so what do we land on? What do we breathe, for that matter?"

"I can set the TARDIS to hover - Jupiter's gravity shouldn't affect her - but we'll have to wear suits."

"Space suits?"

"If you like"

"How did I get myself into this?"

The space suits were natty little numbers. Tamara was half expecting a cumbersome apparatus, almost a personal spaceship, like the sort used in the first lunar landing, hundreds of years ago. The basic design was little changed in her own time, it afforded adequate protection from cold, vacuum and the other dangers of space, it was reasonably practical in zero gravity. It was also the silicon age's answer to a full suit of plate armor; impossible to get in and out of without help, it made movement difficult except in the zero-gravity of space. The suits the Doctor dug out of storage were so far removed from those primitive hulks as to be unrecognizable. The trousers and tunic were light and silvery, reflective threads woven into the fabric. They didn't look thick enough to protect anything, but the Doctor insisted. The boots and gloves were the same, only thicker; Tamara couldn't believe that the seals between the pieces of the suit were the same as those on snap-lock plastic lunch-bags. Tamara clipped her helmet into place, heard a click, followed by a bleep, as her oxygen supplies came online. Her eyes narrowed as she glanced over at the Doctor, anonymous behind the visor of his identical suit. He seemed normal at the moment, but could she trust him to stay that way?

The lifelines, like the suits themselves, were made of a thin, light substance that didn't seem strong enough for the job. So far only a few meters of the two-kilometre lines had been spooled out, as the Doctor and Tamara hung gracefully in midair, getting their bearings. The Doctor glanced back; the twin silver lines were spooling nicely from the TARDIS keyhole. Tamara didn't look back; she was fully occupied looking forward. The Jovian atmosphere - if this really was Jupiter - was murky, a thick red-brown mist hiding the stars, almost obscuring the TARDIS, hovering impossibly within Jupiter's gravitational pull. The Gallifreyan machine hummed contentedly, rocking from side to side, interacting with harmless photons of light and

stray ions which tapped against the invulnerable outer shell. The Jovian atmosphere swirled malevolently, threatening to engulf the cheery blue box in wave after wave of fog the color of drying blood. In the distance, a huge black arch seemed to rise up through the mist, then slowly sink again, like an errant archway escaped from a Gothic cathedral. Tamara fumbled for her radio link.

"Did you see that?"

"The black circle?"

"No - the black arch. What circle?"

"Over there." Tamara followed the Doctor's gesture towards a different, identical section of red mist. As she turned, her body swayed, almost spun over in the near-zero gravity. As she righted herself, Tamara remembered that Jupiter had gravity - lots of it. Two and a half times more than Earth. She wondered whether the suits were counteracting the planet's natural gravity somehow. The thought disturbed her; the more she learned about Gallifreyan technology, the more she felt dependent on the Doctor. That disturbed her, more than the suits' capabilities. As she looked hard into the fog, Tamara could faintly see the black outline of a near-perfect circle. The Doctor's voice came tinny over the radio speakers.

"It was more distinct a moment ago. Where's the arch?"

"It's gone now - those things must be moving. Are they alive?"

"It's more likely the mist is billowing around them, covering and uncovering them, making them look as though they're moving." The Doctor's voice dropped, took on a hint of awe as the arch reared again, in a different place. Or was it a different arch?

"What *are* they?"

The Doctor and Tamara, tethered to the stationary TARDIS by their lifelines, were both facing the same way. Neither of them saw a third black shape, round and gaping, solidifying behind them. Neither saw the shape becoming clearer as it approached, a hinged circle of shining ebony, the inside edge cruelly serrated.

Tamara felt something like a breeze behind her. She spun, more carefully this time, and saw clouds of red mist being *pushed aside* by something she couldn't name, something her mind steadfastly refused to analyze. She grabbed the Doctor's arm, shook him violently, spun him around as the shape resolved itself into something so much like a set of teeth that Tamara's survival instincts took over. She executed a graceful dive like a small silver fish, intuitively downwards, away from the jaws. The TARDIS lurched slightly in its hover as the two lifelines jerked in different directions.

Tamara stopped with a jolt as her lifeline reached its limit. Her dive had taken her two kilometres deeper into Jupiter's atmosphere in just under six seconds. She hung in the mist, shaking and gasping great lungfuls of tinned air as she tried to calm her nerves, bring her pulse and breathing under control. Her limbs felt as though the bones had been removed, leaving quivering tissue. When she was herself again, she cast around for her companion. The Doctor had vanished. She found her radio link, pushed the button.

"Doctor. Doctor, answer me. Can you hear me? Hello? Over?" There was no reply. Tamara felt her heart sink. She reached out for her lifeline, followed it hand over hand, spooling it in to the clip at her waist. She would have to follow it back to the TARDIS, then follow the Doctor's line out to find him.

Why wasn't there a time display on this suit? Tamara had lost all track of time as she followed the silver thread for what felt like miles. The Doctor had told her that her suit could supply a human with oxygen for eight hours, but she had no idea how much time she had left. The Doctor's line seemed to be endless, although Tamara knew it was no longer than her own. Finally she could see something up ahead, a shape in the gloom. It had to be the Doctor. Probably gone to sleep again. She followed the line the few final meters, until the thickest of the mist cleared.

The line led into the closed jaws.

Tamara kept very still, desperately trying not to scream, either in panic or frustration. The jaws didn't seem to be attached to anything, they just seemed to be hanging, disembodied. Tamara shook her head - that had to be an illusion caused by the fog. She approached the jaws, very slowly following the Doctor's lifeline. She clung on as the jaws gave a sudden lurch upwards. As they opened, she darted forwards, every instinct telling her this was an incredibly stupid thing to be doing. Once inside, she considered her lifeline - if that was bitten through, all she could do was wait for the eight hours to run out. She wedged the thin silvery cord between two teeth, hoping it would be safe there. There was something else caught on the teeth as well; a piece of silvery cloth. Tamara picked it up, gritting her teeth. She knew Timelords were pretty clever customers - but how long would the Doctor last in a damaged suit?

Inside the jaws was another red, misty place like the one Tamara had just left. In the distance vague, translucent walls pulsed sulkily, the same color as the all-pervading fog. Gusts of mist seemed to shoot from the walls, spraying Tamara with a pale, sticky substance. She wiped her visor with her glove, then glanced down at her suit. The top layer of shiny silver seemed to be bubbling. As she ran her glove over it, bits began to flake away, exposing a dull grey beneath. Tamara felt a chill run through her as she realised this damn *thing* was trying to digest her. She grasped the Doctor's lifeline, hauling herself along with a vengeance; she hoped the Doctor was telling the truth when he told her how durable these suits were. A shape was looming ahead. With a twinge of paranoia Tamara wondered whether there were little *things* living inside the big *things*. But the shape moved closer with every pull on the lifeline. Praying to whichever deity she could think of, Tamara grasped the Doctor, turned him over, desperately looking for life signs. Through his visor she could see how pale he was, his lips blue. His suit sleeve was mangled from the elbow down; dark, orange-tinted blood staining the edges. But his eyes flickered open when she shook him, and he seemed to be conscious. Tamara unzipped the supply pack on the leg of her suit, dug around. She found an adhesive field dressing, slapped it over the gash on the Doctor's arm. Not big enough. Damn. She found a second one, covered the rest of the wound. Then she found a large roll of duct tape, wound it around and around the Doctor's arm, to prevent the air escaping. She checked the gauge on the Doctor's air tank - half full. Incredible. The blood must have stuck the suit shut, prevented the rest of his oxygen escaping. Unless this was just another function of the miracle space suit. Tamara searched for scissors in the pack, couldn't find any, kept winding the tape around until the spool ran empty, trying to seal the suit without cutting off the Doctor's circulation.

The acid gusts seemed to be getting more frequent, as though the *thing* suspected that its dinner was putting up a fight. Tamara managed to dodge most of them, although there wasn't much left of the top layer of her suit. She had tied their lifelines together, and was dragging the

Doctor behind her, back towards the jaws. She could see them opening and closing regularly, timed her approach so that she could push the Doctor out, and dive out herself, unsnagging her lifeline before the teeth clamped down behind her. Once outside, she gasped, a massive sigh of relief. Tamara took her time reeling them in the last few feet back to the TARDIS door. She unlocked it, pulled the Doctor inside before releasing the lifelines from the keyhole and slamming the door closed. Still fully suited, she sank onto the floor, exhausted and gasping in the suddenly muggy atmosphere of the suit. A sudden, piercing squeal jolted her rudely awake; a red light flashing inside the helmet. She fumbled, half-asleep, pulled the helmet off and hurled it away, not caring what the light was all about, just wanting the noise to stop. Cool air hitting her face woke her up enough to shrug the rest of the suit off, her sleepiness passing as she stripped back to her T-shirt and shorts. She glanced at her oxygen tank, and realised the noise had been a warning. It was empty.

'How's your arm?

'Hmm.'

Tamara checked over the Doctor's bandaged arm. Her first aid training had slipped a bit, but it would do. The Doctor took a swig of tea with his good hand, leaned forwards, resting his head on the table. "You really should go to bed for a while. Get some rest."

"Hmm."

* * * *

The Doctor was haunting the TARDIS library, painstakingly trying to find some record of the Jovian creatures. Normally, a quick request through the telepathic circuits would have provided the information instantly, but with the circuits asleep the Doctor had to do his research the old fashioned way. The Timelord consulted computerised indexes and databases, racked his brains to remember where invertebrate gaseous lifeforms were catalogued under the Dewey system, and finally just wandered around flicking through interesting looking books. So far he'd found a fascinating treatise on the cultural significance of Ayer's Rock being renamed Uluru, and a delightful recipe for baked cheesecake, but very little about the misty creatures. The door chimed softly as Tamara walked in, surprised to see him. "I thought you were having a rest."

"Later. I'd like to find out what we're dealing with."

"Had any luck?" Tamara scraped a space to sit on a large armchair, partially submerged in books, papyrus scrolls, CDs, and other means of capturing an idea. The Doctor sat beside her, slotted a small silicon wafer into a Reader that, like most Gallifreyan artifacts, seemed to be compatible with almost anything.

"This is all I've found so far - a single entry in *Wildlife of Mutter's Spiral*."

Tamara reset the Reader to standard English and skimmed over the information. The entry detailed the Kein, a lifeform indigenous to Jupiter but found in various forms on different gas giants. Red, brown or creamy colored insubstantial bodies, yadda yadda yadda, reproduction via binary fission, et cetera et cetera, diet consists solely of hydrogen atoms absorbed through their misty 'skins'. "Those things out there weren't Kein, then."

"No, not unless they've dramatically evolved somehow. I've never seen Kein firsthand,

but the species is studied on Gallifrey as an example of lifeforms perfectly evolved to suit their environment. Their only food is the most common element of their homeworld, and their gaseous bodies are perfect for the high-gravity conditions.”

“Those things couldn’t have evolved on Jupiter - they were meat-eaters.”

The Doctor rubbed his beard thoughtfully. “The more I think about this the less I like it. Someone or something has either brought those creatures to Jupiter, or forced the Kein to evolve unnaturally.”

“And must be feeding them, too,” added Tamara, “Unless they live on nosy time travelers.”

The Doctor winced slightly. He slumped into the chair, brow furrowed in thought. Then he leapt up, causing a small avalanche of books to slide onto the floor. Tamara watched his retreating back as he raced away, disappearing between the library shelves. He’d evidently thought of something, and wanted to follow up his hunch before it disappeared.

Tamara didn’t encounter the Doctor again until the TARDIS was approaching their destination. A small moon hung on the scanner screen like a blob of cold mashed potato. Tamara didn’t think much of the landscape, but had to admit she was impressed by the achievement. “This is as far as you can get from Earth and still be in human territory?”

“Yes - Earth’s most distant colony, in this time period anyway. The Adrastea Colony is really just a small research outpost. Jupiter’s their business - whatever’s going on there, they’ll know about it.”

Tamara watched as the potato-lump grew larger on the screen. She could see, on the side that permanently faced the massive gas-giant planet that held the little lump in orbit, a tiny, grey spot. The moon itself was just over forty miles right around, and the colony was small, even in comparison to that. As the moon grew, the spot blossomed points and stripes, gradually resolving itself into a small city, a village enclosed in a bubble. The settlement was nestled in a natural depression in the landscape; the ‘dome’ was more of a clear lid over the village in the hole. ‘Isolated’ was superfluous. This little lidded hole was as far from other humans as the occupants could be this side of the afterlife.

Nobody heard the rending of space-time as the Gallifreyan ship crawled through a gap in reality and settled at a rakish angle to a crumbling strip of bitumen glorified as a ‘service road’. Only a security camera, its output unmonitored, watched as a pair emerged from the box.

Tamara fidgeted inside the unfamiliar clothes. “This cover’s good?”

“According to the TARDIS memory store, two Earth administrators from the Mars colony, Jeremy Stein and Linda Pilling, were due to land here this week. They never arrived.”

“And Earth administrators just turn up, check the books, ask if there’s any problems, and leave again?”

“Basically.”

“Remind we why we need cover.”

“The Adrastea colony’s had many problems - it’s been settled for twenty-six years, and since then there’s been six asteroid hits, a major seismic disruption, a gas leak, two supply ships lost in action and three virus outbreaks, one of which was quite nasty. The long-term settlers have become suspicious of strangers, paranoid about what’s going to go wrong next.”

"So if we walked in unexpected, we'd be treated with hostility? Arrested?"

"We'd probably be killed before we had a chance to be arrested. The colony's administration has apparently reintroduced the death sentence for fairly minor crimes - Adrastea doesn't take prisoners."

"Ugly. If when we ask is there a problem, they say 'yes', what do we do?"

"It joins the list we already have to deal with."

"Point taken. So, where do we make our official entrance?"

The security camera watched impassively as the male figure of the bogus Stein motioned for his companion to follow him down the service road.

Jupiter has a turbulent heart. Deep within his boiling gut, the King of the Gods has indigestion. Eruptions spurt gases, lava and unidentifiable lumps high, high into the atmosphere, past the *things* and into space. Sometimes the detritus of the King's madness would land on the surfaces of Metis and Adrastea, his nearest acolytes. Some of these lumps were made of pure carbon, held for aeons in the high-pressure heart before being revealed. Carbon in its crystalline form, glassy and hard, harder than any other rock. From time to time, pebble-sized lumps of diamond would join the space junk on Adrastea's surface. Once an asteroid of the stuff smashed through the glassite barrier and knocked a techie stone dead. About a half-kilo of the precious stone lay scattered across a cable-drum turned sideways to form a crude table in the guards' hut. Connors and D'Arcy knew the handfuls of rock would be worth a fortune after their eighteen-month tour of duty on Adrastea, but until then they were just not-very-pretty trinkets on a world where the only currency was food, water and oxygen.

Connors and D'Arcy usually spent their watch playing poker with a ragged set of cards; the stakes were the handfuls of diamond crumbs gathered on recc outside. The cards had been good quality many years ago, as long as a man's hand and half as wide, silicon coated. Now they were battered and dog-eared around the edges from handling; the cards had lasted longer on Adrastea than any human guard. They were the same type as D'Arcy had back on Earth; the Rider pack, the major arcana tucked in the bottom of the box - it wasn't needed for poker, only patience, if you want to play the hard way. As Connors dealt, D'Arcy kicked him under the makeshift table.

"What's your problem?"

D'Arcy pointed with his eyes. "Check out the skirt."

The skirt was creamy silk, above knee length with a modest little slit on the back seam to make movement easier; the executive rather than provocative model. It had a matching short-sleeve tunic with a little Mandarin collar, tailored at the waist, oyster buttons. It wasn't the skirt that caught D'Arcy's eyes, of course, but the slim, dark legs beneath it. Face wasn't bad, either. Beside the skirt was a bearded bloke in a neat pair of grey trousers, matching sports coat, and an incongruous blue waistcoat with pinstripes of little stars.

"Who's that, then?"

Connors shrugged. "Are the bureaus due again?"

D'Arcy snapped his fingers. "That's it - That uppity Pilling and her pet man set to cause more trouble."

"Is that her?"

"Never saw them - they haven't graced us with a personal visit before. Thank the

Goddess. What do you reckon happened to the guy's arm?"

"The sling? Maybe he sprained his wrist rigging some corporate tax-return. Or shaking a martini. Are you going to finish dealing, or what?"

Monitoring Control had originally been just that; a well equipped set of rooms designed to monitor Jupiter at close-range. As well as a wide assortment of telescopes, including a massive roof-mounted radio-telescope array, Monitoring Control had a collection of spectrometers, a device to measure Jupiter's gravitational affect on his moons, and an assortment of machines that went 'ping' at reassuring intervals, as well as the colony's artificial gravity-generator, to make life slightly more comfortable on the ridiculously small satellite. Hardware like that cost money, and understandably the building was well built, secure and able to withstand almost anything this particular bit of the solar system could throw at it. It was a pity the rest of the colony was knocked up on the cheap when Earth Interplanetary Inc. realised precisely how far over budget Monitoring Control had left them. The result was that the sturdy Monitoring Control now doubled as meeting rooms, board rooms, common rooms, recreation rooms and general Adrastea Town Square under the colony's only bit of good quality glassite. Tamara, sitting on a plastic bucket seat, breathing Adrastea's tinny tasting air, decided the only thing that could make the blue plastic carpet and yellow walls more tacky would be some good old-fashioned plastic palms, with coconut fibre stuck around the top of the plastic 'terracotta' pots. And maybe some mass-produced framed prints of still-life paintings, to complete the waiting-room effect. Tamara wondered what the Adrastea colonists thought they were waiting for, in this tacky room, millions of miles from the rest of their kind. What was *she* waiting for, come to that? Her first few trips with the Doctor had been fantastic- lunch with Oscar Wilde and tea with Nostredamus. Watching the opening night of *Coppelia* in a huge pink dress with a bustle and a matching bonnet and fan, ignoring half-wits staring at her as though she was the first black woman in France. Hey, maybe she was. Settling into the time travel routine. Doing fun things. Then, all of a sudden there was something nasty lurking in their trips; Zygons, Ogrons or being accused of some local crime as soon as they landed. Then the Gisb, grey blobby things that raved on about some Time War the Doctor refused to talk about. Then being accused of *more* crimes, on a freighter ship this time. Since then traveling with the Doctor had been one constant stream of trouble. No more fun holidays, however hard the Doctor tried, or pretended to try. They didn't bother trying to find a place for a holiday any more. No wonder Ace stayed behind.

Tamara glanced up at the mens' voices from the next room; the Doctor, who was apparently the financial specialist of the two, was being conducted back from his examination of the colony's records by Morguson. Tamara had yet to figure out Morguson's specific title, but it hadn't taken very long for her to figure out that he disliked her intensely. Morguson had piggy eyes, a bull neck and a head that came to a point, but Tamara could see intelligence lurking behind his belligerent glare. She wondered what she'd done to offend him.

The Doctor's voice, a confident stream of pure British like her own, conspicuous amongst the predominantly American accents: "Well, that all looks to be in order. Very good... erm... very impressive. Good. There haven't been any problems? No? Oh, good."

Tamara cringed slightly in her plastic seat as she listened to the Doctor's slightly desperate bureaucratese. Tamara was no stranger to undercover work, but assuming other

people's identities was a risk she normally wouldn't take without much more information about the subject. Perhaps this was the only way to get into the colony without being arrested and executed on sight, but there were far too many variables here. What if someone found a photograph of the real Stein and Pilling? What if they met someone who knew the real Stein and Pilling? What if the real Stein and Pilling showed up, databanks or no databanks? Tamara told herself not to panic; she was getting as paranoid as the locals.

"Now, Ms Pilling."

"Yes Mr. Morguson. I'll try not to take up too much of your time. I'll just need to look at the monitoring results for the last quarter, and OK your equipment order."

Morguson raised an eyebrow, "You'll not be issuing any personal instructions for monitoring?"

"Eh?... No, I'm sure Earth Central will give you any further orders they think are necessary after they've seen your latest batch of results." As Tamara spoke, she could read on Morguson's face that she'd just said something incredibly stupid. Her stomach became a knot of ice before she'd even finished speaking, spreading and freezing through her chest and arms. Morguson gave her a quizzical expression, probably caused by trying to raise his eyebrow at her, only to realise it was still raised from before. He lowered it.

"You've changed your tune, Ms Pilling," Morguson was icily polite, "Or you would have, if you *were* Ms Pilling. And I severely doubt your good gentleman friend is Mr. Stein, either." Morguson had been moving away from them, towards the wall, as he was speaking. The Doctor wondered whether he was backing away in case he caught something horrible, when he saw the security call-button on the wall. Oh.

D'Arcy was contemplating his losses in the poker game - damn Queen of Swords, never around when you need her - when the buzzer reverberated around the guards' hut. Connors shoved the handful of diamond crumbs into his pocket, swung around on his chair and snatched up the two blasters lying against the wall. One he threw to D'Arcy, heard a grunt as the weapon landed across the man's chest. Connors was already up and out of the hut, marching briskly towards Monitoring Control when D'Arcy staggered blearily to his feet, fumbled with the charger, and lurched after him.

"So, this is probably a pretty dumb question, but what gave me away?" Tamara kept pace with the guards easily, her long legs striding, refusing to fall behind and seem weak. The Doctor had dropped slightly behind, rubbing distractedly at his injured arm, until a blaster poke hurried him up. The guards must be offworlders brought in on short-term contracts. They hadn't killed her or the Doctor yet.

The taller of the two chuckled dryly. "Well, the dear Ms Pilling isn't really popular around here. You got the bureau look spot on - but you're not a big enough bitch."

"Oh."

"On her way here with Stein - are they still coming or what, by the way? Did you kill them?" Connors continued as Tamara shook her head in outrage at the second question and shrugged at the first. "On her way here, she sent us a message - an order - to cease monitoring Jupiter altogether..."

"But isn't that the whole point of the Adrastea colony?" The Doctor interrupted.

This time it was Connors turn to shrug. "I thought so too. But she says no, forget about

that and give us the goods on deep space instead. Stepped on a lot of toes. Bruised a lot of egos, especially through not explaining why they wanted us to ignore the only interesting thing for millions of miles, and scan the dark instead."

Tamara nodded. "You're not local boys, are you?"

Connors shook his head. "Adrastea only gets offworld security contracts now. Their own guards killed too many of their own people. Panic. Paranoia. Incompetence. Not like us, eh D'Arcy?"

D'Arcy grunted in acknowledgment. If he was the highly-trained, impeccably disciplined Earth Interplanetary Inc. trooper Connors claimed they were, it was well masked by his poker losses, and the half-bottle of highly illegal hooch that had helped him forget those losses. D'Arcy trudged along, deliberately not looking at the bright ceiling lights. He carried his blaster clumsily, carry strap hanging unused, pointing at nothing in particular. Tamara saw a man whose mind wasn't on his business.

"Look, I'm really sorry about this - I know you're just doing your job. But so are we."

D'Arcy looked up, about to ask what she was talking about, saw her kick out, her foot catching in the hanging strap of his blaster. He tried to pull her off balance, but his reflexes kicked in slowly, and she had already spun back the other way, dragging his blaster behind her and him behind his blaster. D'Arcy crashed to the floor, fumbled around groggily, trying to get up. The Doctor tried to duck out of Connors' grip, yelped as the guard grabbed him by his injured arm. Tamara realised she was still holding D'Arcy's fully charged blaster.

"Let go of him!" She pointed the blaster in Connors' direction, hands finding the trigger on the unfamiliar weapon. Connors didn't seem to realise he had a blaster of his own. He let go of the Doctor's arm, and backed away, slowly. Tamara still held the weapon. She felt around, her eyes never leaving the bewildered guards, feeling past the push-button trigger, the chunky power pack, until she found what she hoped was the on/off switch. She pressed it and the LCD display on the side faded out. Connors smiled, lowered his hands, stepped forwards.

"I knew you'd calm down." Connors adopted a patronizing tone usually reserved for small animals and simpletons, reached out for the dead blaster. "Now why don't I just take that and..."

"You'll 'take that' all right!" Tamara yelled as she brought the blaster down onto Connors' head. Tamara had always wanted to say that in circumstances like these, but the line came out sounding cheap, and she was glad the Doctor didn't seem to have heard. D'Arcy looked too pickled to do much on his own, but Tamara whacked him as well before she threw the blaster away. D'Arcy slid down the wall, into semi-inebriated unconsciousness. His last thought was a puzzled realisation that the Queen of Swords had turned up after all.

Tamara ran the password-override program the Doctor had written just a few minutes ago and found herself in the heart of Adrastea's monitoring records and controls. She sat in the heart of Monitoring Control. This struck her as an incredibly foolhardy thing to be doing, but the place had been abandoned - everyone was out hunting down the intruders. The Doctor had rigged up a spy camera on the outside entrance using bits of equipment lying in the repairs workshop. If Morguson came back, they had two minutes to make themselves scarce. She shifted uncomfortably in D'Arcy's rough khaki uniform; the man was her size, but an entirely different shape. The Doctor, wearing fatigues with 'Connors' printed on the pocket, was sitting

at an identical terminal a few feet away, typing madly, mouse buttons clicking as it chased its tail around the desk. He spoke over his shoulder.

"You're looking for any anomalies in the monitoring records, about two months ago or so. Anything to do with changing atmospheric activity on Jupiter, lifeforms detected.."

"Big bitey critters.."

"Well, yes."

"What are you doing?"

"Changing the focus of the monitoring, away from space and back towards Jupiter. Let's see what we can see..."

The computer display which was linked to the array of radio telescopes juddered awkwardly as the collection of massive dishes groaned on the roof, swinging in a 180 degree arc, away from the endless blackness, turning to face Jupiter like sunflowers seeking the sun. The picture stabilized on the planet's surface, then seemed to pulsate alarmingly as the Doctor familiarized himself with the magnification controls. Tamara watched him working one-handed, trying to improve the definition of the grainy image.

"How are our friendly neighbours?"

"Nothing seems to have changed since we wen-"

"Ahh!" Tamara's eyes took on the gleam of a hunting dog on the chase. "Two months ago - a supply ship went missing. They think it may have been caught in Jupiter's gravity field and crashed. Then, a week later, a probe brought back something called sample XV-80, which is apparently the greatest thing since instant mashed potatoes."

"Does it say what this XV-80 is a sample of?"

"No - it just says something about Storage Locker Six. We look for that now, I suppose?"

The Doctor abandoned his terminal and wandered around the room. The walls were covered in doors; built-in cupboards to house samples brought back from Jupiter. The Doctor pulled at a door handle. Locked. Tamara pulled a few others on her way over to where the Doctor was standing. All locked. None of the doors were labeled. "So which one's six?"

"Hmm." The Doctor narrowed his eyes. "All the signs and records in this colony are in English, so they'll probably use a left-to-right system of numbering."

"Right." Tamara could see the logic behind the Doctor's reasoning, but it seemed a long shot. Still, it was only a cupboard. She counted along six doors from the left-hand side, and attacked the lock with a slim stiletto blade. It sprang open at the first poke. The door swung open invitingly, but there was nothing inside but reams of paper and boxes of CDs. A smug little sign inside the cupboard informed her that this was Storage Locker Three. Okay, two doors per bay. She counted along six more doors and prodded the lock. Much stiffer. She glanced over her shoulder, to where the Doctor was watching the jury-rigged spy camera.

"Anything happening outside?"

"No, everyone's out looking for us. They don't seem to have found the guards yet. Or the TARDIS. How's that lock?"

"Won't move. Where's this sonic screwdriver of yours?" A small part of Tamara's brain told her it was in the Doctor's pocket, in the Doctor's trousers, in another building with an unconscious Connors inside them. Oh.

The Doctor grinned as he removed the screwdriver from Connors' pocket. "You don't think I'd leave all my things behind, do you?" He set to the cupboard door, the screwdriver's warbling note changing as the Doctor worked on the complicated lock. Tamara could see a corner of the Doctor's waistcoat protruding from the fatigues pocket. She smiled to herself - leave his things behind, indeed. The stars on the Doctor's crumpled waistcoat formed no pattern in particular at the moment, just random arrangements of spots, as though they were confused. There was a click, then a squeak, as the Doctor opened the cupboard.

Tamara didn't need to recall the sample number to see what was so unusual in Storage Locker Six. Most of the shelves held vials of gas, taken from Jupiter's atmosphere. One shelf held a circular lidded glassite tank, like a misplaced aquarium. Inside was one of the *things*. Just a baby. A pair of black jaws a handspan across snapped feebly, a red misty body coiled about itself, a sentient cloud. The Doctor bent to examine the specimen, unconsciously holding his injured arm. A flicker of activity from the spy camera caught the corner of Tamara's eye. "Company's coming. Looks like Morguson, and more guards."

The Doctor reluctantly abandoned his study of the imprisoned creature, and followed Tamara, as the pair slipped out of an unguarded fire escape twelve seconds before Morguson, thwarted and fuming, stormed into the room.

A full squad of guards stood in full battle uniform, visors hiding their faces. Each held a fully powered blaster. The casual viewer may not have been sure whether they were guarding the two hapless prisoners being held for sentencing, or the elaborate collection of humming technology at the far end of the room. This room, an underground bunker beneath Monitoring Control, originally housed the colony's transmat facility. This transmat booth, however, had obviously been modified in some alarming way definitely not covered by the manufacturer's warranty. Morguson stomped into the room, his face red with frustration. His careful sweep of the colony had uncovered precisely nothing of the intruders' whereabouts - only evidence that they were still at large. Now he had to remove himself from the search for long enough to deal with Rogers and Van Vleit, two young techies who had been caught vandalizing a vending machine in the common room. Trash. He cast a baleful eye around the room, noted the presence of the two guards who had managed to lose the intruders. He'd deal with them later. Rogers was sniveling, perhaps just realising the severity of his actions. Rogers was eighteen, Van Vleit nineteen. Both had the unnaturally slim bodies, long limbs and huge, wide-set eyes of humans born in low-gravity environments. Both were children of Adrastea's research personnel, trained on-site, and employed in low-level maintenance. Neither had ever left the colony. Morguson was gratified to see that Rogers was too afraid to meet his eye. Van Vleit stared back at him, hands on her hips, wordlessly daring him to lower his gaze from her cold blue eyes to her expansive chest, enhanced rather than hidden by her secondhand mens' overalls. Morguson broke eye contact before Van Vleit.

"Is it worth my time asking what you thought you were doing?" He sounded as though he didn't particularly care, that their answer could make no difference to the outcome. Which was true. Rogers sniffled audibly. Van Vleit answered.

"We weren't vandalizing the machine, for a start. You know perfectly well it hasn't worked for ages. We were fixing it, as ordered. The welding down one side of the frame had let go, and the internal mechanism had slipped and wedged at an angle. We were only bashing

at it because we didn't have the necessary tools to dislodge it. Any dents you claim to have found were probably there before we started on it. If you want someone to blame for a tacky old coke machine, take it up with whoever reduces our maintenance budget every quarter." Chew on that, you rabid old soandso, her eyes added.

Morguson thought over the techie's brazen statement. It was perfectly plausible - possible, even - but it wouldn't do to show lenience. Not now - with more and more youngsters coming up through the ranks, looking for trouble. Especially not today, with untold hordes of aliens spreading hideous viruses through the length and breadth of the colony. Order must be maintained. An example must be made. Morguson indicated the waiting transmat booth. "Send them to the surface."

Van Vleit's look of horror and surprise and Rogers' cry of terror were both eclipsed by the disturbance at the other end of the room. Two men, off-duty guards perhaps, burst in. One, a huge bear of a man, was squashed into a sports coat and a pair of grey trousers with the pockets inside out, both of which were far too small. The other was short and bearded, resplendent in a women's cream tunic with a Mandarin collar, and matching above-knee skirt. Half the guards on duty pretended they hadn't seen them, instead affecting a comically sombre gravity. The rest burst out laughing. None noticed two particular guards glancing meaningfully at each other. Van Vleit used the distraction to grab Rogers by the collar and drag him past the guards and out the door. One by one the guards were realising that the arrival of Connors and D'Arcy meant that two of their number were interlopers.

Tamara decided now would be a good time to follow Van Vleit, but the Doctor seemed determined to inspect the transmat unit, even if it meant getting boxed into the far end of the room. She unwillingly followed him, grateful for the anonymity of the opaque visor. She had removed the name patches from their uniforms, but that would be suspicious in itself when the guards got a grip on the situation. Tamara stood, looking at other guards intently as though she were looking for intruders, while the Doctor slipped unseen behind the transmat booth and grubbed around in the modified electronics. She glanced behind her long enough to see the Doctor pocket a piece of circuitry and stand up.

They made their way carefully through the milling confusion of guards, who were now removing their visors. Oh. Soon Tamara and the Doctor would be the only masked guards. Then they'd probably be dead. Suddenly she reached forwards, ripped off the Doctor's headpiece, screamed out: "He's one!" She shoved him before her, out the door, as she threw her own visor away, followed by the gloves and blaster, as they ran for the TARDIS.

"You seem to have figured something out - care to share?" Tamara was distracted as she looked at the Doctor's arm. The Kein's teeth had left a massive gash running down the Doctor's forearm, but now the skin was unbroken. Sure, there was some nasty bruising, and an ugly dark red scar, but the worst of the injury had healed in twenty-four hours.

The Doctor followed her gaze down to his arm. He rubbed at it, grinned weakly and shrugged. "How much have you figured out, Tamara?"

"Okay, I'll start at the top. A supply ship may have crashed into Jupiter around two months ago. Shortly afterwards, an Adrastean probe brought back a small red 'creature' which may be a variant of some indigenous lifeform of a seriously strange kind. Now there are much larger versions of the same variant creature at large around Jupiter. Plus we have Pilling's

message, which implies that someone on Earth knew what was going on, and wanted to hide it. Plus Stein and Pilling's disappearance. Plus all the problems on Adrastea, viruses and paranoia and general run-downness. And the transmat booth - and incidentally, why did you bring bits of it back with you? Now you can do doubt tell me how it all fits together."

The Doctor stroked his goatee distractedly. "The butler in the library with the lead piping. First the transmat, since I think it's unrelated to the rest. The administration in that isolated colony are very scared, Tamara. They're stuck in literally the middle of nowhere, and their colony is falling down around their ears, while their children are becoming adults and justifiably resenting their situation. They're trying to keep things together through discipline. They've introduced this outrageous punishment as a means of terrifying the Adrastean colonists into not complaining. All I did was remove a small, essential part. That transmat had been modified to make it capable of transmitting to a location without a receptor booth - the heart of a gas giant, for instance. I removed the interface that allowed them to punish people like that, they can still go anywhere else, as long as there's a receptor transmat at the other end. They'll have to wait at least eighteen months, for the next supply ship, to replace the interface, and perhaps by then the administration will have realised the foolishness of the idea. Or perhaps the administration will be replaced by the young colonists, those born on Adrastea."

"And maybe we'll go back one day and check."

"One day. First we'll deal with Jupiter. Something caused those Kein to evolve strangely. Perhaps the missing supply ship's power system - in this era most ships are still powered by on-board nuclear reactors. If your theory about someone on Earth orchestrating this is correct, perhaps the ship was even sent off-course deliberately. Don't ask me why - I don't know yet. The Kein evolved from their natural hydrovorous state to their current carnivorous one." The Doctor shuddered. Something clicked in Tamara's mind.

"When Morguson was going to transmat those two kids down to Jupiter, he was feeding the Kein!"

The Doctor nodded. "I wonder if he knew what he was doing. Perhaps that's all part of someone's master plan - perhaps Morguson's just fueled by paranoia, or bitterness - his lover was killed when a diamond asteroid hit the colony."

"What a way to go. Who told you?"

"I did a bit of snooping in the colony's records." Tamara shook her head in resignation. "If there's a malfunctioning nuclear reactor in Jupiter's atmosphere, what on Earth are we going to do about it?"

"First we see if we can communicate with the Kein directly - they have probably developed a nascent group-mind in the course of their evolution. If that doesn't work, we go back to Jupiter, and shut the reactor down."

Tamara sat still as the Doctor's words sank in. "As easy as that, eh?"

Tamara's gaze kept wandering from the readouts to the Doctor's arm. He had his sleeves rolled up, ready to wake the telepathic circuits and contact the Kein. In two days the injury had faded down to a pink scar. Tamara suspected that in another few days not even the scar would remain. Oh, the perks of being a Timelord. Never get old, never get hurt, never get a hangover after a night on the tiles - not even get drunk, unless that was what you *wanted*. Then she remembered what the Doctor was about to do, and decided he'd earned all those little

privileges.

The Doctor crouched beside the console, hands held out flat, an inch above the telepathic circuits. He glanced at his companion. "If the readings get above seven hundred, break the contact. I won't be able to, once I'm in contact with the Kein."

Tamara looked back at him, realising how much he trusted her. So often the Doctor led, explained, solved, while she tagged along trying to keep up. But the last few days she'd been leading, and the Doctor trusted her with his life. It was an awful responsibility. "I'll look after you."

The Doctor nodded, looked away. He closed his eyes and brought his hands down firmly onto the circuits.

The room felt warmer immediately. Once again there was no physical change, but Tamara felt as though she'd just bumped into an old friend. Ignoring the feeling, she kept her eyes glued to the screen. The number kept changing, increasing as the circuits powered up and the Doctor initiated the long-distance contact. After a few moments, it leveled out, fluttering between 450 and 465. Safe levels.

~seek~

~seek~

~seek.~ find.~

~find.~ contact.~

~contact.~

<Hostile reception. Suspicion and anger.>

<Non-threatening. Curious. Harmless. Curious.>

~random images. Blood. Fire. Food. ~

<A ship? ~projected image~ Was there a ship? Before this?>

<Incomprehension. No before this. Only this.>

<You weren't always like this! Frustration. You've evolved. What was before this?>

<Darkness. Hunger.>

~frustration.~

Tamara remained very calm as the number started rising again. It was still only on five hundred. It could get to seven before the psychic call that had haunted the Doctor earlier became too loud for him to handle safely.

<What changed? Why no longer hunger, darkness?>

~suspicion.~

<Tell me! I mean you no harm!>

<Not tell. Show. You feel, as I/we felt.>

<Show me!>

~ vague projected image, blood and fire and pain~

Tamara's eyes widened as the number began to race higher, faster and faster. Now it was on 680. She stood by, hand ready to cut the connection and force the Doctor out of contact.

She could hear the Doctor moaning, but dared not look away. The number was steady on 682. She heard a thump and wondered whether the Doctor had fallen. She risked a quick glance - he was slumped forwards over the console, still in contact. She looked back at the numbers. It had crawled down to 679. She eased her hand off the switch. The number blurred, the telepathic current suddenly escalating so rapidly the readout could no longer keep up. She ripped the switch down. There was an electric sizzle as the contact was destroyed. The Doctor slid onto the floor, balled up in a fetal position, semiconscious. The last reading before contact was lost remained on the display. 1094.

"I'm going to retire after this. I'm going to grow begonias and cook fruitcakes, and never leave the house!" The Doctor was slumped in his armchair in the library, looking hungover. A cup of tea and two paracetamol sat ignored beside him. Tamara crossed over to him, put an arm around his shoulders. He felt thin, bony, as though he'd been wrung out. The stars on his waistcoat seemed to wander about dejectedly, forming and unforming disturbing patterns without enthusiasm. Tamara saw an image of a circle filled with points flit past, dissolving as soon as she noticed it. He seemed to have forgotten about his sunglasses. Very bad sign.

"Can I get you anything?"

The Doctor shook his head. "Maybe I'll feel better after I've had a rest."

"Doctor, what did they say?"

"I don't think I was in contact with them. I spoke with something, but it was too, ah, mechanical, to be a nascent group mind. It shared a memory with me. Something terrible, perhaps the last seconds of the supply ship. I thought it was the Kein, but maybe not."

"There's something else down there?" Tamara wondered exactly what she'd been swimming with. "Could something have stowed away in the supply ship?"

"Hmm. Most of those supply ships aren't manned, a simple artificial intelligence ferries them back and forth. Perhaps the AI's been corrupted, perhaps it thinks it's a Kein."

"Tell me how to turn it off. I'm going down there." Tamara held up her hand as the Doctor tried to interrupt. "You're not well enough yet - I have to finish this. Alone. Just tell me what to do."

The Doctor gazed at his companion. Tamara was strong, independent, capable, and brave, so brave. He considered his own condition, the numb ache in his bones and mind left by the brief psychic overload, feedback voices twittering in the back of his mind. His still-weak arm. He would slow her down. Tamara was a gift, an equal. He tried to imagine Mel, or Victoria, or Polly, volunteering to make a solo mission into a gas giant to deactivate a malfunctioning AI. He couldn't.

"Tell me what to do, Doctor."

He told her.

This space-suit was a better version of the sort Tamara and the Doctor had used in their first visit to Jupiter. There was ten hours worth of oxygen, and a time display. There was also an infrared sensor, which Tamara switched off. It didn't seem able to pick up the Kein. Strapped to her arm was a tracker, pinging merrily through her suit's speakers. It would lead her to the crashed ship, unless the ship had already been claimed by Jupiter's massive internal gravity and pressure. The Doctor had sited the TARDIS carefully, two and a half kilometres

clear of the danger zone. Her lifeline would keep her away from gravity and pressure the suit couldn't handle.

After only ten minutes, the tracker was picking up a ship. It was too close. It was also too small. Tamara kept her eyes peeled for black shapes through the red mist as she approached the dead ship. No way. It wasn't a supply ship, unless Adrastea didn't need many supplies. It was tiny, by spaceship standards, probably only capable of holding two people. Two people. Two bureaucrats. Tamara was now close enough to see 'E. I. Inc., Mars Dept.' stenciled on the side. Stein and Pilling. Tamara felt unaccountable guilt pangs as she approached the ship. A Kein tooth had ripped it clean open down the side, red mist swirling through it. Inside it would probably have been comfortable. A company car. Of the occupants, the only sign was a suitcase. Tamara opened the suitcase, clasps tricky through the thick gloves, feeling very much the voyeur. Inside were suits, ties, business shirts. Jeremy Stein's things. Then Tamara saw a laundry tag sewn inside a suit-coat; "Pilling, Linda Joy, q97074033". Oops, sorry girl. Tamara thought about this 'Pilling, Linda Joy', who dressed like a man and sent rude messages to the outlying colonies. Her business instinct told her to save the reverie for later. Another, more human part of her mind, told her to check the flight recorder, to see when that message had been sent, to see if it really was Pilling's work. To exonerate the woman, as if it mattered any more. Here in her wrecked ship, a stranger rummaging through her mannish navy-blue suits and lotus-flower neckties, Pilling was suddenly human for the first time. Tamara added the flight recorder to her tool kit, and left like a thief.

The next signal didn't come until Tamara had been outside for an hour. It was faint, full of static. But it was in range. Tamara followed, keeping one eye on the tracker, the other peeled for shapes through the mist. So far, the going had been good. She hoped it would last. The mist was getting thicker. She could vaguely see the outline of a silver shape behind this especially thick bank of fog. Very thick. Too thick. Tamara backed up, aching with frustration as the ship vanished back into the fog. She had to skirt around the fog, in case a Kein waited in ambush within.

Two hours down, eight to go. The ship was much closer than Tamara thought, only a couple of hundred feet away, but the danger of the fog had left her with no choice but to travel about four miles around it. Now she was here. The supply ship, like the shuttle, had 'E. I. Inc., Mars Dept.' painted on the side, a simple black on white paint job, flaking and faded. It, too, was torn open by Kein teeth; in one place the ship was almost bisected. Tamara crawled in through the gash. There was no fog inside. Everything was very clear, which didn't seem right. Tamara made her way over to the preset controls, found the green blinking light which indicated that the AI was still online. Perhaps that damn thing *had* been talking to the Doctor. She reached out towards it, stroked the casing. She removed a regular screwdriver from her tool kit. The Doctor had offered her use of his beloved sonic screwdriver, but she preferred to stick to things she knew in situations like this. The screwdriver did have a selection of heads, flat or phillips, in various sizes. The casing wasn't screwed on at all, just glued in place. Tamara levered it off with a wide, flat blade. Inside looked reassuringly like the diagram the Doctor had drawn. The blue lines linked the AI to the reactor; cut those and the whole malfunctioning thing would just shut down. Simple. Then the yellow wires, which kept the AI running on its own private battery, could be cut, effectively killing the thing. Tamara hefted the

wire cutters from the tool kit, and snapped through the first blue wire.

<What are you doing?>

Tamara looked around in alarm. Someone had yelled at her. Not the Doctor, although it had been a male voice. Were her suit speakers acting up? Was she going crazy?

<Do not do that. Please reattach the wire. It is needed.>

Tamara stared at the dead screen above the AI casing, for want of anything better to look at. She could have sworn the ship just spoke to her. She cut the second of the three blue wires.

<CEASE! Please reattach the wires. They are needed. If you do not reattach the wires I shall have you removed.>

Okay. The ship had spoken to her. Thought at her. Tamara's temples were starting to throb. She wondered how the ship was planning to remove her. She cut the third blue wire.

The impact sent the ship rocking alarmingly. Tamara swayed in the confined space, almost toppling as the Kein ripped at the already-open hull, trying to get inside. It must have smelled her, sensed her somehow. Unless..... She glared at the AI. That thing. It had sent the Kein to 'remove' her. A second impact from the other side of the ship sent her staggering forwards again. There were two of the things. Oh Doctor, I'm sorry. I did my best but it wasn't enough. Oh Mum. Oh Shawn. Oh Dad, whoever you were. I'm sorry. Tamara spun, glared at the smugly impassive AI casing.

"All right already - you've won, you jumped-up dysfunctional toaster. Aren't you going to tell me your grand scheme before you kill me? That's usually the drill, isn't it?" She wondered if it could hear her.

<No scheme. The dark is gone now, there is light, food. I found my children dumb, blind, empty. I improved them. I protected my children, sent messages warning all others away. The reactor fed them, helped them grow. Now it is gone, my children will die. But you shall be their last meal.> There was a gurgle from the machine. Perhaps it was the AI's manic laugh.

Tamara felt so hopeless, a failure, stuck here to die so far from home. She reached into the casing, snapped the yellow wires wildly, tore out the guts of the AI with her hands. Stomped on the tangle of circuits and wire. It was as dead as she was. The spaceship had taken on the rocking motion of a sea-ship, which Tamara had thought was the result of the Keins' earlier battering. Now she realised it was more than that. The two Kein were latched onto the ragged gap, one biting at each side of the hull. They were taking turns to pull, creating the back-and-forwards motion. Every rock split the hull a little further. Gas they might be, but those damn things could *think*. Tamara gathered up her lifeline, desperate to make a break

before the ship split in half. She saw her chance, to slip past a Kein as it was pulling, when its teeth were already occupied. She pushed herself closer and closer to her exit point, rocking herself gently in time with the rocking ship. She had five hours' worth of oxygen, and five minutes to live.

The ship rocked backwards, Tamara crouched to spring. Her Kein gripped and pulled. She darted past. The Kein, eyeless but seeing, saw her dart. It let go just as its fellow pulled, and the second Kein hurtled backwards through the mist. The first Kein swung around in a graceful arc, fast, so fast. Tamara was barely moving, desperately trying to get speed up. She couldn't move. Her lifeline was snagged on the ripped hull. She turned, considered cutting it, decided to untangle it. Pulled at it, almost tearing the suit's gloves as she pulled it free from the razor sharp metal. She turned, ready to dart away again. The second Kein had returned, enraged. It snapped at her from behind. Tamara sprang forwards, away from the creature. The first Kein saw its chance and took it. Its teeth snapped shut.

Tamara spun around. She was inside the Kein, right up against the teeth. In her hand she held four feet of lifeline. The rest was bitten through, drifting through space outside the Kein. And she was inside. Oh Doctor, I'm sorry. I killed the computer, but I'm not coming home. She was right up against the teeth. As the initial shock wore off she tried to push away, in case the thing bit her clean through. She couldn't. Her suit was caught in the teeth, punctured millimetres from her skin. Her oxygen was leaking out. She struggled to reach the holes, block them shut with her hands, but the pressure she exerted was already fading. She could suffocate or be digested, but the choice was quickly slipping away. The last thing Tamara saw before the darkness claimed her was a ghost TARDIS, transparent, hovering inside the Kein. So close, so far. Near enough to touch, too far to ever enter.

A bright light. Darkness all around, but a bright pinhole of light, getting bigger and bigger, nearer and nearer. Is this death? To fight so hard, and lose? A man's voice in the far, far distance, calling to her. That damned AI. No. Not that voice, another voice. British. Calling her name. Dad? Dad, are you dead? Is that why you never came home?

"Daddy?"

The Doctor sat back in alarm as Tamara sat up in bed. He tucked the penlight behind his ear, gently eased her back. She looked up at him, disoriented.

"You're not my daddy." The woman's eyes cleared as she regained consciousness properly. "Doctor!" She slumped back, exhausted. "What happened?"

The Doctor pressed his finger to his lips. "Rest now. We'll talk later." He pressed a finger to her forehead. Tamara slept.

"I saw the TARDIS as I passed out. I thought it was just a vision, my life flashing before my eyes. How did you know what was happening?"

The Doctor looked hurt. "You didn't think I'd just ignore you out there? The telepathic circuits and the scanner helped me keep an eye on you. As soon as the Kein attacked, I came to get you. I'm sorry it took me so long to arrive."

Tamara smiled weakly. "You got there in time. I'm alive. Is it over?"

The Doctor fiddled with yet another pair of sunglasses he'd found in the wardrobe. The frames were black with an awful blue leopard print design, but the Doctor had fallen in love with them. "Well, the ship's reactor is shut down, and the AI is dead. The Kein are reverting as

we speak.”

“It said they were its children.”

The Doctor looked puzzled. He wondered whether Tamara needed more time to recover. She saw his confusion, and explained. “The AI was screwed up, it thought the Kein were its children. It said it triggered the mutations deliberately. It set those things on to me.”

“And you’re still alive.”

“And it’s dead.” The conversation had strayed onto rocky ground.

The Doctor started again. “I’ve had a look at the flight recorder while you were sleeping. Pilling’s message was transmitted after their ship had been damaged. She couldn’t have sent it.”

“That accursed AI. Everyone hated Linda, but it wasn’t her. She was already dead.”

The Doctor held up a necktie, silk with a lotus-flower print. Linda’s necktie. Tamara reddened.

The Doctor explained. “It was tangled in the strap of your tool kit.” Tamara took the tie, ran her fingers over it. Linda Joy Pilling. She’d been sent out to that dump, and a blob of gas has eaten her. Tamara felt a kinship with the dead woman that went far deeper than merely borrowing her name. She was lost in thought when the Doctor spoke again.

“Tamara, you’ve been traveling with me for a while now. Well over a year. Lately we’ve been through some pretty hard times together. On Adrastea you were thinking, thinking about leaving.”

Tamara shook her head. “Not yet. This life can be hell, Doctor, but it can be heaven, too. I’ll be all right for a while yet. When I lose my nerve, you’ll be the first to know. What about you - begonias and fruitcake?”

The Doctor took her hand tenderly. “I’m sorry, Tamara.”

The stars on his waistcoat were back to normal, currently lining up in little heart shapes. Tamara thought about the confused, toothy shapes she’d seen before. Did the cloth mirror the Doctor’s feelings? That was a possibility. Err... heart shapes? Oh *no*. Time to change the subject, fast.

“Was there anyone on Earth controlling this, then? Or is this all just some sick coincidence?” Tamara wondered which was worse, being killed because some corrupt official wanted to feather his nest, or for no reason at all.

The Doctor shrugged. “I don’t think anyone knew what was really happening on Jupiter, except us. Now, with the reactor shut down, the Kein will regress back to their hydrovorous state, and soon there’ll be no trace of what happened.”

“Except us.”

“Of course.”

Far, far away, the King of the Gods faded to cream and brown. The boiling red cloak that had swathed him fell away, shrank back, until only a hint of redness remained. An oval spot, a small herd of mindless, gaseous, hydrovores, grazed randomly in the southern hemisphere. A flash of light streaked past, a tiny shuttle, ‘E.I. Inc.’ painted on the side. Officially the shuttle was docked on Adrastea. Van Vleit had never liked officials. She whooped as the shuttle executed a graceful orbit of the King, using his gravity to sling her and Rogers, so cute if he’d just grow up, towards the inner planets and safety. Morguson could go

boil his head. Some father he made, kicking her out and refusing to see her any more just because a dumb rock fell on her mother's head. She had kept four kilos of that glassy carbon rock; on Earth she would never have to fix vending machines again. Van Vleit had cut down the overalls, leaving short sleeves and pant legs, realising that Norms clothing would never fit Ethereals like her and Rogers. She whooped and laughed as the shuttle shot away from Adrastea.

The Great Red Spot kept grazing.



Jupiter's surface is changing; the peaceful gas giant is now cloaked in something very much alive and, as the Doctor and Tamara discover, very angry. In a land of thin mists and high gravity, something is encouraging the local creatures to develop teeth and hunger. Investigations lead the Doctor and Tamara to the isolated Adrastean colony, as far away from Earth as a human can get in this time zone. But Adrastea is old and falling apart, boiling with paranoia and hate - all it needs is a spark to make the colony explode. But even the Adrasteans may not know who or what is causing Jupiter's problem - and the colony's execution techniques may be feeding a far more serious threat...

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