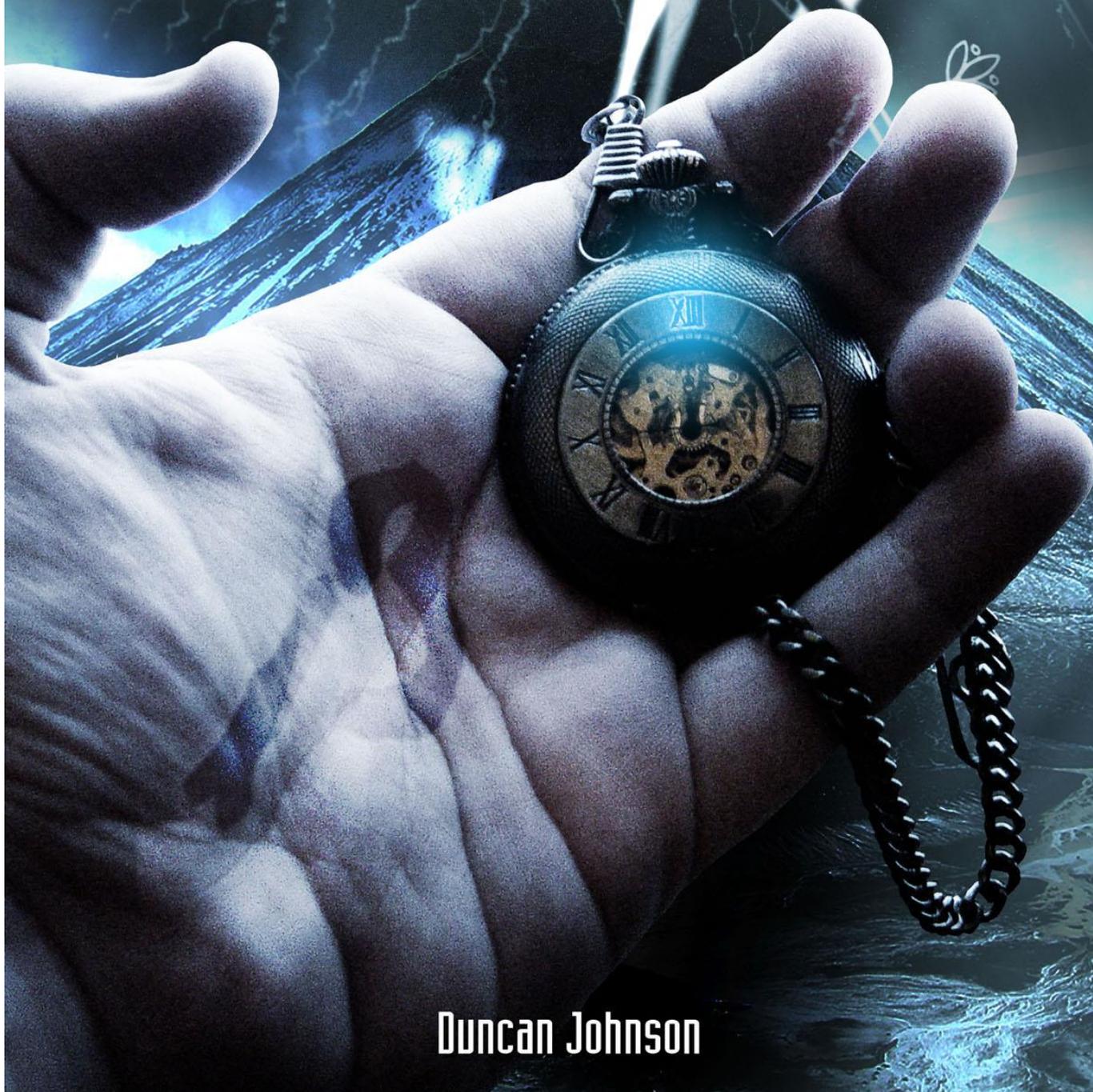


THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

**AND THE CLOCKS
STRUCK THIRTEEN**



Duncan Johnson

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Pre-Title Sequence

It was a bright cold day in April and the chimes of Big Ben sang out in the early afternoon. Tamara Scott paused and counted the chimes, using their rhythmic certainty to calm the fluttering in her heart. If only little Sally could be calmed as easily. Tamara put a hand to her swollen belly as she felt the girl inside her kick again, as if making a bid for freedom. Not long now, Tamara mentally assured her child.

"Are you all right, Miss Scott?" the judge asked, leaning forward on his bench. His face might look harsh, like a rock-face, Tamara noted, but behind his glasses the judge's eyes betrayed a genuine concern. As, she noted, did the eyes of the other twelve people in the room. She blushed, embarrassed at being the centre of attention.

"Quite all right, your honour," Tamara assured the judge.

The judge sat back. "In that case, please continue."

Tamara raised her right hand, palm facing the judge's bench, and began to recite the words she had been practising as recently as that morning.

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign state or power and that I pledge my allegiance now and forever to the Thirteen. I declare that I will support and defend the Constitution and Laws laid down by the Thirteen for the benefit of all their citizens against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the Law and perform any service so required for the benefit of the Thirteen and their citizens as the Thirteen or their appointed representatives so direct. I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion. This I solemnly swear."

The judge nodded. "Miss Scott, in deference to your condition, you may be seated."

Tamara gratefully sat down. She would be glad when she no longer had to carry Sally around with her all day long.

"Mr Robertson?" the judge prompted and the man to Tamara's left raised his hand and repeated the same oath. Unlike Tamara, he had to remain standing once he had finished. The judge then turned to the next person in line.

"By the power vested in me," the judge said once all of the applicants had sworn their oaths, "it is my privilege and pleasure to proclaim you all citizens of Earth and all its colonies under the dominion of Section Thirteen. Congratulations."

Prologue

Earlier. Relatively-speaking.

The TARDIS was screaming and it was not very hard for Dr Taryn Fischer, formerly of the Terran Colony Alliance, to see why. The ship was being torn apart. Corridors twisted and groaned, walls bowed inwards and space folded in on itself. It was as if the TARDIS was just so much paper being scrunched up into a ball by an unseen hand. Putting a hand out to a roundelled wall as the normally steady-as-a-rock floor bucked beneath her feet, Taryn began to make her way to the console room in search of more answers.

She was greeted by more confusion.

"This is getting to be something of a habit, Doctor," Taryn announced as she barged into the nerve centre of the time ship. "Is this another gravitic disturbance that you've managed to pilot us straight into?"

"I wish it was that simple, Dr Fischer," the Doctor replied, bounding from one panel of the six-sided console to another, nearly knocking Grae over in his frenetic dance. "And, for the record, the last time was not my fault. I believe that was due to a certain member of the crew fiddling with the randomiser."

He fixed Taryn with a pointed stare, but she refused to rise to the bait. Instead, she turned to Grae.

"What's going on?"

"I don't know," the Time Lady admitted. "None of the diagnostic subroutines are working."

"That, my dear Grae," said the Doctor, flicking a switch here and twisting a dial there, "is because there's no power to run them." A section of the console exploded in a panel of sparks and the Doctor hopped back, sucking on his burnt fingertips. "Well, that shouldn't have happened."

"But that's impossible, Doctor," Grae said.

"No, no," the Doctor mused. "Probably just some faulty wiring behind that panel. I've been meaning to have it overhauled for centuries."

"I meant that it's impossible for the TARDIS to run out of power." Grae looked at Taryn as she continued her explanation. "The TARDIS draws its power directly from the Eye of Harmony on Gallifrey. Even if we were to run out of all the other fuel sources the ship needs, there would still be enough to run the emergency systems from that connection alone."

"Unless the connection was cut off somehow," Taryn suggested.

"But that's not possible."

"I do wish you'd stop saying that," the Doctor commented. "Nothing's impossible. Ask Alice." He glanced at Taryn. "Where's Tamara?"

"How should I know?" Taryn retorted. "I assumed she'd be on her way here just like I was."

"Yes, that would be in character." The Doctor ran a finger over his goatee. "I wonder..."

"Doctor," Grae offered, "do you want me to go and look for her?"

"No!" he snapped, causing Grae to take a step back. "It's too dangerous out there."

"Dangerous?" Taryn asked. "Dangerous how?"

The Doctor cast his eyes heavenward. "I don't have time for all of these questions."

Taryn was not to be cowed. "Then save some time by answering them rather than complaining about them."

"Oh very well. The TARDIS is actually a very complicated mathematical construction held together by Block Transfer Computations that no one really understands anymore. Well, no one since the Logopolitans... but that's another story. The point is that without the power from the Eye to support the mathematics, the TARDIS's internal structure will begin to break up."

"You mean this ship could fall apart."

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you just say so?"

The Doctor looked to Grae for help. "I did, didn't I?"

But Grae's attention was elsewhere. "Doctor, look!"

A crack had started to form in the wall of the console room. Grae watched in mounting horror as the crack widened and she could see the inhospitable winds of the time vortex trying to force their way inside.

"Taryn, watch out!" the Doctor yelled as the TARDIS lurched, but it was too late. Taryn was knocked off of her feet and fell towards the gaping wound in the side of the TARDIS. As she passed through it, she lashed out with her right arm and managed to gain purchase on a shattered roundel.

"Hold on, Taryn," the Doctor called over the roar of the vortex. "I'm coming."

"What do you think I'm doing?" Taryn yelled back, but she could feel the vortex dragging on her, feel her fingertips slipping on the smooth surface of the roundel.

The Doctor was crawling across the floor towards her, fighting not to be lifted up and carried out into the vortex himself.

"Hurry it up, Doctor!" Taryn's fingers slipped some more.

"Nearly there," the Doctor assured her.

A purple ribbon of energy lashed out from the vortex and caught the Doctor on the side of the head, turning a section of his dark mane grey. Despite the pain, he fought on.

"Nearly there. Grab my hand."

The Doctor reached out for Taryn, but he was just moments too late. Unable to maintain her grip any longer, Taryn was sucked out into the vortex and was lost to him.

"Taryn!" he yelled, but she was no longer in sight, let alone in earshot. Gritting his teeth determinedly, he crawled back over to the console and stuck his head beneath the cap of the mushroom. A hatch swung open and the Doctor started tugging out wires, examining connections and rearranging circuits at furious speed.

"Doctor," Grae asked, hanging onto the top of the console for dear life as the TARDIS rolled like a ship in a storm. "What are we going to do about Taryn?"

The Doctor grunted. More cracks had appeared in the TARDIS's shell and Grae caught herself wondering just how much of the ship was left.

"Doctor?"

"There's nothing we can do." The Doctor pushed himself out and away from the section he had been working on and sprang to his feet. "Taryn fell into the vortex. You know what the time winds will do to unprotected human tissue."

"But there must be something we can do?" Grae insisted. Taryn had not exactly been her friend, but she was one of the TARDIS crew and deserved some loyalty for that at least.

"We can hope it was over quickly," the Doctor replied, "for her sake."

The Doctor's words stung. "How can you be so cold?"

"Look." The Doctor twisted a control and the monitor screen flicked slowly into life. "What do you see?"

The screen was dark. "I don't see anything."

"That's Gallifrey," the Doctor said. "Or, at least, that's where Gallifrey used to be. The reason we have lost contact with the Eye of Harmony is because both it and Gallifrey itself have ceased to exist."

"All those people... Isn't there anything we can do?"

The Doctor turned his attention to what remained of the TARDIS.

"We can hope it's over quickly," he said, "for *our* sakes."

Act One – Beginning To See The Light

At first, Taryn Fischer had tried being patient. She could not remember much of what happened when she fell out of the TARDIS, but once she regained consciousness, she found herself in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but sand stretching in all directions. So, she had found a convenient rock and sat down to wait for the Doctor to turn up and rescue her.

After an hour, she came to the conclusion that he was not coming.

It was kind of obvious when she stopped to think about it. She had seen the TARDIS being ripped apart. Even assuming that the Doctor had survived (and Taryn was not holding out much hope of that), how was the Doctor going to find her without his time/space craft. She was on her own.

It hit her like a sledgehammer to the stomach. She was really on her own this time. The Doctor was not going to come to her rescue and neither was the Terran Colony Alliance. She could be on any planet in any time. She could not just call her uncle and get him to bail her out of her latest misadventure. The desert stretched off for miles in the distance and there was not a single sign of life in any direction. Even assuming her uncle's influence counted for something on this godforsaken rock, there was no one she could bribe, intimidate or cajole with it.

Taryn Fischer had no one she could rely on except herself.

She was so screwed.

Burying her face in her hands, Taryn sat on a rock and cried.

* * * * *

Taryn stopped crying when her stomach contracted, demanding to know how long it had been since Taryn's last meal. She needed to find food and, more importantly, water and shelter from the sun. She glanced around and tears once again stung in her eyes. She could see nothing. Nonetheless, she stood up. President Ralvac Welles' niece was not going to just admit defeat, curl up and wait to die.

Picking a direction, she started to walk.

* * * * *

Taryn had sand in her shoes. She had sand in her blonde hair, which, Taryn suspected with annoyance, had come loose from the coiffeur she worked so hard to maintain and had been turned into a tangled mess by the grit filled wind. Sand had even found it's way beneath her white medical scrubs, despite the microfibre weave. She was going to have serious words with the manufacturer should she ever get back to her own time. No, when she got back to her own time. Best not to think about any other possibility.

Not thinking about it.

I'm not.

I'm...

Like the proverbial blue elephant, having told herself not to think about it, Taryn could do nothing *but* think about it and it was equally pointless trying to fight back the flood of tears welling up inside of her.

* * * * *

The sun had sunk beneath the horizon on Taryn's right. If she knew where she was, that information might have helped her determine which direction she was walking in. Of course, if she knew where she was then she would not need to know.

Now that the sun had disappeared, the temperature had plummeted. Her TCA-issue medical scrubs were supposed to compensate for temperature, but again, this was an issue she was going to have to raise with the manufacturer. She blew on her hands to warm them up, but the movement of air only reminded her how raw her throat was. Her head was spinning and she stumbled, tripped, and ended up face down in the dirt.

Good job, Taryn.

She just wanted to curl up and go to sleep. Just for a little while. She could feel her eyelids getting heavier.

A howl split the night air, jerking Taryn back to wakefulness.

The absence of the day had given her a false sense of security. She had not even stopped to consider what sort of predators this world might possess. With a nervous glance over her shoulder, Taryn scrambled to her feet and set off once again, now a little faster than before.

* * * * *

The sun was beating down on her back, stripping the skin from the back of her neck. How long had she been walking now? One day? Two? More? Taryn could not remember. The pain in her head put a stop to that kind of thing. Her tongue was thick and heavy in her mouth and she was having trouble keeping her eyes open, forcing herself to put one foot in front of the other, shuffling on just that little bit further.

Some part of her brain, a part that seemed a million miles away from where she was now, remembered her medical training, recognised the symptoms, knew that she did not have long left. She was going to die here, in the middle of nowhere, alone and unlamented. They would not even find her body.

I'm going to die.

Taryn tried saying the words out loud, but her mouth would not co-operate. Nevertheless, she had finally accepted her fate. Maybe she should have just stayed on the rock after all. She sat down on the ground, or tried to. In actuality, she collapsed in a graceless tangle of limbs. Taryn did not care. Appearances hardly mattered anymore, did they?

She lay down on her back, staring up at the sky. So much light. She wanted to reach out and touch it, but the strength had fled from her limbs. Still, it would not be long now before she entered the light.

Not.

Long.

At all.

As Dr Taryn Fischer parted company with consciousness, a shadow fell across her, blotting out the sun.

* * * * *

White light. Just what Taryn had expected.

Slowly, her eyes adjusted and she realised that the white was not the uniform background she had at first assumed. She could make out walls, walls with depressions in them. Roundels.

If this was the afterlife, Taryn was going to demand a refund.

She was standing in the doorway of the small room that was the TARDIS kitchen. Inside, Tamara and Grae were sitting at a table, sipping from mugs of cocoa and chatting conspiratorially to each other. They had not invited Taryn to join them. Taryn was the outsider and Grae and Tamara were determined to keep it that way, not that Taryn cared.

"Of course, everyone says 'Oh, if I had god-like powers I'd make the world a nicer place to live'," Tamara was saying. This whole scene seemed terribly familiar to Taryn. It was the aftermath of her first adventure as part of the TARDIS crew. They had landed in an artificial habitat, a place where a man gifted with god-like powers had attempted to create a perfect race, and failed miserably.

"Maybe a *real* god would see beyond that sort of stuff," Tamara continued, warming to her theme, "and actually be interested in doing completely different things."

Why was she reliving to this moment, Taryn wondered. If she had to experience her life flashing before her eyes, couldn't she just skip straight to the good bits?

"The problem with questions like that is that you pretty soon get deep into the realm of theology, which is not my strong point at all."

Despite herself, Taryn felt compelled to speak out, to replay the scene the way she remembered it.

"Maybe," she said, causing both Tamara and Grae to jump in surprise, "O'Hallan just proved that there can't be any gods. Maybe, if there were real gods, the universe wouldn't have all the hate and horror that it has - it would be something else, something different that reflected the nature of the gods, not of us. It's us who keep the universe full of darkness."

* * * * *

Taryn woke up coughing and spluttering. Someone was trying to drown her. Blindly, she forced them away and tried to sit up, but the world started to spin as soon as she moved, so she lay back down. There was something soft beneath her head that she could rest upon.

"Gently, my lady," a voice said, "You still need your rest."

A bronzed, bare-chested figure with the head of a fish was looming over her. Taryn screamed.

The fish-person stumbled back, startled. Then, realisation dawned he quickly removed the fish mask from his face, revealing a bald and very human countenance.

"Do you normally try and scare your guests half to death?" Taryn demanded, trying to preserve some shred of dignity.

"My humblest apologies, my lady," the man said, clearly mortified. "I did not mean to cause offence. It is merely a mask."

The man's eyes were fixed on the floor, as though he could not bring himself to look at Taryn, and Taryn took the opportunity to glance about her. She was alone with this stranger in a stone room with a low ceiling and reed mats on the floor.

"Where am I?"

"You are in the temple of Apsu at the heart of the city of Eridu," the man explained, "But surely your magnificence knows this already."

Your magnificence? Taryn did not know who he had mistaken her for, but so long as she was getting the fawning treatment, she was not about to disabuse him of the notion. Part of that meant not displaying her ignorance and revealing that his reply had left her none the wiser.

"It was...a test," Taryn answered as imperiously as she could manage. "Now who are you?" And how did I get here anyway?"

"I am Ashmadu, a priest in the temple. The Apkallu asked me to watch over you."

"Apkallu?"

"Surely you must know of the Apkallu?" Ashmadu said. Taryn frown and he immediately pressed his head against the floor. "Please forgive me, my lady. I did not mean to question you. It is not my place."

"That's quite all right," Taryn replied, bemused. "You can get up now, if you want."

"I will do whatever my lady desires. I am but her humble servant."

Taryn sighed. This was already getting tedious. "In that case, your lady desires that you sit up and finish explaining how she came to be in this godforsaken place."

"Eridu is hardly forsaken by the gods," Ashmadu said. "In fact, in recent days..."

"The explanation," Taryn said, cutting him short, then, seeing the priest already bowing his head, she added, "and no more grovelling, okay?"

Ashmadu offered her a bemused look before continuing. "A farmer found you on the edge of the desert. You were very near to death, but the Apkallu - and Apsu's healing waters - brought you back from the brink."

"I think I should meet these Apkallu," Taryn mused, "but first..." She eyed the clay bowl in Ashmadu's hands. "Is there any chance of some more of that water?"

* * * * *

Some time later, Taryn was watching the sunset from the fourth tier of the ziggurat that was the temple. The ziggurat was at the summit of a small hill surrounded by a lagoon. Beyond the water, Taryn could see the city of Eridu stretching out into the distance. City was perhaps a generous term for the collection of buildings huddling together down there, but Taryn was not about to slight the people who had saved her life. Well, not just yet, anyway.

As the light faded, farmers returned from their fields, fathers and sons greeted by wives and mothers, dogs barking madly and getting under everyone's feet. From up here, the people seemed, if not happy, at least content with their lot. Could Taryn learn to accept this life too? She doubted it, but stranded as she was eight thousand years before her own time, what choice did she have?

"My lady, you look troubled," Ashmadu remarked as he joined her on the terrace. "Is there anything I can do to assist you?"

"Just admiring the view," Taryn lied.

"The Apsu is very beautiful," Ashmadu agreed, indicating the lagoon.

"I thought Apsu was your god?"

Ashmadu opened his mouth to once again comment on her ignorance, but thought better of it.

"This is another test," he said. "You wish to see if the Apsu's priests are truly worthy."

"Perhaps," Taryn said guardedly.

"In that case, I will tell you that while Apsu is our god, he is also here with us at the heart of our city," Ashmadu confirmed. "We are truly blessed."

"Tell me about him." Taryn was not really interested, but Ashmadu's stories were preferable to dwelling on her current circumstances.

"Apsu is the god of sweet water. By his water is life brought to the land."

Taryn raised an eyebrow, but refrained from commenting. Instead, she said, "Water must be very important to you, out here in the desert."

"The world rests at the heart of a great volume of water, bounded on all sides and below. Water is above us to, though that is held back by the roof of the sky. We stand surrounded by so much water and yet we cannot reach it. Sometimes, holes form in the sky and the water falls through, but those times are always too rare and too brief. We are fortunate that Apsu heard our plight and gave us this."

"Hence the temple and the fish masks, I suppose," Taryn said.

"Indeed." Ashmadu grinned. "The Apsu both contains life within it and brings life to the land around it. The food you had earlier could not have been grown had Apsu not touched this land."

Taryn thought back to the meal of fish and grit-filled cereal that she had had

to fight to keep down, despite her hunger. Had one of the people she was watching grown the grain or caught the fish? Ashmadu showed no sign of ceasing in his devotion to her, but sooner or later the charity was going to dry up and she would be forced to fend for herself. Taryn had never caught a fish in her life. The most cooking she had ever done was to heat up a meal someone else had already prepared. She was out of her depth and while Ashmadu had provided her with a raft to cling on to, how long until that was pulled away and she resumed her drowning.

"Ashmadu," Taryn asked, "what's going to happen to me?"

"I do not understand, my lady."

"No," Taryn said softly, "neither do I."

The first stars were lighting up in the cloudless sky.

"You don't suppose the answers up there, do you?" Taryn said.

"You'd need to speak to Barkayal about that," a new voice said. "I'm afraid that astrology is his area of expertise, not mine."

Taryn turned to find herself face-to-face with an angel. The figure was dressed similar tunic of local manufacturer, but there his resemblance to the other inhabitants of Eridu ended. He was seven foot tall, with pale, milky-white skin, textured like marble. He was completely hairless, with two large, obsidian eyes and a tiny lip-less mouth in an almost triangular face. And he had two mighty wings sprouting from his shoulder-blades. Even folded behind him, they rose almost a further foot above his head and tapered down to the level of his ankles.

Taryn was aware that her mouth hung open, but she could not get it to close. At least, she consoled herself, her behaviour was less embarrassing than that of Ashmadu, who was abasing himself on the floor at the stranger's feet.

"That's quiet enough, Ashmadu," the angel said. There was a musical quality to his voice that seemed to reach right inside of Taryn.

"My lord," Ashmadu was saying, "I am not worthy..."

"Yes, well let's take all of that as read, shall we," the angel interrupted. "Now, run along. I would quite like to talk to our guest alone."

Ashmadu nodded and, head still bowed, scurried back inside the temple.

"Now, perhaps, we can have some peace," the angel said, joining Taryn at the edge of the terrace.

"I thought I'd like having someone fawning over me the whole time," Taryn said, "but it does get a bit much. What is with him?"

"Oh, he probably thinks that you're a god," the angel replied. "There's a lot of that going about." He breathed deeply of the night air. "Night is the only time I can come outside. When they can't see me. My appearance causes too much of a stir during the day."

"I can imagine. Are you one of the...Apkallu, he was talking about?"

"That's Ashmadu's word for us. He thinks that we are something out of his legends. It helps him to accept us if he can relate us to something he can understand."

"So you're not gods then?"

"I wouldn't presume."

"Aliens?"

"If by that you mean are we not of this world, then I would have to agree. I take it that you are also not of this world?"

"I was born on Earth," Taryn replied guardedly.

"But you are not like the others here."

"It's a long story."

The angel held up his hands in a pacifying gesture. "I am sorry. I didn't mean to pry, but I hope that, in time, you may choose to confide in me. In the meantime, can I at least ask your name?"

"Taryn. Taryn Fischer."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Taryn Fischer," the angel replied. "You may call me Shemjaza. Now, shall we go inside? The others are keen to meet you."

* * * * *

"Shemjaza tells me that you know something of the medical arts, Taryn Fischer," Amazarak said. He was shorter than Shemjaza and his skin was darker, like granite. Taryn got the impression that he was elderly, though she could not have explained where that idea came from.

"I'm a doctor where I come from," she told him.

"Then perhaps you can give me some assistance."

Amazarak had taken it upon himself to teach the people of Eridu some first aid and herbal medicine. He had gained quite a following and now his students were crowded around a farmer whose arm had been torn open by a marauding jaguar. Despite the pain, the farmer had revelled in the opportunity to tell the story of how he had killed the jaguar to an appreciative audience. Now, the farmer was silenced, his mouth filled with a strap of leather on which he bit down every time Amazarak forced the bone needle through his skin.

Taryn was wincing too. "I'm not sure I could be much help. We have different... equipment where I come from."

"A bad surgeon blames her tools."

The mask Amazarak was wearing muffled his voice, but Taryn suspected he was laughing at her. At first, Taryn had thought that the rag Amazarak had tied across his face was for sterile purposes, but it would have been impossible to keep this place sterile, what with the sand constantly being blown in through the open windows. Rather, the mask was there to hide Amazarak's face. The people of Eridu might have been in awe of him, but they still found his appearance frightening.

Amazarak held up the needle.

"Come," he said, inclining his head towards the patient. "I will guide your hands."

Reluctantly, but not wanting to show weakness in front of all of these people, Taryn joined Amazarak. He positioned her between himself and the farmer, wrapped her hand around the needle and wrapped his own fingers around her

hand.

"Now," he began, gently steering her, "you want to insert the needle just here."

The farmer moaned as he bit down on the leather and blood welled up where bone pricked skin. Taryn found herself pulling away, but the pressure of Amazarak on her back held her in place.

"That's perfect," he congratulated her. "Now for the next one."

At Amazarak's direction, Taryn pulled the thread of gut tight and made to insert the needle again.

"Why are you doing this?" Taryn asked as she slowly stitched the farmer's wound closed.

"I'm not," Amazarak replied. "You are."

"That's not what I meant," Taryn corrected him. "I meant why are the seven of you helping these people?"

"We have all these gifts, all of this knowledge. These people do not. How can we not share what we have?"

Taryn tied off the stitches and severed the thread. The crowd cheered as the farmer examined her handiwork. Despite herself, Taryn beamed.

* * * * *

"I still can't quite believe how much you're helping these people," Taryn said.

Without either saying anything, it had been agreed that she and Shemjaza would spend their evenings together on the terrace where they had first met, over a week before. In the half-light, Taryn could just make out the construction site, new buildings well on their way to completion thanks to the help and guidance of Shemjaza and his people.

"They are doing all the work," Shemjaza insisted. "The potential has always been there within man. We are merely helping him to achieve it."

"But I still don't get why," Taryn persisted. "These people can't possibly have anything that you couldn't just take for yourselves if you wanted, so why go to all of this trouble? What's in it for you?"

"You are a very cynical young woman, Taryn Fischer," Shemjaza replied.

"Cynical or just realistic? Nobody does anything out of pure altruism in this universe. Everyone has an angle."

"I don't see why it is so hard for you to believe that we just want to make a difference in these people's lives." Shemjaza cocked his head to one side. "You are a doctor, are you not? Do you not also feel a desire to help others?"

Taryn looked off into the distance. The air was cooling rapidly and she rubbed her arms - left bare by the local dress she had been given - to warm them up.

"It wasn't like that," she said.

"Then tell me, Taryn Fischer, what was it like?"

"Have you any idea what it's like growing up as the president's niece? Nobody looks at you like you're a real person; you're just an appendage of the president."

They don't speak to you, they speak to him through you. Nobody wants to know what you think; they're fishing for what he thinks. Nobody even remembers your name."

"It must have been hard for you," Shemjaza said.

"I wanted people to treat me for who I was," Taryn replied. "Why should my uncle get all the attention? I'm special too. I don't deserve to be hidden beneath somebody else's shadow. You want to know why I became a doctor? I wanted a title. My uncle was famous because he was *President Welles*. I thought *Dr Taryn Fischer* might get more respect than Taryn Fischer, president's niece."

"And did it?"

Taryn laughed bitterly, still not looking at Shemjaza.

"I couldn't find a medical school that would accept me. In the end, I only got in because I asked my uncle to pull some strings. It was the same when I graduated. I wasn't that great at medicine. The schools had been right to reject me in the first place and I didn't have much interest in the subject when I got there. It was a means to an end, nothing more, but having got my title, what was I going to do with it? I wanted a post on a starship. I wanted to see the galaxy and most of all I wanted to get as far away from my uncle as possible. But it couldn't be just any starship; it had to be one of the flagships of the fleet. And it couldn't be just any post; I wanted Chief Medical Officer. Of course, no captain was going to be stupid enough to take me on voluntarily, but once again a phone call to my uncle put everything to rights.

"You see, if I've learned one thing it's that there are two kinds of people in this universe, the people who can do what they want and everybody else. I'm going to be one of the former, by whatever means necessary. Everybody wants to be number one. Some people have more of a head start on it than others, but nobody helps anybody else without some kind of ulterior motive. Fact."

"And what about the pleasure that comes from helping people?" Shemjaza asked. "As a doctor, you must have felt that. Do you expect me to believe that you don't feel a better person for helping that man earlier today."

Taryn turned to face Shemjaza. Her eyes were rimmed with red.

"Why should I? I didn't do it for him. I did it because I'm terrified that if I don't keep on your good side I'll end up out in the desert again unable to fend for myself. I don't care about him."

A tense silence descended for a few long minutes. Then it was broken by a polite cough.

"My lord, my lady," Ashmadu said, "please forgive my intrusion."

"What can we do for you, Ashmadu?" Shemjaza asked, before casting a glance Taryn's way. "We're always happy to help."

"A man by the name of Nurkubi called at the temple wishing to speak to the Lady Taryn."

"To me?"

"I believe you tended to his arm earlier today and he wanted to express his gratitude."

"Well, where is he, Ashmadu?" Shemjaza said. "Show him in."

Ashmadu looked troubled. "I...sent him away, my lord. I did not think that you would wish to be disturbed by one such as he. I should not have presumed."

Shemjaza sighed. "It's all right, Ashmadu. You were only doing what you felt was best."

"Nurkubi did ask me if I would give this to Lady Taryn on his behalf. Apparently, this used to belong to the jaguar that tried to claim his arm."

Ashmadu held out a cloak made of jaguar hide. Taryn's mouth fell open. Despite - or perhaps because of - its crude manufacturer, the garment was beautiful.

"Take it, Taryn," Shemjaza encouraged her. "Unlike yourself, some people do find value in giving."

* * * * *

"Ashmadu, Ashmadu!" Ummi cried. "Come quickly!"

Ashmadu scowled. Ummi was his sister's daughter, but he found her familiarity less than fitting for his status in life.

"How many times, Ummi, have I told you not to run in the temple," he scolded her.

The precocious bundle of energy skidded to a halt.

"But Ashmadu, you must come," Ummi persisted.

"I must do no such thing," Ashmadu replied, folding his arms. "The Apkallu require my constant attendance. Really, Ummi, you cannot expect me to abandon them just so I can go and play your games."

In truth, Ashmadu was exaggerating his own importance. That new god, Taryn, had replaced him as Shemjaza's confidant, although she seemed to be avoiding him of late. Did she not appreciate the honour Shemjaza was bestowing on her?

"But Ashmadu," Ummi said, "it's about the Apkallu."

"It is?" Ashmadu dropped to one knee so that he could look the little girl in the eye. "Tell me, and this had better not be another one of your tales."

"It's the truth, I swear it," Ummi said, making a strange pattern in the air with her fingers that might have been her attempt to imitate the rituals performed by the priests in the temple. "There are more of them. More Apkallu. Kuaya and I saw them."

"Have you told anyone else about this?" Ashmadu asked.

Ummi shook her head firmly. Ashmadu smiled and took her hand in his.

"Show me where you saw them."

* * * * *

The water of the Apsu lapped gently against the sides of the boat as the man in front of Taryn pulled on the oars. Shemjaza, who lounged beside Taryn, had offered

to take a turn in rowing, but the Eridan had politely, but firmly rebuffed him. Gods, it seemed, were not meant to turn their hands to the labour of mere mortals, an attitude Taryn was quite comfortable with. Five days had passed since the last time she had spent an evening with Shemjaza. He had made her say things that she would not normally have confided in anyone else and he seemed to think that he had taught her some valuable lesson into the bargain. Taryn had returned to her room in anger and Shemjaza had wisely, not chosen to follow. Sleep had been a long time in coming.

Since then, Taryn had avoided Shemjaza and, by association, the other Apkallu. Ashmadu had brought her her meals in her room so that she did not have to dine with the others and she had found that, by wrapping a scarf around her head to conceal her hair, she could explore outside of the temple without attracting attention, passing for an ordinary citizen in a way the Apkallu could not. The market held a particular fascination for her and she found herself wishing she had something in the way of local currency. She considered asking Ashmadu, but felt that that was taking just a bit too much advantage of her status as a deity.

This evening, Shemjaza had called upon her in her room. Up until now he had given her the space she wanted, though he must have known where she was. This evening, he had invited her to accompany him to a lecture Barkayal was giving on astronomy. Conscious that her continued acceptance within the city was on Shemjaza's sufferance, she had accepted. Shemjaza had neglected to mention that the lecture would take place on the surface of the Apsu itself.

Barkayal was standing up in his boat, bravely ignoring the rocking, as he delivered his lecture. It was, Taryn decided, the perfect place to discuss astronomy. The dark sky, spotted with light, was reflected perfectly by the still water, making it appear that the boats were hanging in space. Shemjaza, however, was paying scant attention to the talk.

"How many of those have you visited, Taryn Fischer?" he asked, looking up at the stars.

"I'm sorry?"

"You said that you travelled on a spaceship. You must have seen many worlds."

"Not so many," Taryn replied, keeping her voice down so as not to disturb anyone else. "I thought I'd get to see the universe, but mostly it's just a collection of spaceports. I had hoped..."

"Yes," prompted Shemjaza when she trailed off.

"There was this man who called himself the Doctor," Taryn began slowly. "He travelled through time and space and he agreed to take me with him."

"Then you really have travelled."

"I wish. No sooner had I joined the crew than there was some kind of accident. The ship blew up and I got stranded here. I keep thinking that tomorrow the Doctor is going to come and rescue me, but he never does."

"He may yet."

"Don't say that," Taryn snapped. "He's not going to come. You know why?"

Because, like any good captain, the Doctor would have gone down with his ship. He's dead and now I'm all alone."

"No, Taryn Fischer," Shemjaza whispered, "you are not alone."

But his words were too soft for Taryn to hear.

* * * * *

The new arrivals were doing little to hide their presence, so it was fortunate for Ashmadu that they had arrived in an area rarely frequented by the inhabitants of Eridu. The magic of the Apsu was not widely felt on this side of the city and the land remained infertile, unsuitable for farming and, therefore, ignored. It was fortunate, too, that the children knew no greater pleasure than to disobey their parents and to explore areas declared out of bounds.

"Greetings," Ashmadu called out as he approached, Ummi trailing close behind him. "I am Ashmadu, priest of Apsu."

He kept his head bowed out of respect, but in truth he doubted if he could look directly at the new arrivals for very long. They shone with an inner light and their white robes and golden hair reminded him more of Taryn, as she had first appeared to him, than the other Apkallu. He hoped that the new arrivals would be more approachable than she was.

One of the shining figures stepped forward.

"Ashmadu," he said. "We are of the Elohim. We seek our kin, the Grigori. Do you know where we might find them?"

"Grigori?" Ashmadu did not recognise the word.

"Forgive me if our words are strange to you," the figure replied. "That is their name in our language, but that may not be the name they are going by here. Have you encountered any strange visitors recently? They would be seven in number and would be unlike you, but not quite like us either."

"You must mean the Apkallu," Ashmadu reasoned. "They are staying in the temple. I can take you to them, if you wish."

"I wish it very much."

* * * * *

"I too have seen the future, Taryn Fischer," Shemjaza said.

"You can travel in time?" Taryn sat up in sudden excitement, but her hopes were dashed as Shemjaza slowly shook his head and she settled back down into the comfort of her jaguar cloak.

"Not as such," Shemjaza conceded, "but I do have some knowledge of what is to come. I look at these people, these humans, and I fear for them."

"Why?" Taryn asked.

"There are... people who mean the human race harm, who would snuff it out as you snuff out the candle before you retire for the night, and with as little regard for the consequences."

"We have to warn someone."

"Who would listen?" Shemjaza asked. "Who would believe? These people have enough of a struggle making sure they get through each and every day. Why should they be concerned with an event that may not happen for ten thousand years or more?"

"Ten thousand?" Taryn found it difficult to wrap her head around the concept.

"As I said, I have seen the future."

"Are you sure about this? I mean, not that I want to sound like I don't believe you, but it does seem a little far-fetched."

"These people... I was one of them, as were my companions. We do not believe that the human race deserves its fate so we rebelled against our masters and came here to do something about it. You keep asking why we work so hard to help the people here. Perhaps our guilt is the answer."

"But what can just seven of you do about it?"

"We can help guide the human race. We can teach them and give them skills they might otherwise not have had or developed too late to be of use. We have thousands of years to prepare this species and prepare them we shall. When the Elohim arrive they will find the human race ready for them. This I swear."

An explosion lit up the night sky.

"What was that?" Taryn yelled over the noise, holding on to the boat for dear life as it was buffeted by the normally placid Apsu.

"The temple!" Shemjaza replied.

Taryn followed the line of his pointing finger.

"It's on fire," she breathed.

* * * * *

Taryn forced her way through the crowd. Shemjaza was probably still caught up at the dock, but Taryn, smaller and less conspicuous had now reached the base of the ziggurat. The apex of the temple was alight and, one level below the flames, she could make out a group of shining figures. They certainly were not human; were these the Elohim that Shemjaza has been talking about?

"People of Eridu," one of the Elohim declared, his voice loud enough to carry to the crowd below, "we have come for the Apkallu. They have rebelled against us and for that they must be punished." The Elohim stepped to one side, revealing five bound figures. "We were told that the Apkallu were in this temple. However, we have only found five. Where are Barkayal and Shemjaza?"

"Why should we tell you?" a man in the crowd shouted.

"The Apkallu helped us," a woman added.

"They healed my son."

"They built me a home."

"Enough!" the Elohim roared. "Tell us where the others are and we will leave you and your pitiful city in peace. Refuse and you will all die."

There was silence and then one voice spoke up.

"The Apkallu will save us."

It spread like a mantra throughout the crowd.

"The Apkallu will save us. The Apkallu will save us."

"Will they indeed?"

The Elohim stretch out a hand and Taryn leaped back as the three people standing next to her burst into flame.

"Do you doubt us now?" the Elohim demanded over the screams.

"Leave them be, Zaphiel," Shemjaza shouted. Taryn turned at the sound of his voice and saw both him and Barkayal trapped towards the back of the crowd. "If you want us, you can have us, just don't hurt any more people."

With that, Barkayal and Shemjaza spread their wings and flew up to the top of the ziggurat.

"A wise choice," the Elohim – Zaphiel – said.

Barkayal and Shemjaza were bound like their comrades and then the Elohim forced the Apkallu into the temple.

Taryn looked around the crowd, all of who appeared frozen in terror and awe.

"Well," she demanded, "aren't you going to do something? The Apkallu helped you. Aren't you going to return the favour?"

"And what do you think we can do against that?" a woman replied, pointing at the still smouldering corpses.

Taryn spotted a familiar face in the crowd. "Ashmadu, surely you aren't just going to abandon them?"

The priest rounded on her in fury. "One of those..." - he pointed at the corpses with a trembling hand – "was my niece."

"I'm sorry." Taryn looked away.

"No, you're not sorry," Ashmadu replied, "but you will be."

Despite the sun, Taryn was suddenly cold. "What do you mean?"

"It took me a while, but I finally recognise you, traitoress," Ashmadu replied. He appealed to the crowd, turning on his preacher's voice. "Look at her. Does she look like the other Apkallu? It seems to me that she has more in common with those who call themselves Elohim."

"Now hold on a minute," Taryn said. "Shemjaza trusted you."

"Because you blinded him to the truth, didn't you, Tiamat."

"Tiamat? But I'm not..."

"We've always known this day would come. Tiamat is jealous of the attention her husband bestows on us so she has come to take him away and she has brought the Annunaki to take the Apkallu from us as well. You've all heard the stories. You know that it's true."

The crowd had been looking at her with suspicion before. Now that suspicion had turned to anger. Taryn wanted to back away, but she was hemmed in on all sides.

"Wh-what are you going to do to me?"

"You want your husband back, Tiamat? We'll take you to him. We're going to drown you in the Apsu."

Taryn continued to protest. This could not be happening, not to her. Her protests were ignored and a rag was shoved into her mouth to silence her. Her hands were bound behind her back and she was led to the edge of the Apsu. There they tied rocks to ropes that were wrapped around her waist and then forced her into a boat.

"I hope you suffer until the end of time," Ashmadu told her, then he stepped back and the boat was pushed out onto the now calm waters of the lagoon.

There were two other people in the boat with her: the oarsman and a guard.

"Do not move," the guard ordered her.

Taryn recognised his voice. It was the farmer whose arm she had sewn back together. She felt his hands at her wrists, untying her bonds both there and at her waist.

"I don't know if you are who Ashmadu says you are," the farmer whispered in her ear, "but you helped me and for that, Apsu forgive me, I will spare your life. I hope you can swim."

He gave her a shove and Taryn tumbled into the water. She disappeared beneath the surface, dragged down by her heavy cloak. Her fingers tore at the fastenings at her neck and she cast the garment free. Lungs bursting, she forced her way back to the surface and then struck out for the far shore, ignoring the yells from the crowd in the distance.

* * * * *

"What am I doing?" Taryn asked herself. Other than dripping all over the floor tiles, Taryn was currently sneaking through the Temple of Apsu looking for Shemjaza and the others. She could, she reminded herself, be far away from this place by now, but where would she go? She needed Shemjaza's help if she was going to survive in this place and time and that meant that she had to free him from the Elohim. Somehow.

The passageways within the temple were empty. Fear of the Elohim had driven the priests from their sanctuary, which allowed Taryn unobstructed access to the top of the ziggurat. At the top of a flight of stairs, she could hear voices. Light streamed into the corridor through an open doorway. Cautiously, Taryn crept over to the door and peered inside. On the far side of the chamber, backs pressed against the wall, were six of the Apkallu. Somehow, the stone had been moulded around their wrists and ankles, binding them in place. Two of the Elohim stood guard over them. Even if she could sneak past the guards, Taryn reasoned, she could not break through stone with her bare hands. She decided to keep looking and hope that inspiration would strike.

Keeping low, she scurried further down the corridor. She had lost her sandals in the lagoon and the crude stone tiles dug painfully into the soles of her feet, but at least it meant that she could run in near silence. She heard someone approaching and pressed herself flat against the wall. The Elohim glided towards her and Taryn held her breath, praying that the half-light in the corridor would conceal her. Her

prayers were answered and the Elohim glided by without pause. When she was sure that he was out of earshot, Taryn let out a sigh of relief.

Then she heard the screams.

Taryn raced along the corridor and up yet more stairs, all thoughts of stealth forgotten. She knew that voice. She skidded to a halt at the base of a set of stairs leading up to the apex of the ziggurat. Bright sunlight poured down the stairs and Taryn was forced to shield her eyes as she slowly ascended. The top of the temple was still on fire, but the flames were confined to the edges of the platform. Surrounded by the flames, Zaphiel was torturing Shemjaza.

"What did you hope to achieve, Shemjaza?" the Elohim asked. "Why did you lead the other Grigori here?"

Shemjaza spat at Zaphiel's feet. "To stop you, Zaphiel, you and all your kind."

"But you can't possibly have believed that you could win."

"That wasn't the point," Shemjaza grunted, forcing himself to talk despite the pain. "We had to try."

"And you would throw your lives away for the sake of a few meaningless organisms?" Zaphiel mocked.

"No life is meaningless. No living creature deserves to be snuffed out just because it's no longer of interest to you."

"And why not? You can't seriously be comparing our needs and desires to those of this rabble."

"You wouldn't understand."

"You're right, I wouldn't. You turned your back on your own people, Shemjaza. You turned you back on us and for what? Just so that you could claim some pathetic moral high ground?"

Taryn could feel a piece of tile moving beneath her toe. She reached down and pried the loose fragment free.

"What are you going to do to us?" Shemjaza asked.

"You will be imprisoned," Zaphiel replied smugly. "Locked in a place where you can watch the fate of these humans and yet be powerless to do anything about it. Perhaps then you, when you see all your works come to naught, you will understand the way the universe really works."

"Do what you like to us, Zaphiel," Shemjaza said, "but spare the humans."

Zaphiel laughed. "Do you really think you're in a position to make demands?"

Taryn threw the bit of tile and Zaphiel turned as he heard the stone bounce across the platform behind him. Seizing her moment, Taryn darted across to Shemjaza. His hands, wings and ankles had been bound with some sort of synthetic rope.

"Taryn, get out of here," Shemjaza hissed. "It's too dangerous."

"Shut up, will you." Taryn picked up one of the blades Zaphiel had been using and started to saw through the ropes. "I'm trying to rescue you."

"What do you think you're doing?" Taryn's distraction had not worked as well as she had hoped and now Zaphiel's full attention was on her. He did not look amused.

"Leave her alone, Zaphiel," Shemjaza begged. "She didn't know any better."

"Then she should learn." Zaphiel gestured with his hand and Taryn was engulfed by flame. She screamed.

"Please, Zaphiel, don't do this."

Zaphiel smiled. The smell of burning flesh filled Taryn's nostrils. She could feel her skin blistering and blackening.

"I said leave her alone!" Shemjaza yelled. Empowered by his rage, he stood up and strained his wings, tearing apart his partially severed bonds. Then he scooped Taryn up in his arms, ignoring the heat and the flames, and leaped off of the top of the ziggurat, gliding down towards the lagoon.

Taryn felt the sudden impact as they hit the surface of the water and then everything went black.

* * * * *

Taryn was crying silently. Her skin had blackened and clear liquid seeped out from cracks in the hardening plates. Shemjaza had engulfed her in the downy softness of his wings but still she was in agony.

The ziggurat was wreathed in light once again as Zaphiel addressed the people of Eridu.

"Shemjaza of the Grigori has escaped from us, aided by one of your own. We warned you of the consequences should you oppose us."

Zaphiel raised his arms and the waters of the Apsu rose along with them. The waves grew until their crests topped the temple itself and then Zaphiel pointed to the city. The waters obeyed his command, hammering down on the people, their homes and their possessions, sweeping them all away. Screams were cut mercifully short as water filled lungs. Houses were uprooted and shattered, as what once was shelter became a weapon and mud and brick descended on the fleeing inhabitants with a force great enough to crush bone.

Taryn could not bear to look.

"This is my fault," she whispered softly through cracked lips.

"No," Shemjaza said darkly. "The Elohim did this and for that they will pay."

Act Two – Anarchy In The UK

And in news about Hurricane Grant, which yesterday cut a swathe through the Caribbean, we are pleased to report that there have been no casualties. Thanks to accurate weather forecasting, all the inhabitants of the islands affected were relocated to temporary accommodation several days before the storm struck. At a press conference to announce the start of rebuilding works, Duae of the Thirteen had this to say:

"Once again, a potential tragedy has been averted through the unity and cooperation of you, the citizens who make up Section Thirteen. This is a moment to take pride in, but we must not allow pride to breed complacency. True, it has been

five years since a life was lost in any form of natural disaster, but that is only due to our constant vigilance and only through continued vigilance will we be ready to face those threats yet to come."

That was Duae of the Thirteen speaking earlier today...

* * * * *

Tamara Scott examined herself in the full-length mirror in her bedroom. She didn't look so bad for an expectant mother just about nine months pregnant, did she? Sally kicked again and Tamara looked down at her bump.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," she scolded. "Right about now, Mummy wants you out of there just as much as you do, honey."

She glanced up again and had to sit down on the edge of the bed as her legs gave way beneath her. The image in the mirror was not her. Or was it? It seemed to be a Tamara Scott that might have been. This woman was not pregnant and her body was more toned and muscular, though not overly so. Her hair was styled differently, too, but what struck Tamara most were the eyes. The eyes in the reflection sparkled with life, whereas Tamara's own, she knew, were dull and tired.

She heard the sound of a key in the front door.

"Tamara, I'm home," Jason called.

"I'm in the bedroom," Tamara called back, turning her attention away from the mirror for a moment. When she turned back, she was herself again.

Major Jason Winters was part of the Section Space Corps. He and Tamara had been matched by the Section as an ideal parental unit and they had been living together in this London flat for just under a year.

"Are you okay?" Jason asked as he entered the bedroom. "I thought I heard voices when I came in. We haven't got company, have we?"

"No, I was just talking to Sally," Tamara explained.

Jason sat down next to her on the bed and wrapped his arms around her, placing his hands flat on her stomach.

"If you're hoping Sally'll kick for you," Tamara said, "I should warn you that I've told her not to."

Sally dutifully kicked and Jason beamed with pleasure.

"Guess she's Daddy's little girl," he said. His face turned serious. "You shouldn't name her, you know. The Section will want to assign a designation once she's born."

"I know," Tamara conceded, "but until they do I have to call her something, right?" She freed herself from Jason's grip and stood up. "I'd better make a start on dinner."

Major Jason Winters watched her go and shook his head sadly.

* * * * *

...and looking forward to the weekend, while we can expect scattered showers in the

rest of the country, it promises to be bright and clear in the south of England so it should be a great day when the Thirteen address their people in Hyde Park on Saturday, not that I imagine a little bit of rain would keep people away. I know I'll certainly be there. What about you, Cin-

<BZZZT>

We interrupt your regularly schedule bland media drivel to provide this important safety announcement. You're being brainwashed. Every single one of you. The Thirteen promise you a world of liberty and equality, but you've forgotten what freedom is. The state controls all the media: the newspapers, the radio, the TV – when was the last time you had a thought that wasn't put there by them? When was the last time you questioned anything they do? They've turned you into drones, but it's time to stand up to them and take back this world. Your world. Stop living in their grey and drab and boring world and choose to live a little, before it's too-

<BZZZT>

I'd like to apologise for that interruption in our regularly scheduled broadcasting. I'm not quite sure what happened there, but normal service has been resumed so let's catch up on the news wherever you are...

* * * * *

Tamara imagined that she looked a bit like an overweight penguin as she waddled down to the bus stop at the corner of her street. The conductor helped her up onto the step when the bus arrived and a fresh-faced young man in a brand-new suit had given up his seat for her. The conductor swiped her ID card for her, debiting the cost of this journey from her account. Jason had had to return to his unit. They were preparing for something big, though Jason could not tell her what, and he could not stay away for long. He had, however, promised to return at the weekend and accompany her to the rally in Hyde Park.

Over dinner, they had joked about Tamara's military pretensions. Fresh out of school Tamara had applied to join the army. Unsurprisingly, her application had been rejected. Tamara knew that there was no place for a woman in the armed forces and yet... She had had the dream again last night, the dream in which she was some kind of soldier. She knew that dreams were just the brain's way of sorting through the information of the day, but it seemed so vivid, so real. She hadn't told Jason about the dream because she knew that he would laugh at her or put it down to her hormones and, intellectually, Tamara knew that he would be right. So why did she still have doubts?

Tamara was so caught up in these thoughts that she nearly missed her stop.

As she slowly descended from the bus, she spied a teenager writing on a window with a marker pen. She wasn't the only one to spot this vandalism and two black-garbed peacekeepers were on him in seconds, binding his hands behind his back and forcing him into their vehicle. She watched them drive off and wondered why anyone would want to disfigure a public building. A cleaner, summoned by a signal Tamara had not heard, was already at work removing the offending marks

by the time the peacemaker's car had disappeared from view.

Tamara waddled her way around the supermarket, slowly filling up her trolley, sometimes pausing to ask Sally for her opinion. Occasionally, the baby would respond with a kick, though whether that was a positive or negative opinion, Tamara could not tell.

"Tamara?"

She turned at the sound of her name. A young woman with red hair was standing at the end of the aisle. She was wearing a grey overcoat and long white scarf over a white T-shirt and faded jeans. When she saw Tamara's face, her eyes lit up and she ran down the aisle, wrapping Tamara up in a hug.

"It really is you! I thought I'd lost you."

Tamara extricated herself from the woman's embrace. There were tears in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," Tamara said, "but I think you have me confused with someone else."

"Tamara, what are you talking about? It's me. Grae. Don't you remember?"

Grae? It meant something to her, but she could not place it.

"I'm sorry, but I really must be going," Tamara said and she turned away.

"Wait!"

Grae put a restraining hand on Tamara's shoulder. Tamara spun round faster than she would have believed possibly, grabbed hold of the hand and locked Grae's arm behind her back. How had she done that?

"Now I'm sure there's no need for violence, ladies..."

A dark-haired man with a goatee beard was approaching, hands raised placatingly. He wore a midnight blue waistcoat decorated with silver stars over a collarless white dress shirt and grey flannel trousers.

"I'm sure my young friend realises that she's made a mistake and will be only too happy to apologise," he continued.

"But Doctor," Grae protested.

"Apologise."

Grae turned to face Tamara as best she could while her arm was still pinned behind her. "I'm sorry," she said. "I thought you were someone else."

"That's okay," Tamara said, letting her go. Grae started to rub life back into her arm.

"There, that was easy, wasn't it," the Doctor said. "I'm sorry to have troubled you."

He put an arm around his companion and ushered her off down the aisle. Tamara gazed after them. She had been truthful when she had told Grae that she did not know her, but she could not shake the uncomfortable feeling that she *should* know both Grae and her companion, the Doctor (and she instinctively knew that that was as much his name as it was a title).

She was not at all surprised when they visited her in her dream that night.

* * * * *

With regard to the interruption in yesterday's broadcast by person or persons unknown, Duae gave the following statement on behalf of the Thirteen.

"Yesterday's incident was nothing less than an assault on our way of life by terrorists. The Thirteen have worked tirelessly in pursuit of the freedom you, our people, enjoy, and we shall continue to do so because we believe that you deserve the best possible society to live in. Ours is an ordered society and there are those who seek to throw that order into chaos and undo all our good works. They are, thankfully, a tiny minority, but their threat is very real and they must be stamped out. I would urge any of you with information regarding the identity of these anarchists to contact your local peacekeepers immediately. In the meantime, remember that the Thirteen work for you."

* * * * *

Tamara reached out blindly and stabbed at the button to turn off the radio. She hit it on the third attempt, then rolled over onto her side and buried her head in her pillow.

"Rise and shine, sleepy-head," Jason called out.

Tamara sat up with a start. "What time did you get in?"

"About three in the morning," Jason said. "I didn't want to wake you. Breakfast?"

He inclined his head towards the tray he was holding.

"You shouldn't have," Tamara protested.

"You deserve a break." Jason perched on the edge of the bed and balanced the tray above the covers. "Besides, you've got a big day ahead."

Tamara pulled a face and reached for a cup of coffee. "It's not today, is it?"

"Fraid so. You know, you don't really have to go. I've said it before and I'll say it again, I'm really not sure you should be going in your condition."

"You're afraid I'll drop Sally in the middle of a speech or something?" Tamara joked.

Jason frowned slightly at her use of the baby's name, but did not comment on it.

"I want to do this, Jason," Tamara continued, putting her hand over his. "This is something I feel I've got to do."

"Okay," Jason conceded, "but only if you promise to speak up if it starts getting too much for you. Deal?"

Tamara smiled. "Deal."

* * * * *

Hyde Park was awash with people. The surrounding roads had been closed off to allow even more room for the crowd. A temporary stage had been erected in the northeast corner of the park, but loudspeakers and giant screens had been erected

elsewhere to allow all attendees a view of the people they had come here to see. Tamara did not need to worry about such contrivances, however; Jason's rank had granted them a position near the stage.

Tamara needed to be here. Too often lately she had felt one step removed from what was going on, as if she was watching the world from the other side of the glass rather than being a part of it. As she considered it now, it seemed a ridiculous notion, but her dreams and then that incident with that woman at the supermarket - (pretend you don't remember her name; that would only make her more real) - had added to the sense that she was not the person she thought she was. Here, at today's rally, she could reaffirm those beliefs she held dear, or thought she did, and hopefully put those doubts out of her mind once and for all.

"Credit for them?"

Tamara was snapped out of her reverie by the voice. A man with greying hair and beard and wearing a black overcoat buttoned up all the way to his chin, was looking at her expectantly.

"I'm sorry?"

"I was just wondering what was so interesting to you," the man said. He had a hint of an accent, but Tamara could not place it. "You're the only one not looking at the stage."

"I'm not?" Tamara glanced up. The staff had finished setting up the stage, but the guests of honour had yet to make an appearance.

"Don't fret," the man said, tapping his watch. "We've five minutes yet. If you can't count on the Thirteen to run to schedule who can you count on?"

"Is this guy bothering you, Tamara?" Jason asked, having returned with a bottle of water for Tamara.

"No, not at all," Tamara began to say, but the man was already backing away.

"Forgive me, I didn't mean to intrude. I just wanted to wish the young lady all the best for her baby. What's its name?"

"Sally," Tamara responded without thinking.

"Sally." The man winked at her and then disappeared into the crowd.

"I wonder what he was up to?" Jason's eyes narrowed.

"He's harmless," Tamara insisted.

"I don't know..."

Tamara poked him in the ribs. "You see conspiracies everywhere."

"It's my job," Jason insisted, but he did offer an apologetic smile. "We all have to be alert for possible anarchists."

A fanfare announced the beginning of the rally and three of the Thirteen - Tamara recognised them as Tria, Novem and Undecim - stepped up onto the stage to be greeted by the adulation of the crowd. The applause seemed to go on and on, but Tamara was clapping as loud as anyone. Finally, Novem stepped up to the microphone and spread his arms wide.

"Hello, London!" he shouted.

The crowd yelled back.

"It's great to be here," Novem said, "and it's a real privilege to be in the presence of so many of you."

That drew even more applause. Novem let it run for a couple of minutes, then waved his arms for hush. Tria stepped forward. She was a slim woman, with short, dark hair and was wearing a charcoal trouser suit. She had a heart-shaped face and lips that seemed curled perpetually in amusement.

"People of London!" She tilted her head to address the television cameras. "People of the world! This is supposed to be a time of celebration, a time where we can reflect on how fortunate we are to live in a world of peace and order. Instead, I come to you today with a warning. Our way of life is threatened. There are people who vandalise our buildings, who interrupt our broadcasts, justifying their disruption of your public services with claims of 'freedom of expression'. Just last week, a bridge in Berlin was destroyed by these individuals as a display of 'defiance against tyranny'. Twenty-seven people lost their lives. This is what I have to say to you: What they call freedom, civilised people like ourselves call anarchy. What they call tyranny, we refer to as an ordered society. The Thirteen are not your oppressors. We exist only to serve you and we will do whatever we have to do in order to make your world a better place.

"So this is a warning not just to you, but to these terrorists. The love of the Thirteen is not without limit and we will show no mercy to those who seek to destroy all that we have laboured so hard to achieve. We will find you. Have no doubt of that."

For a long moment there was silence following Tria's speech and then a whoop carried Tamara's way from off towards the Serpentine. Other voices joined in the cheering and the noise steadily built as people clapped their hands and stamped their feet in appreciation and support. Someone whistled nearby and Tamara raised a hand to her ringing ears.

Then the stage exploded.

To Tamara, it seemed to happen in slow motion. The roar of the crowd dulled to a low background hum as a spark of light ignited in the far corner of the stage. Then the light blossomed like a flower opening its petals and flames spread outward, wreathed in black smoke. The stage was lifted up and shattered, fragments following the path of the explosion. Novem opened his mouth to cry out as a wooden spar impaled him through the chest. He looked down at it disbelievingly before he too was carried aloft by the force of the explosion.

The shockwave hit Tamara and she toppled backward, grazing her elbow on the ground as she tried to break her fall. Bright sunlight filled her vision and her eyes watered, but then a shadow interposed itself between her and the sun. One of the cranes holding a television camera was toppling. It was going to fall on top of her. She tried to roll to one side, but her limbs would not respond and she could not tear her eyes away from the death descending from above.

And then she was elsewhere. The crane had hit the ground with a mighty thud, lifting up great chunks of earth, but Tamara was no longer underneath it. Instead she was lying on her back several feet away with no memory of how she had

made the transition. Now the world snapped back to normal speed as if someone had let fly a taut elastic band. People were running and screaming all around her, trampling each other in their haste to get away. Tria had salvaged a microphone and was imploring the crowd to remain calm, but her words went unheeded. If the terrorists had planned to unleash anarchy then they had certainly succeeded.

Tamara put a hand on the ground to help herself stand. The hand landed in something warm and sticky. It was Novem's bloody corpse. Tears welled up in Tamara's eyes and bile rose up in her throat. She curled up, hands around her knees, waiting for the world to come to its senses.

"Tamara!"

The voice was the most beautiful sound Tamara had ever heard. Jason was at her side, helping her up.

"Tamara, I thought I'd lost you." Jason clutched her to him. "When we got separated I..."

Tamara gently eased him away to arms length.

"Tamara," he asked, "are you okay? You're not hurt or anything are you?"

He was babbling so Tamara put her fingertips to his lips to silence him.

"Jason, I think my waters just broke."

* * * * *

"...and I can confirm that, despite the terrorists best efforts, no casualties were experienced in London yesterday. I am aware that there are rumours perpetuating regarding the death of Novem, one of our own, and I would like you to assure you that there is no truth in these rumours. None whatsoever. Novem is currently in seclusion while he recovers from his injuries and we expect him to resume his duties in the near future."

That was Duae of the Thirteen speaking from Iraq earlier today...

* * * * *

Tamara was alone when she woke up. She experienced a moment's disorientation, a brief attack of panic before her memories caught up and explained to her where she was and how she had got here. Chief among those memories was Sally's cherubic face. She was even more beautiful than Tamara had imagined and, as she held her in her arms, she was struck by how tiny and fragile and oh-so-perfect she was.

And then the doctors had taken her away.

"Sally?" Tamara sat up. "Jason?"

"I'm here, honey." Jason was sitting in a chair by her bed. As soon as he realised Tamara was awake he took her hand in both of his.

"Where is she, Jason?" Tamara asked, looking around the room frantically. "Where's my baby?"

"Tamara," Jason said soothingly, "you have to calm down."

"Calm down? How can I be calm? They stole my baby, Jason. They stole

Sally."

"They didn't steal her, Tamara. Our baby is a ward of the state. They're responsible for her education now."

"But... But she's my daughter," Tamara protested.

Jason shook his head sadly. "Not anymore."

"They can't do this." Tamara pulled her hand out of Jason's grip. "I won't let them do this."

"Tamara, please. It's for the best."

"For the best? How can you tell me this is for the best?" She swung her legs over the side of the bed.

"Tamara, please calm down. The stress can't be good for you." He reached for the call button. "Nurse! Nurse!"

Tamara was on her feet when the doctor and a nurse bundled into the room. The nurse grabbed hold of her and held out her arm for the doctor. Tamara wanted to fight her off, but she still too weak so she could offer only token resistance as the needle pierced her skin.

Then everything seemed to retreat into the darkness.

* * * * *

Tamara dreamed.

She was in a white kitchen. It was familiar although Tamara was certain that she had never been there before. Such was the way in dreams.

She was sitting at a table and she had a mug of cocoa in one hand. Opposite her sat a redheaded woman with a similar mug. Tamara recognised her as the woman from the supermarket. She was telling a joke and, though she could not make out the words, she felt her dream-self laughing.

"Of course, she said in her dream, "everyone says 'Oh, if I had god-like powers I'd make the world a nicer place to live'. Maybe a *real* god would see beyond that sort of stuff and actually be interested in doing completely different things."

What was she talking about? The Thirteen made the world a better place. Why would anyone else want to usurp them? And what was a god anyway?

"The problem with questions like that," her companion was saying, "is that you pretty soon get deep into the realm of theology, which is not my strong point at all."

"Maybe, O'Hallan just proved that there can't be any gods."

Tamara looked up. A third figure had entered the room, a small blonde who, despite her lack of height, seemed to look down on everything. Again, Tamara felt she should recognise the face, but it was no good. The memories, if that was what they were, were lost to her.

"Maybe, if there were real gods," the blonde continued, "the universe wouldn't have all the hate and horror that it has - it would be something else, something different that reflected the nature of the gods, not of us. It's us who keep the universe full of darkness."

What hate? What horror? The Thirteen had created a world of peace and harmony, but if that was the case the why did this woman's words ring so painfully true?

* * * * *

He was waiting for her when she left the hospital. Not Jason; Tamara had made it quite clear that she wanted nothing to do with him ever again and Jason had agreed to give her space. For a while. No, the figure sitting on the bench apparently unconcerned by the steady drizzle was the bearded man who had approached her in Hyde Park. He was still wearing his long black overcoat and he was holding some kind of stick to his mouth.

"Hello again, Tamara," he said.

Tamara started. "How do you know my name?"

The man shrugged. "Maybe I've been watching you for months while I made up my mind as to whether or not you were worth recruiting to our cause. Or maybe I overheard your boyfriend saying it at the rally. You decide."

"Recruit me for what?"

The man patted the bench. "Why don't you sit down and find out. Don't worry, I won't bite."

Tamara sat down. As she did so, the man removed the stick from his mouth and blue out a cloud of blue-grey smoke. Tamara wrinkled her nose in distaste.

"What is that... thing?"

"This? This is a cigarette. It contains compounds that are highly addictive and can cause cancer, both in the smoker and anyone else inhaling the smoke so naturally our beloved Thirteen made them illegal. Which is why I smoke them."

"You could get arrested for that."

"Unlikely. Your average peacekeeper isn't old enough to know what one of these is, let alone whether it's legal or not. Want one?"

"No, thank you."

The man shrugged. "Suit yourself."

He took another drag on his cigarette. When it became obvious that he wasn't going to say anything further, Tamara said, "Look, who are you anyway?"

"You can call me Morrison."

"Is that your name?"

Morrison considered this for a while. "It's not the name *they* gave me, if that's what you mean, but it is the one I chose."

"What do you mean you chose your name?"

"Shocked that someone can rebel against the Thirteen like that. Welcome to the real world, sister."

Tamara's eyes widened. "You're an anarchist, aren't you?"

"And proud of it."

"I shouldn't be talking to you." Tamara stood up. "I don't even know why I let it go this far. I should be getting home."

"Aren't you going to report me to the peacekeepers?" Morrison mocked.

"I... I... Of course I will. Just as soon as I get home."

"Yeah, right. Mind you, if you did that, you'd never find out where they've taken Sally."

* * * * *

The rain had started to fall more heavily so they had retreated inside a café. Morrison bought them both mugs of black coffee.

"Don't drink it," he said as he set the steaming mug down in front of Tamara.

"Why not?"

"It's chock full of chemicals designed to keep you docile and receptive to the Thirteen's propaganda."

"That's ridiculous. You're paranoid."

"Then drink it."

Tamara didn't. "What did you buy them for if we can't drink them?"

"We'd look a bit daft sitting in a café without them," Morrison pointed out. "Now, where were we?"

"You were about to tell me why I shouldn't turn you over to the peacekeepers and just get on with my life."

"Hey, not so loud. You'll get us both arrested."

"Not me. I haven't done anything wrong."

"You really think that will stop them? They'd arrest you on 'charges yet to be determined' and then they simply forget about you."

"You're making that up."

"I've seen it happen."

Tamara shook her head. "The Thirteen wouldn't do that."

"How do you think they've stayed in power this long? Anyone disagrees with them and poof, they disappear."

"If that's so true why haven't you been rounded up yet?"

"My time will come. I've just been lucky so far."

"Right."

"Okay, how about this. Let me tell you a story. There was this guy, a musician. Before your time, which is why you probably haven't heard of this. He didn't want to produce the tame, boring, lifeless music that was acceptable to the Thirteen. No, he felt that music could really speak to people, that he could use his art to open people's minds. Now the Thirteen, well the last thing they need is a population that can think for itself so they shut him up. Permanently. He was arrested as a terrorist and then publicly hung."

"Maybe he was a terrorist," Tamara said. The justification sounded weak, even to her.

"One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter," Morrison replied, "and freedom is something that's sorely lacking under the Thirteen. That man was a hero. That's why I took on his name."

"You're saying it's okay to blow things up so long as it's for 'freedom'? What about all those people who died in Berlin?"

"We didn't blow up that bridge. The Thirteen did."

"You're crazy."

"Think about it, Tamara. They need the people to believe that there's a threat, that they need the Thirteen to protect them because if they didn't then they might start asking themselves if they need the Thirteen at all. So, if there isn't a credible threat then I guess the Thirteen would have to create one."

"You're wrong." But despite herself, Tamara could tell that his words made a disturbing kind of sense.

"You know I'm right, Tamara. I promise you, we aren't interested in harming innocent people. We just want to take out the Thirteen."

"That was why you were at the rally, wasn't it? You planted the bomb. You killed Novem."

"Not if you believe the news reports. The *Thirteen's* news reports, I should add."

"I saw his body. You're a murderer. I can't believe I'm sitting here with a murderer."

"We're at war, Tamara. There are always casualties in war."

"Is that how you sleep at night?" Tamara stood up. "Well let's see you justify yourself to the peacekeepers."

Tamara made for the door, but a wiry young man with ginger hair blocked her way. "I don't think you'll be going anywhere, Miss Scott."

"Let her go, Orwell," Morrison said. "If Tamara wants to go to the peacekeepers then we won't stop her."

Tamara looked at him incredulously and Morrison smiled as he let the other shoe drop.

"Alternatively, if she wants to see her daughter again, she can take a ride with us."

* * * * *

They had a bus. It made sense, Tamara supposed. The only cars on the roads were used by government employees. Everyone else use public transport.

Morrison introduced her to the other members of his cell as they boarded. Orwell she had already met. He was, Morrison said, their resident geek, always one step ahead of the Thirteen's encryptions. Isherwood drove the bus. He had soft brown hair and an open face of the kind Tamara felt she could trust under different circumstances. He looked like an ordinary guy, not a terrorist, which was, as Morrison explained, the point.

"In our line of work, sometimes it helps to have someone...respectable. Someone on the inside, as it were."

The fourth member of the team was a woman. Losey. She was sitting at the back of the bus cleaning an automatic rifle when Tamara arrived. Once upon a time

she might have been attractive, but the left hand side of her face and her exposed arms were covered in swirling tattoos and she had piercings through her nose, ears and bottom lip. Tamara did not want to know what other self-mutilations she might be hiding beneath her clothes. How could someone do that to herself, she wondered. Still, if she was going to be stuck in an enclosed space with her for the duration, it could not hurt to be nice.

"Hi," she tried.

Losey glared back. "Let's get one thing clear right now. You're only here because Morrison likes you and it's not like he hasn't been wrong before. I don't like you. I don't trust you. We're not going to be friends so don't even try." She turned away and then something else occurred to her. "Almost forgot. If you betray us I'll blow your brains out. And I'll enjoy it too."

I just bet you would, Tamara thought to herself.

"Ignore Losey," Isherwood told her. "She's this charming to everyone, though I think she might have a soft spot for yours truly."

"You wish," Losey called.

"Guy has to pass the nights somehow, Los."

"Pig!"

Isherwood laughed. Orwell was pretending to ignore the byplay, but Tamara caught him smirking as he stared out of a window.

"Don't mind them," Morrison told Tamara as he slid into a seat across the aisle from her. "They're just blowing off steam. It's healthy."

He peeled off his overcoat.

"What are you wearing?"

"Do you like it?" Morrison beamed, showing off his garish, multi-coloured shirt.

"It's a little..." Tamara searched for the word. "Bright," she finished lamely.

"Haven't you ever stopped to question the uniformity imposed by the Thirteen? Everyone's in greys or browns or blacks. Heaven forbid anyone should try to be a bit vibrant. It reflects the whole Thirteen philosophy."

"So *you* say. I'm still to be convinced."

"Then why are you here?" Losey demanded.

"It's rude to eavesdrop, Losey," Morrison told her.

"Yeah, well, we're the ultimate rebels, aren't we?"

Morrison turned back to Tamara. "Sometimes I forget how young they are."

"Ever ask yourself if it's fair to drag kids into your 'war'? That was the word you used, wasn't it?"

"It's their war, not mine," Morrison replied. "It's their world we're fighting for."

* * * * *

The bus came to a halt an hour later.

"It looks like the middle of nowhere," Tamara commented.

"We go on foot from here," Morrison said as he buttoned up his overcoat. "The bus would draw too much attention."

He stopped and stared at Tamara.

"What is it?" she asked, uncomfortable beneath his scrutiny.

"I'm getting old," he muttered. "I should have thought of this earlier. Losey, have you got anything Tamara can wear. I don't think her current outfit is suitable for breaking and entering, do you?"

"Good thing one of us is on the ball, eh, boss?" Losey sneered, throwing a bag in Tamara's direction. "Those should be about your size. If not, don't come crying to me, okay?"

"Nobody said anything about breaking and entering," Tamara said.

"You've come this far. Might as well go the rest of the way."

"Yeah, it's no big deal," Isherwood assured her. "We do this kind of thing all the time."

"Yeah, that's what bother me," Tamara replied.

The others waited on the road outside the bus while Tamara changed. Losey might not like her much, but at least the clothes she had chosen for Tamara were comfortable. A black, ribbed sweater, black slacks that tucked into black boots, black gloves and a black balaclava to complete the ensemble.

"Looking good, Tam." Isherwood gave her a thumbs-up as she exited the bus.

"Um, I hate to be the one to bring this up, but we can't keep calling her by her given name when we're inside," Orwell said hesitantly. He rubbed the back of his neck with his hand. "It's, well, kind of a security risk, don't you think?"

"It's a good point, Orwell," Morrison said. "Very well, for tonight, Tamara, you get to be Huxley."

"No," Losey declared vehemently.

"It's just for one night, Losey."

"No way," Losey insisted. "No way does she get to use his name. Not now, not ever. Got me?"

"I got you, Losey. In that case..." A vertical line appeared between Morrison's eyes as his brow creased in thought. "Block. Tamara can be Block."

"Block?" Tamara said.

"Cartoonist," Morrison replied. "I'll explain later. If you're still interested that is."

"Pleased to meet you, Block." Isherwood grinned and extended a hand. Before Tamara could take it, Losey forced her way between the two of them.

"Enough chit-chat," she said. "Let's go blow stuff up."

"This just gets better and better," Tamara drawled.

* * * * *

Fifteen minutes later, they were crouched beside a three metre high fence topped with barbed wire.

"Have you got the wire-cutters, Isherwood?" Morrison asked.

"We're just going to cut our way in?" Orwell asked. "I mean, what if the fence is electrified."

"It's not."

"How do you know?"

"The kids exercise in this field," Morrison replied. "They're hardly going to put them right next to a death trap, are they?"

"But what if you're wrong?" Orwell continued. "You were wrong about Huxley and..."

"Enough already." Losey reached across and grabbed hold of the fence with both hands. She started to shake violently.

"Losey!" Orwell yelled.

Losey stopped shaking and winked at him. "Fooling. It's safe, okay."

"You're psychotic, you know that, Los." Orwell shrank back in a sulk.

Losey grinned, teeth and piercings shining in the moonlight.

Isherwood cut the fence and Morrison held the flap open until everyone was through.

"You said 'kids', didn't you?" Tamara asked Morrison as she passed. "Is Sally in here?"

"I think so," Morrison replied. "I can't be one hundred per cent, but yes, I think so."

"That's enough for me."

Morrison turned to his troops.

"Isherwood, Orwell, Losey. There's something Tam... sorry, that *Block* needs to see. Give us ten minutes, then blow the generator. We'll meet back at the bus."

"Fine by me," Losey said. She drew a gun from the waistband of her jeans and checked the magazine.

"No, Losey." Morrison put a hand over the barrel. "I don't want anyone killed."

"What you want, old man, may be several kilometres from the facts. If it's them or me then I know how I'm swinging."

"Very well," Morrison conceded reluctantly, "but only if it's them or you."

"Whatever."

Morrison closed his eyes as if pained. Then he turned to Tamara.

"Well, 'Block', are you up for a spot of illegal entry?"

* * * * *

"What is this place?"

They were in a library. Tamara picked one of the books up at random. *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's cautionary tragedy about two people who lost their lives because they refused to take heed of the advice of their parents. Tamara had read it to Sally.

Morrison poked his head around the edge of the door to check it was safe, then ushered Tamara on.

"They call it a nursery," he explained quietly. "All children are taken to one of these places as soon as they are born and don't emerge again until their sixteenth birthday. The nanny state."

"All children?"

Morrison changed tack. "What do you remember of your childhood, Tamara?"

"I..." What *did* she remember? Faces swam in front of her vision. She could see her mother with a smile big enough to swallow her up. And there were others, too. Two brothers. Tamara recalled roughhousing with them, having to prove herself twice as much because she was a girl. But where was her father...

No, that was not right. Tamara Scott had not known either of her parents and she was an only child. She was certain of it. Certain. The word had taken on a questionable meaning lately.

"I don't remember," she confessed to Morrison.

"No, you wouldn't." Morrison reached for a door handle. "Be very quiet."

Very gently, he opened the door. Tamara craned her neck to look past him. Within the room were dozens of bunk beds all occupied by sleeping children. There were speakers in each corner of the room and a soft voice was being piped in.

"The Thirteen are your friends," said the voice. "The Thirteen want to protect you. Safety comes from conformity. Security comes from conformity. Disunity breeds anarchy. Disunity breeds terror."

"Brainwashing," Morrison said as he closed the door.

"It's horrible," Tamara said.

"I couldn't agree more. That's why Losey's going to destroy the generator. It won't take them long to fix it, I guess, but for one night at least these children will get to enjoy dreams of their own. That has to be worth something."

Tamara's face was grim. "Let's just find Sally and get out of here."

* * * * *

"Um, excuse me. I seem to be lost."

"Stay right where you are," the guards yelled as they levelled their weapons.

Orwell raised his hands. "Well, if you insist, but there's something you should know..."

Isherwood and Losey clubbed the guards around the backs of their heads and they crumbled unconscious to the ground.

"...I'm not the real threat," Orwell concluded.

"So this is the generator, huh?" Isherwood said as they entered the small metal hut some distance from the main house.

"It's regulated by a microprocessor," Orwell said as he examined the equipment. "I could infect it with a virus and shut everything down that way."

"You could," Losey remarked pointedly, "but then I wouldn't get to blow anything up."

"That works too," Orwell conceded as Losey began priming explosives by the light of his torch.

Isherwood was standing by the door. "There's something going on outside."
"Well don't look at me," Losey said as she connected a timer. "Go check it out."

Isherwood stepped out into darkness then came running back in a moment later.

"They've found the bodies." He panted for breath.

Losey swore. "There wasn't supposed to be another patrol through here for another half hour." She pointed at Orwell. "You said so."

Someone was pounding on the door. "Open up in there. Open up or we shoot."

Orwell looked to the others. "I don't suppose this place has a backdoor?"

The timer connected to Losey's bomb continued its remorseless countdown.

* * * * *

When the alarm started, it was a harpy screech that threatened to burst Tamara's eardrums. They had found Sally. She was in a room with a dozen other babies, some in incubators, some able to manage without. Each cot had a chart attached to it and a name label. Sally had been given the name Joanne.

"How can we leave any of them behind?" Tamara had asked.

"Who's going to look after them?" Morrison replied. "Much as it pains me to admit it, they're better off here than with us. For the moment."

"But."

"We'll come back for them. When we've stopped the Thirteen we can close down this place and all the others like it."

Then the alarm sounded.

"What's that?" Tamara asked.

"It means they're on to us." Morrison checked the corridor. "We're clear for the moment. Grab Sally and let's go. Now."

Tamara wrapped her daughter up in a blanket and, clutching her to her chest, followed Morrison. The sound of booted feet echoed down the corridor.

"There they are," a guard shouted. "Halt or we fire."

"Don't stop." Morrison practically dragged Tamara around a corner.

"But you heard what he said..."

"And if we stop they'll shoot us anyway. They have no place for people like us in the world the Thirteen made."

Gunfire ricocheted off of the walls and Tamara yelped.

"Keep down," Morrison yelled. He dived and rolled and when he came up again he had a fire extinguisher in his hands. He pointed the nozzle at the approaching guards and fired, engulfing them in a cloud of white. As they emerged from the cloud, coughing, spluttering and blind, he clocked them around the heads with the heavy extinguisher canister.

"What about their guns?" Tamara eyed the two prone figures suspiciously. "Don't you want to take them?"

"I won't use guns," Morrison replied.

"But you're happy to have Losey use them on your behalf," Tamara said. "You remind me of someone I used to know."

"Really? Who?"

Tamara opened her mouth to reply and then realised she did not know the answer herself. A moment ago the memory had been so clear, but now...

"Doesn't matter," she said. "Let's just get out of here."

* * * * *

"I'm not going to die in a trap like this," Losey declared. "Let's go out and meet them."

Orwell raised a hand. "Um, I'd rather not die at all if it's all the same to everyone else."

Isherwood opened the door. "We're coming out," he yelled. "And we're unarmed."

He glared at Losey who reluctantly put her guns down on the floor.

Three guards were waiting for them outside together with two dogs that barked aggressively whenever one of them so much as twitched.

"Simmons," one of the guards said, never taking his eyes from his prisoners, "go see what they were up to in there."

Another guard - presumably Simmons - disappeared inside the generator hut.

"They've planted a bomb," he called back.

One of the guards started at this, but their squad leader remained icily calm.

"Can you disarm it?"

"No problem. There's still two minutes left on the countdown."

"Down!" Losey yelled, grabbing Orwell and Isherwood and hauling them down onto the damp grass just as the hut disintegrated. The explosion billowed outward, knocking the guards off of their feet and sending the dogs running for cover. Debris rained down from the sky overhead and Losey kept her face pressed against the ground until it was over.

"Never could get the hang of those timers," she remarked.

Isherwood laughed. "Losey, I could kiss you. Well, were it not that you'd shoot off my genitals for even trying."

"And don't you forget it," she replied.

"I will never complain about your work again," Orwell promised as he stared at the flames with childlike delight.

"Don't worry, it's not like you'll get the chance," the guard leader croaked. He was battered and bloodied, but he could still just about stand. And he had an automatic rifle pointed at Orwell's head.

* * * * *

Tamara and Morrison were sprinting across the grass in the direction of the hole Isherwood had made in the fence. Their cover blown, they were making no effort to

hide, but were ducking and weaving as they ran to present more challenging targets to the guards. Sally was crying and Tamara wished that there were something more she could do for her.

Then the explosion knocked her off of her feet.

"What was that?" she yelled over the ringing in her ears.

Morrison simply pointed towards the ruined building, wreathed in flame. Tamara could make out Isherwood, Orwell and Losey. They looked to be okay, thank goodness, but they were not alone. A guard had survived the explosion and he was armed.

"Take, Sally," Tamara ordered Morrison.

Adrenaline was pumping through her and instinct had taken over, forcing back the rational part of her mind that wanted to know what on earth she thought she was playing at.

"Hey, over here," she yelled at the guard as she sprinted towards him.

He pivoted trying to bring his gun to bear. Tamara dived to one side and bullets whizzed past her as she fell. She rolled on the grass, scrabbling for the gun abandoned by the guard who had taken the full force of the explosion. Then she was up in a crouch and firing from the hip, two shots right between her opponents eyes. Blood oozed slowly from the wound and he toppled over backwards, dead.

Tamara shivered and dropped her gun as shock began to set in. Orwell and Isherwood were staring at her with open mouths.

"You have got to show me how you did that," Losey said.

"Sure," Tamara replied distractedly. *Just as soon as I figure it out myself.*

* * * * *

Sometime later, Tamara descended the stairs to the kitchen of Morrison's safe house.

"I've got her to sleep," she announced. "Finally."

"So no all night partying then?" Orwell asked.

"Don't even joke."

Morrison filled a glass with red wine and handed it to her. "To toast our victory."

"Some victory," Tamara said, taking a sip. "I keep thinking about all the ones we left behind."

"I haven't forgotten about them," Morrison replied. "None of us have." He put down his glass. "So, Tamara, you've seen a little of what the Thirteen are really about. How do you feel about joining our crusade now?"

"Hold on a minute," Losey protested. "Don't we get a say in this? Shouldn't we, like, put it to the vote or something?"

"She saved my life," Isherwood said. "She gets my vote."

"That goes double for me," Orwell agreed with a grin.

"Well, Losey?" Morrison prompted.

"Oh, what the hell," she conceded. "You're no Huxley, but you'll do."

"Thanks," Tamara said, "I think."

"Then here's to Block," Isherwood said, raising his glass, "the newest member of our little gang of anarchists."

He drained his glass and then threw it against the wall where it smashed. The others, including a rather bemused Tamara, followed suit.

Losey leaned forward expectantly. "So what do I get to blow up next, boss?"

"Sooner or later we really must try and curb those destructive tendencies of yours."

"But not just yet, right?"

"Not while there's still work to be done."

"I have a suggestion," Tamara began hesitantly.

"Well, let's here it," Morrison said encouragingly.

"Sally's father, he's a major in the Section Space Corps."

"Well, bully for him," Losey muttered.

"He told me that they have an operation planned. Something big."

"Well, you did say we needed to move up to the big leagues," Isherwood reminded Morrison.

"Yes, I did, didn't I. Very well, let's go and pay the Space Corps a little visit."

Act Three - Not Fade Away

Grae clung to the console for dear life. She instinctively knew that this would be that last part of the TARDIS to be destroyed. The Doctor was a whirling dervish, elegantly vaulting the widening crevasses in the floor as he sought for a way of rescuing them from their predicament.

"Grae," he instructed without looking up, "when I give the word, I want you to transfer all power through the dematerialisation circuit."

"But we don't have any power," Grae protested.

"We will do when I disintegrate what's left of the TARDIS' structure." There was a manic gleam in the Doctor's eyes. "We'll cannibalise the TARDIS herself for the energy."

"And what if you disintegrate the console room by mistake?"

"What are the chances of that?" The Doctor crossed his fingers. "Now, on my mark... Transfer the power."

The Doctor lunged forward and flicked a panel of switches while Grae spun a dial on the opposite side of the console. The TARDIS groaned as if in agony.

"I'm sorry, old girl," the Doctor whispered. "I wish there was another way."

Then the central column burst into light, the crystals inside assuming their reassuring glow as it rose and fell with a familiar wheezing, groaning sound.

"Well, here goes nothing."

The Doctor reached for a control and then paused. He looked at Grae and offered her his other hand over the console.

"Trust me?"

"Always," Grae replied, taking his hand in hers.

The Doctor pulled on the control.

* * * * *

With a trumpeting roar, the two Time Lords materialised on the north bank of the River Thames. Of the TARDIS there was no sign.

"Is she really gone?" Grae asked.

The Doctor leaned on the wall down one side of the pavement and stared downriver towards Westminster Bridge.

"The TARDIS and I have a connection."

"The symbiotic nuclei," Grae agreed.

"No, it's more than that, more...fundamental. Wherever I am, I always have some sense of her. I don't sense her anymore at all." A gust of wind blew the Doctor's long hair into his face and he examined his new grey streak, a gift from the time winds. "Rassilon, I feel like I've aged three centuries."

Somewhere in the distance a boat sounded its horn.

"At least we're on Earth." Grae tried to find some comfort in their situation.

"There are worse places to be stranded."

The Doctor gave her a look.

"When do you suppose we are?" Grae continued.

The Doctor considered. "Judging by the architecture, I'd say early twenty-first century, but..."

"But?"

The Doctor sat down on a bench, pulled a stale bread roll from his pocket and began to feed the pigeons. "Smell the air, Grae. Savour the bouquet."

Grae sniffed experimentally. "It smells...clean, I guess."

"Too clean," the Doctor said. "If I was to go by smell alone, I'd say that this was pre-industrial Earth. Also, listen."

"I don't hear anything."

"Exactly. Where's the traffic. Even on a Sunday, London should be busier than this. Something's not right here."

Grae sat down beside him on the bench, folding her coat beneath her.

"So, what do we do now?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Does it really matter?"

* * * * *

They had started walking, more for something to do than because either of them had a particular destination in mind.

"Well, whatever's going on around here," the Doctor was saying, "they're keeping the streets remarkably clean."

"Don't you want to investigate?" Grae asked, stuffing her hands deeper into her pockets.

"What? Solve the mystery, save the world and unmask the villain? And they

would have got away with it too if it wasn't for that meddling Doctor?" His sombre tone undercut the humour of his words. "Maybe later. Right now my hearts just aren't in it."

"I wish Tamara was here," Grae said, giving voice to the thought that had been lurking at the back of both of their minds since their arrival.

"So do I," the Doctor agreed softly. "Just when I thought I'd got her back for good..."

"She was my best friend," Grae continued. "You know, when I joined you in the TARDIS I was worried that you might resent me."

"Resent you? Now why would I ever do that?"

"Isn't it obvious? I'd only know you a short time, but even I could see how strong the bond was between the two of you. I was afraid that you'd think I was...intruding."

"Nonsense. Tamara's and my relationship was plenty strong enough to accommodate an extra guest. Or two."

Grae paused, formulating her words carefully. "I feel bad about Taryn."

"It was a terrible way to go," the Doctor agreed, but Grae shook her head.

"That's not what I meant. I mean I feel all this grief over Tamara, it's as if I've pushed Taryn to one side."

The Doctor put a hand on his companion's shoulder. "That's only natural. You and Tamara were very close whereas you hadn't had much of a chance to get to know Dr Fischer."

"But I could have made more of an effort." There was anger mixed in with the grief now. "Despite my fears, Tamara never failed to make me feel part of the team, but I kept Taryn at arm's length when I should have been extending the hand of friendship."

"Well, I know one shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but Taryn didn't really go out of her way to encourage warm fuzzy feelings," the Doctor pointed out.

"Don't try to excuse it," Grae snapped. "I screwed up, Doctor, and now I'll never get the chance to make it right."

"If you made a mistake then I'm equally to blame," the Doctor said. "I was a keen as anyone to drop Taryn off at her destination and leave her there. But, for a time, we were a team. Let's focus on the good times."

Grae raised her hand in a mock toast. "To Tamara and Taryn."

"To Tamara, Taryn *and* Grae," the Doctor corrected with a smile, "and not one of you from an era that would appreciate a Charlie's Angels joke."

* * * * *

Grae was walking with a lighter step, the Doctor noted. Talking about her friend had helped. She was a sensitive child, which was why he did not regret not telling her the whole truth. Gallifrey had not simply ceased to exist. If the readings he had taken during those last few minutes within the TARDIS had been accurate then something had excised Gallifrey so completely it was as if it had never existed.

Ever. If that was the case, then what, one might wonder, did that mean for two Time Lords like the Doctor and Grae? The Doctor had his suspicions. He raised a hand in front of his face. As he expected, he could make out the outline of the houses lining the street through his translucent appendage. He stuffed his hand back into his pocket where Grae could not see it. There was no sense in worrying her unduly so for now, at least, he would keep his own counsel.

The fact that he would have told Tamara everything, had she been here instead of Grae, only served to enhance the pain of his loss.

* * * * *

"What's he doing?" Grae asked.

"Who, what and where?" the Doctor asked. He had been lost in his own thoughts and had not been paying attention.

"Over there, by the bus. Is he writing on that window? That's vandalism."

"Grae, Grae, Grae, Grae, Grae." The Doctor tutted. "I would have thought that you would have a better appreciation for the Vandals than that. I really must take you back and show..."

He trailed off. It still had not sunk in yet, had it? He wasn't ready to accept that his wandering days were over. He shook his head and dismissed the thought.

"Nevertheless," he continued, "I suppose that *is* vandalism. Which is odd, when you think about it, given how neat and tidy this London is. Perhaps we should have a brief chat with our young 'vandal', hm?"

He stepped forward and was almost run down as an unmarked black car came speeding around the corner. It pulled to a halt and two visored men in black stepped out. Both were armed with batons. They took hold of the vandal, pinning his arms behind his back and then slammed him against the car.

"By the powers vested in me by the Thirteen," one man began while the other attached cuffs to the vandal's wrists, "I'm arresting you for terrorism. You will be taken from this place to a secure facility where you will serve the remainder of your sentence."

"Now wait just a minute," the Doctor interrupted, stepping forward, "there's no need to be so rough with him. The poor boy's terrified. And whatever happened to due process? His right to a fair trial?"

While one man bundled the vandal into the car, the other advanced on the Doctor.

"Sir, may I see your identification."

"Well, I, um..."

"Sir, please present your identity card."

"Ah, you see, the thing is..."

"Sir, if you do not present your identity card then you will be detained."

"And I don't suppose I'll get any form of trial either, will I?" the Doctor mused.

"Very well, sir, you leave me no choice. By the powers vested in me by the

Thirteen..."

"Excuse me, officer," Grae interjected. She removed her rose tinted glasses and batted her eyelids at him. "You don't need to see our identification."

"I don't need to see your identification," the man repeated in a monotone.

Grae replaced her glasses.

"Move along please," the man said. "There's nothing to see here."

"Of course, officer." Grae smiled sweetly at him and the man climbed back into his car, which then sped away.

"The human mind is a very delicate instrument," the Doctor scolded, "and shouldn't be toyed with."

"Even if my hypnotism gets you out of a jam?"

"Yes, well, let's see what that young man was writing, shall we?" He pored over the symbol on the glass.

"It's a letter A." Grae was unimpressed.

"Specifically, it's an A for anarchy," the Doctor corrected, "but what do you suppose it means?"

"Doctor, that man mentioned the Thirteen."

The Doctor smiled grimly. "I wondered if you'd notice. It could be nothing, of course, but I don't believe in coincidences. I had hoped that Commander Poole and your future self would have taken care of them, but something must have gone wrong."

"Do you think it might be connected to what happened to the TARDIS? And to Gallifrey?"

"As I said," the Doctor replied, "I don't believe in coincidences. We need more information."

"Agreed," Grae said, "but where do we start looking?"

The Doctor pointed to the nearby supermarket. "I'm going to buy a newspaper."

* * * * *

The Doctor read his newspaper while they browsed the aisles in the rest of the supermarket. Looking for clues, the Doctor called it. Light music was piped throughout the store and overlaying that was what was ostensibly a news broadcast. Or, to the Doctor's way of thinking, propaganda espousing the virtues of life under the Thirteen's rule. The newspaper was not much better, but at least from that he was able to learn the date: Friday the fifteenth of April 2005. The newspaper went on to tell him about the Thirteen's achievements. There had been a hurricane in the Caribbean. Fortunately, there had been no loss of life. The Doctor found it hard to imagine that that would have been the case in the world he knew, but the Thirteen did have the advantage of being able to force cooperation between everybody. They were holding a rally in Hyde Park tomorrow, the Doctor noted. The article claimed that three members of the Thirteen themselves would be there, only three because the rest were otherwise occupied in Iraq. Try as he might, the Doctor

had never seen even one of the Thirteen in person, let alone three. Perhaps he should attend.

The newspaper was not all about backslapping the Thirteen. Amongst all the triumphal fanfare, he found a report of a bomb that had blown up a bridge in Berlin, killing twenty-seven people. The article was vehement in its condemnation of the attack, a sentiment the Doctor wholeheartedly agreed with where loss of life was concerned, but it did at least tell him that the Thirteen did not have things entirely their own way.

This society had all the trappings of a benevolent dictatorship and the Doctor had only two problems with that: this was not the state of political affairs in the 2005 he recalled and, more importantly, he found it hard to associate the Thirteen with a benevolent anything.

"Don't get too far ahead, Grae," he warned his companion. If Earth really was under the thumb of Section Thirteen then he did not want Grae wandering off.

However, when he looked up from his newspaper, his fellow Time Lord was nowhere to be seen.

* * * * *

Grae was frustrated. Section Thirteen was here. That much was obvious. Section Thirteen was responsible for the deaths of Tamara and Taryn, the destruction of the TARDIS and of Gallifrey and for whatever had happened to her future self. Okay, so that was more of a stretch, but even if it was a leap, it was a logical one. Having been convinced that she would never be able to regenerate, Grae had only recently learned that she did have a future after all. The idea that the Thirteen may have taken that away from her, on top of everything else, was almost too much to bear.

Why weren't they out there looking for the Thirteen? Why were they wasting their time examining dried produce in a supermarket? (Consider the lack of variety here, the Doctor had said. Every item is produced by just one company. There's no competition.) How was this going to solve their problems?

She stopped and glanced around. In her anger, she had stormed off ahead and now she had lost the Doctor. She did spot another familiar face, however.

"Tamara?"

The woman turned at the sound of her name and Grae's hearts skipped a beat. The face was just as she remembered it, though the dark hair was longer. The Tamara she remembered would have complained about it getting in the way. Most shocking of all was her bump. Could Tamara be pregnant?

None of that mattered, though. All that mattered was that she was alive and, fighting back tears, Grae ran to her friend and embraced her.

"It really is you," she said, her voice breaking. "I thought I'd lost you."

Tamara looked embarrassed and not a little disconcerted by the attention. She pulled away from Grae, breaking out of her arms.

"I'm sorry," Tamara said, "but I think you have me confused with someone else."

Did she? Could it just be someone who bore an uncanny resemblance to Tamara Scott? No, Grae was certain now. No one could be that much like her friend and not *be* her.

"Tamara, what are you talking about?" she asked. "It's me. Grae. Don't you remember?"

Tamara shook her head and took a step back. "I'm sorry, but I really must be going."

"Wait!" Tamara turned to leave, but Grae put a hand on her shoulder to hold her back. Tamara world round on instinct and in the time it took Grae to blink she had the Time Lord's arm pinned behind her back. Now the tears in her eyes were of pain, not joy.

"I'm sure there's no need for violence, ladies..."

Grae grinned despite her predicament. If anyone could make Tamara see sense, it was the Doctor. However, his next words effectively deflated her hopes.

"I'm sure my young friend realises that she's made a mistake and will be only too happy to apologise."

"But Doctor," Grae protested. "Couldn't he see what she saw?"

"Apologise." The Doctor's tone would brook no argument.

"I'm sorry." Grae forced out the words as she might force down bitter medicine. "I thought you were someone else."

Tamara released her and Grae started to rub her arm to restore the circulation.

"There, that was easy, wasn't it," the Doctor said. He beamed at Tamara. "I'm sorry to have troubled you."

And then he let her go.

"Come along, Grae. Let's not trouble this young lady any further." He put an arm around Grae's waist and practically dragged her away.

"But, Doctor, don't you know who that was?"

"No," the Doctor replied.

It took a moment for Grae to recover her powers of speech. "But...but that was *Tamara*."

"Tamara's dead," the Doctor pointed out with solemn finality.

"We both saw her."

"Then why didn't she recognise you, hm?"

"I don't know." Grae considered this. "Maybe this is before she met you."

"Grae, Tamara wasn't even born in 2005," the Doctor told her. "Whoever that was, while she may have looked like Tamara, she wasn't Tamara. She couldn't have been."

You're wrong, Doctor, Grae thought. *This time you're wrong.* She kept her thoughts to herself, however.

* * * * *

Was it fair of him to lie to Grae, the Doctor asked himself. Probably not, he decided,

but he had already lost two companions and his desire to protect the third would do for now. It was only to be expected that she would not believe him, that she would strike off on her own in pursuit of the woman she still thought of as her best friend. The Doctor had his own ideas as to "Tamara's" presence here, but while Grae was learning the answers for herself, he was free to beard the lion in his den.

Alone.

* * * * *

"Good evening," the Doctor called out to the man at the gate as he approached what, in the 2005 he knew, would be called the Houses of Parliament. He would have to remember to ask someone what it was called here.

"Halt," the guard snapped. "I'll need to see your identification."

The Doctor pulled a face and waved a hand vaguely in the air between them.

"You don't need to see my identification."

"Actually, sir, I'm afraid that I do."

The Doctor sighed. Why did that trick never seem to work for him? "Would it help at all if I explained that I don't have any identification because I don't really exist in this time-line? I'm an impossibility and I've always wanted to be one of those."

"In that case, you will have to come with me, sir," the guard insisted.

The Doctor rubbed his hands together. "Oh good. Is this the part where I get to say 'take me to your leader'?"

* * * * *

Time Lords do not need to sleep as much as most other species, nor is their physiology as susceptible to the effects of cold temperatures. That was what Grae kept telling herself as she stood across the road from Tamara's flat, shivering. Darkness had swept in several hours ago and Grae had passed some of the time trying to identify the constellations. There was one that she was could not place, but she put that down to her unfamiliarity with this particular region of space. Or possibly her tiredness. Grae would have loved to rest her head against a soft pillow and drift off into brief oblivion, but she was not about to leave her friend behind. Not again.

Her attention was starting to drift, but she was suddenly woken by movement over by Tamara's flat. Who was that man and what was he doing at her door? Glancing around to see if anyone else was watching, she dashed across the road, but by the time she reached the door, the man had disappeared inside. On impulse, she tried the door. It was still unlocked and swung open at her touch. Cautiously, she stepped into the hallway...

...and straight into the arms of the man she had been following.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" the man demanded in a harsh whisper.

"I could ask you the same question," Grae replied.

"I live here," the man responded. "What's your excuse?"

While Grae was digesting that, the man was studying her.

"Wait, I know you," he said.

"You do?"

"Yeah, you look just like your picture. They said you'd come for her, sooner or later. Seems they were right."

"Who are they?" Grae asked, trying and failing to break free from his grip. "Section Thirteen?"

"You ask a lot of questions."

"It's the only way to learn anything. Why are we whispering by the way? Is it so Tamara doesn't find out what you're up to?"

"Something like that," Major Winters said as he reached up and delivered a nerve pinch. Grae did not even feel it before unconsciousness rushed up to claim her.

* * * * *

Grae was back in the TARDIS. She had never realised before just how comforting the ambient hum of the ship really was, but now she greeted it like an old friend. The white-on-white décor, the ever-present roundels... It might not be the most attractive design statement, but it was home and there really was no place like it. Had it all just been a bad dream? The loss of the TARDIS, the death of Tamara, nothing more than a simple nightmare? Grae longed for that to be true, but as her surroundings achieved sharper focus she knew that that was not the case.

She was stuck in a memory.

She was sitting in one of the TARDIS's kitchens. It was a tiny room, but its intimate quality made it a favourite with Tamara and herself. The sweet smell of cocoa wafted up to her nostrils from the mug warming her hands and she took a sip.

"Everyone says, 'if I had god-like powers I'd make the world a better place,'" Tamara was saying, emphasising her points with her free hand.

O'Hallan, Grae recalled, had tried to create a perfect race of people, but he was only human himself. His powers did not make him any more suited to wield them. What would Grae do with such power? Bring Tamara back from the dead for a start, and that in itself was a little selfish. She should be bettering society, making the universe a better place, but all she really wanted was her best friend back. Maybe she was no better suited to make those sorts of choices than O'Hallan.

"Maybe a *real* god would see beyond that sort of stuff," Tamara said, echoing Grae's thoughts.

"Which just goes to prove that there can't be any gods."

Grae jumped, startled. Her cocoa jumped and dribbled down onto her top. Taryn was standing in the doorway, not the figure Grae remembered, but one torn and withered by the cruel winds within the time vortex. She blinked and Taryn's appearance returned to normal.

"If there were real gods," Taryn continued harshly, "then the universe wouldn't have all this hate and horror in it. It would be something different, something that reflected the nature of the gods, not of us, but it would be something better. It's us who drag the universe down into the dark.

"Maybe the universe would be better off without us."

* * * * *

"There comes a point," the Doctor declared, "when the novelty value of being repeatedly locked up finally wears off."

He was not talking to anyone in particular. The cell was spotlessly clean so there was not even a fly, let alone a rat, with whom he could share his repartee. He was sitting on the edge of a bed, the only piece of furniture in the small, windowless room. He had not even pretended to sleep. He wanted them to know that he did not need it, that he was not subject to normal human weakness.

"How long does it take these people to process a blood sample anyway?" the Doctor asked his non-existent audience. They had drawn blood from his arm on arrival, no doubt intending to compare his DNA against some database or other. They were going to be severely disappointed if they expected him to be in their system. However, the Doctor hoped, if they were sufficiently open-minded then his blood might be of much more interest than mere law enforcement.

There was a rattle of keys in the lock and the door was flung open by a man in a white coat. Two black-clad guards followed in his wake.

"Took you long enough," the Doctor muttered.

"What is this?" the man in the lab-coat asked as he brandished a test tube. "It's not blood."

"Not human blood, certainly," the Doctor agreed, "but then you know that already."

"What are you?"

"I'm a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Should it, Doctor?"

A tall, thin man entered the room. He had snow-white hair brushed back from a heavily lined face and wore a grey suit and Nehru jacket and gloves. The guards stood respectfully to one side as he approached.

"You are dismissed, Hastings," the man said.

"But, sir..."

"I will be taking personal responsibility for this prisoner, Hastings. Should your services be required any further than no doubt you will be summoned. Now, as I said, you are dismissed."

With a hurried bow, Hastings scurried from the room.

"A very talented young man," the man with white hair continued, "but one has the feeling he would rather find the answers to his questions by cutting you up instead of talking to you."

"Then it seems I owe you a debt of gratitude, Mr..?"

"They call me Unus."

The Doctor drew in a breath. "The leader of the Thirteen himself. This is an honour."

"Probably." Unus shrugged. Then he turned and started to walk out of the cell.

"Wait. Aren't you going to interrogate me?"

"Oh yes," Unus agreed lightly. "It's a long flight. These men will get you ready."

The guards grinned. Then one of them punched the Doctor in the stomach.

* * * * *

Grae strained against her bonds. The man had tied her up with her own scarf and left her in a cupboard. She could hear him talking to Tamara in the next room. They were talking about attending some kind of rally in Hyde Park. Grae had to warn her about him, but she was tied securely and the tape across her mouth prevented her from crying out. Her best friend was in terrible danger and yet, despite the fact that she was only metres away, Grae could do nothing about it.

What had he meant when he had said that he recognised Grae by her picture? Did Section Thirteen have a file on her? Had they been expecting her and the Doctor to turn up and try and rescue Tamara? How much of this was part of their plans and how far had Grae played into the hands of her enemy?

The cupboard door opened and Grae scrunched up her eyes to protect them from the sudden light.

"We're going out now," the man informed her. "Some agents will be around to collect you while we're gone. You won't give them any trouble, will you?"

If it were not for the gag, Grae would have spat in his eye. The man must have sensed this because he started to laugh.

"What's so funny, Jason?" Tamara called from another room.

Please come and investigate, Grae silently begged her. *Please find me*. But the man was already closing the cupboard door.

"It's nothing, honey. Just recalling a joke some of the guys were telling at the base yesterday."

The front door slammed closed and Grae knew that she was alone.

"Alone, alone, alone, alone." A mocking voice echoed around her. Grae looked about as best she could, but she was unable to make out anything in the darkness.

"I can see you," the voice continued in a singsong tone.

Had the Section agents arrived already, Grae wondered. No, she would have heard the door, besides which, the voice was in the cupboard with her.

"Clever girl. So who am I then?"

Grae could feel warm breath on her ear and the hairs on her neck stood to attention.

"Don't be frightened. We'll meet soon enough."

Grae pulled against her bonds and was shocked to find one of her hands

already free. The scarf was still tied, so how had that happened? Not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth, however, Grae swiftly freed the rest of her and tore the tape from her mouth.

"Who are you?" she yelled at the darkness, but there was no response.

Grae shook her head, adding her "ghost" to the growing list of mysteries she was compiling about this place. She wondered how long it would take her to reach Hyde Park.

* * * * *

The Doctor awoke on a small jet. Unus was sitting across the aisle, watching him.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Like two of your thugs beat me half to death, which I suppose shouldn't be much of a surprise to either of us." Surprised to find his hands were not bound, the Doctor removed a white handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at his face with it. It came away spotted with blood.

"I'm sure you'll heal quite quickly, Doctor," Unus remarked. "Hastings would probably regard it as an interesting experiment."

"And what do you regard it as, Unus?"

"A necessary evil." Unus rose from his seat. "Can I offer you a drink? We have a quite excellent scotch on board."

"I'll stick to water, if you don't mind. Still by preference."

"You want to keep a clear head. That's quite understandable." Unus poured the drinks and handed the water to the Doctor. The Doctor noticed that he was still wearing his gloves.

"Forgive me if I'm a little surprised by your concern for my welfare."

"As I said, the incident was...regrettable." Unus retook his seat.

"But necessary."

"Order must be maintained."

"Of course," the Doctor sneered. "We can't have anyone questioning the magnificence of the great Section Thirteen."

"Tell me, Doctor," Unus said, forming a steeple with his fingers, "what have we done to offend you?"

"This isn't the first time I have encountered Section Thirteen, but every meeting is characterised by your lust for power and willingness to tread on anyone to get it. Everything and Everyone is secondary to the great goals of the mighty Thirteen."

"Do you really think this is just about power, Doctor?" Unus asked patiently.

"Isn't it?"

"If all we wanted was to rule then we could have achieved our aims long ago."

The Doctor leaned forward. "Then why don't you enlighten me?"

* * * * *

"Tamara!"

Grae's scream was drowned out by the explosion that tore through the stage. She had arrived too late, delayed both by her imprisonment and then by her own unfamiliarity with the geography of London and now that she had finally arrived at Hyde Park, she was going to be forced to watch her best friend die all over again. This event – whatever it was – was being televised and the explosion had damaged one of the camera cranes. Tamara was positioned directly under it.

Grae rushed forward, moving through the crowds separating them like a hot knife through butter, but she knew she would not be in time. Tamara was too far away and there was...

There was a flash of light and Tamara vanished. The crane crashed into the space she had been just moments before while Tamara herself reappeared several feet away.

"Tamara!" Grae yelled, running to her side. "How did you do that?"

Tamara ignored her.

"Tamara!"

"She can't hear you." The ghostly voice was back. Grae tried to tune it out.

"Tamara, it's me. Grae." She reached out to her friend and was shocked when her hand passed right through her shoulder.

The ghost laughed. "Weren't expecting that, were you?"

"What's happening to me?" Grae asked. She looked at her hands. They were fading away and she could see the grass through them.

"Don't you know, Graekatziasa'asterus?"

"If I did, I wouldn't be asking." Grae was shouting at the sky, but no one else seemed to notice. She reached out for another member of the crowd, but again her hands could not find purchase. One woman, fleeing the explosion, ran straight through Grae and the experience sent a shiver down the young Time Lord's spine.

"It devours everything in its inexorable march, the living and the dead, animal, vegetable and mineral. And yet it hungers not, nor does it walk. To kill it is but to make it faster and, when all is said and done, it will be the end of all of us."

"I don't have time for riddles." Grae's coat was losing its opacity now.

"Grae, Grae, Grae, you disappoint me." The spectral voice was condescending now. "Yet Time is the answer and Time, my dear, has finally caught up with you."

* * * * *

The Doctor waited a full three minutes before running out of patience and going in search of Unus. The leader of the Thirteen was sitting in the co-pilot's seat listening to the radio.

"Anything good on?" the Doctor asked. "I doubt it. Art is about people expressing their own ideas and there's no place for other people's opinions in your world, is there, Unus?"

Unus looked up, slowly, his face ashen.

"Novem is dead."

"I'm sorry," the Doctor said.

"I thought you would be pleased. One less member of the Thirteen for you to worry about."

"I mourn any loss of life," the Doctor replied.

"How noble of you," Unus responded. "However, it appears that your fellow terrorists don't share your ideals. They planted a bomb at a rally Novem was attending. We're extremely fortunate that more lives weren't lost."

"I may not agree with their methods, Unus," the Doctor said, "but the fact that they are prepared to go to such extremes does tend to suggest they have some pretty serious grievances with the way you're running things."

"Before he joined us, Novem's name was Carl Garrett," Unus went on, seemingly ignoring the Doctor. "He had a wife and two children. Daughters. The eldest had just graduated from the local nursery when I met her. Very gifted child. He had to give them all up, of course. Members of the Thirteen can't have a life outside of the Section. For those of us without family, it's not such a difficult decision, but Carl was very torn up about it. He chose to accept the honour, however, because he believed that what we are doing is important, vital even. He wanted to be a part of that."

"I've met more dictators than I care to count, Unus. I've heard all the justifications going."

"Then let our actions speak for us. We've created a unified society. Can you imagine a world divided into different factions all with their own agendas? Naturally, some would be better off than others. The strong would prosper, the weak would wither and die or worse, suffer in poverty and ignorance and neglect. And there's no need for it. There is plenty of wealth to go around. No one need go hungry or be without shelter, not if there's someone to make sure that what we have is distributed fairly."

"That someone being you, I suppose?"

"Yes," Unus answered. "If you're expecting me to apologise for taking control then I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed, Doctor. I'm extremely proud of what we've done. We've eliminated poverty. Crime is negligible."

"Only because you lock people up for the most minor of offences and then throw away the key."

"We have a zero tolerance to crime. Criminals are not a productive part of society and we will treat them as such. And, as I said, the result is a world that is mostly crime free."

"With the notable exception being bombs at rallies?"

"That was a particularly tasteless jibe, Doctor." Unus' tone was scathing. "I expected better from you."

"I apologise, Unus, that was insensitive of me. However, the fact remains that there are some people who disagree strongly – violently, even – with the choices you've made."

"Such people are...misguided I suppose would be the word. They cling to the belief that the world would be a better place if individuals made their own decisions

rather than following the dictates of the Thirteen."

"I have to say that I would agree with them on that," the Doctor remarked.

"Would you?" Unus raised an eyebrow. "I can't think of anything more frightening than a world divided. Everyone with their own opinions, no consensus ever able to be reached. People using force to ensure their opinion is the one that takes precedence."

"Much as the Thirteen themselves have done," the Doctor pointed out.

"But not on the same scale, Doctor, not on the same scale. We nipped it in the bud before it became a cancer that would devour this world from the inside out. No World Wars, Doctor. No Somme, no Auschwitz, no Dresden or Hiroshima. Tell me that's a bad thing. Tell me we were wrong to strive for a world of harmony and peace and order."

"Hitler wanted much the same thing."

"But all of this is just a side issue, part of a much wider picture. Consider, Doctor, if a world divided would be able to stand strong against threats from without."

The Doctor leaned forward, intrigued in spite of himself. "What threats?"

Unus turned away and looked out of the window.

"We'll be landing soon. You should return to your seat and strap yourself in."

The Doctor turned to go, but paused at the cabin door.

"Yes?" Unus prompted. "Was there something else?"

"Just one more question," the Doctor replied. "If the World Wars never happened, how is it that you know so much about them?"

* * * * *

"You didn't really think that you'd got away with it, did you?" the spectral voice continued, by turns both mocking and sympathetic. "Gallifrey and all the other Time Lords get excised from existence and yet somehow you and your precious Doctor are spared? Oh, please. It's not very likely, is it?"

Grae was sitting on the grass in the park, her arms wrapped round her legs and her knees tucked under her chin. She could no longer feel the dampness of the grass or the wind on her face. The colour had faded from her skin and her hair and her clothes and she felt no more substantial than the clouds that scudded through the grey sky overhead.

"Just...just tell me what's happening to me," she asked. "Please. Am I...am I dying?"

"Dying? No, no you're not dying, my dear child. You were never born so how can you die?"

"You're saying I can't exist, is that it? I'm a paradox."

It was getting dark now. Was that night creeping in or something else, something more sinister and permanent?

"Just so," the ghost replied, "and Time does so dislike an impossibility. She's sweeping up all the loose ends, spring-cleaning her universe and making sure it's

ready for visitors. You and your friend the Doctor were close to the eye of the storm so you were protected for a while, but Time was bound to catch up with you sooner or later. Not even a Time Lord can defy her forever."

"So this is the end, is it?" Grae asked. Her world was now restricted to a patch of grass maybe two metres square. Everything else was blackness. She wiped a hand across her nose. "And I never got to say goodbye."

"I never said it had to be the end, did I?" the ghost replied. The voice was no longer coming from all around her. Instead it was focussed on a point directly ahead, a pinprick of light in the darkness. "Why do you think I'm here?"

The light was taking on a definite shape now, that of a winged figure. As it grew closed, Grae had to raise a hand to shield her eyes from the light's intensity.

"There's a place," the figure told her, "a place outside of this universe, a place where Time can't find you, a place where victims of the type of accident you've suffered can continue to exist. I'm here to take you there, if you want to go."

"And what happens if I say no?"

The figure snapped his fingers. "Then it's lights out. Permanently."

He vanished and Grae found herself suddenly plunged into total darkness.

"Wait!" she cried out in panic. "Don't leave me here. Not alone in the dark."

The figure reappeared as instantly as he had vanished.

"Only kidding," he laughed. The figure extended a hand. "So what's it going to be, Grae? Are you coming with me?"

"Is that where the other Time Lords went?"

The figure nodded. "We managed to rescue them in time, if you'll excuse the pun. There's a little corner of home just waiting for you."

"Then I guess there isn't really a choice," Grae replied, taking the figure's hand in hers, surprised at how warm it was.

"I knew you'd see it our way, Grae."

He seemed to glow even more brightly than before and his light ate away at the dark, revealing a gothic cloister that seemed to stretch off to infinity in both directions. Grae looked down at her hands, relieved to see colour and substance flooding back into them.

"How's it feel to be a real person again?" the figure asked.

"It feels wonderful," Grae replied honestly. "I don't know how to thank you... You never did tell me your name, did you?"

"Thanks are unnecessary, my lady," the figure replied, executing a courtly bow, "and as for my name, I am Jophiel of the Elohim and I bid you welcome to the Interstitial Zone."

* * * * *

The hot desert sun was beating down on the tarmac and the Doctor had retrieved a pair of sunglasses from his waistcoat pocket and put them on to shield his eyes from the glare. It occurred to him that in this timeline, the manufacturer of these glasses did not exist and they were as much of a paradox as he was himself.

"Where are we anyway?" he asked Unus as they strode across the runway towards a series of low, prefabricated buildings. "Somewhere in the Middle East? Syria perhaps?"

"Very good, Doctor, very close," Unus replied without sarcasm. "We're actually in Iraq, not far from the ancient city of Eridu. That's to be our launch site."

"Launch site?" the Doctor repeated. "Going somewhere are we?"

"Indeed."

"Anywhere special."

"You could say that, Doctor. You might even say it was out of this world."

"Sounds fascinating." As the buildings drew closer, the Doctor noticed a small group of people waiting for them. "I take it this has something do with the 'wider picture' you're so keen on?"

"It's the very reason that the Thirteen exists," Unus replied.

"And when are you going to tell me what the reason is, Unus?" the Doctor asked. "You promised to enlighten me and yet all I have are more questions. Chief among them, I'd like to know how this timeline can exist in the first place?"

"Perhaps I can explain that, Doctor," a woman offered as she stepped forward to meet them.

"Ah, Duae," Unus greeted her, "so good of you to join us."

The Doctor simply stared at the small blonde woman.

"I really don't know what to say," he finally confessed.

"The Doctor at a loss for words? That must be a first," Dr Taryn Fischer replied.

Act Four – Break On Through (To The Other Side)

At first, Taryn had tried to count the bodies, but after the fifty-seventh child she decided that she could not bear it anymore. The ziggurat had, mostly, survived the flood, but the rest of the city buildings were mostly wooden constructions, which had been smashed to splinters by the wall of water. Taryn picked her way through the debris and floating corpses clinging on to the hope that somewhere she would find someone still alive. She had been searching for hours now without success. Flies were already buzzing around the bodies that were decomposing in the heat.

She had found the jaguar hide cloak that Nurkubi the farmer had made for her washed up among the rubble. Nurkubi himself was out there somewhere. He had betrayed his priest and spared her life and Taryn had repaid him by bringing *this* down on his city. She wondered if he had died cursing her name. She could not wear the cloak. Shemjaza had called upon an energy deep within him to heal the worst of her burns, but her skin was still blistered and raw and even the gentle breeze sent needles of pain lancing deep into her. Instead, she carried the cloak with her as she continued her search. The garment was important to her, though she could not have said why.

Finally, night fell and Taryn returned to the ziggurat. Shemjaza was waiting for her at the entrance.

"I'm not going to find anybody, am I?" Taryn asked.

"If there was anyone alive, I would be able to sense them," Shemjaza replied.

"I know," Taryn said, "but I still want to look for myself. I feel I owe them that much. I'll work my way through the south side of the city tomorrow."

"I understand," Shemjaza said. "We will stay as long as you need, but for now we both need our rest."

Taryn thought of lying down on her ruined flesh and knew that the pain would keep her awake all night.

"I think I'll just sit out here for a while, if it's all the same to you."

Shemjaza seemed to guess her meaning. "In the morning, when I am rested, I will see if I cannot heal more of the damage Zaphiel did to you."

Taryn offered him a weak smile of thanks. "Shemjaza, you said that there were people who wanted to destroy us. You meant the Elohim, didn't you? Was that what you were warning me about?"

"I meant the Elohim, yes, but not this," Shemjaza responded. "The Elohim have plans for humanity, plans that will take many thousands of years to reach fruition. They only came here, now, to prevent myself and my colleagues from interfering. Compared to what they will do, this was nothing and it would not have happened had I stayed away."

"You mustn't blame yourself."

"I don't, I blame them."

"So they'll be back, is that what you're saying?"

"Yes, they will come back to wipe the slate clean."

"Then we've got to do something," Taryn insisted. "All these people... We... *I* can't let their deaths be in vain."

"We will do something, Taryn Fischer," Shemjaza assured her. "We will continue the work I started here. We will prepare humanity for the Elohim's return and they will not find us so defenceless a second time. Now get some rest. I will see you in the morning."

Taryn bade him goodnight and watched him disappear inside the ziggurat. Then she turned her attention to the stars illuminating the sky.

"You know," she whispered, "I don't know whether or not I believe in you. Not so long ago, I was certain you didn't exist, but after the things I've seen here I'm keeping a more open mind. And, well, if there is some kind of divine presence watching over the universe then I guess I need to talk to you."

Taryn bowed her head and knotted her hands together.

"I was sure you couldn't exist because I look at the horror out in the universe and the terrors human beings inflict on one another and I'd ask myself why, if there was a divine being, didn't he just sweep down and do something about it? Why didn't he put an end to all the pain and the suffering and the misery? I used to pray to you, you know? Do you remember that? I remember being fourteen and kneeling by the side of my bed. I would beg for you and come and set things to right, but you never did and I decided that, if there was a god, it wasn't one I wanted to believe in anymore."

"But then I met Shemjaza. I suppose you know all this, being omniscient and everything and I don't mean to bore you with it, but I need to put this in some kind of order *I* can understand. Does that make sense? Of course it does. What am I saying; everything makes sense to you. So anyway, Shemjaza isn't like anyone I've ever met before. I really think he just wants to help people because it's the right thing to do. And he's got the power to do something about it. And... and I believe in him. Isn't that funny? I got to wondering, I'd been waiting for you to come on down and set the world to rights and I'm thinking that maybe Shemjaza is you doing just that. We've got a real chance to start over and do things properly this time round and I guess what I want to say, assuming that you're there and that you're even listening, is please, don't let us screw it up this time."

* * * * *

It took them three days to walk to the city of Uruk. While Taryn had been examining the dead, Shemjaza had been salvaging supplies for their journey. Each morning, he had used his powers to heal Taryn a little bit more and each evening they set up camp and he wrapped Taryn up in his wings to keep her warm.

They approached the city along the banks of the River Euphrates, entering via the docks. Shemjaza concealed his inhuman appearance beneath a heavy cloak, but they both knew that that would not stand up to heavy scrutiny so they took refuge within a partially constructed warehouse.

"I cannot go out into the city," Shemjaza said, "not without attracting too much attention. I will stay here and wait for you to return."

"What is it you want me to do?" Taryn asked.

"Find individuals of like mind to ourselves," Shemjaza replied. "The Grigori are no more so we must form a new council to spread the word. Find them for me, Taryn Fischer."

"I'll do my best."

"I know you will, Taryn." Shemjaza sunk back into the shadows, rested his head on his chest and appeared to go to sleep.

With a final concerned look back at him, Taryn left the warehouse and wandered into the city streets. The docks were one huge market. Goods were unloaded from the barges, merchants snapped them up at the quayside and then they were sold on stalls running the length of this central arcade. Taryn eyed up salted meats, fresh fish, spices, fine cloths, pottery and many other items as she made her way through the market, being jostled on all sides by curious shoppers. Vendors loudly hawked their wares while musicians sat in the dusty street playing their pipes in return for a handful of coins. Taryn tried to pay attention to the people she passed, to get a sense as to whether there was a great leader among them, someone who could help Shemjaza change the world, but she simply seemed to be awash in a sea of interchangeable faces.

The crowds parted and Taryn realised that she had arrived back at the docks. A barge had just arrived and crates containing its cargo were being unloaded. A

man in fine robes, and with his dark hair and beard well-oiled, was examining the crates and making notes on a clay tablet with a stylus. The captain of the barge was arguing with him and Taryn stepped closer so that she could eavesdrop on their conversation.

"Sin-kashid," the captain was saying, "surely we can come to some mutually profitable arrangement?"

He rubbed his thumb against the first two fingers of his right hand suggestively.

"Captain Pirhum, I do hope you're not attempting to bribe a city official." Sin-kashid did not even deign to look up from his note taking.

"Who said anything about a bribe." Pirhum spread his broad arms wide. "I'm talking about a gift for a good friend."

"I am not your friend, Pirhum."

The captain scowled. "Now listen here, you snivelling tax-collector, all I want is to be treated fairly..."

"And you will be treated fairly," Sin-kashid replied. "What you want is to be given special treatment and that's not going to happen. Not on my watch."

"Then maybe I should just take my goods elsewhere, eh?" Pirhum suggested.

"Be my guest," Sin-kashid replied with disinterest. "Be advised, however, that you won't be able to sell these wares anywhere within city walls without my seal."

"Why you..." Pirhum darted forward and grabbed Sin-kashid by the hair. He produced a bronze dagger from within the folds of his tunic and pressed it against the tax-collector's throat. The blade was crude, but very, very sharp.

"Now listen here, Sin-kashid," Pirhum snarled, "you're going to stamp these crates with your seal and you're also going to mark them at the price I want."

Sin-kashid recoiled from the captain's foul breath. "I will do no such thing. Everyone who wishes to sell their goods in Uruk gets treated the same, equally and fairly. Kill me if you want, but you will not make me compromise my principles."

"A man of honour, eh?" Pirhum sneered. "Honour doesn't put bread on the table. Honour wouldn't but my spit."

As if to illustrate his point, Pirhum expectorated on the floor at Sin-kashid's feet.

Taryn had heard enough. She glanced around for a weapon and her eyes alighted on an oar sticking out from beneath an upturned boat on the quayside.

"The punishment for murdering a city official is death, Pirhum," Sin-kashid warned.

Pirhum's eyes sparkled with psychotic glee. "Only if I get caught."

Taryn clocked him around the back of the head with the blade of the oar and his legs gave way under him. Sin-kashid kicked the captain for good measure, then turned to Taryn.

"I owe you my life," he said. "I don't recall seeing you around here before."

"My name is Taryn and I've only recently arrived in the city," Taryn explained.

"Well, it is lucky for me that you arrived when you did."

"Lucky for both of us," Taryn replied. "I was impressed with what you said, about treating everyone equally."

"It's the only way," Sin-kashid agreed. "Any other method leads to division and conflict."

"I have a friend who would like to speak to you about just that," Taryn said. "He's just this way."

"I shouldn't really," Sin-kashid said, obviously torn between doing his duty and going to see whatever this attractive woman had to show him.

"We won't be long," Taryn assured him. "We won't be long and I promise that it will be worth your while."

Sin-kashid caved and allowed himself to be led into the warehouse.

"Shemjaza," Taryn called, "I think I've found someone for you."

Shemjaza stepped out of the shadows and Sin-kashid recoiled in horror.

"What manner of demon are you?"

"Don't be afraid." Taryn put a hand on his arm. "He's not a demon. He's a friend."

"And I would very much like to be your friend as well, if Taryn thinks well of you."

"His name's Sin-kashid," Taryn explained. "I heard him speak out on the docks. He believes in fairness and equality and was willing to die rather than compromise those beliefs."

"Was he indeed? Tell me, Sin-kashid, how would you like to help forge a better world?"

* * * * *

A month passed during which time they travelled the region recruiting new members to their cause. Not everyone was keen on this, however. Tabni-ishtar had been due to marry Prince Zummabu of Larsa in a ceremony arranged years previously by their respective families. Given the choice, Tabni-ishtar had eagerly agreed to do something to make a difference in the world rather than marry a boy barely past puberty and spend the rest of her days raising his children. Her family had not seen it that way so the fourteen of them, Shemjaza and his thirteen disciples, were now camped several miles outside of the city safe from Larsa's guards.

"Thirteen," Shemjaza said, scanning the faces around the campfire. "It is a good number. You have all given up your old lives to follow my dream and I thank you for it. It cannot have been easy for you."

"Actually, it can," Sin-kashid said. "We're not following your dream."

"We're following ours," Tabni-ishtar agreed.

"And in that I can see that I have chosen wisely," Shemjaza said. "You shall be my new brotherhood, the Brotherhood of Thirteen. I shall teach you what I know and you in turn will teach others and together we shall unify this world, *your* world."

A great storm is coming. It will not break in your lifetimes or in your children's lifetimes or even in those of your children's children, but it will come. When it does, I know that the human race will be ready because they will have been forged that way by the Brotherhood of Thirteen, both those around this fire and the successors that you will recruit and train to continue the good work when we are nothing but dust in the wind. Our physical bodies may fail, but our legacy will live on. I look around and I see the saviours of the human race. I could not be more proud."

Tabni-ishtar raised a slender hand. Bangles sparkled on her wrist. "I think I speak for all of us here when I say that we're grateful to you for giving us this opportunity."

There was a general murmur of agreement around the campfire.

"I am glad," Shemjaza said. "Now, let us rest. Our work begins in earnest on the morrow."

Some time later, Taryn paced beneath the moonlight. Her scars were almost completely healed now, but still she could not sleep.

"What troubles you, Taryn Fischer?"

Taryn started. "Shemjaza. I didn't hear you approach."

"My apologies. I did not mean to startle you," Shemjaza replied. "You should be resting."

"I can't sleep."

"Is something preying on your mind, Taryn? A burden shared is a burden halved."

"Thank you, Shemjaza. I appreciate the thought. It's just all this, the Thirteen business, it's bringing back memories."

"Bad memories."

Taryn nodded. "Do you remember I told you about the man I travelled with?"

"The Doctor?" Shemjaza offered.

"Yes, the Doctor. When I joined his crew, he had just dispatched a combined force of the Time Lords and the Terran Colony Alliance to destroy an organisation called Section Thirteen."

"And you believe this Section Thirteen may be a future incarnation of our Brotherhood?" Shemjaza suggested.

"The Doctor does not understand what we are trying to achieve. He's going to undo all our good work."

"Not necessarily, Taryn Fischer," Shemjaza replied. "We simply leave a message for a descendent warning them of the attack. That way, they can be prepared to meet it. Of course, I am assuming that you want the attack to be stopped. You do believe in what we are doing, don't you, Taryn?"

"Yes, Shemjaza, I do," Taryn said determinedly. "I believe in it with all my heart."

* * * * *

"Three days later, Unus arrived in a timeship and brought Shemjaza and myself

back to the present day," Taryn concluded.

The Doctor massaged the bridge of his nose with his hand. He was sitting at a table with Taryn – or should he be calling her Duae now? – and Unus. Shemjaza was standing. Shemjaza intrigued the Doctor; he was of a race he had never come across before. However, he had enough mysteries demanding his attention as it was.

"So, let me see if I've got this straight. You," – the Doctor pointed at Unus – "are from the original timeline, the one that Taryn and I originate from. You got Taryn's message warning you of my plans and were able to go back in time and change things."

"In very simplified terms, yes," Unus confirmed. "We – that is the Thirteen and I – laid a trap for Commander Poole and her troops. Once we realised we had captured a Time Lord force, however, we knew that we could turn it to our advantage."

"You turned the Time Lords own weapons against them," the Doctor deduced. "The captured TARDISes would enable you to get past the transduction barrier and into the Capitol."

"We've had time travel capability for some time. By we, I mean the original Thirteen." Unus paused. "Tell me, Doctor, as one time traveller to another, do you have as much trouble with tenses as I do?"

"Occupational hazard," the Doctor consoled him.

"Yes, I suppose it must be. But getting back to the point at hand, we could never take full advantage of our time technology because your people would always be one step ahead of us, policing the space-time continuum. Well, naturally, once we had control of Gallifrey and your more advanced time technology, we decided to get rid of that problem once and for all."

"You made sure that the Time Lords could never interfere by arranging things so that they never existed."

"It was a relatively simple matter to go back to when your solar system was being formed, Doctor, and destroy that which would one day have become Gallifrey."

The Doctor was furious. "You're talking about the murder of billions!"

"It was a necessary evil."

"Oh yes, that's always your excuse, isn't it, Unus. It was necessary." The Doctor rounded on Taryn. "And I can't believe that you would be a party to this. I trusted you."

"I didn't know that he was going to do that," Taryn shot back.

"Well that makes it all right then."

"But," Taryn continued icily, "I'm not sure that I disagree with him."

"What?!" The Doctor exploded. "You would condone genocide on such a scale?!"

The Doctor slammed his fist down on to the table or rather he would have done had not his hand passed straight through the surface.

"Careful, Doctor," Unus warned. "It would seem that you are substantially less than the man you once were."

"Yes, Taryn," the Doctor agreed venomously, "I'm fading away. Thanks to you, soon there will be nothing left of me. Grae may have already disappeared completely. Do you remember Grae? Your friend?"

"My fellow crewmember," Taryn corrected, her voice cold and calm. "Doctor, the future of the human race is at stake. If I have to choose between my species or yours it's not as difficult a choice as you would obviously like to believe."

"There should have been another way," the Doctor said, his anger draining away.

"Yes, Doctor, in a perfect universe there would have been," Unus agreed, "but we both know that this is far from a perfect universe."

The Doctor released a long, slow breath. "So what happens now?"

"Well, thanks to Duae here, we've been able to move our timetable forward substantially," Unus replied. "Before, the plan was to guide the human race through little nudges here and there to make sure that they were ready when the Elohim finally attacked. However, now that we have unlimited time travel, we've been able to mould the human race more directly. We've already achieved the unity we've been striving for so now it's time to take the fight to our enemy."

"We are going to rescue my people, Doctor," Shemjaza said.

"I wondered when you were going to join the conversation, Shemjaza," the Doctor said. "You know, I'm afraid I don't recognize your species."

"You would not, Doctor. We are not native to this universe."

"I see."

"The Elohim have trapped the other Grigori in that space between our two universes, in the minute gap that separates one false vacuum from another."

"I know the theory, Shemjaza," the Doctor replied. "Multiple big bangs creating multiple universe, each with different physical laws, each contained within its own 'bubble'. These universes could exist separated by mere millimetres in one of the higher dimensions, but, if there theory is to be believed, there should be no way to perceive another universe from within one and no way to cross from one to another."

"And theories are all very well, Doctor," Shemjaza replied, "until they are disproved by facts. There is a bridge between the universes. The Elohim discovered it and they named it the Interstitial Zone. It is via that bridge that I came to be among you today."

"A fact for which we are extremely grateful, Shemjaza," Unus said.

Shemjaza inclined his head in silent acknowledgement. "The Interstitial Zone is not merely a bridge, however. Its dimensions are near infinite and the Elohim have taken to using it as a prison for the discarded results of their experiments. We will find the Grigori there."

"And once we have freed the Grigori, we will use the bridge to cross over into the Elohim's universe and make sure they can never threaten the human race again," Unus added.

"That still doesn't quite answer the question of how we get to this Interstitial Zone in the first place," the Doctor pointed out.

"Have you had a chance to do much stargazing since you arrived, Doctor?" Unus asked. "You may have notice that the constellations look a little different than you remember."

"The Thirteen have spent the last three decades building and launching a series of giant satellites that now orbit between Earth and the moon," Taryn continued.

"Very industrious, I'm sure," the Doctor said, "but what's it all for?"

Shemjaza took up the conversation. "There is a theory that all the physical laws in the universe can be expressed as a single equation."

"Humans call it the Unified Field Theory," the Doctor replied. "I've always felt it was an attempt to simplify a concept that was beautiful in its complexity."

"Nevertheless, the laws of your universe can be expressed by a number of equations."

"And the satellites?"

"By rewriting those equations into the fabric of the universe we can change those laws."

"Change them? Are you out of your mind?"

"Have no fear, Doctor," Shemjaza reassured him. "Your universe is very resilient and we can only shift those laws so far and for so long. It is enough, however, to grant us access to the Interstitial Zone."

"We have a fleet of shuttles ready to launch from sites around the globe within the next thirty-six hours. The flagship will launch from where Eridu once stood, at Duae's request."

"I never had you down as the sentimental type, Taryn," the Doctor commented.

"It's been a long time since I last saw you, Doctor. A lot has changed."

"So I'm beginning to realise," the Doctor muttered darkly.

Unus leaned back in his chair.

"Well, now you know our plans," he said. "All that remains is to decide what to do with you."

"You have committed genocide on an almost unparalleled scale, you have shown wilful disregard for the laws of time and have enslaved the population of an entire planet. I despise you and your precious Thirteen with every fibre of my being. However, you have quite impressively cut off my options and, if I am to save the human race, it would appear that the only way I can do that is at your side."

"You'll help us?" Taryn asked.

"Unus tells me that one of your number was killed earlier today. Novem, wasn't it? I take it that means there's a vacancy in your little brotherhood?"

"Are you proposing that you join the Thirteen, Doctor?" Unus inquired.

The Doctor grinned. "I like to think of it as a necessary evil."

* * * * *

"Hi, Julie. What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?"

Julie looked up at the new arrival who grinned broadly at her, showing gleaming white teeth.

"Hi, um, John," Julie stammered, reading off the name badge on his lapel. "I haven't seen you around here before."

"I just got transferred," 'John' replied, sliding into the seat next to her. "I think it was meant to be some kind of punishment, but they obviously hadn't thought about the company I'd be keeping."

Julie blushed and looked away.

"Oh, grow up, Isherwood." Orwell's voice crackled through the microphone in 'John's' ear. "Do you even know what covert means?"

Tamara and Orwell were sitting in the waiting room of the airport terminal, watching the proceedings on Orwell's laptop. Morrison and Losey were browsing the shops, playing father and daughter. Tamara fought down the urge to look up and see where exactly they were.

The five of them needed to get to Iraq if they were going to disrupt the launch. Unfortunately for them, all flights were strictly controlled and the Thirteen were not just going to let them onboard. That was why Isherwood was impersonating an immigration officer.

"Can I help it if I enjoy my work," Isherwood told Orwell.

"What was that, John?" Julie asked as she checked and stamped another passengers paperwork.

"I just said that I think I'm going to enjoy my work, Julie. So long as you're here."

Orwell looked to Tamara with a pained expression. "Please get phase two underway before he makes me lose my lunch."

Tamara took a mobile phone from her bag.

The phone on the desk rang and Isherwood picked it up.

"It's for you," he said, handing the phone to Julie. The tone of his voice warned her that it was bad news. She listened while the woman on the other end of the line explained the situation, the colour draining from her face as she did so.

"It's my mother," she told Isherwood when she put the phone down. "She's been rushed to hospital."

Isherwood looked at the growing queue of passengers and then back to Julie.

"Listen, if you want to go, I can cover. Probably."

"I couldn't just leave you here, John."

"Go," Isherwood insisted. "Family is important. The Thirteen say so, right. I'll be fine."

"Well, if you're sure." Julie practically ran from the room.

"I feel really bad about doing that to her," Tamara said to Orwell as they joined the queue leading up to the immigration desk. She could see Morrison and Losey several places ahead of them.

"Don't," Orwell told her. "Think of how thrilled she'll be when she finds out her mum's really okay."

"I guess."

Morrison and Losey had reached the desk.

"What's the nature of your trip?" he asked as he added an official stamp to their documentation.

"Terrorism," Losey replied.

"Well I hope that works out for you, ma'am," Isherwood said as he handed back her papers. "Have a nice flight."

"I just love it when a plan comes together," Morrison said with a smile as they strode out of the immigration office and onto the waiting aeroplane.

* * * * *

The Doctor walked with Taryn as twilight coloured the sky like a bruise. The wind tugged playfully at Taryn's hair. She wore it loose now, the Doctor noted, and not pinned up as he remembered it. Another change. Neither one of them had asked the other to join them, but they had felt drawn together anyway, separated now only by an uncomfortable silence. The Doctor broke it first.

"Was it worth it?" he asked.

"Was what worth it?" Taryn replied. She was only half-listening to the Doctor. She could see what remained of the Temple of Apsu from here and she was remembering other nights spent out in this desert under the stars.

"Well, there can't be many people who set in motion a plan on this scale and live to see it come to fruition," the Doctor continued. "Is it what you expected?"

"The fire was here," Taryn said, drawing a circle in the dust with the toe of her boot. "Here or hereabouts. We sat round it that first night and we brought with us our dreams of a better future. No, this isn't the world I thought we were making."

"Having second thoughts?"

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, Doctor? Well, sorry to disappoint you, but given the choice I would do it again in a heartbeat. You didn't see what the Elohim did. You didn't force yourself to look into the eyes of every man, woman and child who died that day. And that was just one city. Imagine what it's going to be like next time."

"So you're motivated by what? Fear? Anger? Vengeance?"

"Justice," Taryn replied. "Someone has to make them pay for what they've done. Someone has to make sure that there's order to the universe."

"And does your desire to make them pay justify taking away the freedoms of everyone on this planet?" the Doctor asked.

"We feed the hungry, Doctor," Taryn said. "We consolidate the world's resources and we divide them equally and, as a result, no one needs to go without food or power or shelter or clothing or medical treatment or suffer all the million other crimes humanity inflicts on itself in your precious timeline. And in return, yes they have to give up some freedom, but I believe that, given the choice, this is what most people would have wanted."

"But the point is, Taryn, that you didn't give them that choice," the Doctor

replied.

A plane passed overhead on its descent to the airport.

"That will be Tria," Taryn explained. "We should get back. Unus will want to convene a council of war."

* * * * *

Tamara was running down a city street. Gleaming skyscrapers towered above her and cars flew through the air over her head. Someone was shouting at her to stop. Several someones. A blaster bolt zinged past her ear and Tamara ducked into an alleyway. Was that burning hair she could smell? She reached for an unmarked door and, as she did so, she noticed the number thirteen, in roman numerals, tattooed on the back of her hand.

The scene shifted. She was in the centre of a circular room illuminated by deep red light. A horseshoe shaped platform ran round the edge of the room and sitting on that platform were thirteen hooded figures. The figure at the exact centre rose to his feet and extended one long bony finger in her direction like the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come.

"Welcome, Tamara Scott, to Section Thirteen."

Another blink, another transition. She was in a restaurant kitchen in Bangkok. Kitchen staff worked furiously, shouting instructions and insults at one another and practically juggling hot food as they strove to prepare it as quickly as possible. Tamara pushed one man out of the way and focussed her attention on the short chef stirring the soup.

"Wang Chen?" Tamara asked.

"Who is asking?" the chef replied.

"Section Thirteen send their regards."

"Who?" the chef looked puzzled. "What is this section thirteen? Who are you and what do you want?"

"We know of your hobby. I'm here to tell you that your theories are correct. The fuel cell would work. Unfortunately, this doesn't suit the sections desires."

"I don't know what you're talking about." The chef backed away. "Help! Help!"

Tamara shot him between the eyes.

Blink.

There was blood on her hands. She was kneeling on the grass outside the nursery and the body of the guard lay at her feet.

"Why?" he asked, lips pulled back from his teeth. "What did I ever do to you?"

There was so much blood. How could there be so much blood? It was all over her hands and forearms and it dripped down onto the grass to form a puddle, a puddle in the shape of the number thirteen.

Then there was nothing but white. Tamara was lying on her back. She was strapped in place, so tightly that she could not even twitch. There was a whirring coming from somewhere above her. Masked figures wandered in and out of the

periphery of her vision.

"Just remember that you chose this," a voice drifted to her.

The whirring was getting louder and Tamara could see a drill bit descending from the ceiling and it was going to strike her right between the eyes and she could feel it tearing at her flesh and she screamed and...

* * * * *

Tamara woke up, gasping for air.

"Are you all right?" Orwell asked, leaning over the armrest that separated them.

It took Tamara a moment to realise where she was.

"Just a bad dream," she told Orwell. "Nothing to get worked up about."

"Well, if you're sure," Orwell said before returning to his book.

* * * * *

Tamara got another shock as she disembarked the plane.

"Is that, Tria?" she hissed to Orwell.

"Yeah, and that's Quinque over there, I think," Orwell replied, his voice at normal volume.

"Don't stare at them, Orwell," Tamara warned. "What if they see you?"

"Tamara, there are two members of the Thirteen over there. We'd stand out more if we weren't staring. Come on, let's go and join Morrison and Los at the hotel.

The hotel was only a short walk from the airport. Morrison had already collected their room keys so Orwell and Tamara took the lift straight up to the sixth floor. The door was ajar so they went straight in. Morrison was standing by the window the looked out over the airport.

"Where's Losey?" Orwell asked.

Losey kicked the door closed and stepped out from behind it. She was cradling a gun.

"How did you get that through security?" Tamara said.

Losey grimaced. "You don't want to know."

"Isherwood will be joining us later," Morrison supplied. "He has some personal business to take care of."

"This personal business wouldn't be a certain airport employee named Julie, would it?" Orwell suggested.

"Now there's an image I didn't need," Losey said.

"I can do better than that," Orwell told her. "If he's still wearing his camera I can give you streaming video."

"If we can stay on topic, people," Morrison interrupted, "the delay gives us the opportunity to scout out the objective."

"I'm game," Tamara offered. "I could do with stretching my legs after the flight."

"No, Tamara, I want Losey and Orwell to handle the recon," Morrison replied. "I have something else in mind for you."

"Oh, what's that?"

"You said that Sally's father is stationed here?"

Tamara nodded. Sally herself was back in England, lodging with one of Morrison's associates. It broke Tamara's heart to be parted from her again, but at least she knew that her daughter was safe.

"I want you to go talk to him," Morrison continued. "Discreetly. Find out what's really going on here."

"What makes you think he'll be willing to talk to me?"

"Have you looked in the mirror lately?" Orwell asked. Losey kicked him in the shin. "Ow! Hey, I was only saying. That really hurt."

Losey turned to Tamara and shrugged.

* * * * *

"Who is he?" Tria yelled across the council chamber.

"The Doctor will be our new Novem," Unus explained, "and I would remind you to wait your turn to be heard. We have yet to hear Duae's report on the readiness of our fleet."

Tria was undeterred. "You appointed a stranger to the council without consulting us. We should have voted on this."

"I lead the Thirteen, Tria," Unus replied. "I do not need you to sanction all my decisions. It is my right to act. Duae vouches for the Doctor also."

"Well that makes sense," Tria sneered. "We accepted her when she appeared from nowhere, why shouldn't we accept him too?"

"Do you also doubt me, Tria?" Shemjaza asked. Officially, he was not a part of the council and he stood away from the meeting table.

"Oh now, my lord, Shemjaza, I would not presume." Tria bowed low.

"Taryn Fischer, the woman you now call Duae, was my first disciple, long before anyone else seated at the table. She alone of those assembled here did I choose personally to be part of my Brotherhood of Thirteen. The rest of you would do well to remember that."

"What's the matter, Tria?" The Doctor asked. "Surely you didn't really expect to have a voice here. The rest of your people don't."

"Doctor," Unus warned, "might I point out that as Novem your time to speak falls well behind Tria's."

"My apologies, Unus," the Doctor said, "I am still unfamiliar with council protocol."

"Apology accepted, Novem. Now, if we can get back to business..."

The meeting rumbled on with little further disagreement and much discussion over the arrangements for the launch and the disposition of troops. Coordinating so many shuttles and troops over these distances was a vast undertaking and even the Doctor had to admit that he was impressed. Finally, The council was

dismissed.

"Tria, stay and talk a while," Unus instructed her as the others filed out of the council room.

"Yes, Unus?"

"You don't think much of Novem, do you?"

"We are not seriously going through with this charade, are we?" Tria perched on the edge of the round table. "This Doctor is not one of us. He's an anarchist. I can practically smell it on him."

"He is also useful, if all the tales Duae has shared are to be believed. We do not have time to find a proper replacement for Novem before we leave and the Doctor's insights may prove invaluable once we arrive at our destination. You did not hear him discussing the possibilities with Shemjaza. We have only theorised about the Interstitial Zone and what lies beyond, but the Doctor seems to *understand* it."

"He's dangerous," Tria countered. "There are enough risks implicit in this mission without us dragging along problems of our own."

"If it makes you feel any better, my dear Tria, the Doctor isn't long for this world," Unus said. "He does not belong in this universe and the universe is reminding him of it. He is gradually coming apart at the seams."

"Not soon enough, though."

"Which is why I am relying on you to keep an eye on him for me and, if he becomes a danger, to take appropriate action."

"Appropriate action, Unus? Now whatever do you mean by that?"

"You know exactly what I mean, Tria."

"So there's no need to be coy, is there? You want me to kill him, don't you? Go on, say it."

"Tria..."

"Is the idea so distasteful to you, Unus? Is that why you want to pass the job to someone else? Don't you have the stomach for this fight anymore?"

"I will do whatever is necessary for the success of the Thirteen," Unus snapped back. "Just because I don't like some aspects of our work does not mean that I am any less committed to the cause."

"There's no need to excite yourself, Unus," Tria purred. "I'll be your assassin, if that's what you want. And, as far as the Doctor's concerned, I *will* take pleasure in my work."

* * * * *

Major Jason Winters had an office in the long, squat building at the far end of the camp. Tamara had charmed this information out of a new recruit, eager to please his boss and, by association, the mother of his child. The recruit had even escorted her to the office and let her in so that she could surprise the major.

Tamara felt a pang of guilt as she started to search through Jason's files. They had been very much in love not so long ago. Perhaps they still were, though

Tamara did not know what to think anymore. How much of her thoughts came from her and how much had been programmed in by the Thirteen. Nevertheless, she could not help but feel that she was betraying Jason's confidence.

"You don't have to do this," Losey had told her before setting off on her own mission. "Just because it's Morrison's plan doesn't mean it's a good idea."

"Thanks for the concern," Tamara had replied, "but I'll be fine."

"I just don't want to see you end up like Huxley," Losey told her.

"People keep mentioning that name," Tamara said. "Who was he?"

Losey had looked down at her feet. "Doesn't matter."

"It obviously matters to you, Losey..."

"Just drop it, okay!"

So Tamara had dropped the subject.

Orwell had shown her how to bypass the security on Jason's computer and now she was trawling through his e-mail. She was so engrossed that she did not hear the door open.

"Tamara?" Jason's mouth fell open. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to see you, Jason," Tamara replied, standing up.

"But how? The Thirteen would never allow..."

"Shh." Tamara put a finger on his lips. "The Thirteen know what you're about to do. They know you might not come back. Don't you think they'd want you to spend one last night with your loved ones?"

"What are you saying, Tamara?" Jason was torn between shock and anticipation.

"I'm saying, why don't we go somewhere a bit more comfortable?"

* * * * *

"I still say we should go look for her," Losey insisted. She was sitting on the edge of the bed.

"And I say that I won't risk it," Morrison replied.

"It's our fault she's in trouble in the first place," Isherwood called from the bathroom. He had only just arrived and was in the process of changing into some fresh clothes.

"We don't know that she's in trouble," Orwell pointed out. Morrison and Losey glared at him and he could even feel Isherwood's eyes boring into him through the bathroom wall. "I'm only saying. So she didn't come back last night. That doesn't necessarily mean..."

Losey shook her head pityingly and turned back to Morrison.

"I'm going to find her."

"Losey, it's too dangerous. I forbid it."

"Like you forbade us to go and help Huxley?" Losey spat. "Anyway, I wasn't asking you, I was telling."

There was a knock at the door.

"Well, who's going to answer it?" Orwell hissed after a pause.

Losey pointed at him then took up her position behind the door. Cautiously, Orwell eased it open.

"Tamara!" His mouth was agape.

"Tamara?" Losey echoed.

"Morning," Tamara said. "Sorry I'm late. Is there any coffee?"

"Where have you been, Tamara?" Morrison asked.

"Talking with Jason. Like you asked."

"All night?" Orwell commented. "Must have been some conversation."

Tamara glared at him.

"I wish people would stop doing that," he muttered.

Morrison had switched on the kettle. It would only boil enough water for two cups at a time, however, so it was a while before they were all seated and sipping their drinks. Isherwood, was towelling off his hair.

"So, what do we know?" Morrison asked his assembled squad.

"We know there's a bloody great spaceship a several miles thataway," Orwell supplied.

"Fully fuelled, that's going to make a really big bang when it goes up," Losey added with relish.

"Let's try and work out what it's for first, shall we?" Morrison suggested.

"Tamara?"

"It's an invasion force," Tamara explained. "According to Jason and the files I found in his office, there are these aliens who are planning to destroy the earth. The fleet is so the Thirteen can get them before they get us."

"Rubbish," Morrison said. "Aliens? Really? I realise that they have brainwashed the population to love them, but do they really expect them to swallow this?"

"What if it's true?" Isherwood asked.

"You disappoint me, Isherwood," Morrison said. "We *know* that the Thirteen invent threats in order to justify their regime. This is just the next level."

"I'm not so sure," Tamara interjected. "According to Jason, the Thirteen have an alien working with them."

"Really?" Orwell asked.

"And have you seen this alien?" Morrison continued. "No, I didn't think so. We have enough problems to deal with as it is without giving credence to clearly fictional opponents."

"Fictional according to you," Isherwood corrected. "I may not have seen any evidence of these aliens, but I haven't seen anything proving they don't exist either."

"It does seem a bit of a stretch that we would be alone in the universe," Orwell agreed.

"Et tu, Orwell?" Morrison asked.

"Oh, stuff it," Losey said. "The way I see it, we go ahead with the original plan and blow up the shuttle, but we risk being up to our armpits in little green men any day now, or..."

"Or?"

"Or we stow away and see what we can see," Losey suggested. "If they are making it up then we can always blow them up later."

Tamara grinned. "Then it's a good thing I swiped this."

She waved the passkey under Losey's nose.

* * * * *

Taryn wrestled with the latches and tags on her spacesuit.

"Doctor, could you check me over?" she asked.

The Doctor studiously examined the various seals, tightening one at her elbow that might have caused difficulties later on.

"It feels odd going into space wearing all this," Taryn remarked. "I saw the holos of those first astronauts, but I never expected I'd actually be one."

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself," the Doctor replied.

Taryn looked at him, still wearing the same grey trousers, white shirt and midnight-blue waistcoat decorated with stars that she remembered from her last trip in the TARDIS. How long ago was that now? It felt like a lifetime.

"Aren't you going to get suited up?" she asked.

"What would be the point?" The Doctor stretched out his arm, pushing it right through Taryn's chest and out between her shoulder-blades as if she was not there.

"What's happening to you, Doctor?"

"I'm dying, Taryn. Slowly, by degrees, I am dying. You killed me."

"I... I didn't know." Taryn struggled to find the words. "I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter," the Doctor said. "After all, it's all necessary, isn't it?"

"Doctor..."

"No, don't say anything, Taryn," the Doctor continued, his voice barely a whisper. "You made your choice and now we both have to deal with the consequences. You should be proud. You've achieved something my enemies have been striving towards for centuries. Strange, I never expected one of my companions to be my undoing."

He turned his back on Taryn so he did not see the tears in her eyes.

"Come along, Duae," he continued. "They'll be waiting for us."

* * * * *

One of the soldiers grunted so Losey tied the gag tighter.

"Leave him be, Los," Orwell reprimanded her.

They had surprised this group of soldiers in the changing area, stripped them and were now in the process of donning their spacesuits.

"Once the helmets are on, they won't be able to tell we're not the real thing," Isherwood said as Tamara checked his suit. When she was done, he proceeded to do the same for her, a touch too enthusiastically for Tamara's taste.

"And what do we do when we get inside?" Orwell asked.

"Sit quietly and wait," Losey told him, "and hope that these guys weren't supposed to do something important."

"Like pilot the shuttle, you mean?" Tamara suggested.

Losey flashed a crooked smile. "Yeah, that'd cover it."

"Could someone check my suit, please?" Morrison asked and Orwell obliged. Morrison had been hanging at the back of the group, keeping quiet, his authority temporarily wrested away by Losey.

"All done?" Losey asked. "Then let's..."

"Hey, what's keeping you guys? They're about to start the countdown." A figure poked his head around the door, a figure Tamara recognised.

"Jason?" The word was out of her mouth before she could stop it.

"Tamara?"

The others looked uncertainly from Jason to Tamara and back again so Tamara took the initiative.

"Go," she barked. "I'll deal with him."

"Stop!" Jason yelled as Losey, Morrison, Isherwood and Orwell raced out of the room's other exit and made for the shuttle.

"Let them go, Jason," Tamara said.

"I can't do that," Jason replied, reaching for the radio clipped to his belt. "They won't get far."

"Farther than you think," Tamara replied as she kicked the radio out of his hand, it skidded across the waxed floor, stopping at the feet of one of the bound soldiers. He leaned forward, trying to grab hold of it.

"What are you doing here, Tamara?" Jason demanded, nursing his bruised fingers.

The pair of them started circling one another, each keeping one eye on the radio.

"You know how it is, honey, I just wanted to see where you worked." The longer she kept him talking, the more time the others had to get onboard.

"I loved you, Tamara."

"Then let me go."

"You know that I can't. My loyalty is to the Thirteen above all."

"So much for your 'love'."

Tamara dived for the radio. Jason fell on it a moment later, but he was too late. Tamara was already up and racing for the door. Snarling in frustration, Jason pulled out a knife and dropped it on the floor by one of the soldiers.

"Sound the alarm," he ordered before setting off in pursuit of Tamara. The soldier wriggled over to the blade and began sawing at the tape around his wrists.

Clutching the radio to her chest with one hand and shielding her eyes from the bright sunlight with the other, Tamara ran as quickly as she could towards the shuttle, burdened by her bulky spacesuit. She could see the lift containing her four companions rising rapidly to the top of the gantry while a female voice counting down to launch echoed from the loudspeakers around the launch site. The shuttle,

turned white by the sun, towered imperiously over its launch platform, which was itself situated above a pit designed to catch and funnel away the worst of the exhaust blast.

"Tamara, stop!"

Tamara glanced over her shoulder and saw Jason brandishing a gun in her direction.

"You won't shoot me," she shouted back. She was bluffing, however. Given the influence of the Thirteen, who knew what Jason do if he could justify it as being in their name. She stumbled backwards, reaching out for the orange scaffolding that surrounded the lift, her boots scraping against the raised edge of the pit.

The strident wail of an alarm picked up. One of the soldiers must have finally worked his way free.

"It's over, Tamara," Jason said. "There's nowhere you can run."

To Tamara's relief, he lowered his gun.

Then a second shot rang out and Tamara felt a sharp pain in her right arm. It seemed to take her forever to make the connection and by the time she did she was falling.

* * * * *

"What's that noise?" Taryn asked. The screeching of the alarm could be heard even within the confines of the shuttle.

"There's trouble outside," Tria said, starting to unbuckle the harness that held her in her seat. "Someone is trying to disrupt the launch."

"We should abort," Unus said to the pilot. He turned to the others and added, "At least until we know what's wrong."

"That sounds eminently sensible, Unus," the Doctor agreed, but his softly spoken words were drowned out by Shemjaza.

"No! We go now!"

"Shemjaza, I understand how important this mission is for you," Unus said, trying to pacify the Grigori. "It's important to all of us and that is why we need to discover what this problem is before we can proceed."

"No!" Shemjaza repeated. "There will be no more delays. I have waited long enough for this already."

With a beat of his mighty wings, Shemjaza tore apart his harness while the other occupants of the shuttle's forward cabin were still struggling with their buckles. He was at the pilot's side in moments, wresting with him for control of the vehicle.

"Shemjaza," Unus begged him, "stop this madness!"

Septem was the first of the Thirteen to free himself. He clambered over the seats and tried to grapple with Shemjaza. The Grigori battered him aside with such force Septem cracked his skull on the shuttle's hull, sending blood spraying about the cabin.

"We go now!" Shemjaza yelled for one final time.

He stabbed at the launch controls.

* * * * *

"Tamara, are you all right?"

Tamara could see Jason leaning over the edge of the pit. Was she at the bottom of it? How had she got down there and why did her body hurt so much? Jason reached out his hand towards her.

"Tamara, we've got to get you out of there," he said, a concerned edge to his voice. "Come on, take my hand and I'll pull you up."

Tamara shifted her weight and a sharp pain shot through her leg causing her to cry out. She looked down at the twisted, bloody mess and felt bile rising in her throat. She forced it down, forced herself to remain calm.

"Jason," she said, her voice flat. "I think my leg's broken."

Jason considered this for a moment, then cross to the ladder leading down into the pit.

"I'm coming to get you," he said.

"No, wait..." Tamara protested, but he was already descending.

He was at her side, gently brushing her hair out of her eyes.

"Oh, Tamara, I'm so sorry." He quickly appraised her condition. "This is going to hurt," he warned her, "but there's not time for anything else."

He scooped her up in his arms and Tamara screamed as pain once again sliced through her leg.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Jason whispered soothingly, taking a step backward as he adjusted to her weight. "Don't worry, Tamara, I'll have you out of here in no time."

Then the shuttle's solid rocket boosters ignited, engulfing the pair in flames.

Act Five - Delicate Sound Of Thunder

The force of take-off pinned Taryn back against her seat. Septem's limp body was hurled across the cabin like a rag-doll before becoming trapped behind an equipment locker in one corner. Neither the Doctor nor Shemjaza seemed to notice the acceleration. Clouds brushed passed the windows and then, suddenly, they were out in space looking up at the stars. Taryn had seen this all before, of course, but somehow this primitive, fallible and downright dangerous way of getting into space gave the whole experience a brand new sense of wonder.

"It's beautiful," Unus said.

"Isn't it," the Doctor agreed. He was glaring at Shemjaza, but the Grigori's transgressions seemed to have been forgotten about in the enormity of the moment.

There was a thunk as the fuel tank was detached from beneath the shuttle and the two solid rocket boosters followed soon afterwards. Without the roar of the motors, a hush descended over the cabin. The craft rotated on it's axis and first the Moon and then the Earth itself spun slowly into view. Several members of the

Thirteen had their faces pressed against the windows, marvelling at the views they were privy to. Even Taryn was keen to get a good view. The other shuttle launches had been successful and the rest of the fleet was forming up behind the flagship.

"There they are," Taryn announced suddenly, pointing out into the distance. Despite himself, the Doctor floated over to take a look.

Several large, strangely shaped satellites were orbiting between Earth and the Moon.

"What are they?" he asked.

"My equation," Shemjaza replied proudly.

* * * * *

When he heard the roar of the solid propellant motors, Jason braced himself for the flames, knowing that there was no way he could reach the ladder before both he and Tamara were incinerated by the heat. However, the heat never came.

He opened one eye and discovered that he was floating in the heart of the exhaust plume, protected within a cocoon of light. The temperature outside the cocoon had to be frighteningly high, but within it was like a cool spring day. Tamara floated to the left of him. Light streamed from her every pore. Both her bullet wound and her leg had healed without trace. She looked more beautiful and radiant than Jason had ever seen, except perhaps in his dreams. Was this why the Thirteen were so interested in her, why he had been ordered to protect her?

She swam upwards, the flames parting before her like waves split by a ship's bow. Jason tried to call out to her, but his voice was lost amid the deafening roar. Tamara must have heard something, however, because she turned to him and smiled. Jason could see galaxies dancing in her eyes.

They were closing on the ship now, but Tamara did not slow as she approached the hull. She kept going and passed right through it like light through glass. Trailing behind her in his cocoon, Jason raised his arms to protect his head from impact, but he did not feel any evidence of the shuttle at all as Tamara pulled him inside. Once they were within the shuttle's cargo bay, Tamara's glow faded and she collapsed to the floor, spent and exhausted. Jason looked at her in amazement. Then he drew his gun.

* * * * *

The Doctor counted at least a dozen satellites forming a crude line in space. From this angle he could see that they were meant to represent occult symbols. The Doctor recognised Hecate's Wheel and the divided circle that represented the element of water among others. At the heart of the line was a triangle enclosing the Eye of Horus. The pupil of the eye itself was wide enough to accommodate the entire fleet flying in formation.

"Did I not tell you, Doctor," Shemjaza was saying, "I have written my equations across the face of your universe. One simply needs to know the right

language."

"A cocktail of magic and science," the Doctor mused.

"Different laws for different universes," Shemjaza explained.

"And the breach is formed by a blend of them all," the Doctor reasoned. "There's a curious kind of logic to it."

"Unus, perhaps you would give the order to embark?" Shemjaza suggested.

"Oh, of course." Unus reluctantly tore his attention away from the view and reached for the radio. "Citizens of the Thirteen, I speak to you now from the flagship Amazarak. You have laboured long and hard to get this far, but regret that the task will get yet harder from this point on. We are about to enter another universe, to face down a foe about which we know little and whose powers we may find hard even to imagine, let alone understand. However, these beings have threatened our way of life, our very existence. I ask you, do you want to live in a climate of fear or do you want to stand up for what you believe in. We will rise up and we will take our fight to our enemy and we will triumph because we have right on our side. I thank you all for your courage and perseverance and, while some of you may fall in the coming fight, I personally praise you that none of you will ever be forgotten. You are heroes. Now, let Operations Divine Justice commence."

He turned to the pilot.

"Set course for the eye."

The pilot dutifully obliged and the engines roared into life, sending the shuttle gliding towards the heart of the Eye of Horus. As they drew closer, the Doctor could see that the pupil of the eye was a roiling mass of violet energy. As the ship penetrated the barrier, he comforted himself with the thought that at least he had managed to keep Grae away from the danger.

* * * * *

"So what is this place?" Grae asked Jophiel.

They were walking through what Jophiel had described as the Interstitial Zone. The zone itself seemed to be fluid, fluctuating wildly in appearance as they explored. So far Grae had been led through a narrow, brick-lined corridor, the banqueting hall in a palace made of ice, a garden filled with multi-coloured butterflies illuminated by no less than seven suns and a gothic cloister complete with fluted columns and flying buttresses. At one point they had appeared to be walking unsupported through empty space. Grae would have panicked were it not for Jophiel walking steadily on, seemingly unaffected by these sudden, abrupt changes in their surroundings.

"It's the only object in a realm that doesn't exist," Jophiel explained. "Your universe is just one of many, stacked one above the other. However, between each universe there is a space, tiny though it may be, that prevents the universes from interacting with each other. That space is nothingness in its purest sense. Nothing exists there, not even a single atom...or so we believed. Then we discovered this place, straddling that space between your universe and ours."

While he spoke, Grae studied Jophiel. He had first appeared to her as a figure of light, but the more time she spent with him, the more time her eyes had to adjust and she was able to make out the figure within the light. He was humanoid, at least seven feet tall, hairless and he had a pair of wings sprouting from his back. He looked every inch an angel.

"Not only does this place allow us to cross into your universe, Grae," Jophiel continued, "but, because it exists in that gap, it is not subject to the laws of either universe, which makes it the perfect place to put those people whom the physical laws of your realm would otherwise destroy."

"But, in the case of the Time Lords, we're talking about a whole planet of people," Grae pointed out. "How big is this place?"

"That's a question our scientists are still asking," Jophiel returned with a smile. "Some of the more radical among them are starting to bandy around the word 'infinite' in reference to its dimensions."

"But I thought you said that the gap between universes was tiny. How can all this possibly fit? How can we be here, for that matter?"

Jophiel spread his arms and shrugged. "I confess I do not know, but it is so and, as such, it would be pointless to question it. Perhaps it has something to do with the gap being beyond our physical laws that allows something so small to contain an environment so large."

They were walking through a cavern of red stone. Grae could not see a source of illumination, but wherever it was, it caused the stalactites and stalagmites to cast long shadows across the ground. Jophiel paused by a pool in the floor. The water was still and murky.

"Ah, we're here," he said. "I wanted you to see this."

He disturbed the pool with his foot and, when the ripples had settled, the waters had cleared. Grae could make out shapes moving beneath the surface, but even leaning in close she could not tell what they were.

"Try this," Jophiel said, offering her a curiously shaped telescope.

Grae held it up to her eye. Below the surface of the pool, odd, creatures darted about, scurrying from shadow to shadow amid a forest of twisted grey trees. From the waist up, they appeared to be ordinary human beings, but below the waist the resemblance was more akin to a weasel.

"I believe they are known as the Tritonomendetes," Jophiel explained. "They were considered no longer fit for your universe so we brought them here where they can continue to exist. We have preserved hundreds of species of intelligent life in this way, not counting the many millions of species that make up their respective ecosystems. Out there, amid these halls, you can find the Sunnites, led by King Phaeton, continuing their war against the Moonites and their general Endymion for control of Lucifer. Houyhnhnms roam the plains while giant Rukhs patrol the skies. And in still other corners, one might stumble across a Bobdingnagian or a Boojum, though I'd advise against it."

"But what happened to all these species?" Grae asked. "How did they end up here? I've never even heard of them."

Somewhere deep within the bowels of the Interstitial Zone, a bell began to toll. Jophiel tilted his head to one side, considering the mournful, funereal note.

"It would appear our guests have finally arrived," he told Grae. "We should go and greet them, don't you think?"

* * * * *

They were in a white room. The whiteness stretched away in all directions and it was impossible to see the walls of the room with the naked eye, though radar confirmed that they were there. The fleet had all crossed the barrier successfully and the Thirteen's army was in the process of disembarking their shuttles and setting up camp. The Thirteen themselves had gathered in a hastily assembled mobile headquarters.

"We need to establish a perimeter," Tria was saying, "and send out scouting parties as soon as possible to get the lay of the land. I suggest six-man teams."

"Do we really need six people in each search party?" Undecim queried. "If we only had, say, three in each team then we could send out twice as many teams and cover the ground twice as fast."

"We don't know what's out there," Tria pointed out. She was patronising, as if she was addressing a small child. "With six-person teams, there's more chance of them being able to come back and tell us. Do you understand now, Undecim?"

"Very good, Tria," Unus said. He turned to one of the soldiers standing by the door. "Captain Forrester, see to it."

"Very good, sir." The major snapped to attention and turned to leave, but his exit was blocked by two people coming the other way. Major Jason Winters was escorting Tamara into the room at gunpoint.

"Excuse the intrusion, your honours," he said, "but I wanted to bring this... person to your attention as soon as possible."

"This is highly irregular."

"Sit down, Octo," Unus chided the speaker. "I'm sure Major Winters has a good reason for his behaviour. Major, your report if you please."

"This woman, Tamara Scott..."

"Not *the* Tamara Scott." Quattuor stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Be silent," Unus snapped. "That information is privileged."

"But not among members of the Thirteen." The Doctor leaned forward, intrigued. "You can tell me what's got poor Quattuor so hot under the collar, surely?"

"Why don't we let the major finish his report first, Novem," Unus suggested.

"Miss Scott is part of an anarchist cell that was attempting to disrupt the launch of your flagship. I was able to apprehend Miss Scott, but I believe the other members of her party may be on board the Amazarak."

"Is that true, Miss Scott?" Tria asked.

"Go to hell," Tamara spat.

"It will go easier for you if you tell us where to find your friends."

Tamara just laughed.

Tria turned her attention to Jason. "How did these anarchists gain access to the flagship, Major?"

Jason looked flustered. "I believe they stole a passkey."

"Really? And whose passkey did they steal, Major?"

Jason was now very interested in the shin on his boots. "Mine."

"So you let these anarchists on to the flagship."

"I didn't let... She stole it from me when..."

"Yes, Major, go on. We're all very interested in your explanation. When exactly did Miss Scott steal the passkey from you?"

"When we... spent the night together."

"You passed the night in the company of an anarchist?" Tria said. "And which night was this?"

"Last night?"

"So this would have been at the Eridu facility?" Tria persisted.

"Yes," Jason conceded.

"A facility to which you knew Miss Scott did not have access. You must have known that she was an anarchist when she approached you, but rather than report her, you chose to satisfy your selfish, physical desires rather than the needs of the Thirteen, isn't that right, Major?"

Jason mumbled a response.

"I said, isn't that right, *Mister Winters*," Tria barked.

Jason snapped his head up. "Sir! Yes, sir!"

Tria dismissed him with a wave of her hand. "Captain Forrester, execute this traitor."

"Now wait just one minute," Tamara began as Forrester drew his pistol.

"Do you have something you want to say, Miss Scott?" Tria asked. "Something that will convince me to spare the life of this... man?"

"I... um..."

"No, I didn't think so. Please continue, Captain."

"Wait!" Tamara muttered a silent apology. "I'll tell you where the others are, just don't kill him."

Tria drummed her fingers on the tabletop. "I'm listening."

"The plan was to hide in a cargo pod," Tamara explained, inwardly cursing herself as she did so. "We saw it when we scoped out the place. It was for spare equipment and such so we figured it wouldn't get opened right away on arrival, giving us a chance to find a new hiding place."

"I see. *Major* Forrester." Tria stressed Forrester's new rank. "Go and round up these anarchists."

Forrester saluted and marched out.

"There's just one more thing," Tria said. "Mister Winters?"

"Yes?" Jason asked.

Tria drew a pistol of her own, small enough to conceal in her palm, and shot him in the head. Blood plumed out in an arc as he fell backwards, stiff as a statue.

"No!" Tamara yelled. "I gave you what you wanted. You didn't have to kill him."

"He had betrayed the Thirteen," Tria explained coldly.

"Not deliberately."

"It was still a display of weakness," Tria replied, "and that is something we can ill afford. Now what are we going to do with you, Miss Scott?" Tria licked her lips. "The punishment for anarchy is death."

"No!" The Doctor was on his feet.

"Are you showing weakness now, Novem?" Tria demanded. "Hardly suitable behaviour for a member of the Thirteen."

"She's just one woman," the Doctor continued. "What harm can she do?"

"She's an anarchist!" Tria retorted. "She spreads chaos and dissent wherever she goes. The society we built is based on a foundation of order and the rule of law. She represents a cancer that must be cut out. I understand that this is distasteful to many here, but we have learned to subsume our emotions and to place the good of many above the good of any individual. I suggest you do the same, Novem, if you wish to remain among our number."

The Doctor bowed his head in defeat and sat back down.

"In gratitude for the information you provided," Tria said, levelling her gun, "I'll make this quick."

"Don't feel you have to give me any special treatment," Tamara replied. "I doubt you could inflict anymore pain than I'm currently feeling for betraying those who trusted me."

Tria's lips curled into a cruel smile. "You'd be surprised."

"Wait!"

Tria lowered her gun angrily. "Not you as well, Duae? Does no one here see what must be done?"

"I see, Tria," Taryn replied, "more clearly than you, I think?"

Tria was about to protest, but Unus cut her off.

"Please continue, Duae."

"Thank you, Unus," Taryn said. "Yes, the punishment for anarchy is death. We all know what they did to the previous Novem, but what message will this woman's execution out here send to others like her if they are not here to see it? Better to confine Miss Scott and her companions until we return to Earth and then we can publicly execute all of them, sending a clear message to anyone thinking of opposing the Thirteen."

"Your plan... makes sense," Tria admitted. She turned back to Tamara. "It seems you've been granted a reprieve. Trust me, it's only temporary and when we do get back I'm going to enjoy executing you personally."

* * * * *

"Publicly executing your friends now, are you?" the Doctor asked. "I thought I understood you, but there really aren't any depths to which you won't sink, are

there? I'm only surprised you didn't insist on performing the act yourself."

The meeting was over and Taryn had decided to stretch her legs while surveying the perimeter of their encampment. The Doctor had stormed after her.

"The punishment for Tamara's crimes is death," Taryn replied levelly. "I can't change that. I can, however, buy you some time to come up with a way of rescuing her."

"Oh," the Doctor said, somewhat deflated.

"Don't worry," Taryn continued, "I'm not expecting you to thank me."

"*Thank* you? After everything you've done?" The Doctor stared at her. "So you may be trying to save Tamara, but what about everything else, hm? You've corrupted history, wiped out the inhabitants of one planet and enslaved those of another all in the pursuit of some mysterious agenda. You represent everything I have dedicated my life to fighting against. Have the Thirteen blinded you so much that you can't see the crimes you're committing in their name?"

"Have the Thirteen blinded *me*?" Taryn laughed.

The Doctor recoiled as if struck. Had he misjudged the situation?

"Have you forgotten who founded the Thirteen, Doctor?" Taryn continued. She could sense his confusion and was pressing her advantage. "*I made them. I set their agenda. I decided what was and was not acceptable, what was necessary in pursuit of our goals. The Thirteen believe what I told them, not the other way around.*"

"But Shemjaza?"

"You'd like it all to be his fault, wouldn't you, Doctor?" Taryn sneered. "It would be so much easier if your opponent was a stranger. The idea that one of your companions might disagree with your vision for the universe must be tough to stomach. Shemjaza's a scientist, Doctor, not a politician. He might have dreams, but he lacks vision, drive and the skills necessary to make those dreams a reality."

"And that's where you came in."

"I am my uncle's niece," Taryn replied. "Do you think I learned nothing at his knee?"

"So all of this...the brainwashing, the executions, the genocide...you created this world *deliberately*?"

"Yes."

"How could you?" The words tasted like ashes in the Doctor's mouth. "I don't understand."

"Of course you don't, Doctor," Taryn replied. "You're a Time Lord, as you're so fond of reminding people. You're not a human being. You walk in eternity. You think we don't understand the implications, but some of us do. You don't have the human race's best interests at heart, do you, Doctor? You consider yourself 'a citizen of the universe' and to concentrate on just one planet's affairs would be...what? Too parochial for you?"

"That's not fair," the Doctor protested. "I have a concern for Earth."

"A *concern*, Doctor?" Taryn retorted. "No, don't bother to argue. I'm not blaming you for it. You see your remit as covering all of time and space and while

some might wonder at the colossal ego that allows you to assume such a responsibility, I simply want to illustrate the point that with all of these other species to look out for, humanity's interests can only occupy a fraction of your time. Worse yet, what if our best interests conflict with those of another race. On whose side will you come down then? We can hardly expect any loyalty from an alien, can we?"

"So you've set yourself up as humanity's champion in my place. And you have the gall to mock *my* ego."

"Did you see the bodies left at Eridu, Doctor, bloated and burst by the waves? Did you walk the streets of Rygel 7 in the aftermath of their civil war? Did you see what they had done to their own children? As part of the presidential family, Doctor, I had certain official responsibilities. People say that I'm cold, that I have a heart of stone, that I don't care for anyone but myself, but that's just a defence mechanism. I've seen man's inhumanity to man first hand. If I let myself feel their pain do you really think I could get up in the morning? I told myself that there was nothing I could do so I said the standard platitudes and got out of there as soon as I could."

"There *was* nothing you could do," the Doctor said. "Their suffering wasn't your fault."

Taryn's gaze was pure venom. "Don't patronise me, Doctor. Don't you dare. Maybe there was something I could have done. I bottled my feelings up so deep inside I doubt I would have helped them even if I could have. It disgusted me, do you understand that? The human race was its own worst enemy and I guess I managed to convince myself that it wasn't worth saving."

"So what changed?"

"I couldn't run away anymore," Taryn replied. "Before, I could always use my family's credit to get shot of a particular province, planet or government, but when I was stranded in Eridu I had nowhere else to go. I had to face up to the fact that the place might be my home for the rest of my life and that I had a responsibility to be a part of that community. You wouldn't understand that, would you, Doctor? You've always been a wanderer, refusing to be tied down, refusing to commit yourself to any one place or time, refusing to accept any kind of responsibility for the long-term effects of your actions."

The Doctor had no answer to that.

"Shemjaza tried to help me find my place," Taryn continued, "but I failed, Doctor, and I got them all killed. All those deaths in Eridu are on my conscience, Doctor. Don't try and tell me otherwise. But out of every tragedy comes some small ray of hope. I had an epiphany, Doctor, I realised that I was in a privileged position. I knew what was to come and I could use that knowledge to prevent my species from making the same mistakes all over again."

"You decided to play with history," the Doctor said. "You might as well attempt surgery blindfold and with only a hacksaw and a chisel and expect a similar chance of success. The patient is invariably worse off and that's assuming you haven't managed to kill them with your insane behaviour."

"Invariably, Doctor? I think I've done quite well, don't you? Am I sorry about the Time Lords, about Grae and Tamara and yourself? Of course. I'm not a monster, Doctor. But for every death I cause, I can take comfort in the fact that I have saved a hundred, a thousand, a billion lives further down the line. Tell me, Doctor, while you're sitting in judgement on *my* actions, if you had the chance to save an entire intelligent race, what would you do?"

The Doctor looked away.

"Don't turn your back on me," Taryn snapped. "Answer the question. What would you do?"

"Whatever it took," the Doctor conceded quietly.

"You see? I don't have any regrets because I know I'm doing the right thing. Humanity tried being the masters of their own fate and look where that got them. Maybe it's time to let Shemjaza and his kind have a go."

"He's not all powerful, Taryn, and he's not omniscient," the Doctor warned. "He's just as mortal and fallible as you or I."

"You're wrong, Doctor," Taryn said. "You weren't with him in Eridu. You didn't see him give of himself to help people, in spirit as well as in body."

"You're making him into something he's not," the Doctor persisted, "holding him up to standards he can't possibly live up to. He may look like an angel, Taryn, but he's no god."

Taryn smiled oddly. "He created the world in seven days, Doctor. What would you call him?"

* * * * *

Tamara was running along a darkened corridor. She put a hand out to the wall and was surprised when the wall shifted beneath her touch. It felt like canvas. She could see light up ahead so she directed her steps in that direction. As she approached, she realised that the specks of light were actually refracting off a number of mirrors. Tamara could see herself reflected in the silvered surfaces, but in each on her image was distorted, like the mirrors in a funhouse.

One mirror showed her entering a ziggurat on the south side of the River Thames. Tamara judged it to be by Vauxhall Bridge, but she was sure that no such building existed there. Within the strange building, her image was taken, via a lift to an office without windows. A man with steel grey hair and sunken eyes was sitting behind a heavy wooden desk. He handed a manila folder to Tamara and she broke the seal on it. As she did so, the Tamara outside the mirror noticed the red stamp on the front of the folder. *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. What was that all about? Britain had not had a monarch since the seventeenth century.

Another mirror showed her exploring a hedge maze. Her image stopped and looked up and a blue box (the TARDIS? – where had that word come from?) faded into existence on top of one of the hedges. The door to the box open and a man stepped out. He was about thirty-five, with a goatee, sunglasses, a black shirt and trousers and some really nice boots. Unfortunately, he had stepped out into mid-air

and promptly plummeted the two metres to the ground to land in a heap at Tamara's feet. She could see her mirror-self helping him up and she read his lips as he spoke.

"I'm the Doctor."

The third mirror was so dark that it was difficult to make out anything at all. In the centre of the image stood a woman with wavy blonde hair and freckles across the bridge of her nose. Tamara found herself resenting the woman's curves. The woman was standing on a dais and, at the edges of the picture, Tamara could just about make out shadowy figures sitting in judgement on her. But where was Tamara herself? Ah, there she was, striding into view from the left of the mirror. Her double took hold of the woman on the dais and spun her around. Then she raised a strange looking gun and pulled the trigger.

Tamara turned away, horrified, as her mirror image blew a hole in the woman's head.

She found herself facing the fourth and final mirror. She could see herself walking steadily through the Australian Outback. The Tamara watching paused. How had she known where the image in the mirror was? She had never been to Australia. Or had she? None of this made any sense. A girl was running along beside Tamara, keeping pace. Tamara recognised the figure, even though she was a stranger, and a name popped unbidden to her lips.

"Sal."

What did it all mean? How could these images be so familiar when none of this had ever happened to her? She fell to her knees clutching her head as, one by one, her twisted reflections stepped from their mirrors and gather round her.

"I'm Tamara Scott," one said.

"I'm Tamara Scott," another echoed.

"I'm Tamara Scott." They all picked up the chant. "I'm Tamara Scott. I'm Tamara Scott."

"But if you're Tamara Scott," Tamara protested weakly, "then who am I? Who am I?"

* * * * *

"Who am I?"

Tamara sat up. Sweat had welded her clothes to her body.

"Easy now," Losey said, helping her to sit up. "That Forrester guy hit you pretty hard. You've been out for over an hour."

"Don't waste your breath on her, Los," Orwell muttered from a corner of the small, featureless room. "Let's not forget who ratted us out."

"Yeah, and if she'd kept her mouth shut like Huxley she'd be dead right now." Losey held a cup of water to Tamara's lips. "Don't worry, I got your back."

Tamara gave her a slight smile then gratefully sipped at the water.

* * * * *

The Doctor watched Taryn walking away and felt a pain deep in his hearts. He also sensed something else.

"You can come out now," he announced, turning to the vehicle parked nearby. It had been used to ferry equipment to the perimeter, but its trailer now appeared to be empty, apart from some rolled up canvas. As the Doctor approached, that same canvas started to move and Tria's head poked out.

"Well, I guess you caught me," she said. "My bad."

"You wanted to be caught, Tria," the Doctor said. "You're too good for me to have spotted you otherwise."

"Flattery will get you everywhere, *Novem*."

"Please, call me Doctor. I suspect you have about as much respect for my new rank as I do."

"Do you really think it's wise to tell me you're a traitor, Doctor?" Tria asked. She had wriggled out from beneath the canvas and had swung her long legs over the side of the trailer. She held a knife idly in her hands.

"Now, Tria, anyone that seriously believes I have any love for the Thirteen really hasn't been paying attention," the Doctor pointed out.

"You realise, of course, that Unus ordered me to follow you," Tria said, languidly easing herself up off of the trailer and into a standing position, "and to kill you if necessary."

"You're welcome to try."

Tria shrugged. "If you insist."

She stabbed the Doctor through the chest with her knife.

It came as no surprise to either of them when the blade slid ineffectually through his ghostly form.

"Assassins are the least of my worries right now," the Doctor said, brushing down the front of his waistcoat.

"Can't blame a girl for trying."

"Indeed. Initiative's something of a dying art," the Doctor replied, "at least in your timeline. Tell me, how do you like following Unus' orders?"

"He's the leader of the Thirteen."

"That's true, but... How can I put this delicately?"

"Don't bother on my account," Tria said.

"He's not terribly dynamic, is he?" the Doctor continued. "That must be a little restrictive to someone as... driven as yourself. And then there's Duae."

"What about her?"

"Well, you said yourself, she's just appeared from nowhere and then suddenly she's second-in-command of your order. Before she turned up, did you have your eye on that post yourself?"

"I might have done," Tria replied guardedly. "What of it?"

"It just seems to me that a woman like yourself is meant for greater things than third place behind the likes of Unus and Taryn. I wonder what you could achieve with the right help."

"Your help, I suppose?" Tria laughed. "Do you really expect me to trust you?"
"No, I'm not that naïve," the Doctor admitted with a wry smile, "but I do think you're intelligent enough to listen and then make up your own mind."
Tria licked her lips. "What did you have in mind?"
The Doctor's eyes sparkled. "First, tell me about Unus."
"What would you like to know?"

* * * * *

"Sir, we have two figures approaching."

"Very good, Captain... sorry, *Major* Forrester," Unus said.

Forrester shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

Unus looked up from his paperwork. "Was there something else, Major?"

"Er, what would you like me to do about them, sir?"

Unus massaged the bridge of his nose. "Bring them here, Forrester. I'll want to question them. And while you're at it, you should probably let the rest of the Thirteen know that we have guests."

"Sir!"

Fifteen minutes later, the Thirteen had gathered in their makeshift council chamber. Shemjaza stood in one corner, despite the fact that one seat - Septem's - was empty.

"May I ask why we've all been summoned here?" Octo demanded impatiently.

"It would appear that we have some visitors," Unus explained.

"The Elohim?" Taryn asked.

"Possibly. Major Forrester, would you show our guests in?"

"Grae!" The Doctor earned himself some black looks as he leaped from his seat and embraced the closest of the new arrivals. "I thought you were still on Earth. How did you get here?"

"I was fading away," Grae explained. "Jophiel saved me."

"Then for that you have my thanks." The Doctor extended his hand to the other "guest", but Jophiel made no move to take it.

"We could not allow a specimen such as Graekatziasa'asterus to be destroyed," Jophiel said, simply.

"Er, yes. Quite," the Doctor agreed, returning his hand to his pocket.

"Jophiel, the guardian at the gate," Shemjaza said as he slowly walked around the edge of the room towards him. "I should have known that you would be the first to greet us."

"I am here to ask you to turn back," Jophiel replied. He regarded each of the Thirteen in turn. "The Elohim mean you know harm."

"Is that really the case?" the Doctor asked sceptically.

"Ask your companion." Jophiel gestured to Grae.

"It's true," Grae said. Nervously, she brushed a lock of hair behind her ear.
"At least, I think it's true. The Elohim save lives."

The Doctor turned his attention to Shemjaza. "It appears we may have been

misled."

"What about Shemjaza?" Taryn interjected. "If we are free to go, is he free to come with us."

"Shemjaza does not belong in your universe," Jophiel pointed out. "I must insist that he remain here."

"I go where I please," Shemjaza replied. "I am no longer bound by your rules and regulations."

"I'm afraid we cannot allow that," Jophiel said. "You and your colleagues have caused us enough trouble as it is."

Shemjaza lunged forward and pinned Jophiel to the temporary wall, which bowed beneath the impact. "Where are Amazarak and the others? What have you done with them?"

"They are quite safe, Shemjaza," Jophiel replied, seemingly unperturbed by his undignified position. "They are here, in the Interstitial Zone, with all our other failures."

"Other failures?" the Doctor prompted.

"Do you mean the Rukh and the... the Tritonomendetes?" Grae asked, struggling with the unfamiliar names.

"The Elohim treat your universe as a laboratory, Doctor," Shemjaza explained without releasing his grip on his captive. "They run experiments on artificial ecosystems, watching the evolution from primordial mud, to thinking, feeling life. And then, when their experiment has run its course and they have gathered all the data they require, they sweep up the remains and deposit them here."

"But that's monstrous," the Doctor replied. "If that was the case, surely we would have seen evidence. Without wanting to brag, I've been around a bit and I've never seen anything that suggests..."

"The Elohim clean up after themselves most thoroughly, Doctor," Shemjaza said, cutting the Time Lord off in mid-flow. "They wipe their experiment from history, deleting its existence from all points in the time stream, calming any ripples its presence may have caused so that they cannot affect anything else in your universe. It is as if their work had never existed. And then, at the very beginning of your universe, they plant another seed with different variables and the whole experiment begins anew."

"But that's impossible," the Doctor insisted. "Time is too resilient."

"Within your universe, perhaps, Doctor," Shemjaza agreed, "but the Elohim exists outside of it. They aren't bound by physical laws as you understand them."

The Doctor turned his wrath on Jophiel. "You deliberately manufacture life in order to perform experiments on it and then, when your done, you just put it in a box and file it away! That's obscene."

"It's no different than what the people of Earth do to life they consider inferior to themselves," Jophiel replied. "We are so far above you that questions of morality are an irrelevance."

"An irrelevance? How can you claim morality is an irrelevance?"

"Doctor," Taryn said. Her voice was soft, but it nonetheless cut right through his rant. "Earth is one of the Elohim's experiments. The human race is going to end up wiped from history unless we do something to stop it."

"Is that true?" the Doctor asked Jophiel.

"Of course it's true," Shemjaza snapped. "That is why we are here."

"Is it true?" the Doctor repeated, ignoring the Grigori.

"The Earth and its inhabitants are just an experiment," Jophiel replied. "Their sole value lies in the data they provide. Once the experiment is complete, they will have no more worth."

"But you could just leave them alone once you're done with them," the Doctor insisted. "You don't have to remove them."

"And risk contaminating our other experiments?" Jophiel responded. "Any scientist knows the importance of a controlled environment."

"A controlled environment?" Grae's mind was furiously considering the implications. "But what about contamination from the rest of the universe...unless... How much of the universe *is* your experiment?"

"Why don't you ask Shemjaza?" Jophiel suggested. "He-"

Shemjaza lifted Jophiel off of his feet, upended him and smashed his head into the floor in one smooth movement. The Elohim's head split open like an egg. Grae skipped backwards to avoid the contents that were seeping across the ground. The Doctor took her hand as she hopped over to him and together they looked at Taryn. Her mouth was open in shock as she looked at what Shemjaza had done.

Shemjaza himself was still staring at the corpse.

"Where are my friends?" he screamed. "Where are my friends, you bastard?"

The light that illuminated Jophiel dimmed and then was gone.

* * * * *

Tamara had propped herself up against one gently curving wall. The dreams were coming even when she was awake now, images of herself in another life. She was remembering strange places, alien vistas and giant robots. Creatures such as Daleks, Gastropods and the Revenant. How could these names be familiar to her and yet be meaningless at the same time? There were times when the images seemed more real than what was going on around her.

The five of them had been locked in the cargo hold of one of the shuttles. The cargo had all been removed so there was plenty of room for them to spread out. Orwell and Morrison were sitting cross-legged in the middle of the room. Orwell had had a travel Scrabble board stuffed into a pocket (the Thirteen alone knew why) and Morrison was making him regret bringing it. Isherwood was asleep. Tamara was surprised his snoring hadn't already drawn the attention of the guards, always assuming that there were any guards on the other side of the door. Perhaps they had just abandoned them in here to slowly starve to death. Tamara's stomach growled at the thought, reminding her that all the food they had between them was half a bag of lemon sherbets Morrison had brought with him.

Losey was slowly working her way around the walls, diligently tapping as she searched for a weak spot. She was the only one of the group who did not seem resigned to her fate. It was by watching Losey, that Tamara spotted the red mark.

"What's that?" she asked, clambering to her feet.

Losey paused and followed the direction of her finger. The red glowing patch of the wall was getting larger. Losey stretched out a hand towards it and then recoiled.

"Damn, that's hot," she said.

"Time for this later, Orwell, my boy," Morrison said, folding up the Scrabble board. "Another game is afoot."

The wall was buckling under the heat and the pressure and a blackened chunk fell away.

Isherwood sat up. He had awoken so suddenly that Tamara found herself wondering if he had really been asleep at all. Seemingly catching her thoughts, Isherwood winked at her.

A large enough section of the shuttle's hull had now been cut away for them to be able to see a female figure beyond, holding a weapon of some sort. She returned the weapon to a holster in her belt and pulled on the softened metal with hands that were protected by heavy gloves. Once the gap was wide enough, she stepped through and into the hold, removing the visor that had protected her eyes while she worked.

"Wow," was all Orwell could say as he drunk in the blonde curls and the delicate freckles across the bridge of the woman's nose.

Isherwood was more forward. "To what do we owe this rare pleasure, Miss..?"

"I'm rescuing you," the woman said. "That is, unless you want to be executed by the Thirteen. This way if you want to live."

"Wait," Tamara said as the woman turned to leave. "Do you really expect us to trust you just like that?"

"Yes," the woman replied. "Given your options, I don't see that you have much choice."

"Regretfully," Morrison said, "I have to concede that the young lady has a point. Can I at least enquire as to the identity of our would-be rescuer?"

"Didn't I say?" the woman smiled coyly. "I'm Bramahl."

Act Six – Boulevard Of Broken Dreams

"Taryn," the Doctor commented, "it would appear that your friend has some anger management issues."

His words were addressed to his companion, but his focus never left the Grigori. He had put a protective arm around Grae, surprised that he was actually able to touch her. He had not realised how much he had missed physical contact.

"Shemjaza," Unus began, "that Elohim could have been a valuable source of information."

"Not to mention the fact that he was a living, feeling creature," Grae added

angrily. She had known Jophiel for longer than the others and was consequently most affected by his death.

Shemjaza was still looking at the body, seemingly oblivious to the comments and criticisms of those around him. Taryn got up from her chair and walked slowly towards him. She had her hands raised in front of her, though whether she was reaching out to him or trying to ward him off even she could not have said.

"Shemjaza," she asked, "why?"

"I do not know what came over me," Shemjaza confessed. "He was talking and talking and mocking and laughing and pretending that what the Elohim are doing is not a crime, but rather something perfectly natural and I was thinking about Amazarak and Barkayal and the others and what *his* kind might have done to them and... And then he was dead. I do not even remember the act of killing him."

"It's all right, Shemjaza," Taryn said soothingly. "It's all right."

"Shemjaza, we understand how difficult this must be for you," Unus said, "returning here after all this time, coming face to face with the people who took your colleagues from you. However, we need you to be strong. We must be united if we are to prevail. Random acts of violence only serve to spread disharmony."

"I understand," Shemjaza replied. "I will try to show more restraint in future."

"Very good." Unus leaned back in his chair and formed a steeple with his gloved fingers. "We have all heard the Elohim's intentions as stated by one of their own. Are there any among us who would deny they pose a threat?"

No dissent was heard.

"The Elohim are here, in this 'Interstitial Zone' as our friend calls it. They represent a clear and present danger. As such, we will begin mobilising our forces immediately. It is unfortunate that they appear to already know that we are here, but if we strike swiftly and with strength and resolve then we will prevail."

"No," the Doctor said.

"No?"

"Violence is the last refuge of the weak-minded," the Doctor continued. "It's the last resort to be used when all other avenues have run dry and even then, it betokens failure. Failure of intellect, failure of reason, failure of compassion. Let me go and talk to the Elohim. Let me negotiate on your behalf. Give me a chance to avert unnecessary bloodshed."

"And while you are talking, you're giving the Elohim more time for their forces to attack us," Tria pointed out.

The Doctor ignored her and appealed to Unus.

"Unus, you told me that you believe violence to be a necessary evil. Surely, by that argument, if violence is unnecessary in a given situation than it becomes just evil. I believe you to be a man of your word and by that word you owe me a chance to try."

"Very well, Novem, you shall have your chance," Unus agreed. Tria began to protest but Unus waved her down. "My decision has been made. However, we shall continue to prepare our forces so that we are ready should Novem fail. Tria, I shall

leave you in charge of that work while I am gone."

"Gone?" Tria asked. "You will be going with him?"

"Someone must represent the Thirteen's interests," Unus pointed out.

"I shall go as well," Shemjaza declared.

"I don't think so," the Doctor said. "With all due respect, and given the available evidence," he indicated Jophiel's broken body, "I think your presence might be counterproductive."

"I will go," Taryn said to Shemjaza before he could protest. "You trust me, don't you?"

"As you wish," Shemjaza reluctantly agreed. "Taryn Fischer will speak for me in this matter."

"Excellent!" The Doctor clapped his hands together in satisfaction. "How soon can we get started?"

* * * * *

"Where are we going?" Orwell asked. They had been walking for hours and he was starting to lag behind.

"I told you," Bramahl replied, irritably, "I'm taking you to meet some people who can help you."

The group was not moving as fast as Bramahl wished. They were showing too much interest in their surroundings and kept stopping to comment on what they were passing. A twisted crystal forest had been one such distraction, a shoal of brightly-coloured fish floating in mid-air had been another. Only Tamara seemed uninterested in such sights; her eyes never strayed from Bramahl.

"I know you," she said.

"I doubt it," Bramahl replied. "I must have one of those faces."

"No, I'm sure I've seen you before." Bramahl's face swam through her memory as her mind struggled to make the connection. "Do you know the Doctor?"

Bramahl jumped slightly, startled. "Who's the Doctor?"

"I... I don't know." Tamara shook her head. "I can see him - hear his voice, even - but the images make no sense."

"Are you feeling all right?" Bramahl asked. "Maybe they hit you harder than you realised."

Tamara massaged the back of her neck. "My head feels like I've been hit by a Dalek stun beam." Her eyes widened. "What's a Dalek?"

"I think perhaps we should rest here for a while," Morrison suggested.

"We really should keep moving," Bramahl said. "It isn't that much further."

"I think Morrison's right." Losey folded her arms and met Bramahl's gaze. The pair sized each other up for one long moment and then Bramahl acquiesced.

"Have it your way," she said, "but we can't stay here for long."

"Thank you." Morrison took Tamara's arm and helped her to sit down on a large, red and white toadstool.

"A giant mushroom," Tamara commented. "Now why does that seem so

familiar?"

"Why are you helping us anyway, Bramahl?" Losey demanded. "What's in it for you?"

"Let's just say that I have no great love for the Thirteen."

"Let's not," Losey replied. "If you want us to carry on following you, you're going to have to give me more than that."

Bramahl pursed her lips. "They killed my brother. Are you happy now?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"But..."

"Have you ever lost someone you loved?" Bramahl asked.

Losey looked away.

"Like I said, I don't want to talk about it."

"Are you okay, Tamara?" Morrison asked softly, trying to ignore the exchange going on on the other side of the cavern.

"I thought I was going by Block now," Tamara replied, "or did I dream that too?"

"No, you didn't dream that," Morrison said, "but it hardly seems to matter now." He slumped down on the grass at her feet. "I've never felt so out of my depth."

"Me too," Tamara agreed. "It's just... I keep having these visions. It's getting harder and harder to tell what's real and what's just make-believe."

"You'll get through it, Tamara. You're strong. That's why I chose you."

"That's what he said."

"Who?"

"I can't remember."

Morrison patted her knee and then stood up. "Look's like Bramahl's calling."

"Don't trust her," Tamara hissed. "She's dangerous."

"How can you tell?"

"I don't know. It's just a feeling."

"No disrespect," Morrison said, "but your feelings aren't entirely reliable at the moment and she does seem to have a good reason for hating the Thirteen."

"Morrison, you can't trust her," Tamara insisted. "You have to believe me."

"I do," Morrison replied. "Leave Bramahl to us. You just concentrate on getting well." He walked over to Bramahl. "I don't think Tamara's in any condition to go on. We can leave her here until we've met with these friends of yours and then come back for her. Orwell can keep an eye on her while we're gone."

"No!" Bramahl snapped, forcefully.

Morrison took a step back.

"I mean, it's not safe to split up," she amended hastily. "Trust me, we really haven't got much further to go."

Morrison frowned. "Fine. We'll follow your lead, for now."

"For now is all I ask," Bramahl said, before adding under her breath, "or require."

* * * * *

"So what on Gallifrey is going on here?" Grae asked. "What's up with Taryn? Where's Tamara? Where are we anyway? Why is it I can touch you, but not anyone else around here and what do you think you're playing at working for Section Thirteen of all people?"

The Doctor grinned despite the seriousness of their situation. "I've missed this part of the Doctor-companion relationship. You'll be twisting your ankle next."

"Doctor."

"All right," the Doctor conceded, "but it will have to be the abridged version. I have a nasty suspicion we're running out of time, which is an odd feeling to have in a place where time doesn't really exist, don't you think?"

"What do you mean time doesn't really..." Grae pulled a face. "No, I'm not going to let you sidetrack me. Just tell me what's going on."

"Well, let me see, do you remember when Tamara returned from her period of absence with the location of Section Thirteen's base? Yes, of course you do. Well then, you'll also remember that I sent Commander Poole to deal with them."

"Accompanied by the Time Lords and my future self," Grae added.

"Yes, we'll come back to them in a minute," the Doctor replied. "What's important to understand for now is that Commander Poole's attack was a disaster. The Thirteen were expecting it and they set a trap for them."

"But how could they know they were coming?"

"Taryn told them."

"Taryn told them?" Grae repeated unbelievably. "But when? How?"

"When? Oh, about eight thousand years ago, relatively speaking," the Doctor replied, revelling in the growing shock displayed on his companion's face. "How? Well when Taryn was stranded in Mesopotamia - have I mentioned that she was stranded yet? - she told Shemjaza who left a message with the founders of the Thirteen warning their successors in the twenty-fifth century." The Doctor's expression became wistful. "The scale of their plans is magnificent. I'd be impressed if they used it for something other than the subjugation of the masses. There are times when even I struggle to keep track of their schemes. My previous incarnation would have loved this."

"So they beat Commander Poole," Grae said. "How do you get from there to here?"

"Via time travel, Grae." The Doctor snapped his fingers to emphasise his point. "Their opponents included Time Lords armed with the latest in TARDIS technology. Once they sprung their trap, the technology was theirs to play with."

"But the technology would have been far in advance of anything they were used to. It would have taken decades for them to have worked out how to use it, at the very least."

"But that's the point, Grae. Time becomes meaningless once you can travel through it. They could have taken centuries to unlock the technology, but once they had it they could travel back to the very beginning and start using it right away."

"But what about the Laws of Time, Doctor?" Grae asked. "They expressly forbid that sort of behaviour."

"Regrettably, laws are only as effective as those that enforce them," the Doctor replied, "in this case, the Time Lords. I suspect that the first thing the Thirteen did once they captured the technology was to make sure the Time Lords could not interfere. We know that they disrupted several of the Thirteen's time experiments in the past. Is it too much of a stretch to assume that the Thirteen saw them as one of the greatest threats to their plans."

"Gallifrey's transduction barriers would provide no defence against time machines actually grown there. But it wasn't enough simply to invade Gallifrey. Oh no. There's only one sure way to defeat an opponent that can travel freely in four dimensions."

"They wiped Gallifrey from history," Grae reasoned.

"Every planet begins with a seed, a tiny core of matter around which the rest can form. It really isn't that difficult to go back in time and collect that seed before the rest accretes. I should know."

"We're the last Time Lords left, Grae, and time is slowly catching up with us."

"That's why we can't touch anything," Grae said. "We're gradually losing substance. And we can touch each other because?"

"Because we're both from the original timeline, if I can still call it that." The Doctor sighed. "Once the Time Lords were out of the way, the Thirteen were free to start playing with Earth's history and the first thing they did was to rescue the woman who had saved them."

"You mean Taryn."

"I mean Taryn." The Doctor looked away. "I underestimated her. I thought she was a spoiled little rich girl who turned her hand to medicine because it amused her, not because she had any calling. She's so much more. She has a brilliant coordinator, has a first rate political mind, but, most importantly of all, she has a vision and the drive to turn that vision into a reality. This..." The Doctor spread his arms wide. "...this is her doing."

"As near as I can tell, the Thirteen then started nudging human history in the direction they wanted. They could have made more drastic changes, but I think they were limited by Taryn's memories of history. The further they got from established fact, the less reliable her predictions would be. That's why twenty-first century London was still mostly recognisable."

"But Taryn wouldn't have ended up in the past if Gallifrey hadn't been destroyed, cutting off our link to the Eye of Harmony," Grae said, "and the only reason Gallifrey was destroyed is because Taryn was stranded in the past to warn the Thirteen about the Time Lords."

"You think that's confusing? How does Taryn end up travelling through time in the first place if the Time Lords don't exist and who made the Thirteen's time technology in the first place? I find it best not to think about it too much. It happened so what's the point in trying to prove that it was impossible?"

"But that doesn't explain what you're doing working with Section Thirteen,"

Grae pointed out. "Novem? Is that what they're calling you now?"

"I told them I was out of options. The Thirteen are working to save the human race. In our timeline, that would be my role so I'm trying to fit in as best as I can."

Grae cocked her head to one side. "That doesn't sound like you."

"No, it doesn't, does it?" the Doctor agreed. "This game isn't over yet and I always play to win. My only concern is that the Thirteen have changed the rules. I have this uncomfortable feeling that I'm playing chess on a Scrabble board." He scratched his beard. "Grae, there's something I need you to do for me."

Grae did not hesitate. "Just tell me what it is."

"If Jophiel is to be believed," the Doctor began, " – which is a bit of a leap, I know – then the Time Lords are in here somewhere. I can't trust Taryn, I don't know what's happened to Tamara and there's too much happening for just the two of us to handle. I need you to find us some help."

"I'll try, Doctor," Grae agreed, "but this is a huge place."

"Don't worry about finding them all, just concentrate on finding Alice. I think you'll find the two of you have a connection."

"We should," Grae agreed, "what with her being me and all, but where do I even start looking?"

"To find Alice?" The Doctor grinned impishly and tapped Grae on the tip of her nose, "why don't you try down the rabbit hole."

* * * * *

Bramahl, Tamara and the others emerged from a narrow corridor into a golden chamber. It seemed to stretch away to infinity so Tamara could not see the other walls. The high ceiling was supported by pillars spun from light. The chanting of a melodic choir filled the air and yet had been inaudible while they were still within the corridor.

"We've arrived," Bramahl said.

"Finally," Orwell muttered.

"Greetings, Bramahl." Tamara turned towards the sources of the voice and saw a dozen figures stepping from a fountain of blue light. They were tall, dressed in white robes and each had six wings. They were all breathtakingly beautiful.

"Zaphiel." Bramahl inclined her head.

"Most of your kind would bow down before us, Bramahl." One of the figures - Zaphiel? - stepped forward. Tamara noticed that the light moved with him.

"I pride myself on not having a kind," Bramahl replied.

"As I have discovered," Zaphiel agreed. "I've learned not to expect humility from you, though I do expect something by way of compensation."

"Who are these people?" Morrison whispered to Bramahl.

"It would appear that I'm forgetting my manners," Bramahl announced. "Zaphiel, may I introduce Morrison, Orwell, Isherwood, Losey and Tamara Scott. They are rebels fighting against the Thirteen, the human organisation your traitor

set up." She turned to Morrison and the others. "And may I introduce to *you* Zaphiel and the Elohim, inhabitants of a universe other than your own."

"Is that even possible?" Isherwood asked.

"I've seen papers on it," Orwell replied, "but it always seemed a bit too much like science-fiction to me."

"You promised us that you would assist us in our defeat of Shemjaza and his associates," Zaphiel remarked. "If this rabble is all the help that you can offer us that we are most displeased."

"This 'rabble' is nothing to me," Bramahl replied. She pointed at Tamara. "This woman, on the other hand, is of immense importance to you. May I present the Thirteen's secret weapon for you to eliminate at your leisure."

"Eliminate?" Orwell repeated.

"Now wait just a moment," Morrison interjected. "Nobody is doing anything to Tamara until..."

But Bramahl did not wait, even for 'just a moment'.

She focused on her greatest threat first, spinning on her heel and shooting Losey in the head. Before the girl had fallen, Bramahl was plunging a dagger into Isherwood's stomach. Losey was too dangerous to let live, but she had not yet made up her mind about Isherwood and this wound, while eventually fatal if untreated, would allow her to make that decision at her leisure. Orwell was charging towards her, yelling and screaming. He was almost amusing, Bramahl decided and she stabbed her extended fingers into his throat and sent him staggering back, choking. Morrison approached her cautiously, adopting a boxer's stance. Once upon a time Bramahl might have had to take him seriously, but age had long since slowed him to the point where he barely registered on her radar. She smashed a boot into his kneecap and then tripped him while he was reeling. He hit the ground hard.

"I guess it's just you and me, Tamara," Bramahl said, turning her attention to the remaining member of Morrison's group. "I've been looking forward to this rematch."

"Bramahl," Tamara said. She tasted the name, savouring it. "I remember you."

It was not just brave words; she did remember Bramahl. Perhaps the life or death situation and the surge of adrenaline had kick-started something in her brain or perhaps it was this place that was performing the rewiring, but in any event, her memories, her *real* memories, were becoming clearer. There was still much she could not see - it was like watching her life through a haze of smoke - but Bramahl stood out from the rest.

"You worked for the Thirteen," Tamara continued, "until you failed them one too many times. I took your place."

"You had no right," Bramahl snapped as they circled one another. "I believed in the Thirteen. What do you believe in?"

Tamara ignored the question. "I thought I'd killed you."

"I got better," Bramahl sneered.

"I remember. You tried to kill me."

"This time I'll get it right."

"You betrayed the Thirteen," Tamara said. "You were supposed to be working with the...the Time Lords? What happened?"

"I got a better offer."

Bramahl lunged forward, her fist snaking out towards Tamara's collarbone, but Tamara saw the punch coming and ducked to one side. She struck out with her foot, but Bramahl coiled away at the last possible moment. Bramahl caught Tamara a glancing blow to the side of the head and Tamara reeled.

"In your prime, you might be a challenge," Bramahl said, "but I bet nine month's pregnancy has taken the fight out of you."

Tamara closed her eyes and thought of Sally. She thought of her daughter growing up without her and ground her teeth together in barely suppressed rage.

"Wanna bet!"

Tamara sprung forward, too fast for Bramahl to counter, and clamped her hands around the smaller woman's throat. She started to squeeze.

"You won't take my daughter away from me," Tamara yelled. "You won't!"

Bramahl was fighting to breathe. Black spots were forming in front of her eyes. She clawed at Tamara's arms, scraping away the flesh with her nails, but the other woman seemed not to notice. In desperation, Bramahl flung herself forward, her head connecting soundly with Tamara's nose. There was a loud crack and Tamara fell backwards, trailing blood in her wake.

"Enough of these games, Bramahl," Zaphiel warned her. "Finish this now."

"With pleasure," Bramahl snarled, drawing her gun.

"No!"

Losey barrelled into Bramahl, knocking her off of her feet. Blood flowed freely from a wound at her temple where Bramahl's shot had grazed her. Losey's reflexes had saved her life, turning her aside as soon as she had seen the gun.

"Run, Tamara," Losey yelled as she struggled with Bramahl. "Don't worry about me, just go."

Tamara hesitated.

"Think about Sally," Losey said, chancing on the one thing that would get Tamara to move.

Tamara ran.

Zaphiel shimmered and vanished from where he stood only to reappear in Tamara's path.

"Going somewhere?" he asked as she pulled up short.

* * * * *

Grae had returned to the cavern of red stone in which Jophiel had shown her the Tritonomendetes. She reasoned that the pool was some kind of scrying device and, once she had located it again (it was hidden behind a flat-topped stalagmite) she got down on her hands and knees and tried to figure out how he had worked it, ignoring the red dust gathering on her clothes. Jophiel had activated the pool with his foot

and, feeling beneath the surface of the water, Grae found some curiously switch-shaped stones. She pressed down on them and they shifted deeper into the silt. The image in the pool distorted and Grae found herself looking at something other than her own reflection. The image was distorted and unclear, however, and then Grae remembered the telescope Jophiel had given her. She had pocketed it when she had finished with it. The Doctor's influence must be rubbing off on her and, besides, Jophiel had not asked for it back.

She peered through the telescope and the image sharpened into focus. Unfortunately, it was not the image she was looking for. Holding the telescope to her eye with one hand, she used the other hand to operate the switches and the images snapped from one to other like the changing channels of a monitor screen. Finally a familiar planet hove into view. All she had to do now was work out where it was.

"If only this thing came with a map," she muttered.

* * * * *

Tamara was hovering three feet above the floor, arms and legs splayed. She was pinned in mid-air like a butterfly while the Elohim examined her. Zaphiel put his hands into her chest and they disappear beneath her skin. She could see her flesh ripple as he moved his fingers beneath it. Zaphiel's eyes flashed and the air around Tamara filled with blue-white diagrams. They looked like the sketches of the human body one might see in an anatomy textbook, but Tamara knew enough about human biology to know that there was something very wrong about these diagrams.

The Elohim seemed to sense it too. They crowded closer, studying the diagrams intently.

"So what's the prognosis, Doc?" Tamara croaked. Her whole body felt numb and paralysed and she could barely move her lips. "Am I going to make it?"

Zaphiel ignored her and moved his hands lower. The diagrams twisted and reformed in new patterns.

"Do you see it, my brothers?" Zaphiel asked. "Do you recognise his work?"

"These techniques were forbidden," one of the Elohim said, aghast.

"They may be forbidden, Israphel," Zaphiel replied, "but that does not mean that they are not still practiced. He might as well have signed his work."

"Hey, Zaph," Bramahl interjected, "are you going to explain what you're looking at for those of us who don't speak angel?"

"Impudent whelp," a bearded Elohim snapped.

"At ease, Ariel," Zaphiel calmed him. "Bramahl has fulfilled her terms of our bargain. She has earned the right to speak, even if we wish it would be with less... informality."

"Still waiting," Bramahl called.

"This... this *creature* is a Nephilim," Ariel explained, still managing to sound haughty even when voicing his disgust. "She is an abomination, a hybrid of Elohim and human. Her creation was a crime."

"There are some experiments we cannot allow," Zaphiel said.

"Kind of like experimenting on embryos back where I come from," Bramahl commented. "So what are you going to do with her?"

"The other Nephilim were all destroyed," Ariel replied. "They were considered too dangerous to let live."

"Why should this one be any different?" Zaphiel asked.

A cough interrupted the conversation.

"How about because that's my friend you've got floating up there," the Doctor said, "and I'd really prefer it if you didn't kill her if it's all the same to you."

* * * * *

The door was round and green and the paint was peeling. It was also less than a foot high. Hoping that any watching Eternals were thinking favourable thoughts towards her, Grae took a deep breath and reached for the brass doorknob. She had forgotten that she was insubstantial, however, and her fingers slid right through it. She hung her head in despair. Her touch, ghostly as it was, must have had some effect, however, for, with a creaking that betrayed its age, the door slowly swung open.

On the other side of the threshold was space. Within the blackness, Grae could see stars, gas giants, spiralling galaxies and comets going about their endless, repetitive journeys. Yet despite the vacuum beyond the door, Grae was not being forced off of her feet by the air rushing out through it. Clearly, the door was not the only barrier at work here.

Grae removed the telescope from her coat pocket and started searching for familiar sights. From this angle, familiar calculations were distorted, but Grae had excelled at spatial geometry at the academy and it was easy for her to rearrange the stars in her mind to confirm that this was the region of space that she thought it was. Confirming her reasoning, she shifted her view down and to the right and there, hanging like a jewel or a well-polished Christmas bauble, was Gallifrey.

No sooner had she spied the planet than a TARDIS eased into existence beside her. Unlike the antiquated Type 40 she considered home, this TARDIS appeared with a gentle hum, not an elephantine groan. It was in its default form of a featureless white box. The door swung open and a familiar figure stepped out.

"Hello, me," Alice said.

She was slightly shorter than Grae, but the heels on her black leather buccaneer's boots brought her level again. She wore a red frock coat, trimmed with black, over a ruffled silk shirt. Her long hair was styled in ringlets.

"Alice." Grae embraced her dark-haired future self. "I thought I'd never see you again."

"Technically, we're not supposed to see each other at all," Alice pointed out. "Blinovitch would have a fit."

"That's not what I meant," Grae replied. "It's just... I thought..."

"I know what you thought," Alice said. "but you were wrong, okay. You will

regenerate, in spite of everything. I'm living proof of that, me and the others."

"Others?" Grae pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and blew her nose.

"Ah, that hasn't happened for you yet then," Alice said. "I'd best keep my mouth shut."

"How did you get here so fast?" Grae asked. "I've only just opened the door."

"I didn't," Alice replied. "We noticed the light from here twenty years ago, but it took us that long to work out what it might be. Once we had done that, I just programmed my TARDIS to take me back to when it had first appeared so as not to keep you waiting."

Grae wrinkled her nose. "But wouldn't you have known what the light was. This has all already happened for you."

"Doesn't work like that, I'm afraid, kiddo," Alice replied with a smile. "We're outside of time here. Normal service has been suspended for the duration. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've just got to send a signal from my TARDIS to summon the rest of the fleet and then we can get on with the business of rescuing the Doctor. I assume he is at the heart of this."

"As usual," Grae confirmed, "but I'm thinking that maybe I'll let you handle the rescue."

"Why, what will you be up to?"

"There's something about this place I can't put my finger on," Grae explained. "It's the thing that lets the Elohim into our universe and I'm thinking it may be the key to stopping them."

"Sounds intriguing," Alice replied. "Fancy some company."

Grae's eyes sparkled in anticipation, but she was cautious. "I thought you said we weren't supposed to be together?"

Alice shrugged. "Even Blinovitch has his limits."

* * * * *

"Who are you?" Zaphiel demanded.

"Don't you know?" the Doctor asked, jumping down from the jeep that had brought him there. "That's not very omniscient of you."

"We don't claim to be omniscient."

"No, just that you know better than everyone else. I'm the Doctor and I'm here to help."

The Doctor scanned the room, his eyes settling on Isherwood, curled up into a foetal ball against one of the pillars of light. Ignoring the Elohim, the Doctor rushed to his side. Instinctively, he stretched out his hands towards him before snatching them back, ashamed of his lapse.

"What happened here?" the Doctor asked, turning to the bearded man sitting next to him. The man's wrists and ankles were bound with golden chains.

"He was stabbed," the man replied, "in the stomach. He's bleeding out."

The Doctor turned to the two soldiers who had accompanied him. "You two, get this man stabilised and get him back to the shuttles immediately."

The soldiers looked uncertainly at each other and then turned to Unus, whom Taryn was helping out of the jeep. The white-haired leader of the Thirteen nodded and the soldiers snapped into action.

"Will he be all right?" the bearded man asked.

"There's still time," the Doctor assured him. "I'm the Doctor."

"Morrison," the bearded man replied.

"The anarchist?" The Doctor raised an eyebrow. "It's a pleasure to meet you at last, but you'll have to forgive me if I don't shake hands. I'm experiencing a certain existential dilemma at the moment."

"What are you doing here, Doctor?" Zaphiel demanded, his voice echoing around the room.

"I was about to ask you the same question," the Doctor retorted, straightening up. "Were you just going to leave that man to die?"

"We did not injure him," Zaphiel replied.

The Doctor's eyes alighted on the other occupant of the room.

"Bramahl, I should have known."

"The pleasure is all yours, Doctor," she said.

"Then there's not very much of it to go round," the Doctor snapped. "What are you doing here anyway? I thought I left you with Alice and Kathryn. I hardly imagine either of them just letting you go."

"I escaped in the confusion when Section Thirteen sprung their trap," Bramahl explained.

"So you know about that? No, of course you would. The question should be, did you know about it before or was it as much of a surprise to you as to everyone else? I keep losing track of which timeline we're in at the moment." He did not bother to wait for an answer. "So, you're the Elohim, are you? Sorry it took us so long to find you. You wouldn't believe what a maze it is out there." He grinned. "Or maybe you would. Have you considered adopting a grid system? With a catchy name like 'Interstitial Zone', the Milton Keynes look would be quite appropriate."

"Is this prattle really necessary?" Zaphiel asked wearily. "You have long since ceased to amuse me."

"Have I?" The Doctor hopped up onto the bonnet of the jeep and settled into a lotus position. "I'm so sorry I'm not entertaining enough. Perhaps you'd like to try and kill some more people? Did you pull the wings off flies when you were just a little cherub? You look the type."

"Doctor," Taryn warned quietly, "we're supposed to be negotiating with these people, not antagonising them."

"You're the one with the political blood in your veins," the Doctor replied sulkily. "Show me how it's done."

Throwing the Doctor a black look, Taryn stepped forward.

"Please forgive the Doctor," she said. "He is an independent agent and does not speak for the Thirteen or for the people of Earth."

"And you do?"

Unus spoke up. "I am Unus, the leader of the Thirteen and, by extension, the

planet Earth. Duae speaks with my authority."

"Well delegated," the Doctor muttered as an aside.

"May I know whom I am addressing?" Taryn asked. Her tone was polite, but not humble; she was dealing with an equal, not a superior.

"I am Zaphiel. My brothers and I are the Seraphim, the highest possible order amongst the Elohim." Zaphiel, in contrast, did not view Taryn as being of equal standing. He spread all six of his wings dramatically, revealing his brilliant plumage.

Taryn refused to be cowed by his peacock-like strutting. She remembered Zaphiel now and recalled what he had done to the people of Eridu, but she could suppress her emotions for the good of her species. She had had a lot of practice at that.

"We are here to begin a dialogue with you. We know of your intentions towards our species. We wish to prevent that and are here in the hopes that, between us, we may find an alternative, yet mutually acceptable solution."

"You speak elegantly, for a human," Zaphiel remarked.

"Thank you," Taryn replied, ignoring the implied slight. "Am I to take it that this means that you will enter into negotiations with us?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Zaphiel replied. "A successful negotiation relies on both parties having something that the other wants. What can you possibly offer us that we cannot simply take for ourselves?"

"Cultural exchange would be to the benefit of both our species," Taryn continued. "We come from wildly different environments. Consider what we might learn just by talking to one another. There are whole vistas of art and science and culture waiting to be discovered."

"Would you attempt a meaningful cultural exchange with a worm?" Zaphiel asked. "That is as palatable and as absurd as what you offer us. There will be no negotiation, no dialogue and the experiment will proceed as scheduled."

"You're missing out on a golden opportunity, Zaphiel," the Doctor insisted.

"I think not."

"That's your problem, Zaphiel," a fluting voice agreed. "You do not think. You never have and you never will."

"Shemjaza." Zaphiel scowled at the new arrival. "Brave words coming from the greatest criminal that the Elohim have ever known."

"To be a criminal within such of society is a label I wear with pride."

Shemjaza was not alone. Soldiers were pouring into the room, their heavy boots striking the floor like jackhammers. Vehicles rolled into the room, the roar of their engines blending uncomfortably with the unseen choir, Tria at the vanguard of their advance. Equipment was unloaded and tripod mounted weapons were erected. With an efficiency born of discipline and years of training, the Thirteen's army rapidly took up their positions and picked their targets, lighting up the Elohim with the lights from the laser sights.

"What is all this, Shemjaza," the Doctor demanded hotly. "We came here to talk."

"I thought you might require more bargaining potential," Shemjaza replied. "Are you ready to surrender yet, Zaphiel?"

"Surrender? To you?" Zaphiel laughed. "You've wandered far out of your depth, Shemjaza. Far too far."

The air rippled like a heat haze. Time seemed to slow and the voices of the choir were distorted into long, low vowel sounds. Then reality snapped back together and Zaphiel was surrounded by more than just his fellow Seraphim. The Orphanim led the charge. Spinning discs with blades in place of their wings, they scanned the forces arrayed before them with their multi-faceted eyes and then launched themselves into the densest concentrations of troops. Body armour provided no protection. Some soldiers took cover behind their vehicles, but the Orphanim tore through those without even slowing. Blood flowed freely as arteries were shredded and the unseen choir's song rose in triumphant fanfare, drowning out the screams.

The Devas came next, the Shining Ones. In the Thirteen's universe, their abilities would have been considered magic, but they were the natural progression of evolution in their own domain. They were masters of the elements and they provided covering fire by sending flame and ice hurtling over the battlefield. The strongest of the number reached down into then ground, causing it to buckle and quake, knocking their enemies off of their feet. Even the weakest among the Devas had a part to play, summoning up a mist to provide cover for the next wave.

Under the cover of the fog, the Cherubim advanced. Unlike the superior Seraphim, each individual had only a single pair of wings and these were a pale, dove grey rather than the rich plumage displayed by Zaphiel and his kin. They were armed with swords of crystal that appeared delicate and fragile on first inspection, yet they cut through flesh as if they were the finest tempered steel.

The Thirteen's soldiers had recovered from their initially shock and their leaders were already staging a counter-assault. The sharp retort of machine-gun fire echoed throat the expansive chamber. Bullets tore at the advancing Elohim, but rather than lose blood from their wounds, light escaped into the ether. A single shot was not enough to stop an Elohim, but inflict enough damage and they did not just die, they exploded, often taking one of their fellows with them in the ensuing blast. Once they realised this, the Thirteen's army started to concentrate their fire.

Grenades were thrown and the Cherubim's advance was slowed as the ground disappeared from under them. One brave soldier managed to steady a rocket launcher long enough to get off a shot at one of the Devas. The creature, like a strange sculpture of burning wax, erupted on impact, sending flaming debris amongst its colleagues, starting a minor rout.

It was not enough. What the Elohim lacked in numbers, they made up for in sheer power, which the only human forces could not hope to match. There were being torn apart.

* * * * *

Morrison rolled to one side as a grenade exploded nearby. He coughed to clear his throat of the dust.

"Losey, Orwell," he shouted, "are you still okay."

"We're alive," Orwell called back, "But I think Losey would feel a lot happier if she could get her hands on a gun."

"I don't appreciate people shooting at me when I can shoot back." Losey was straining against her chains and blood was running down her forearms where the cuffs had dug into her wrists.

"Losey," Morrison said, noticing her injuries, "stop that. You're hurting yourself."

Losey shook her head. "If I can make my wrists slick enough, I might be able to slide these things off."

"And take most of your hands with them," Morrison warned her.

"Do you have any better ideas?"

"Actually, yes." Bramahl was standing over them. She was holding the energy weapon she had used to cut into the shuttle, the muzzle aimed at Losey. "Hold still, this won't hurt a bit."

* * * * *

"Stop this madness now," the Doctor yelled at Unus, "while there are still people left to save."

"Never, Doctor," Unus replied, clambering up on top of a jeep.

"Are you insane?" The Doctor made a grab for Unus, trying to pull him back down. "You're a sitting duck up there."

Unus ignored him. "Tamara Scott! Tamara Scott, can you hear me."

Tamara tilted her head ever so slightly, but Unus took it as a sign of recognition.

"Tamara, I speak for the Thirteen. Do you remember the Thirteen? Do you remember what they did to you?" A blast of molten rock whizzed past Unus but he did not even flinch. "Tamara, initiate Revelation protocols, codeword: Sally!"

Tamara's skin started to bubble, as if there was something beneath struggling to get out. Then her flesh ruptured and tore, sloughing off of her in great chunks. Naked, now a being of pure light, she rose towards the ceiling, free of the Elohim's restraints. All around her, the fighting ceased as combatants turned their heads to see what was happening and then found themselves unable to look away. When she spoke, her voice brought with it the memories of a thousand nightmares.

"You called me an abomination," she accused Zaphiel. "You think of me as a monster, in spite of your own crimes. Would you like to see a real monster?"

Lightning gathered around her. Sparks crackled amid her hair. The unseen choir had fallen silent, waiting.

Tamara ignited the storm.

* * * * *

"We're getting deeper," Alice said.

"Are you sure?" Grae asked. "We haven't seen any stairs."

"I have an excellent spatial sense," Alice replied. "We've definitely been moving downwards and in a tightening spiral unless I'm very much mistaken."

"Like going down the plughole," Grae remarked.

"What a charming analogy," Alice teased her younger self. "I prefer to think of it as getting to the heart of the matter."

"In that case, o great and wise me of the 'excellent spatial sense'," Grae replied, "are we nearly there yet?"

"Don't mock," Alice replied. "One day all this experience will be yours."

Grae shrugged. "Until then, what I lack in experience I make up for in looks."

Alice punched her on the arm. "Are we sure I was ever you?"

"I don't know what you're worried about," Grae said, pouting. "You can put the past behind you, I've got all this to look forward to."

Alice stuck out her tongue. "I am going to so love seeing you in the Death Zone. And in answer to your first question, I think we've arrived."

The room was dark, the surfaces like polished black stone. Grae cautiously made her way towards a strange altar in the centre of the chamber.

"It's like being underground," she said, "or underwater."

"Or in the belly of some creature," Alice added. "You can feel it too?"

"Like a pressure coming from all directions, crushing you."

Alice stepped back out into the corridor. "It's fine out here."

Grae nodded thoughtfully. "It's like the room itself is rejecting us."

"Well tough for it then." Alice said, confidently striding back inside. She misplaced a foot, slipped and stretched out a hand to steady herself. The wall came away in her hand.

"Grae, take a look at this." The black surface was a build-up of ash and grime, but to have risen this thick and solid it must have been accumulating for centuries. Alice ground it to greasy powder between her fingers. Beneath the dirt, the wall was smooth and white, with just the hint of a pattern still concealed by the grime. Alice began scrabbling at the surface to uncover more.

Grae had spotted a curiosity of her own. Behind the altar, curled up in an aged and weathered chair, was a skeleton. Grae wanted a closer look, but, as she moved closer, the altar moved.

"What was that?" Alice spun round, looking for the cause of the noise.

Above the "altar", the time rotor struggled to rise. The light that illuminated the crystals within sputtered on and off intermittently. The rotor fought on, however, steadily rising and falling. As it did so, it dislodged centuries of accumulated detritus from the altar to reveal a familiar hexagonal console.

"Is that what I think it is?" Alice asked.

Grae could not believe what she was seeing. "It's the TARDIS."

Act Seven - The Final Cut

"Of all the Othering..." Alice swore. Several times.

"I thought I'd have grown out of that sort of language," Grae said.

"I'm older than you. I never said I was more mature." Alice had stopped picking at the wall. Not that she knew what it was, she was not sure that she wanted to touch it any more. "Are we sure it's his?"

Grae was examining the console. "The configuration's a little different, but there's a serial number just under here. Besides, how many other Type 40s are there out there?"

"None," Alice confirmed unnecessarily. "There's only one person who'd be seen dead in an antique like this." Her eyes alighted on the skeleton sitting at the other side of the console. "Poor choice of words."

With uncomfortable trepidation, Grae approached the skeleton. The chair it was sitting in was rotting and warped. One leg had almost been eaten through entirely causing it to list to the left. Mould fringed the faded fabric. The skeleton was hunched forward, its narrow arms wrapped around it as if to protect it from the cold. Frayed strips of velvet hung down from its shoulders and between its ribs and a gold fob watch dangled from spindly fingers. The Doctor's fob watch.

Gently, Grae pried the watch from its grasp. She opened the lid and music began to play. A hot, salty tear rolled down Grae's cheek.

"How long?" Grae asked, her voice breaking. "How long until he ends up like this, do you think?"

Alice shook her head. Time Lords could live for thousands of years, barring accidents, but they both knew of the Doctor's reputation for burning through his regenerations.

"Grae, I..."

"No," Grae shouted at the ceiling. "I won't accept this. Why do people keep dying on me?"

Alice put her hands on her younger self's shoulders. "Everybody dies eventually."

"Not him. He's immortal. He has to be." She looked Alice in the eye. "If he's not around to fight the monsters, who will?"

* * * * *

The Elohim screamed.

The hall, once golden and magnificent, was now dark and oppressive. The pillars of light were cracked and the unseen choir gave voice to a mournful dirge. Blue-white lightning crackled about the room, guided by Tamara's hand. With a gesture, the Elohim were speared by the energy, light bleeding painfully from their eyes and mouths.

"How does it feel to be poked, prodded and dissected?" Tamara asked cruelly.

"This is your doing, isn't it?" the Doctor demanded of Unus.

"We needed a means of fighting the Elohim on their own terms," Unus

replied. "We knew that conventional weapons would not be enough. Fortunately, Shemjaza provided the answer."

"What did you do to Tamara?" the Doctor snapped angrily.

"She came to us," Unus said. "She wanted to be part of the Thirteen."

"It was a ruse," the Doctor replied. "She was working for me the entire time."

"Do you honestly think we didn't know that?" Taryn asked. "That didn't mean that we couldn't take advantage of her."

"You knew about this?" the Doctor asked. "You were a party to this? Then everything you said about giving me time to rescue Tamara..."

"Was a lie, yes, and you were completely taken in, weren't you, Doctor. We couldn't execute Tamara, not without destroying our advantage, but we had to make it look like we would to divert suspicion away from her. All the time she thought she was rebelling against us she was really acting on post-hypnotic suggestion, putting herself exactly where we wanted her."

The Doctor shook his head, trying to ignore the strengthening smell of ozone. "But there are too many variables, too many things that might have gone wrong. You can't possibly have predicted this so exactly."

"Things *did* go wrong, Doctor," Unus confirmed, "and when they did we simply went back to the beginning and tried again."

"You turned back time? How many times? How long have you been playing with our lives?"

He looked at Taryn, noting the small lines around her eyes, deeper than he remembered, and the weariness behind her eyes mostly camouflaged by a steely determination.

"How long has it been since I lost you?" he asked.

"Ten years, Doctor," Taryn replied. "Ten long years since I first met Unus in Mesopotamia."

Dark clouds were gathering, obscuring the ceiling of the chamber. Thunder cracked as Tamara played the lightning like the strings of a harp.

"Ten years," the Doctor muttered.

His voice was soft and cautious, as if he was uncertain whether he was talking to Taryn or solely to himself. Just as Taryn had seemed to age before the Doctor's eyes, now it seemed to Taryn that the weight of the Time Lord's years were catching up with him. His back bent beneath the weight and the streak of grey in his hair fluttered, caught by a faint breeze. Then, with an effort, he straightened, rolling his shoulders and standing proud and defiant once again, ready to make the universe stand up and take notice.

"Ten years," he repeated, this time in a rich, confident baritone. "I think this travesty has gone on for more than long enough, don't you?"

He strode towards his companion. "Tamara, can you hear me?"

Leaving the Elohim pinned in the air like butterflies beneath glass, Tamara turned towards him.

"I hear you."

The Doctor stuck his hands into the pockets of his trousers and tilted his

head at an angle.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked.

Tamara looked down at her hands. It was unclear now where her fingers ended at the lightning began.

"My duty," she replied. "These creatures are a threat. I have to remove them."

The words lacked emotion, as if Tamara was reading them from a card for the first time.

"Remove them?" the Doctor repeated. "You're killing them."

"I have my orders."

The Doctor frowned. "Tell me, who do you think you are?"

"I..." Tamara opened her mouth to reply, but the idea in her head was fractured. *I am Tamara Scott, British secret agent. I am Tamara Scott, companion of the Doctor. I am Tamara Scott, soldier for Section Thirteen. I am Tamara Scott, mother to Sally.*

"I am the servant," she replied.

"I see." The hairs on the back of the Doctor's neck were standing on end. He put it down to the static hanging in the air, but conceded that he might be deluding himself. "And who do you think I am?"

Tamara stared at him, regarding him with eyes of white fire. His form was unstable, flitting and changing as she watched. At one point he was her handler in the British Secret Service, all hooded eyes and slicked back hair, handing her her latest mission dossier. Then he became a younger man in a midnight blue waistcoat decorated with silver stars - the Doctor. He never ordered, never insisted, merely *suggested* courses of action, gently prodding her in the direction he wished her to take. At least the Thirteen were more honest. He was Unus now, standing at the head of his colleagues, his instructions echoing around the darkened chamber. Or was that just in her head? Finally he was Sally, Sally as a baby, Sally as the child she might yet grow to become. She was screaming, demanding, never satisfied. None of them were ever satisfied. She could never do enough.

She knew him now, recognised him beneath whatever mask he was wearing.

"You are the master," she said.

"Is that how you see me?" The Doctor hung his head. "I suppose there is some truth in it. In my own way, I'm as guilty as anyone here of trying to force people to conform to my agenda. I sent you to join the Thirteen and this is the result of that poor judgement. At the time, I thought it was your decision as well, but now I wonder if I just told myself that to assuage any guilt." He looked up, his eyes burning bright and green. "Tamara, if you really do see me as 'the master' then I have one last command for you. Don't listen to the Thirteen. Don't listen to the Elohim. Don't listen to me even. No one can force you to do anything anymore. Tamara, think for yourself."

Tamara threw back her head and screamed. She flared with light and, for a moment, everyone in the room was blinded. Then everything was quiet. The room was dark and the lightning had faded. Tamara lay in a crumpled heap on the floor.

"What have you done?" Unus demanded of the Doctor.

"I believe I've disarmed you." The Doctor grinned impishly. "That's the trouble with using people as weapons. They can always refuse to fight."

Taryn was using the lull in the fighting to help Tamara to her feet. She had draped her jacket around Tamara's shoulders. The use of Tamara's new power had drained her and she was struggling to stand, unsteady on her own feet as a newly born fawn.

"You were supposed to kill them," Unus roared at her.

Tamara shrugged weakly, holding the jacket closed with one hand. Her other arm was around Taryn and she was leaning on her for support.

"I chose not to, isn't that right, Doctor?"

"It's good to have you back, Tamara," the Doctor replied.

"It's good to be back."

"Touching as this reunion is," Unus said, "do either of you realise the consequences of your actions? We came here to stop the Elohim. Thanks to you, they're free to continue with their plan to destroy the entire human race!"

"I hardly think so," the Doctor replied. "Look at them. Tamara may not have killed them, but they're not exactly in the best of shape right now. This is your chance to come to the table as equals. Both sides know what the other is capable of so why not try talking for a change?"

"You expect me to *negotiate* with these primitives?" Zaphiel demanded, his voice strained.

"What are your options?" the Doctor asked. "If you carry on fighting, do you really think you'll make it out of here alive?"

"I still have some strength," Zaphiel warned.

"And I'm sure you could take many of the humans with you before you go," the Doctor agreed, "just as I'm sure Unus here already knows that. Both sides have nothing to gain by persisting with this conflict and everything to lose."

Taryn stepped forward. "Zaphiel, on behalf of the human race, I'd like to offer you the hand of friendship."

"Duae!" Unus protested.

"The Doctor's right, Unus. It's time for a fresh start." She turned back to Zaphiel. "What do you say?"

"I doubt we could ever be friends, human," Zaphiel replied scornfully.

"This isn't easy for me either," Taryn said. "I watched you drown a city full of people. I'm not saying I'll ever be able to forgive or forget what you did, but I'm willing to try."

Zaphiel looked from Taryn to the Doctor and then back again.

"You are a strange people, primitive in so many ways and yet there is a nobility to you that some Seraphs would be hard pressed to match," he said. "I can make you no promises, but I will listen to what you have to say."

He clasped Taryn's outstretched hand in his.

"I love it when a plan comes together," the Doctor quipped.

"You don't seriously expect me to believe that you were manipulating things all along," Tamara remarked.

"No," the Doctor conceded, "but somebody was." He cast a glance in Taryn's direction. "Has it turned out the way you expected?"

"No," Taryn replied, "but I think I prefer it this way."

"Splendid." The Doctor clapped his hands together. "So, Unus, I take it the Thirteen will be relinquishing their stranglehold on the Earth?"

"I'm sorry?" Unus raised an eyebrow.

"You should be," the Doctor replied, "but that's by the by. The Thirteen exist solely to protect the human race from the Elohim. Now that the Elohim are no longer a threat, there's really no reason for you to stick around, is there?"

"The human race still needs a firm hand to guide it."

"Really? When a child grows up, we let it go out into the world free to make its own mistakes. Aren't you in danger of playing the overprotective parent, stifling the child's true potential? Imagine where we'd be now if Vespucci's mother had never let him out of the house. 'I'm sorry, Amerigo, but you can't go and discover the New World today, it's too dangerous.'"

"The problem, Doctor, is that for every Vespucci or Leonardo or Ghandi there's a Hitler or a Caligula or a Ghenghis Khan. Left to their own devices, yes human beings are capable of great breakthroughs and they use them to create the atom bomb. And the majority aren't great pioneers or villains; they're just apathetic, knowingly turning a blind eye to the crimes being perpetuated around them. They don't deserve to be masters of their own destiny."

"And what right do you have to lead them?" the Doctor asked.

"I am the leader of the Thirteen," Unus replied. "We have been ruling the Earth, directly or indirectly, for thousands of years."

"The Thirteen may have been," the Doctor agreed, "but not you. I've been talking to Tria."

"Tria? What has she been telling you?"

"From the start, I was suspicious of the way you defeated the Time Lords," the Doctor explained. "Not the trap per se. It wouldn't be the first time someone has outwitted them. No, it's more the fact that you knew they were coming in the first place."

"I left a warning for them," Taryn interjected. "I told you that."

"Yes, you did, but think about it for a moment," the Doctor replied. "You left a message that wasn't going to mean anything to anybody for nearly eight thousand years. Even believing it to be written by a member of the Thirteen - and how long is it going to be before they start questioning that? - people will argue of its interpretation. Is it meant to be taken literally or is metaphorical. By the time the events you were warning them about come to pass, is there really going to be anyone around he even understands your message, let alone takes it seriously?"

"I did," Unus replied.

"I know." The Doctor pierced him with a stare. "But you weren't one of the Thirteen, were you, Unus?"

"I wanted to be," Unus said.

"But they didn't want you," the Doctor replied. "What were you really? The tea-boy?"

"I was an archivist."

"Of course," the Doctor said, "that's how you came across Taryn's message."

"The Thirteen didn't take it seriously," Unus said. "You were right about that. They treated it like a holy relic, but they didn't appreciate its content."

"And you did."

"These were the words of one of the founding members of the Thirteen. How could they not be important? I started to spread the message in secret, to rally the support I needed to save the Thirteen."

"So when the Time Lords arrived it was you and your allies, not the Thirteen themselves, who were waiting for them and it was you and not the Thirteen who gained unrestricted access to time as a result."

"They had strayed too far from the true path of the Thirteen," Unus declared. "They were no longer worthy to bear their name or receive their gifts."

"Gifts which you happily accepted in their place," the Doctor remarked, "and the first thing you used these 'gifts' for was to go back in time to meet your heroes, am I right? Then you and she tinkered with the timeline to create a Thirteen more in keeping with your views."

"Is anyone not seeing the irony here?" Tamara interjected. "Go on, Doctor, spell it out for them."

"We wouldn't be here if you hadn't rebelled against the Thirteen, Unus, in direct defiance of those principles you claim to hold so dear," the Doctor said. "What gives you any more right to think and act for yourself than the six billion people on the planet below? Do they make mistakes? Absolutely and I'm sure there's far worse to come. Do they need to start taking responsibility for their actions? Yes, of course they do. They need to grow up, but they won't do so if you keep treating them like children. They don't need you to hold their hand anymore."

"Humans are the most infuriating species I have ever encountered. By turns malicious and loving, destructive and boundlessly inventive. There are times I wonder how they could possibly be my favourite species and time when I can't imagine it any other way. Give them a chance, Unus, and I guarantee that they will surprise you."

"I've worked so long and so hard to make the world a better place," Unus said. "I'm not sure I can just step back and let them ruin it."

"*The Selfish Giant*," Morrison said. He was walking towards the small group by the jeep, massaging his wrists where his restraints had cut off his circulation. A fragment of gold chain still trailed from his ankle where Bramahl had severed it with a blast from her gun.

"I beg your pardon?" Unus said.

"It's a story," Morrison explained. "It's on the Thirteen's banned list, but there are still a few copies around if you know where to look. It's about a giant who owns a beautiful garden. One day, he returns home to find some children playing in it. The giant does not want them playing in *his* garden so he threw them out and

built a high wall around it and the children were left to play in the dirt of the road. Time passed and spring rolled by, at least it did everywhere except the giant's garden, which remained caught in the grip of winter, cold and foreboding and lifeless. Summer came to the rest of the world, but the giant's garden remained barren and when fruit arrived elsewhere in the autumn, winter still lay claim to his plot of land.

"Then, one morning, the giant was woken by the sound of music. A bird was singing in his garden and the branches of the tree it was sitting in were covered with blossom. Amazed, the giant went out into the garden and, among the trees, he found children. They had crept into the garden through a hole in the wall and they had brought the spring in with them."

"When the giant realised how selfish he had been," the Doctor continued, "the giant knocked down the wall and made the garden the children's playground forever."

"Do you seriously think we want to wreck the world?" Morrison asked. "All we've ever wanted is to be a part of it."

"We've done what we set out to do," Taryn agreed. "We can step down now, Unus."

"No," Shemjaza declared, "that will not do at all."

The Grigori was at the head of the regrouped army of the Thirteen. Tria stood beside him, an automatic pistol cradled in her hands like a talisman.

"The Thirteen's work is not yet over," Shemjaza continued, "but you have outlived your usefulness."

"Goodbye, Unus," Tria said, raising her pistol. "I guess it's time for you to step down after all."

There was a loud crack as she pulled the trigger. Morrison was already in motion. Slamming himself into Unus, he knocked the leader of the Thirteen to the ground, but he could only move so fast. The bullet struck Morrison in the chest.

"You saved me," Unus said in disbelief.

Morrison reached up and gripped Unus' hand with his last remaining strength. "Promise me you'll set my people free."

"I promise," Unus whispered as he closed Morrison's eyes for the last time.

"Tria," the Doctor yelled at the assassin. "I thought we had an understanding."

"We did, Doctor," Tria called back, "but Shemjaza made me a better offer."

"Leadership of the Thirteen?" the Doctor asked. "Won't that be a little pointless given what Shemjaza has planned for the Earth?"

"If I was planning to stay there I'd have to agree, Doctor," Tria replied, "but Shemjaza only wants the one planet so I get the rest of the universe. Shemjaza has already promised me a hundred soldiers like your friend there to help me enforce my claim to it."

"You would make more Nephilim?" Zaphiel demanded.

"Of course he would," the Doctor confirmed. "They were his idea in the first place. That's why he rebelled against you, because you were going to shut down his experiments."

"He said he was trying to save the human race," Taryn insisted.

"Which was true, as far as it went," the Doctor replied, "but he wasn't interested in saving humanity out of altruistic motives. Shemjaza wanted to save it because he made it."

"The Earth was my crucible," Shemjaza agreed. "We were doing magnificent work there, pushing the boundaries of science farther than anyone before us."

"Your experiments were obscene," Zaphiel declared.

"Obscene? Only to someone too naïve to see their potential. All I wanted was more time. Time enough to bring my experiments to a satisfactory conclusion."

"Time to create more abominations?" Zaphiel sneered. "The parameters of the research and the allocated time scale were clearly defined beforehand. You had no right to deviate from them."

"No right?" Shemjaza laughed. "You can't stifle creativity or place boundaries around genius. Our discoveries set their own requirements."

"So rather than give up your research, you decided to get rid of the Elohim once and for all," the Doctor reasoned.

"I expected it to be more difficult, somehow," Shemjaza said, "but human beings are surprisingly gullible."

"I trusted you," Taryn spat. "I believed in you."

"If it makes you feel any better," the Doctor whispered to her, "the Elohim really were a threat."

"It doesn't," Taryn replied.

"Ah."

"You'll never get away with this," Unus announced. "We will stop you."

"Really, old man," Tria mocked, gesturing to the ranks of troops arrayed behind her. "You and what army?"

The Doctor tilted his head to one side, grinning as his sensitive ears were the first to pick up the approaching noise.

"This one, I think you'll find."

A buzzing filled the air as the elegant, sleek war-craft of the Time Lords sped into the room. War TARDISes materialised in clusters about the battlefield in all their gothic splendour. Alongside the Time Lords came the Terran Colony Alliance. Their vehicles were blockier, less stylised, but were nonetheless the best the twenty-fifth century had to offer, which put them four centuries in advance of the force Shemjaza was fielding.

"Quella, Kathryn," the Doctor said, nodding to the Time Lord president and the commander of the TCA respectively, "so nice of you to join us."

"Do you have any idea how long we have been confined here, Doctor?" President Quella asked, her diaphanous robes rippling around her as she surveyed the scene. "We were the masters of time and they took that from us, forced us to live

out our interminable existence able only to move along the time's river in one direction and at one speed. Do you have any idea what that feels like?"

"As it happens, yes," the Doctor replied.

"It was..." Quella fought to maintain her composure. "...beneath our dignity."

"What the President is trying to say, Doctor, is that we're glad to be here," Commander Kathryn Poole added. "We've got a score to settle."

"Perhaps," the Doctor said, "but I'd still rather solve this without violence if I can." He turned to the Grigori. "Well, Shemjaza, what's it to be? You can't possibly defeat a combined army of Time Lords and humanity's finest."

"No, I doubt I can," Shemjaza agreed in an amused tone, "but I think they'll find it somewhat difficult to defeat me either." He advanced towards Quella. "Boo!"

"He's just trying to provoke you, Quella," the Doctor warned. "Don't do anything rash."

"Consider me provoked," Quella replied. "Chancellery Guard, fire at will."

"Quella, no!" the Doctor protested, but it was too late. The Chancellery Guard already had the Grigori in their sights. As their president commanded, they did not hesitate to fire, but if they had expected their staser bolts to have any effect then they were sorely disappointed.

The powerful energy beams passed harmlessly through Shemjaza.

He laughed. "Are you really that foolish, Doctor? Did you think that the Elohim would keep all these people here in the Interstitial Zone if they had the capacity to do them any harm? They have been rendered out of phase with the native reality. They can no more affect me than you can, which means they can't stop me either." He turned to Zaphiel. "I will sweep through our universe like a cleansing fire, burning away any last vestiges of your decadence and short-sightedness. Then I shall return to the Earth to complete my work. With all of the Elohim's resources under my control, there will be nothing I cannot achieve. Nothing!"

"We will fight you, Shemjaza," Zaphiel insisted. "We will oppose you to our dying breath."

"Which just makes it all the sweeter. My Nephilim has left you diminished, no longer a credible threat. True, she was supposed to kill you, but I believe that I prefer it this way. I look forward to crushing the life out of you with my bare hands. Consider it payback for what you did to my colleagues."

"Aren't you forgetting someone?" Bramahl sashayed out of the shadows, one hand on her hip, the other running through her hair.

"Ah yes, my favourite pawn," Shemjaza replied. "Our most loyal servant turned most hate-filled traitor. You played your role perfectly, handing Tamara over to the Elohim just as we planned all along."

"You think I don't realise how you manipulated me? You killed my brother just to provoke a reaction!" A crooked smile danced across Bramahl's lips. "That's why I'm so glad to have finally outwitted you."

"You? What possible threat could you pose?"

"Doctor," Bramahl called out, "I hope you realise who's saving the universe this time around." She met Shemjaza's incredulous eyes. "You know, you really should have given more thought to what I might ask the Elohim for as my part of our deal."

Bramahl spread her arms above her head. Her fingers stretched as her skin fell away and she stepped out of the prison of her flesh.

"You turned her into a Nephilim," Ariel said to his leader in disbelief. "This flies in the face of all our laws. How could you?"

"Oh still you tongue, Ariel," Zaphiel scolded him. "Do you really think that matters now?"

Bramahl threw back her head and laughed.

"Dance for me," she said as lightning sprang from her eyes and lifted Shemjaza off his feet.

"Take aim!" Tria yelled to her troops. "Fire!"

"That tickles," Bramahl said as the bullets bounced off of her. "Is that the best you can do?"

"Far from it, girl," Shemjaza said through his pain. "I made the first Nephilim and what I created I can also destroy."

He plunged his hand into Bramahl's chest.

"That might be more effective if she actually had a heart for him to pull out," Tamara muttered.

"Tamara," the Doctor replied, "I understand your antipathy towards Bramahl, but in this instance she is on our side. I think."

Shemjaza withdrew his hand and light bled out of the hole he had made, dissipating outside of Bramahl's body.

"That hurt," Bramahl said. "Let me return the favour."

Shemjaza's skin rippled and split open as dozens of insects forced their way up from beneath his flesh and out to freedom.

"A plague of locusts," Shemjaza said, his face contorted in agony. "How...original. Tria, target the Elohim and proceed with the plan. Leave this creature to me."

With that, Shemjaza unfurled his wings and hurled himself bodily at Bramahl. Gunfire erupted as the Thirteen's army attacked the Elohim. Zaphiel's forces struck back, but, weakened by Tamara's attack, their response was much less than it had been previously and, despite their casualties, once they realised this, Tria's forces redoubled their efforts.

"Kathryn." The Doctor had to shout to be heard above the noise. "Where's Grae?"

Kathryn Poole raised a hand to shield her eyes as an Elohim exploded. "She and Alice went off to explore this place. Grae has an idea that she could find a way to end all this elsewhere."

"Did she now?" The Doctor scratched his beard. "I wonder what put that thought into her head? I have to find her, though it would help if I knew where to start..."

"I think I know where she is." There was a faraway look in Tamara's eyes. "This power inside of me, it connects me to everything. I'm having trouble filtering all of the inputs, but if Grae's one of them then I can find her."

"Then let's get started."

"I'm coming with you," Taryn said.

"I can't stop you," the Doctor replied.

"We're coming too." Orwell and Losey insisted.

"Tamara's our friend," Orwell continued. "Where she goes, we go too."

Losey grinned at Tamara. "I've got your back."

"This isn't a coach outing," the Doctor snapped irritably. He pointed at Orwell. "You, help Tamara. She's still weak after using all that power."

Orwell put an arm around Tamara and she draped a grateful arm across his shoulder, allowing him to take some of his weight.

"You can't leave now," Kathryn protested, gesturing towards the battle. "What about all this?"

"I'd be useless in a fight. I save lives, I don't take them," the Doctor replied, before adding under his breath, "if I can help it. If I'm going to save the day then it won't be here. Now, can I get on with it, please?"

"Be careful," Kathryn admonished him.

"I rather think we're beyond that, don't you?" Without waiting for a reply, the Doctor spun on his heel and strode away.

* * * * *

Grae's fingers hovered uselessly over the TARDIS console. At some point in the future, the Doctor would change the console's configuration, but all the controls were still recognisable if not in the same places that Grae remembered. There was the helmic regulator, here the scanner control and near the edge of one of the triangular sections Grae could see the fast return switch, clearly labelled for use in emergencies. Somewhere among these controls was the answer, Grae was sure. The console had returned to life at her presence and she suspected that the TARDIS itself might well have lured her here. In their own way, TARDISES were living creatures and it wouldn't have been the first time one had attempted to communicate with its passengers via its telepathic circuits. Such communication was crude, as inter-species communication often was, but it could be surprisingly effective.

The problem, as Grae saw it, was that she could not actually touch the controls. Every time she tried her hand passed right through the console and Alice had no better luck. The answer to all of their problems was so close and yet there was nothing she could do about it.

A tear of despair fell from her eye. It did not make a splash.

"Doctor?" Alice announced in shock as he strode into the room.

"Alice, how good to see you again," the Doctor replied without breaking his stride. "Have you done something new with your hair? Grae, I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I knew I could trust you to get to the heart of our problem."

"Tamara!" All of Grae's despair evaporated as she was reunited with her best friend.

Tamara studied her for a moment. "Grae, right?" Grae nodded. "You'll have to forgive me. My memories like Swiss cheese right now, but I'm slowly filling in the holes."

"What is this place?" Orwell asked, gazing at his surroundings.

"A TARDIS." The Doctor's voice became sombre. "*My* TARDIS unless I'm very much mistaken."

"Doctor," Grae warned, trying to position herself between him and the corpse. She was too late.

The Doctor licked his lips. His hand went to his beard, then to his forehead, then down to his pocket as he tried to work out what to do with it.

"Who's the stiff?" Losey asked, oblivious to the looks Alice and Grae shot at her.

"The 'stiff', as you put it, young lady, is me." The Doctor dropped to one knee and placed his fingers on the temples of his corpse's skull. "I suppose walking over your grave is inevitable when you travel in time as much as I do."

"Doctor," Tamara said. He was fighting to sound cheery and upbeat, but his voice was quavering. She wanted to give him a hug. But knew that her hands would just slide through him.

"Alas, poor Doctor, I knew him well... I suppose we explored that little bit too far," the Doctor said to his other self. "We ran aground in the space between universes. I wonder when it's going to happen. Perhaps I stave off the inevitable until my last regeneration, or perhaps it happens tomorrow. Who knows? My companions, assuming I still have any, will die first as age claims them, but I will keep going for thousands of years, regenerating and regenerating. Do you think I'm going to die of old age or will the food run out first? Or perhaps the boredom drives me to take my own life. What sort of willpower would it take to kill yourself over and over and over?"

Grae was growing uncomfortable. "Doctor, you're scaring me."

"I'm scaring myself, Grae," the Doctor replied. "Everyone dies eventually, but no one likes to be reminded of the fact."

"Doctor," Taryn said, "are you saying that the TARDIS is part of the Interstitial Zone?"

"Not part of the Interstitial Zone," Alice explained. "The TARDIS *is* the Interstitial Zone."

The Doctor stood up and brushed off his trousers. "Alice is right. The strain of holding herself together in this environment – or lack of one – must be playing havoc with the old girl's internal dimensions. The TARDIS is bridging the gap between universes. My detractors would probably point out at this juncture that,

had I never left Gallifrey, the Elohim would never have gained access to our universe."

"As I understand it," Tamara said, "had you never left Gallifrey then there would never have been a Gallifrey for you to leave."

"That doesn't make any sense," Orwell said, scratching his head.

"No, it doesn't," the Doctor agreed. "That's the trouble with paradoxes, before long their spiral out of control and get swallowed up by their own internal logic. I've given up trying to figure out all the hows and whys and wherefores. I'm just going to try and do the right thing and there's only one tried and tested way to deal with a Gordian knot."

"Doctor," Grae began, "I don't think I found this place by accident. I think the TARDIS brought me here for a reason."

"I don't doubt it. Imagine the pain the poor girl must be in, stretched between two universes with incompatible physical laws. She wants me to put her out of her misery."

"What are you going to do?"

"Convert the TARDIS's mass to energy," the Doctor replied. "Grae and I did something similar to effect our materialisation in London only this time we'll make sure there isn't anything left."

"You'll permanently sever the two universes," Taryn concluded. "The Elohim won't be able to interfere anymore."

"I had hoped to encourage peaceful coexistence," the Doctor mused, "but under the circumstances I think this is for the best, don't you? Alice, you had better go and find President Quella and Commander Poole and get an evacuation under way."

"Is that going to work?" Tamara asked. "Won't they still be – what was it Shemjaza said? – out of phase with reality?"

"That's the really good bit about this plan," Alice replied enthusiastically. "Because the gap between universes is outside of time, when the Doctor destroys the TARDIS it will be as if it was never here in the first place. Gallifrey will never have been destroyed so we'll never have been put out of phase."

"Sort of like a cosmic reset button?" Orwell asked.

"Not the way I would have preferred to end this story," the Doctor mused, "but I seem to have run out of options. However, anyone still in the TARDIS when it vanishes will die permanently, which is why we need to get everyone out of here. Now hurry, we don't have a lot of time."

Alice nodded and hurried away.

The Doctor formed a steeple with his fingers and stared at the console. "Now comes the tricky part. I can't actually touch these controls so, Losey, you're going to have to be my hands. Losey?"

He looked up. Shemjaza was standing in the doorway. He was stooped and his body was covered with burn marks and open wounds. His hand was clamped around Losey's head. His grip was so tight that blood ran from her ears and nose.

"Bramahl fought well," he said, "but she was only human in the end."

"Let Losey go," the Doctor demanded.

"With pleasure." Shemjaza hurled Losey across the room and she collided with Tamara, knocking her off of her feet. Both women ended up unmoving on the ground.

"You need someone in phase with this reality to operate those controls, don't you, Doctor?" Shemjaza said.

Orwell charged him and Shemjaza grabbed hold of his arm and snapped it like a twig. Orwell's screams of rage turned into cries of pain and horror as he stared at the jagged stump of bone protruding from just below his elbow.

"I'm going to kill all of your friends, Doctor, one by one, and there isn't a thing you can do about it."

"I'm warning you, Shemjaza," the Doctor said.

"Was that a threat? I'm quaking," Shemjaza mocked. "You're powerless, Doctor."

Shemjaza's arm shot out and his clawed fingers clamped around Taryn's throat.

"Taryn Fischer, my first disciple," he said as he lifted her bodily off of the ground. "My betrayer. You sided with my enemies, Taryn. You turned your back on your god. How do you think I should punish your disobedience?"

"You're no god," Taryn grunted. "You're just a man."

Her foot connected with Shemjaza's groin and he cried out in pain as he dropped her.

Taryn ran for the console. "Okay, Doctor, how do I work this thing?"

"Taryn?"

"What's the matter, don't you trust me?"

"Oh, Taryn." The Doctor shook his head. "Of all the questions you could have asked..."

"Doctor, we don't have time for this," Taryn snapped. "You need hands. I'm offering mine. It's that simple."

Taryn matched the Doctor's gaze, staring into his green eyes unflinchingly.

The Doctor nodded. "Very well. Press that button there, toggle that switch and turn that dial to 5.5."

"I'll kill you, Taryn Fischer," Shemjaza snarled, straightening up. "You will suffer agonies like no human has ever known."

Taryn ignored him, concentrating on her work. Grae could only watch in horror as Shemjaza advanced.

"Next panel," the Doctor continued. "Flip all the blue switches and push that slide to maximum. That's it, Taryn. Good girl."

"Taryn, look out!" Grae yelled.

Taryn jumped to one side as Shemjaza's fist rushed past her and tore a chunk out of the console. Before he could try again, he was forced back by a hail of bullets. Losey was standing unsteadily, one hand supporting herself against the wall, the other pointing a gun in Shemjaza's direction.

"Ignore them, Taryn," the Doctor ordered. "We're nearly there."

"But what about the console?"

"We'd finished with that panel, now focus. The green lever should open up a keypad. That's it. Now type in the following sequence..."

Losey cursed as her magazine ran out. Seizing his moment, Shemjaza sprang across the room, gliding the last few feet towards Losey. She threw her otherwise useless gun at him, but it bounced ineffectively off of his thick hide.

"You irritate me, girl," Shemjaza said, "but not for much longer."

"Bring it." Losey spat in his face.

"No!" Orwell screamed as Shemjaza raised his arm to strike.

"The red button, Taryn!" the Doctor shouted. "Hit it now!"

Taryn brought down her fist and the room shook. The tremor knocked Shemjaza off of his feet and he fell to his knees. He tried to get up, but instead he grunted with the strain as he realised he could not. Some force was pinning him down.

"What's happening?" Shemjaza asked. "I can't move."

"Oh what a shame. The old girl's artificial gravity must be malfunctioning," the Doctor explained. "She is getting on a bit. Or perhaps she just doesn't like you very much."

The room shook again.

"I think that's our cue to get out of here," the Doctor told the others. "The TARDIS is already breaking up."

Orwell, cradling his arm, led the way. Taryn and Losey, supporting Tamara between them, followed with Grae bringing up the rear. The Doctor was about to cross the threshold when Shemjaza called out to him.

"Wait! You can't leave me here like this," he said. "If I don't get out before this place is destroyed then I'll die. You've got to help me."

"Really?" the Doctor replied coldly. "Now why exactly would I want to do that?"

"Because you're not a killer," Shemjaza replied desperately.

"Yes, I suppose there is that," the Doctor agreed. "Unfortunately, there's nothing I can do. As you said yourself, I'm powerless. I'm sorry."

The Doctor turned and ran down the corridor after his companions, Shemjaza's protests reverberating in his ears.

"Doctor!"

* * * * *

The TARDIS was coming apart around them as they ran for where the Thirteen's fleet had originally landed. The weird and wonderful architecture had reverted to its default white and even that was now disappearing in a wash of static. Suddenly the floor beneath Orwell vanished and he started to fall. Dropping Tamara, Losey dived forward, grabbing him by his broken arm.

He screamed.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," Losey apologised hurriedly as she hauled him up.

"You save my life." Orwell fought back the pain. "What are you apologising for?"

On impulse, he darted forward and planted a quick kiss on Losey's cheek. Losey blushed.

"I should break your arm for that," she muttered, not trusting herself to look at him, "but somebody beat me to it."

"Yeah right," Orwell replied.

He turned to look back at the others and saw a section fall out of the ceiling, blocking the corridor.

"Tamara," he yelled, "are you okay?"

"We're fine," the Doctor's voice came back, "but we're not going to get through here. You two go on ahead. We'll find another way around."

* * * * *

"Leave me," Tamara said as Taryn helped her to stand. "I'll only slow you down."

"I got you into this," Taryn replied through gritted teeth. "I'll get you out."

"Or die trying?" Tamara asked. "Is this some bizarre kind of penance?"

"If you're strong enough to argue, you're strong enough to walk unaided," Taryn shot back, "so just shut up, okay?"

"Doctor, I've been thinking," Grae said. "There are hundreds of other species trapped here. What's going to happen to them when the TARDIS vanishes?"

"They'll vanish too, I'm afraid," the Doctor replied. "I wish we could save them all, but there wasn't time."

"I could do it," Tamara said.

"You could?"

"I think so," Tamara replied. "I'm connected to everything. I should be able to use this power to shunt everybody into our universe. It has to be good for something, right?"

"Are you sure?" the Doctor asked. "You're still weak from the last time you used this power. The strain could kill you?"

"But if it's the right thing to do?"

"And what if it isn't?" Taryn interjected. All eyes turned to her. "These species were excised from the timeline completely. If we put them back, who knows what the consequences will be. Maybe all these species weren't meant to coexist. Once they start interacting and the ripples start spreading out through the universe... I'm just saying that we may be doing more harm than good."

"So we should condemn hundreds of species to certain death?" the Doctor asked. "I suppose I should expect this from the person who wiped out the Time Lords."

"That isn't fair," Taryn retorted. "I didn't know that Unus was going to do that."

"It isn't fair that these species are trapped here either," the Doctor replied. "They have as much right to their freedom as anyone else and I say that if there's a chance then we should give it to them."

"No matter what the risks?"

"I'm willing to take them."

"And you're happy to make that decision on behalf of the entire universe?"

"The entire universe isn't here to ask!"

"But we are," Taryn said. "You're so keen on democracy, let's put it to the vote."

"I take it that you're voting against?" Taryn nodded. "Then that's one vote each. Tamara?"

"I don't feel comfortable voting like this," Tamara said.

"I realise it's a difficult decision..."

"It's not that," Tamara replied, cutting the Doctor off, "it's just that my minds been turned inside out so much lately that how am I going to know if my opinions are really mine and haven't been put there by someone else."

"I understand."

"Grae," Tamara continued, "one thing I am sure of is that I trust you. Whatever you decide, I'll side with you."

"I don't know, Tamara," Grae said hesitantly.

"You're my best friend, babe," Tamara said. "I have faith in you."

Grae looked from Tamara to the Doctor and then on to Taryn. Finally she looked down at the floor.

"I vote we should save them," she said quietly.

"Then lets not waste any time." The Doctor took hold of Tamara's right hand with his left. "Tamara, if you need it, you can draw strength from me."

"Me too," Grae said, taking Tamara's left hand.

"Oh what the hell," Taryn murmured as she linked hands with the Doctor and Grae to complete the circle.

There was a flash of light...

* * * * *

It was the smell that hit her first, the smell that brought back the memories, the smell that caused her to vomit. It was the smell of rotten corpses, baking in the desert sun.

"Why are we here?" Taryn asked when there was nothing more to expel than yellow bile. She wiped her mouth on the back of her hand.

"I've no idea," Tamara asked, standing ankle deep in water. "I don't even know where here is."

"It's Eridu," Taryn said, forcing herself to look at the bodies floating around her, "just after Zaphiel drowned its inhabitants."

"In that case, I imagine we were drawn to this part of your mind when we linked because it's an important memory for you."

"It's one I'm trying to forget," Taryn replied, "but I still see their faces whenever I close my eyes, even after all these years."

"Their deaths changed you," Tamara said.

"I got them killed," Taryn replied. "I vowed to make their deaths count for something."

"And you did."

"Oh yes," Taryn said sarcastically, "I honoured their memory by forcing the population of one planet into servitude and completely obliterating the population of another and all to further the agenda of someone who lied to me from the start."

"You saved the world, Taryn. If it wasn't for you, the Elohim would have killed everybody."

Taryn shook her head. "That's not going to wash the blood off of my hands. That's not going to keep the ghosts at bay when I sleep."

"And maybe that's a good thing," Tamara replied. "It proves that you have a conscience, that you take responsibility for your actions."

"I doubt the Doctor sees it that way."

"Like it matters what he thinks." Tamara waded over to Taryn and put her hands on the shorter woman's shoulders. "You tried to make a difference. You fought for what you believed in and you made it work against all the odds. Lesser people would have given up. Most people wouldn't have even tried in the first place, but you stayed strong. I'm proud of you for that. You should be too."

"I need that strength now, Taryn, if I'm to put this right. Will you give it to me?"

She stretched out her hand. Taryn took one last look at the devastation around her.

"It will take more than that to put *this* right," she said, taking Tamara's hand.

"Your methods may have been suspect, but your heart was in the right place." Tamara said. "It's that same heart that's responsible for any guilt you're feeling now. It's telling you where you went wrong and where you can do better next time. You've been given another chance, Taryn. Promise me you won't waste it."

* * * * *

Grae stood in the pool of actinic illumination provided by the streetlight. Tamara's flat was across the road. She could see her best friend moving about inside. She was also standing next to her.

"I thought I'd lost you," Grae said.

"Well, you were wrong," Tamara replied. "Wouldn't be the first time."

"I don't now what I'd do without you, Tamara," Grae continued. "You've taught me so much, so many things I'd never have learned closeted away on Gallifrey."

"Yes, well, I'm not sure that *all* of it was for the best."

"I got so scared when I thought I'd have to go on without you. It was difficult enough when you went away, but at least I knew that you were out there somewhere, that I was going to see you again. The idea that you might be gone for good..."

"Grae, one day I will be."

"Don't say that."

"I know you don't want to hear it, but it's true. One day, probably sooner than either of us is ready for, I'm going to leave you. And the Doctor will leave you too. You've got to learn to find your own way."

"But you've been my friends for so long. You're more than friends now, you're family."

"I know and I feel the same way, Grae. I don't want to be parted from you either."

"Then don't go."

Tamara laughed gently. "I don't think it's something either of us is going to have much say in, not given the life we lead. But when it happens, I know that you'll be able to cope and that you'll go on to even greater things. I can take comfort in that."

There were tears in Grae's eyes so Tamara offered her a tissue, which she accepted gratefully. Their fingers brushed against each other as Grae took hold of the flimsy fragment of paper and there was the briefest of pauses as they prolonged the contact longer than was strictly necessary.

"I left the Doctor to try and find you," Grae said, wiping her eyes. "I left him to face the Thirteen alone while I followed you here. You were more important to me than anything else."

"Don't say it," Tamara admonished quietly.

Grae smiled. "I love you, Tamara."

"Your compassion is your strength," Tamara replied, "not just for me, but for everyone else. Who was it who thought about those other species when the rest of us were just trying to save our own?"

"The rest of you would have remembered them too, given time," Grae insisted.

"Oh, we'd have remembered them all right, but who's to say we wouldn't have left them to their fate? The Doctor, Taryn, even me...we've all been hardened by our experiences. We've had to make some hard choices and they've changed us. But you've managed to cling onto your innocence, Grae. You still give everyone the benefit of the doubt whereas the rest of us are less likely to be so trusting. It's not a weakness. The ability to see good in everyone is a strength and it's one I wish I had to. I need your strength if I'm to save everybody. Will you lend it to me, Grae?"

"You know I will, Tamara," Grae said. "You shouldn't even have to ask."

"I know."

The two best friends embraced and a tear rolled down Tamara's cheek.

"I love you too," she whispered.

* * * * *

The Doctor was in the TARDIS. His TARDIS, the way he remembered it. His palms were resting on the edge of the console and his head was bowed, his long black hair falling in front of his eyes. Grae was sleeping so the TARDIS had dutifully dimmed the lights throughout the ship. Nevertheless, the Doctor still noticed the shadow falling across him.

"Hello, Tamara," he said without looking up. "I take it we're in my memories. Do you recognise this one?"

"You've just sent me to join the Thirteen," Tamara supplied.

The Doctor snapped his fingers. "Got it in one. Once again, I treat my companions like pawns on a chessboard, willing to sacrifice them so long as they bring me that much closer to putting my enemy in checkmate."

"That's not the way I remember it," Tamara said.

"I should never have sent you," the Doctor continued. "This is all my fault."

"Hey, I volunteered to go," Tamara replied. "I was a secret agent long before I met you. It was the right thing to do."

"I still should never have put you in that position," the Doctor said. "I play games with peoples lives, intentionally or otherwise. Look at what happened to Taryn and Grae and Ace. Perhaps it's time for me to start travelling alone again."

"And have you ever stopped to ask us what we think?" Tamara asked angrily. "There isn't one of us that doesn't travel with you willingly because we know that with you we have the chance to make the universe a better place. You can inspire such loyalty in the people around you. It's your strength."

"And their curse," the Doctor pointed out.

"I'm not just talking about the people you travel with, I'm talking about everyone you meet," Tamara persisted. "You've started revolutions, turned enemies into friends, convinced people to throw away their guns with nothing more than an impassioned speech. You've achieved more with words and force of will than most people can achieve with an entire fleet at their backs."

"I just try to do the best I can," the Doctor said.

"And nobody does it better," Tamara replied. "You're a beacon of hope for so many people. There are those who see you as an example to aspire to."

"More fool them," the Doctor muttered.

"Hey, I'm one of them," Tamara protested lightly. "There's nobody else quite like you, Doctor. Don't ever stop."

"I never asked for any of this."

"The great ones never do." Tamara extended her hand. "I can't do this alone. Will you help me?"

"After that pep-talk, how can I say no." The Doctor clasped her hand firmly. "You're the best friend a Time Lord could ever hope to have."

"Just doing my job." Tamara replied with a grin. "You know, it wasn't all bad being stuck on Earth. I have a daughter."

"A daughter? What's her name?"

"Sally," Tamara replied. "If we get out of this alive, remind me to introduce you."

"If we get out of this alive..."

"Doctor, you said the strain might kill me," Tamara began.

"It was a worst-case scenario."

"But it might happen, right? If it does I need to know that Sally will be okay. Promise me you'll look after her if I...if I can't."

The Doctor nodded.

The world shifted.

* * * * *

The light faded.

"Is everyone all right?" the Doctor asked.

"Depends how you define all right," Taryn replied, massaging the back of her neck.

"Tamara?" Grae asked urgently. The flash of light had made her eyes water and all she could see was indistinct shapes.

"Tamara?" The Doctor added his own voice to Grae's.

"I'm still here," Tamara replied weakly. "You don't get rid of me that easily."

"How are you feeling?" the Doctor inquired as he examined her.

"Even worse than when I was in labour, assuming that's possible," Tamara said. "I just feel so drained. I think I used up the last of that power."

"Probably for the best." The Doctor produced a penlight and proceeded to inspect her eyes.

"But did we succeed?" Grae asked.

"Yes," Tamara assured her. "For a moment there I was in touch with everything. It was like being the heartbeat of the universe."

"Omnipotence," the Doctor murmured, pocketing the torch, "the most potent drug of all."

"The important thing is everyone is safe."

"Everyone except us," Taryn pointed out.

"Quite," the Doctor agreed. "Tamara, can you walk?"

"Running would be better," Taryn said.

"I'll try."

"Then let's get out of here."

There was now more static haze than there was solid TARDIS, but, at the Doctor's direction, they managed to pick a safe path back to the shuttles. There was only one left and Orwell was standing at the hatch.

"All aboard that's coming aboard," he called out.

"You shouldn't have waited," the Doctor scolded as he climbed inside.

"I wasn't going to," Losey called back from the cockpit, "but Orwell insisted."

"Let me guess, he wrestled you into submission," Tamara joked.

"Don't I look the forceful type?" Orwell asked, feigning hurt.

"Well I for one am glad you waited," Taryn said.

"Enough chit-chat," Losey announced. "You'd better get strapped in back there. I've never flown one of these before so it promises to be a bumpy ride."

The shuttle's engines ignited and the ship began taxiing towards the exit.

"We're running out of runway," the Doctor remarked as he slid into the seat next to Losey.

"Not good," Losey agreed, trying to coax more speed and power out of the shuttle. "Now might be a good idea to start praying to whatever deities you believe in."

"I don't believe in gods," the Doctor replied. "I've met too many."

"Personally," Losey replied, "I believe in hedging my bets."

And then, just as the last of the ground was consumed by grey static, the shuttle took flight. Losey whooped with joy as the shuttle soared and even the Doctor cracked a smile. Ahead of them, the Eye of Horus beckoned invitingly, but grey static was encroaching at the periphery of their vision.

"We're not going to make it," Orwell said. "We're not going to make it."

"Not helping," Losey muttered as she narrowed her eyes, focussing on her objective.

"Come on, Losey," the Doctor encouraged. "Just a little further."

Grey static had nearly enveloped their field of view now. The only solid object that remained was the black pupil at the centre of the Eye.

"We're not going to make it," Orwell repeated.

"Oh ye of little faith," Losey replied as she somehow managed to coax a last burst of energy from the engines and the shuttle sprang forward...

* * * * *

The sudden momentum threw the Doctor forward and he collided with the console.

The TARDIS console.

"Home," he whispered.

"What happened?" Grae asked as she picked herself up off of the floor.

"It worked," the Doctor replied with a mixture of pride and disbelief. "The universe has snapped back to the way it was meant to be so it's dropped us off in our rightful place, namely the TARDIS."

"Are you sure?" Taryn asked, sitting up.

Grae looked around with mounting horror. She could see the Doctor and Taryn and...

"Doctor, what's happened to Tamara?"

Closing Credits

The Doctor stood alone in the TARDIS library. Shelves of books stretched away to the inky blackness in the distance and climbed up to the high, vaulted ceiling, where they could only be reached using the wheel ladders that were spaced at

irregular intervals. On a whim, the Doctor plucked a book at random from the shelves and opened the red leather cover. It was *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

There was a typewritten note gummed to the inside of the cover. It read "Property of the Ambridge Public Library."

The Doctor shook his head. He had never even heard of this Ambridge, much less been there. Or had he? So much was different now.

They must have passed through the Eye of Horus at the same moment as the TARDIS – the *future* TARDIS – had finally been consumed. Reality had reset itself, Time racing to paste over the cracks left by so many people's meddling. Her hasty reorganisation had deposited the Doctor and his companions back in their old TARDIS, but Tamara had slipped through the cracks.

"What's happened to her?" Grae had said, her voice betraying her rising panic. "Where is she?"

"I'm sure she's fine," the Doctor replied, trying to access the TARDIS's databanks. "Everything was rearranged when we destroyed the TARDIS. I'm sure Tamara was simply misfiled, that's all."

From where she was standing, Grae had not been able to see the fingers crossed behind his back, but Taryn had and she had met his gaze to make sure that he knew that she knew.

"I'm just looking her up in the TARDIS systems," the Doctor continued, "and then we'll pop by and pick her up and... Oh no."

He trailed off.

"Doctor, what is it?" Grae asked. "What have you found?"

"We changed history, Grae," the Doctor said, still staring at the display screen. "All those species we reintroduced, all those interactions. Events didn't happen in this timeline the way we remember them."

"What do you mean? Where's Tamara?"

The Doctor looked up slowly. "In this timeline, Tamara's parents never met. She was never born."

"But I remember her," Grae insisted. "She must have been born."

"I wish that were true."

"She trusted me," Grae said in a small voice. "She trusted me to make the right decision, but I didn't, did I? If we'd left things as they were then Tamara would still be here, wouldn't she?"

The Doctor started to make his way around the console towards her. "Grae, you can't blame yourself."

"Can't I? Doctor, I killed my best friend."

"Grae, I..." The Doctor reached out to her, but she turned away and ran from the room.

The Doctor had been aware of Taryn's gaze resting on him.

"Well, aren't you going to say I told you so?" he had asked.

"Do you really think so little of me?" Taryn replied, stung. "I'll be in my room."

And then she had left him as well.

Now he stood in the dimly lit library, weighing a hardback book in his hands. He ran a hand through his hair. The streak of grey had vanished when they passed through the Eye. He wished the internal scars could be healed as easily.

Tamara Scott, his most trusted companion, was gone forever, killed by his hand, or as good as. Grae was tearing herself apart with guilt, crying herself to sleep in her room. And Taryn? The Doctor did not want to think about Taryn just yet. She was a problem for another day. The happy family dynamic of the TARDIS crew had been shattered into a billion pieces and the Doctor feared that it was beyond even his skill to put them back together.

Then there was the universe outside the TARDIS, a strange and unfamiliar place where history was not quite the way he remembered it. He had thrown a handful of pebbles into the river and now he was forced to deal with the consequences of all those ripples.

The Thirteen would have the last laugh at his expense after all.

With a cry of impotent rage, the Doctor hurled his book at the wall.

* * * * *

Robert backed up against the low playground wall as Warren advanced on him.

"Come on, you little twerp," Warren snarled, looming over the smaller boy. "Hand it over."

"But I need it," Robert insisted in a trembling voice, cradling the brown envelope to his chest.

"And I need it more. Now hand over the lunch money or I'm going to give you something." Warren raised a meaty fist. "Want to guess what that is?"

"Why don't you leave him alone?" a new voice asked.

Robert peered over Warren's shoulder to see a little black girl wandering towards them, her hands clasped behind her back.

"This is none of your business, runt," Warren insisted.

The girl shrugged and sauntered over to stand beside Robert. "Why not?"

"Look, you're new here so you don't know how it goes," Warren explained. "I'm the biggest and strongest in the playground so if I want something from squealer here, he gives it to me."

"Or you hit him," the girl deduced. "Why?"

"Because he annoys me," Warren said.

"He annoys you because he doesn't give you something that isn't yours in the first place?"

Warren paused a moment while he tried to figure that sentence out.

"You're starting to annoy me too," he said at last.

"Does that mean you're going to hit me as well?" the girl asked innocently.

"I don't hit girls," Warren replied.

"Just people who can't fight back." The little girl drew herself up to her full height. "Go on, hit me. I dare you."

"Get lost."

"I double dare you," the girl persisted, "or are you scared of a girl?"

Warren saw red.

"Don't say I didn't warn you," he growled as he brought his fist to bear on his new target.

Giggling, the girl skipped aside at the last minute and Warren's fist impacted with the wall. He cried out in pain.

"You... you..." He could not think of a suitable epithet so instead he ran off in search of the school nurse.

"Thanks," Robert said, a little bit in awe of his rescuer.

The girl shrugged in a clumsy, uncoordinated fashion. "Don't mention it."

"My name's Robert," Robert continued.

"I'm Sally." The girl had a big smile that lit up her blue eyes. "Sally Scott."



Who are Section Thirteen?

The Doctor has crossed their path several times already,
but what does he really know about them?

They have been manipulating the human race for thousands of years,
but what are their ultimate goals? It is time for the truth to be revealed...

In another universe, Grae will learn the true destiny of the human race.
Stranded in the past, Taryn will learn the startling secret behind the origins of Section Thirteen.
And, on present day Earth, Tamara will find herself a pawn in the Section's schemes,
a masterplan seven thousand years in the making.

With the Doctor excised from existence, is Section Thirteen the last,
best hope for the human race?

This is another in a series of original fan authored
Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project
featuring the Eighth Doctor as played by Jeremy Banks-Walker

