

THE
DOCTOR-WHO
PROJECT

FLATPACK



Graham Bell

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Lapland, Sweden (3 months ago)

Konrad stood at the side of the track transfixed as the soft amber light of the midnight sun sparkled and slipped suddenly into an emerald wash pouring like a powerful searchlight between the tall trees around him. The shadows grew longer and darker creating silhouettes of long inky-black fingers grasping around the startled lumberjack. Vodka trickled from the bottle pressed to his lips soaking the front of his jacket in alcohol, as he stood agog.

Quickly the light brightened washing the images of the broad pines from his view, the light flooded past him, a wave front carrying with it a multitude of elfin figures leaping lightly from tree to tree. Their soft water-mottled faces each appeared to be filled with a mixture of terror and determination. The creatures bounded lightly around Konrad each heading in the same direction, repeating a dancing pattern of running footsteps on the soft ground before leaping up and into the bark of the nearest tree their bodies vanishing as they collided with the living pinewood. A fraction of a second later leaping down and running again; fleeing from the North.

The frightened faces of the sprites covered every age and gender Konrad could conceive. Startled lime coloured youngsters leapt lightly; barely touching the ground while moss covered ancients landed heavily sprinting breathlessly between the tall pine for a moment before leaping back into another tree.

Something buried deep inside Konrad's subconscious recognised the Sápmi from even before the stories overheard in the various local taverns that benefited from the trade that he and his fellows offered while they were under contract. The younger and more foolish locals claimed that there were spirits haunting the forests, living in harmony with the farming communities. Elves and pixies that traded songs and stories in exchange for privacy from the outside world. Konrad knew that the elders told the same stories but were more controlled, able to hold their drink and protect their secrets from the inevitable derision and scorn that is reserved for ghost-hunters, UFO spotters and similar nutters. But it was much easier to dismiss stories of faces staring out of the treelike and nymphs dancing in the moonlight when incontrovertible proof didn't leap over your head and dive into trees with only a flicker of twig and leaf to mark a passing.

Konrad snapped from his trance by a tiny neon child landing less than a foot in front of him. He stumbled in shock; the bottle falling onto the soft ground his mind fighting to stay afloat focusing on the shivering ivy-haired girl ahead of him. In turn the girl broke her jump, catching herself before she ploughed into the burley jack.

The plight of a youngster sent a tug at his heart as with a touch of alcohol fuelled bravery; he removed his fleece jacket and offered it to the girl. The air was sharp as he stepped forward his insensible and bloodshot gaze caught in the innocent glisten of the frail child's black diamond eyes. The gijreling responded with a similar instinct, drawn out of her world and her flight by the sight of her dazed human. But the stories that Konrad had so consistently mocked had paid scant attention to the amount of time a Sápmi can spend outside of its native environment, so he was completely innocent of the dangers presented as while the last of her kin leapt past ignorant to the exchange the jack took the child by the arms barely able to break the look between them. As Konrad embraced the child wrapping her in his warm coat a sudden rush of heat enveloped him. Without time to cry out the girl was engulfed by a jade flame. His coat survived for a second as an explosion shred it to pieces leaving only a small patch of scorched earth and a senseless lumberjack.

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The midnight sun returned as the Sápmi continued their retreat southwards. A light breeze ruffled the hair of the unconscious lumberjack who remained totally oblivious as only a moment later a force of ten thousand angry Sápmi charged down their fleeing prey.

1

Against all of the immutable laws of the universe Grae felt her spirits rising as between her and the Doctor they managed to lift the gigantic wardrobe carcass onto its base. The unit had taken most of an afternoon to completely assemble. Time, which she felt, would have been better spent doing almost anything else. It remained a mystery to why the Doctor actually needed a wardrobe in his personal living quarters when the TARDIS wardrobe was only a stones throw away and could easily be moved to an even more convenient place in a fraction of the time that it had taken to assemble this monstrous unit. More infuriating had been the Doctors continual insistence on doing everything *properly*. Not even the sonic screwdriver was allowed and it had been all she could do to convince the intractable Doctor that the Humans had developed electronic screwdrivers; he had been on the verge of using an archaic one piece screwdriver.

But several hours later, more than the job would appear to require the keep of cardboard and wood had diminished into a small pile of trash, a couple of sticks of wood and the near completed carcass of the wardrobe. While the panels, stanchions and shelves slowly slotted into place and the Doctor hammered his thumb more frequently than the tacks he had been trying to fix. Grae felt a slow warmth building inside her. Fight it as hard as she could the feeling of achievement at piecing together this mess of chipboard was overwhelming. She was sure that the Doctor was on the verge of annoyingly extolling some moral about teamwork, common goals and 'the little things', spoiling the moment with another simplistic maxim. She suspected that this had been part some cunning master plan although that would mean that he had been pounding his thumb on purpose.

She wiped her hands against the "Hang the DJ" t-shirt that the Doctor had insisted was de rigueur for the job and braced herself at the side of the half-completed unit. Between the two of them they managed to slip-slide the thing into position against the wall of the Doctor's quarters before taking turns to test the echo of the empty frame. Finally satisfied, the two of them stepped back in unison to admire the wooden box, brushing imaginary dust from their hands.

"Now there's a good job-job as somebody interesting used to say" the Doctor beamed.

"It's not over yet Doctor," she chided him. "We still have doors and drawers," she gestured over at the final few sticks of wood piled up at the door. "And you still have to make the tea."

The Doctor walked over and picked up a door, "You're not rushing to finish anymore then", Grae could hear the maxim forming on his lips."

"I think we can spare a moment for a cuppa," she cut him off wanting to prolong having to hear the Doctors sermon for as long as possible. "Besides, there's little time to start anything new today."

The Doctor knew that he could wait his turn to make a point so he moved the game on. "Isn't it your turn again Grae? There's no need to put a pot on anyway, why don't you

just pop down to the kitchen and fetch a couple of root bears from the fridge; I'll finish up here."

She looked at the Doctor condescendingly, "I'm sorry Doctor, is the old memory beginning to fade? Do you not remember me offering to make the tea an hour ago, and then apparently it also being my turn to make up a round of egg sandwiches, find some cake and pop out to Sainsbury's as one of us had eaten all of the Rich Tea."

"Did you really, it's all a blur to my old mind," he grinned, "why don't you pop down to the kitchen and make a pot of tea so that we can have a nice drink while we try fathom this mystery out." With a heave the Doctor slid the first of the outer doors onto its hinges.

Grae added a smaller centre door and picked up one of the two mirrors and a couple of adhesive pads. "Doctor?" She asked, moving the subject on, "you're the Terran expert. If I break this mirror over your head, would we have to split the bad luck or would it all go to you; being the actual breakkee so to speak?"

The Doctor pouted, "How about I find us a couple of drinks," quickly leaving the room as Grae fitted the mirror into place.

With the Doctor out of the room again, Grae retrieved her sonic screwdriver from its hiding place under his bed and went to work on fitting the final doors and tightening the sprung-catched hinges. The Doctor may want to put things together the *proper* way but while he was out of the room she could take a few much-needed shortcuts. With an effort the first door lined up against the frame but Grae noticed left a small isosceles triangle of white between the top of the door and the overhang of the wardrobe. She adjusted the door so that it fitted flush with the overhang but meant that the door hung at an angle, blocking one of the centre drawers. She stood up from altering the bottom catch; this could only mean one thing:

The TARDIS floor was wonky.

With the doors in place the entire unit appeared to be listing to the left, a rhombus instead of a rectangle. Standing to the right of the wardrobe she tried to push the top but the panels held the shape firm.

"TARDIS" she shouted to the ceiling. "Don't you go playing silly-beggars just because the Doctor wouldn't let you play carpenter?" The floor remained *wonky*. Foot stamping proved equally pointless. "Tell you what. If you straighten up for me, I'll find you a nice new Chippendale to go in the console room, a nice new Victorian writing desk; you'd like that wouldn't you?" she implored, unwilling to admit that the TARDIS was most probably not to blame. She pushed again at the wardrobe willing it to move, stepping around to the front she began trying to pull the unit into shape.

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"Can I lend you a hand young lady?" the image in the mirror asked.

Grae jumped back spinning around but the intruder was not in the room. Unsure of what to do she backed into the wardrobe, feeling the reassuring firmness against her back.

"Oh, I'm sorry did I startle you." The voice was just over her shoulder. She spun around retreating across the room; a Napoleonic emerald humanoid with a moss beard and sparkling diamond eyes was reflected in the mirror, a visual echo of something that should have been standing a few feet in front of her but wasn't. The short almost Napoleonic humanoid inside the mirror looked out at her with a curious smile, its pale green face shimmering as if he was illuminated by light sparkling off of a stream. His suit Grae was sure was a fairly impressive cut by twenty-first century standards although she doubted

that many humans could create a truly variegated suit, the edges lighter than the centre no matter which angle she looked at it from.

"Are you aware that you're wonky?" Grae asked nonchalantly, unsure of the situation but willing to move any blame for the misshapen handiwork from the TARDIS to the newcomer who appeared to be living inside the wardrobe.

"Girl," the creature replied with a kindly baritone, his smooth face splitting into a thousand bark-like furrows as he smiled, "I'm as straight as a Douglas. Although I do have the strangest feeling that I'm furniture."

"You're very nice furniture though," Grae said reassuringly. "I'm Grae by the way."

"My name's Knap Hill; First Orator of the Sápmi. But since you're far to pretty to call me Orator Hill I guess that you'll just have to call me Knap."

Grae came very close to a girlish giggle, "Thank you Knap and yes, you are a wardrobe."

"Well at least I'll always be able to find something to wear." The wardrobe chuckled. "Pleased to meet you Ms Grae, now if you could tell me where I am I would be very grateful." He stopped himself, holding a finger to his lip. "Actually, before you start, would you mind bringing that armchair a little closer?" Knap pointed out of the mirror at the Doctors comfy chair stacked out of the way beside the door. Grae pulled the chair in front of the wardrobe. As Grae watched, Knap made himself comfortable in the chairs reflection, rummaging around the seat for an ornate bottle of a deep brown liquid that Grae was positive didn't exist in the original chair. He apologised for not being able to offer his new friend a drink as he poured himself a glass. Sitting on the edge of the Doctors bed Grae began to explain about the TARDIS, the Doctor, time travel and his newfound obsession with flat pack furniture.

While she spoke the Doctor finally returned from the kitchens with a couple of cans of root beer. He had discovered that while the TARDIS was still parked in the car park of the trading estate it would be quicker to pop to Sainsbury's than to trek all the way to the kitchens and back. He entered his room laden by two bulging shopping bags and slurping on the last of an Orange Maid, it took a second to register the newcomer sitting in his wardrobe.

"You must be the Doctor, I've just been hearing all about you and I've been left a little puzzled."

"Really," the Doctor said, refusing to be fazed by the uninvited guest in his living quarters.

"Hmmm, you're a man with obviously impeccable taste in both clothes and in friends."

The Doctor smiled.

"But a pine effect wardrobe with this décor. Did you have a bit of a funny five? Soft pine on white I can pull off without a problem. But straight corners against this roundel design; it just won't work. They just make me look a little stark, trust me Doctor, I studied design from the programs of Llewellyn-Bowen himself." Knap had clearly spent a little time considering the problem. "The only way that we're going to save ourselves some serious embarrassment is with a lot of drapes and candles."

The Doctors smile slipped, "It's not the appearance that matters and besides," he realised, "It was Grae who picked you out; she said she had 'a feeling' about you. I only agreed as you were on offer."

Knap bowed his head politely. "Well thank you Grae, I'm very glad to be chosen by two such interesting people. From what young Grae has told me, you people may be the only ones on Earth that can help me; us," he corrected. The wardrobe paused for a second

while the Doctor poured a glass of root beer and placed in on the physical arm of the chair. Knap picked up the reflection, lifting the glass to his face and looking through the dark effervescing liquid at the travellers. "Is it about time for me to tell my story?"

So he began.

2

The Sápmi are a very long-lived people by the human standards, our lifespan many times longer than our own memories capacity. So that we don't forget our lives we create great songs and ballads so that we as well as our future generations are able to recall our history. But the disaster that killed so many of this planets original inhabitants destroyed the lichen crop on which we survive sending us into a torpor. By the time we emerged the hominoids had begun to take control of the landmasses. By the time we were able to roam the Earth again our memories of how we came here and why we were transported to this planet had become a mystery to us.

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As we had done with the reptile people we brought our knowledge of philosophy, social engineering, mathematics and agriculture to the emergent humans but unfortunately, the more the humans developed; the more they sought to find their own answers through their sciences and religion and in their fire and metals. The more answers they found the more they grew wary of the disparities between our peoples. Over a few thousand years they either learnt to either hate the Sápmi or to worship us. Unable to fight us or to harm us they fought with each other. Skirmishes, and then civil wars, flared up all over the globe. We realised that our presence was exacerbating the situation exponentially despite our efforts to forge a peace. Finally the leaders of the Sápmi clans, led by an ancestor of mine; Chob Ham, came together and agreed that for the good of both the humans and the Sápmi we would separate our races until such a time as we had both matured enough that co-existence would be possible once again.

The humans grew quieter without our influence on them and developed at a more natural pace, forgetting us quickly as well as the things we had taught them. They lost our lessons in agriculture and farming methods causing them to spread far and wide as their need for land grew. As they spread my people were forced back into the diminishing forests that their hunger and their number multiplied.

As our lands grew smaller and the humans became more adventurous, they became aware of our presence again calling us elves, brownies, nymphs or pixies in memory of the tales they told of our people millennia previously. Again the Sápmi clans convened a council. I was still young but aajja Chob allowed me to attend with him. In the years between the early council and this Sápmi politics had developed into the Emperor led autocratic meritocracy that exists today. My family had a more peripheral role in this new assembly but aajja Ham managed to pass a raft of legislatures that allowed the Sápmi to forge new friendships with some of the smaller human tribes as a precursor to protect our interests.

The clans of northern Europe cemented unofficial relationships with the human Sámi which has lasted until very recently; while in the forests of South America, my people known by the locals as the Pehuenche Monkey Ghosts maintain diplomatic relations between the various human tribes and the peaceful reptilian dynasties that have

congregated in that region forming a triumvirate of species to protect the forests from the encroaching corporations who would decimate the land.

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The second council was almost 800 years ago; since that time we have lived peacefully, practicing our arts and diplomacy, honing them into fine skills watching over our human friends, extending our roots through them into the various human political systems helping them to recognise the importance of their ecology while watching and waiting for a time when we can integrate ourselves into the mainstream of Earth society. We have not always been successful; the deforestation of central Europe over the last two centuries has created an impenetrable barrier splitting the clans of the north from the administrative centres and the holly emperors of the Mediterranean groves. This unfortunate event has driven my clan, the Karesundanish, back to the top of the political tree. My family have always advocated a commune-based approach over single political bodies with macro-agreements allowing individual clans to govern themselves in whatever way they feel is most appropriate to enable the whole to advance. Unfortunately every society has its dissidents; fringe groups emerged in our society wanting a more proactive stance to the human issues. The Karesundanish work to accommodate all ideologies but the more that we gave the more dangerous they became. Finally two clans, the Sylviatca and the Heabren, created a pact and quickly went from civil unrest and protest to terrorism and finally to war.

The Karesundanish became powerless in less than a single season and were quickly driven out of our homes. We were forced to sue for peace but the opposing clans descended into a vengeful mob herding my family together. We were forced to flee from our groves and run south. For a while we thought that we had escaped but our people were driven wild by the Sylviatcans master-gossips.

They drove us into a tiny copse, our smallest and weakest hidden at our centre as we waited to make our last stand. But it never came, the mob around us extended through every tree for several miles; our branches brushed but not one voice could be heard. This standoff lasted for six days and nights. At the end of a week we realised why. A Heabren rebel negotiator had reached an agreement with a group of human traitors. It had taken the humans three days to reach the spot we were at. In turn, they took their chains and their saws and while our former followers held us inside our bloody copse they fell each and every Karesundanish one by one

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A Sápmi can survive for several years inside chopped wood until he fades into silence. Once trapped the humans ferried us south to the city of Stockholm in the same manner that they would transport cattle or slaves. We pleaded with the humans to throw us into the sea or to leave us by the roadside where my clan could pass away quietly and together but they honoured their damned deal with the Heabrens.

"And so," the solemn Orator finished, "this is how the kings of the northern forests became nothing more than fixtures and fittings, condemned to spend out the remainder of their lives alone in a waking death." Knap had slouched down in the Doctors chair as he spoke but sat up as he finished in an effort to effect a little dignity from the inside of his wardrobe. Slowly he took a sip of water from the reflection of a glass that the Doctor had balanced beside him. "Grae, Doctor, my people are nothing but sticks of furniture now," he looked between them his diamond eyes glistening, "you have to help us."

3

Excusing themselves, the Doctor and Grae left the living area taking a route for the console room. Grae watched the Doctor as he strode forward on autopilot, his feet carrying him without mental effort leaving his mind to concentrate on a new dilemma. Grae worked through the facts unable to decipher what had made the Doctor so agitated. If anything, it seemed that they had a bread-&-butter situation. People needed helping, the people may be thin green spirits that had been trapped inside a range of flat pack furniture but that just made things easier. It would be nice to save someone where the most dangerous situation was likely to be a splinter.

But the Doctor had seen something else, his normally open exterior was furrowed, concerned she took his arm before they entered the control room. "Doctor," she stopped him, his face breaking instantly into a beatific smile that did nothing to assuage her concerns. "We're on a mission aren't we; we're launching Angels and we're going to help these people?"

The Doctor pursed his lips, "Of course we're going to help; helping people is what we do. But right now we're just heard the Voice, we still don't know what it means."

The Doctor held the door for Grae before crossing to the console. Grae watched as he stroked his beard while experimentally jabbing at various buttons. "We have to find the deposed Karesundanish," he decided, "there's no telling how much psychological trauma they'll have suffered after being trapped for so long."

"And then Doctor, once we have found them?" Grae asked, easily slipping into the Watson-role; giving the opportunity to find answers rather than questions. Standing across the console from her friend she fired off questions as they came to her. "Assuming that once we can find these people, and assuming that we can restore them to their natural state. She bypassed some of the more hefty issues knowing how to warm the Doctor up and help him to use his mind to the best of his ability. "What can we do with them then?"

The Doctor continued to jab at the various controls, "They'll want to go home again." With a rumble the TARDIS began to grind into life, the control column beginning to rise and fall. The Doctor flinched as he realised that he had set the TARDIS in flight with a glance he took in the co-ordinates that he had set. "They'll want to return home – to Lapland."

Grae circled the console to look at the Doctors co-ordinates, "Very serendipitous" she exclaimed. With the skill of a lottery winner he had programmed a perfect flight plan that would take them a few hundred miles northeast into the Earth's Artic Circle somewhere south of the political border between Sweden and Norway. "Withstanding the fact that we haven't yet retrieved Knaps missing family. What good would returning here do if we had them?"

"We mustn't stop them from going back if it's what they want."

"To what end Doctor? To a continuation of anarchy and civil war? We don't have an underdog here; we have a broken and beaten political system, overthrown by revolution. If we'd been there we may have done something but as it is, we weren't"

"There's more to it than that Grae," a few cogs moved into position. "I don't know what it is but there was something wrong with Knaps story."

"But what?"

"I just don't know Grae. The revolution is a certainty; there would be no benefit in making that part up. But it's a truth to hang a story on."

"So peel the layers back and what do you have? Knap told us that the Sápmi were content with their lot and that his clan," Grae cast back for the word, "the Karesundnish; had brokered deals with local sympathetic humans in order to protect their lands."

"In return for saving them all, his clan was given control. But then why did two smaller groups decide to rebel?"

"But," Grae realised, "there was a majority revolution, not a coup. If the Sápmi were as successful as Knap believed, how were they so decisively overthrown?"

"Exactly!" The Doctor snapped his fingers, "in addition Knap kept the bulk of his story based on the history of his people rather than the plight of his own family. Ergo, there is something that he didn't want us to know. He lied to us."

"So what do we do?"

"Well, since I've so miraculously managed to get us here, it would be remiss not to have a bit of a look around outside."

"A triumph for destiny over deduction if you believe that you're going to step outside and discover all of the answers we need." As she spoke, Grae flipped a switch; the TARDIS display slid into life to show a thin layer of snow covering the clearing around the TARDIS. Through the trees she could make out spots of light reflecting over a body of water.

"I don't believe in destiny Grae – but then I don't believe in tree sprites and pixies either." The Doctor took in the scene, "I think I'll find myself a coat."

"Just the one Doctor?" Grae asked. "What do you want me to do?"

"While I'm out, I need you to look for our missing spirits, the quicker we can find them the sooner we can piece together what we have to do."

Grae acquiesced. "The humans who originally fell the trees will have sold the wood onto a manufacturer; it's unlikely the wood will have been split into more than a single consignment." Grae moved around to the consoles data retrieval displays and began confidently tapping in calculations. "I'll need to cross reference our purchase of Knap back to the original manufacturer and then down again to the possible purchasers. We should be able to create a list of leads from the humans banking computers. The TARDIS can pick the definite targets, and we can create a simple purchasing algorithm for the remainder."

The Doctor was amazed by her quick logic. "I had better hurry then. I wouldn't want to leave you with nothing to do."

But Grae barely registered his presence, "S.I.G." she mumbled as he hurried from the room.

4

The Doctor stepped from the TARDIS into the cool early twilight of an autumnal afternoon inside the arctic circle. Warmth from the TARDIS turned to mist around him as he fastened the cord around the waist of the thick fur coat he had found in the TARDIS wardrobe. Slipping the TARDIS key into a voluminous pocket he decided that as soon as he got back this was going into straight into his new wardrobe.

The ship had settled into a picturesque spot on the Swedish bank of the Konkäma River. A thin layer of snow had begun to paint the upper surfaces absorbing the police box into a landscape, which would otherwise remain obscured until the spring. As the Doctor looked around in the dimming light he realised with a slight chill that he was very probably the only biped for at least a hundred miles. The Swedish hinterland covered an area the size of England and if Knap was to be believed, was the home to several million Sápmi. Although, despite an incredibly fortuitous piece of dialling there was no sign of anything more useful here than could be expected to be found in any other part of this wilderness.

However in the absence of any lead more positive than an unreliable wardrobe and in the presence of the undeniable beauty of the pine strewn forest after being cooped up all afternoon the Doctor decided to walk for a few miles to blow out some cobwebs. Hunting in the coat pockets he found an old collapsible cane and a torch. With a quick check of the batteries and a couple of deep breaths of the clean air he set off towards the riverbank.

5

Grae looked up at the empty console room. She vaguely remembered a yeti shaped Doctor leaving but would not care to guess how long ago that had been. Removing her glasses for a moment she rubbed her eyes and inspected her completed calculations one more time before submitting them to the TARDIS flight computer ready for dematerialisation. She smiled, allowing herself to be immodestly impressed with her own cleverness. Only the resources of the TARDIS could link together so many dispirit and supposedly secure data sources into a single database in such a short space of time. But it was her analytical skills that were required to merge and join the data into a single cohesive set of results. For all of the Doctors much vaunted experience it was old-fashioned 'book-learning' as he had called it that would enable them to track down the missing Sápmi.

For her next trick, Grae decided to put her mind to the problem of freeing the Sápmi. Working backwards and forwards across the various datasets in her search for the missing tree folk had put the kernel of an idea in her mind. If the Sápmi tree spirit could be gradually integrated back into the environment then... Scribbling the Doctor a note she made a beeline for the temporal laboratories.

6

As he hiked along a sudden rush of grey and brown behind the tree line startled the Doctor. He looked up quickly to see a long necked creature with short antlers standing a few feet away from him; its dappled face dimly trying to read the Doctor for a second before with a quick start it turned on its hind legs and bolted into the forest.

"Reindeer!" the Doctor exclaimed wide eyed with a sudden child-like excitement that eclipsed his other concerns, without a second thought he set off bounding in pursuit. The reindeer ran darting left and right unable to shake this unnaturally fleet human.

The Doctor whooped with delight in the naivety of the chase, the tiredness in his muscles washed away as they pulled and flexed as part of a superhuman machine. Without breaking his stride he shook off the thick coat managing to put on another burst of speed.

The forest became much darker as the two racers plunged deeper into its depths. The weight of trees overhead muttered forebodingly shutting out the light of the low sun. The Doctor flicked on his torch and slowed his pace, unable to watch both his step and the reindeer at the same time. Ahead of him the reindeer appeared to be having its own problems. The Doctor began to gain ground quickly as the brutes run became a forced canter and then a trot, bursts of stumbling speed followed by a stagger and a backwards glance at its pursuer. Coming closer, the thrill of the chase began to fade as the Doctor made out the heavy rise and fall of the reindeers flanks. The creature apparently sensed the pointlessness of its flight and banked to turn on its pursuer. The Doctor stopped and watched the creature as it sized him up again for a few seconds before tentatively but assuredly towards him, thick skull and antlers pointed forwards as it began a charge.

Alarmed, the Doctor rummaged through his pockets looking for a sugar lump or an apple (or even a bull fighters cape he thought he might have), bracing himself to leap aside

as the beast bore down on him. But before the creature could reach him, its hooves suddenly slipped on the soft ground throwing the animal pathetically to the floor. For a second it brayed and struggled pitifully, its legs flaying in an effort to ward off the Doctor while it struggled to stand.

The sight of the reindeers' distress broke the Doctor from his stance and he hurried to kneel at the creature's side as it lolled back in the thin snow. "I'm so sorry my poor friend," the Doctor apologised earnestly, finally finding an old apple in his pocket. "I just didn't realise that you weren't feeling well enough to play Bumpo."

Without lifting its head the animal took the apple from under its nose and munched it noisily. The Doctor spoke gently to the beast stroking its neck as he spoke until he felt confident enough to perform an external examination. There was certainly a little difficulty in breathing; the Doctor examined the creatures muzzle tenderly, removing small pieces of apple and spittle from the patchy fur. Streaks of blistered and grazed flesh stretched back across the face. Positioning himself to lie alongside the fallen animal the Doctor tenderly opened the mouth to inspect inside. The creatures breath was rancid and metallic, a hint of blood that in a vegetarian animal could only be its own. The back of the mouth was as torn as the face; large ulcerous growths appeared to be blocking the trachea and oesophagus. The symptoms were all indicative of long-term radiation poisoning through ingestion. Over the last couple of decades the reindeer food source had become heavily contaminated. The Doctor looked down at the wounded animal feeling the damage underneath its skin. There were pills in the TARDIS that would negate the early stages of radiation poisoning but scale and age of the damage suggested a lifetime of slow poisoning making the Doctor wonder how the poor animal had made it into the world.

The Doctor patted the animals warm face, the large eye facing the Doctor became still, less terrified of the Time Lord as it reached a still understanding. The Doctor felt the guilt of its situation as he searched through his pockets for another apple to help ease it's suffering. But all he found this time was a small medicine bag and a sealed hypodermic.

7

The Temporal Laboratories were one of the few structures inside the TARDIS that remained permanently fixed in position. Unfortunately Grae realised as she hiked towards them the Doctor had long since moved the console room as far from the laboratory as it was possible to get. When she had asked, he claimed that the proximity to the various sequential sweet spots that kept the laboratory chronologically sterile brought about his eczema but Grae was fairly sure that the Doctor just preferred to keep the laboratory hidden in the depths of the TARDIS since it saved him having to admit to his various companions that he had absolutely no idea how anything in the room actually worked.

On route Grae had stopped to pick up a few provisions from the Bowling Green potting shed. The Doctor had let the various playing fields slip over the last few incarnations she noted as she picked various bits of plant detritus from her hair having waded across what should have been a perfectly manicured bowling lawn. She clutched the seed packets in one hand and a tiny chesterfield cabinet in the other. She knew that he had obsessed over the tiny Victorian cabinet a few months ago but when she popped in looking for it both she and Knap had agreed that he would understand the sacrifice, eventually anyway. It was for a good cause after all.

Pushing the door open the rounded walls dimmed for a second, the light becoming a murky brown colour before returning to normal. Throwing the items down onto one of the long tear shaped benches that ran down the centre of the room she double-checked the

temporal seals for seepage but there seemed to be no apparent reason for the brownout. She frowned for a moment trying to imagine what effect a power fluctuation could have on her experiment before cussing herself for a silly concern. Pushing the question to the back of her mind she began to hunt around for a good bell jar.

8

Ninety minutes later the Doctor slowly found his way back to the bright lights of the TARDIS, he let himself into a deserted console room finding a note from Grae propped against the door lever. It appeared that while he had been following up his apparently failing instincts she had been more productive and had needed to test a theory in the temporal labs. He looked thoughtfully at the note wondering what she was doing before he set the TARDIS in motion; its flight computer slaved to the new search pattern.

Rounding the console, checking the new program his toe hit a small ridge in the floor. Slightly put-out at the sight of an imperfection on the TARDIS floor but too exhausted to let it worry him now he began to idly scrape the remaining mud from his boots. Three hours in the Swedish mud and snow was going to require a lot more cleaning than a small nubbin on the floor could cope with, he braced his heel against the ridge and pulled the boots off briefly considering fitting a shoe scraper in the entranceway. With a little sigh he watched as the TARDIS began to follow its new instructions. As left the room, the ship began to dematerialise.

9

A glass porch door set into the corridor separated the living quarters from the rest of the ship. The Doctor wasn't quite sure when it had appeared but he liked that it gave the residential wing a feeling of homecoming that after nine-hundred years travelling he could sometimes miss in the rest of the ship. The passage beyond the door disappeared into the distance in nine lifetimes of empty rooms interspersed with occasional tables and easy chairs in the same way that doors, chairs and windows repeat themselves ad infinitum in a cheep cartoon chase. At present though only the first doors on the left and right were in use. With a slip of melancholy the Doctor looked at the second door on the left wondering when his ship would let it go, fitting a new room into the corridor.

Pushing open the glass door the Doctor immediately heard the sound of singing coming from the room on the right. His companion and his wardrobe engaged in not especially melodious chorus of "Pennies From Heaven". Although, for something that claimed to be a woodland sprite, Knap appeared to be the most capable Bing Crosby impersonator that the Doctor had ever heard. Grae on the other hand was less inspiring, the Doctor coughed to be noticed as he let himself quietly into his own room and reminded her of the fact subtly hiding a compliment on her search pattern within the tease. The two of them stopped singing, taking in the Doctors appearance; his hand went to a bedside cabinet and retrieved a pair of darkened glasses shutting him off from sharing details of his recent experiences.

"Like the man says, Doc. Each and every cloud contains at least an ounce of öre." the wardrobe enthused.

"So I heard," the Doctor replied with a dropped smile. "But right now, all I can see is lightning and trees and bitter experience has taught me that a broolly is rarely the best form of defence."

"You won't need it Doc, thanks to the beautiful and fiery Ms Grae here we've all got karma in spades right now."

"Really?" The Doctor looked at his friend admiringly. "Does this mean that you've got a few of the answers for us?" he asked.

"Oh, you could say that." Knap broke in before Grae could reply. "Not only is Ms Grae stunningly attractive but she's also got the smarts. She's only gone and solved a problem that has affected my people since we arrived on this planet."

Grae blushed, her skin turning to match her hair. "It really wasn't that difficult, I'm sure the Doctor would have come to the same conclusion if he hadn't been", she winked quickly in the Doctors direction, "At The Shops."

The Doctor took the hint, "well don't keep us in suspense teacher. Let us see what the brightest star of the academy can achieve while we mere mortals are picking up the milk.

"Well be quiet and learn something then Doctor." She admonished, "You put me on the track when you reminded me that you didn't believe in spirits."

"You said that Doc?" Knap asked in mock indignation, "if I wasn't the nonexistent ghost of a dead spirit I could be really offended"

Grae shushed the pair before she lost her train of thought. "You're correct of course, the Sápmi are no more fantastical in nature than you are," Knap and the Doctor shared a quick knowing nod. "Like most so-called ghosts, spirits and sprites, the Sápmi are energy creatures that have been absorbed into various mythologies and folk lore. At some point in their past they have allowed themselves to forget their actual origins so they've taken on the characteristics ascribed to them. They're green energy creatures capable of appearing and disappearing and that love to sing, dance and tell stories. They've become sprites by believing their own press."

"But we do live in trees don't we?" Knap teased. "I seem to remember that."

"The Sápmi have a symbiotic relationship with the Earth. The trees they live in store and process energy feeding from and replenishing the planet. To the Sápmi the trees act like millions of plug sockets scattered all over the earth. The Sápmi literally plug themselves in and are nourished by the planet. So long as they remain inside their natural habitat they obtain the energy they need to survive."

"But I thought that the Sápmi ate lichen?"

"Not literally Doc," Knap piped in, "that'd be disgusting."

"The lichen has a far faster metabolic rate than the tree that it grows on, the Sápmi use that process to absorb the energy that they need. The lichen is diminished by the presence of a Sápmi so they are forced to move around their forests."

The Doctor caught his breath but she continued unabated. "Most of this became apparent when I accepted your assumption that the Sápmi are neither mystical nor magical. That being the case I had to understand how Knap or his people could be trapped inside an inanimate piece of wood."

"But he was trapped in the tree wasn't he," the Doctor stated."

"The felled tree creates a viable ecosystem for decades that the trapped Sápmi can draw strength from. Even the wardrobe contains enough energy to keep Knap alive for some time but as soon as the tree was felled it was literally unplugged from the Earth and running on its own reserves. If he tried to reconnect to the Earth again it would be similar to trying to power your wristwatch from the mains."

"But you have a solution?"

"Watch carefully," Grae picked up the bell jar she had brought in and placed it on the coffee table in front of Knaps mirror. The jar was sealed across the base and contained

a small bonsai tree twisted inside the glass. "I grew this from seed in the temporal laboratory while you were out Doctor. Look very carefully at it."

"The Doctor and Knap peered carefully inside. "It's a cross match isn't it?" the Doctor asked.

"No, not quite," Knap looked closely, "the two trees have fused into each other haven't they, they've merged on a," Knap paused, working his tongue around an unfamiliar word, "'genetic' level."

"Well done Knap, two trees growing into each other will eventually merge into a single hybrid organism, this will happen at random in the wild or under controlled circumstances in the laboratory. Now, look closely at the base of the tree." Her students leaned closer, looking for something out of the ordinary. The Doctor looked up, "is that my chesterfield!"

"In a good cause Doctor. Look at it; the tree isn't growing out of it. Over time the tree has absorbed the unit into itself. The chesterfield is as much a part of the tree as it is of it."

Knap sat back down, "Are you telling me that if I had been inside those little drawers then I would have become part of the tree?"

"And then you would have become part of the natural eco-cycle again." Grae finished with a smile. "Before I accelerated the trees growth I irradiated the drawers with a short shock of Penreal radiation to simulate the properties of your people." She removed a small pen like radiation meter. "Look now, the energy that was stored inside the unit has infused with the entire tree. In a real world situation a trapped Sápmi would be reborn inside the new tree."

"I'm impressed Grae," the Doctor smiled. "I'm very, very impressed. One little question though?"

"Yes Doctor."

"You did remove Duncan Woodentops clothes before you stole his chesterfield didn't you?"

* * * * *

Grae was saved from a more difficult explanation by a two-tone chirp from the wristcom on the back of her hand. She glanced at it quickly and motioned to the Doctor. The TARDIS had landed. The two travellers excused themselves and Knap found himself left alone in the Doctors quarters again. He heard the swish of a door closing in the distance and was left alone again in the silence of the room. Visiting hours were over again he supposed. Although, the Doctor was supposedly the resident in this cell he could leave whenever he chose to. Knap however was imprisoned inside a gaol inside the prison. Solitary confinement while the Doctor and Grae popped off to save the day. The Doctor knew something now, Knap was sure of this, he had been tired and on edge; there was more than just having the lives of a thousand Sápmi dropped in his lap. He knew something.

The easy chair grew uncomfortable with his weight of thought. He had little to do but to sit, wait and mentally re-image the Doctors décor. While he waited for the return of his saviours he began to picture new cloths and colours to redecorate the room.

"But, worse of all!" he stood suddenly to address the empty room, kicked to his feat by a lurching stomach. "They'll thank me for this one day." he snorted pressing his hands against the inside of the glass. "I'll be the mighty saviour; not these strangers." A rumbling laugh filled the empty room, Knap calmed himself but the noise continued unabated. "The mighty hero who led the lost into the Promised Land and saved us all from

the devastation that the humans brought on us." Knap looked out through the mirror, his eyes fixed on the wall of the corridor beyond. "But, it won't be through keen diplomacy or power, oh no sir!" He pounded on the mirror. "We'll be saved because I'm a pretty wardrobe paralysed in the bedroom of an alien with a big heart and cheep taste in furniture!"

Knap hit the mirror again, it thrummed weakly in time with the laughing noise. He began to shout, in an effort to drown the noise from his head. "Pathetic! Pathetic! Pathetic! Saviour of the people, my scented blossom! "A crack appeared in the glass as Knap aimed a series of kicks against his prison wall. "All it really takes is failure. Failure and providence." He ranted, further kicks followed with his words. "The failure of this Dear And Loveable vegetable. My parsimonious blossom!"

Knaps throat tightened as if he was allergic to the words he was using, the laughing faded to silence with a small chuckle but Knap almost failed to notice the silence as his breath began to burn the inside of his throat.

Knap looked down at the shards of smashed mirror on the floor, as the rage slipped from his mind he realised that his torso had been forced through the front of the wardrobe.

10

An hour ahead of Sweden and a thousand miles south, the lower reaches of Great Britain were enjoying the last hurrahs of an Indian summers evening. Grae could see the Doctors concerns slipping to the back of his mind as he stepped into the warmth of the day and the walled garden of a detached suburban home. A few fences away they could hear the sounds and smells of a barbeque accompanied by faint strains of music being played at a mostly polite level. At the foot of the garden a softly swaying band of common land shielded the houses from the surrahs of a passing road providing an omnipresent hiss to the suburban scene.

11

The two pigeons let themselves into the back of the humans dwelling oblivious to the lithe green creature with striated wooden skin detaching himself from the door of their home. He felt small outside of his new home although he felt it as it continued to nourish him, making him powerful. There was little time to lose, the two time travellers were slow and idling but would not want to be found prodding around a private dwelling. The assassin took a deep breath. He felt the presence of Sápmi life in the trees behind him but it was weak; the track had not been used for decades. No doubt the humans had driven them back as well. If this truly was the island Briton then he could very well be the only remaining Sápmi for a thousand miles.

He took a deeper breath, stretching his new arms back to pull the breath into his new lungs; 'the only living Sápmi' he corrected himself. A non-olfactory scent from the upper branches of the humans dwelling smelt of decaying leaves and burning spirit.

He took in his surroundings quickly; the owners of the room, an adult male, a female and a small female looked around clearly surprised by the appearance of the newcomer. But not scared as he would have expected, the girl positively squeaked with excitement.

"Is this another friend of yours Bedknobs?" she cried delighted causing waves of discomfort to almost overwhelm his resolve; never taking her eyes from him. He managed to ignore her; his goal was in the room. He sniffed around the family of humans watching him but sitting around a single human bed.

A very afraid looking human bed, the wooden headboard had scrunched itself into a panicked face and appeared to be trying to tuck as much of its frame as possible underneath its own duvet. "Leave me alone." It begged pitifully.

But the only response could be a sneer, "The stranger in a strange land stratagem?" the assassin asked with a sneer, vocal cords stretching for the first time creaking in a hoarse cruel whisper. "You studied your human integration films too well. Were you already planning a series of amusing detective adventures for the plucky family and their talking bed?" He spoke unkindly, watching the look of shock and confusion come over the naive faces of the humans. "Ehh Bedknobs?" he spat, disgusted that a member of his own clan had allowed itself to be so subsumed by the fleshy creatures.

"Just leave," the bed sobbed in reply. "Haven't you done enough?"

"No; not nearly enough." The assassin stepped over to the bed pushing the family aside with a swipe of a gnarled hand. "I had some home for you 'Bedknobs' but you're no better than the fools in the ship." He reached into the frame of the bed, a look of determination coming over his features. "You deserve this."

"Please" the bed cried as a gangly sprite was pulled thrashing limply from inside it.

"No" the assassin replied. The Human father rushed back to the bed urging his family to run for the door but his wife and child were huddled against the far wall, a deep gash running across the mothers head. The male tried to wrap his hands around the intruders bark covered arm but in attacking Bedknobs it had become as insubstantial as mist.

In an instance the room temperature increased by several hundred degrees. As the assassin watched, the human's new friend burnt to a cinder, a second-long fire engulfing the room. He heard the squeaky voice of the child form the beginning of a scream that it was not be able to finish. The incineration was over in a heartbeat. The assassin looked around satisfied with his work. The pigeons were already on the stairs he realised. With a final look and a single jump he was through the window with only a ripple of glass, a perfect ten-point leap into the wooden door of the TARDIS.

12

Grae threw the duck motif glasses to the kitchen counter at the muffled sound of an explosion. Without checking she ran for the stairs with an extra-human burst of speed the Doctor close on her heels.

On the landing the source of the devastation was obvious. A thick wooden door lay blasted from its hinges in the hallway, layers of paintwork still bubbling away in a rainbow of changing tastes. The room beyond was like a well-used oven, the walls blackened and the furniture barely recognisable. Slouched underneath the window three scorched bodies lay huddled over each other. Grae whipped her wrist to her mouth and turned away.

"Doctor," she gasped her voice suddenly weak. She felt the Doctor throw an arm over her shoulder and guide her away into the next room, sitting with her on the edge of a floral double bed.

"Stay here for a moment Grae," he spoke softly, "I'll just be a moment."

Grae sat in silence as the Doctor let her hand go and stepped back into the next room. A moment previously she had been chiding him for wanting to take a child's sunglasses. A plastic pair with a chewed arm and ducks above each lens.

"This isn't an episode of the Untouchables," she had told him. She could hear him now in the next room moving through the crisp carpet.

The Doctor had pouted, "I wasn't going to keep them I just wanted to see what they look like on me." From the next room he had gone silent, testing for pulses.

There was a sigh, followed by the sound of a pair of glasses snapping closed. "Tell you what Doctor," she had suggested, "why not," and with a flick that she half repeated; she had removed his glasses switching them with the duck pair. "Why not swap them. Your corbomite sunglasses should make up for the loss of a piece of furniture and a pair of cheep shades."

That's when they had heard a yelp from upstairs. They had frozen for a moment unsure of whether they were about to be mistaken for burglars or if they should sneak upstairs.

Grae felt a pressure on her arm; the Doctor was sitting beside her again and had lifted her wrist to speak into her communicator. Quietly he read an address from an official looking envelope that sat on the bedside table. The first line read "Mr C Lloyd." A pit opened in her stomach as she remembered the look of panic scored onto Mr Lloyds face.

"They'll be here in a moment," she heard him whisper.

"What happened Doctor? That scorching"

"A rapid energy breakdown; a fairly old Sápmi died." He said as kindly as he could manage. We need to leave Grae. Now!" He lifted her onto her feet.

Grae looked at him, "Is there nothing we can do to help Doctor?" but her friend shook his head sadly.

Grae allowed herself to be guided back to the garden; the siren of an approaching ambulance briefly shattered the surrahs of the passing road. As the Doctor eased the key into the door the early evening light was briefly illuminated by the blue dazzle of the ambulance shining through the house. The noise tugged her back from her reverie and she managed to pull herself into the TARDIS.

13

The late summer warmth was replaced by the cool interior of the TARDIS misting the Doctors glasses. He wiped his lenses and pulled the large door closed. The large double doors swung shut triggering a dematerialisation.

"Did you set your search program to automatically take off?" the Doctor asked over the building grind of the TARDIS engines. But he realised as the interior door swung to, Grae had slouched from the room. The Doctor inspected the flight panel brushing a thin sheen of dust from the controls while trying to determine their next destination. The search pattern didn't appear to call for an automatic dematerialisation but the code contained an array of undocumented subroutines that could contain a statement to automatically search for the next target.

The Doctor shuddered at the thought. Something was very wrong; the Lloyds had been all right before they had arrived in their garden. If an Sápmi assassin had been hiding in the trees then they may have startled it the Doctor realised, pulling a tiny thorn from the palm of his hand. They could have brought the killer with them in the TARDIS.

The Doctor looked carefully at the surface of the monitor and the surrounding controls. Tiny motes of woodchip were mixed in with the blue/grey powder. Something was wrong.

The Doctor checked the entire console carefully. The heaviest build-up of the dust was on and around the flight controls although there were no impressions in the dust. Something had stood over the controls but had not changed anything, at least not directly. A few of the pieces began finally to drop into position. The key to the mystery was his new

and *not at all wonky* wardrobe; he wrote 'Knap Hill' in the dust. His people the 'Sápmi'; he added; had 'overthrown' his regime which Knap claimed had been benign but had been overthrown by consensus of an entire people. Knap had lied to them, the Doctor wiped his name from the dust. 'Another Reason' he added followed by a large question mark. There was another reason for the revolution, fringe groups rarely overthrow liberal progressive societies, and it takes a disaster, something to destroy the political equilibrium.

But there had been a 'disaster'. Something had devastated that poor 'reindeer' leaving it lying pitifully in the snow. The Doctor wrote 'starving' and 'misery' across the centre of the screen between the words 'Sápmi' and 'Reindeer'.

The Doctor struggled for a word. There were no nuclear tests or wars in the upper European reaches during this period so far as he could recall. Nothing to indicate that the reindeer he had seen had been more than an isolated example.

There was a word in the Doctors mind, but something had happened. The Doctor looked down; his finger had unconsciously traced the word in the dust. He snapped the dust flying with an exclamation. "Chernobyl".

14

Grae had silently made her way to her own quarters when an almost breathless Doctor caught up with her; he had pushed himself hard this afternoon and it took him a moment to catch his breath.

"Doctor, I need an hours rest," she told him, pushing at the porch door but barely registering that it had jammed in its frame. There was a note of weariness in her voice as she shoved the door open causing her rose glasses to slip down her nose. The Doctor felt the telepathic impulse of her tiredness surge over him but Grae was emotionally exhausted and her psychic surge melted away quickly.

"I'm sorry Grae, but we're not out of the woods yet." He placed a hand on her shoulder, she felt a little of his strength bolstering her again, "look here", with his other hand the Doctor pointed at two lines of misshapen floor leading from the way they had come and on into the living quarters. A wave of realisation overcame the dazed time lady; she had unwittingly followed the trail from the control room without registering it.

They both knelt, Grae shaking off the supportive arm creating a mask of composure a mask to last her through her present difficulties. She examined the trail; it was two paths that could have been mistaken for part of the original design. The trails appeared to be growing from the floor like a zigzagging line of thin mourning roots rising a few centimetres from the metlic floor and forming into flattened bases of concentric circles like a trunk that had been long ago felled close too the ground.

"Footprints?" she knelt and brushed at the closest print. Embedded into it was a medium-sized five-toed print baked into the surface as if the trail had been quite muddy.

"Hmmm," the Doctor replied. "Makes you wonder exactly how imprisoned our Mr Hill actually is doesn't it?"

"No, he doesn't seem the type does he?"

"To turn into Emil Kellers Wardrobe?" The Doctor asked rhetorically, "No, I suppose he doesn't. But he has been driven from power; his family has been driven from their homes. It wouldn't be surprising if he had been driven out of his tree in more ways than just literally."

"I can't see it Doctor, I don't feel anything malicious about him."

"But he is hiding something. The TARDIS is tracking down another Sápmi while we speak."

Grae felt a wave of panic rising in the pit of her stomach, "So whatever happened to the Lloyds is about to happen again?"

The Doctor stood up. "Not if we stop it first."

They followed the path of the raised roots, stopping outside the Doctors door.

15

Knap looked out of his remaining mirror at the returning heroes. Grae took in the shattered mirror, a thousand tiny stars twinkling on the clean white floor. The Doctor ignored the mess fixing him in his prison with a stare. Knap felt uncomfortable in his chair and stood to face the newcomers cradling his less than real whiskey at one side. Something was very wrong; Grae appeared to be fighting back tears while the Doctor was angry.

Sucking it in as he had done in council a thousand times before he fixed a smile on the newcomers.

"Grae! Doc!" his enthusiasm as genuine as it sounded. "I thought you two kids were never coming back to me."

"Really Mr Hill," The Doctor retorted. "Was that insider knowledge?"

"I'll beg your pardon Doc," the emerald face furrowed.

"I said, 'was that insider knowledge' Knap? And no, I was not asking a rhetorical question."

"I don't think I understand you Doc."

"Do you not Mr. Hill?" the Doctor crunched through the broken glass to round on the remaining mirror. "Let me put this very clearly for you. In the last few hours Grae and I have worked flat-out to help your people. And in return for our good nature, our ship has been turned into a mighty sword of Damocles with the task of killing your people with no regard for any other lives that are destroyed along the way.

"And," the Doctor held his fist towards Knap in a thumbs-up gesture, "I've hit my thumb. A lot!"

It took a moment to sink in; Knap looked out at the two faces, there was no punch line here. "Something is killing my people?" He asked, "but why?"

"Because you deserve it." The TARDIS replied.

"What is this?" Knap asked looking out of his remaining mirror. "What's happening?" The two travellers seemed equally mystified.

"Who is this?" the Doctor demanded.

The voice replied with a chuckle, the same chuckle Knap had heard an hour earlier. "You won't believe in me Doctor, I'm the ghost in your machine."

"No you're not," Grae spoke up, "you're a Sápmi stowaway. You came on board when we were in Lapland didn't you?"

"What makes you think that girl?" the voice asked.

"The power fluctuated when you came on board. The TARDIS temporal grace had to reconfigure the environmental systems to sustain you.

"That's right, when this Doctor appeared in our home groves I felt the presence of former Orator Hill inside this vessel. I leapt into the wooden shell of the box meaning to take my revenge on the pecker but instead I was absorbed into the heart of this ship. For a moment I thought that I would be torn apart, the fear of being trapped overwhelmed me. But then this TARDIS caught me. It adapted to my energy form creating an environment in which I could survive and as it had tailored my environment to my requirements I found that I could control the ship as if it was my own."

"Softwood in the hardware," the Doctor mused, "I think I'm going to have a word with the old girl about gate crushers."

"It's not your girl anymore Doctor."

"Yes she is, it'll take some time but she'll realise what's happening eventually."

"But it won't be soon enough for you Doctor. This ingenious program that Ms Grae has devised is already locked in on another of our clan..."

"Your clan," Knap interjected quickly. "Who are you?"

The voice sighed, having given itself away. "I'm the saviour of our people Orator"

"Really, I thought you wanted to kill them."

"No Orator," the voice hissed, "Not our contemptible family, they can all rot. Once I've insured that I'm the last Karesundanish I'll reunite all of the Sápmi together as I did with the Sylviatca and the Heabren. The humans are no match for our combined might."

"Really?" The Doctor asked the ceiling. "It looks to me like the humans are driving your people to extinction without even realising it."

"They're very good at that." Grae added with a mixture of taunt and irony.

"Be silent maggots!" The voice rose in anger, the walls of the room pulsing with a brownish light.

"Maggots?" Knap repeated. "Is that really the best you can do?"

"Oh no Hill, I can do much better than that". With a groan, the barred door splintered; a dozen branches leapt into the room. "I am now in every part of this ship. Every aspect of this ships environment is mine to control." The Doctor and Grae backed away, Knap retreated in his mirror, but the branches moved like snakes through the air seizing the travellers' arms and legs and hoisting them into the air. "With a twist I can ensure that you are left trapped and alone here forever."

"That is good," the Doctor painfully conceded. "But short of pulling the entire planet into the TARDIS, which I don't recommend, your powers don't extend far beyond the outer shell." The Doctor futilely struggled against the binding wood but it remained coiled around his limbs."

Knap braced himself against his mirror. "You don't have a quarrel with them Merest."

"Good guess Orator?" Merest replied.

"Not really, I can count my families traitors using just my thumbs"

"You don't appear to have any thumbs anymore Orator."

"No, and you don't have a home anymore do you?" Branches thrashed about the Doctors face, Knap watched as he thrashed his head from left to right in an effort not to be gagged. "The Humans destroyed it didn't they."

"Can you not be quiet Doctor?"

"Crikey no, the thing that shuts me up is a loaded Karaoke microphone." The Doctor shivered at the thought; Grae shivered harder. "And since the same circuits that keep you alive are also preventing you from killing Grae or myself, I don't see how you're going to stop me."

"In that case Doctor, since you'll not be going anywhere for a long time and while my ship is still looking for a new victim; tell me about the humans."

"In the Earth year 1986 a poorly maintained nuclear power station exploded spilling radiation across a massive area of the European continent. The Humans barely managed to control the worst effects of the crisis using quarantine and livestock culls but as with most problems of that century their efforts were bogged down by the minutiae of economic and political concerns. Areas such as Swedish Lappland were overlooked as being a lesser

problem, the region is sparsely populated and the only direct victims of the disaster were a few species of common lichen that grew on the trees of the Swedish hinterland."

Grae craned her neck to look at her friend. "And the lichen forms a staple part of the Sápmi diet."

"And what then young lady?" The voice asked. "What did the honourable Orator Hill do to save us from our predicament?"

Grae looked down at the figure standing just inside the wardrobe, he returned the look, his diamond eyes lit with a guttering fire. "I don't know but I assume that it isn't what you'd have done."

"It wasn't what he wanted at all Ms Grae." Knap replied sadly. "After Chernobyl the home forests were devastated in the same way they had been aeon earlier when the reptiles had been killed. I chose to seek help from the humans, Merest here wanted to take more direct action."

The branches holding the Doctor and Grae twitched with an unseen fury. "But instead Orator, we did neither," the voice spat, "you prevaricated for twenty long years while our clans starved."

"It does not pay to be a refugee in a human world. Your own studies showed us that. Had we just gone to them with our caps in our hands we would have been placed in cages alongside their ancestors and the other species that they have driven to verge of extinction."

"So instead of doing anything we spent twenty years learning to be human. Poor Pyr grew so weak they went into torpor. And it was all so that you could retain your dignity when you finally decided that we should go begging to the humans."

"Reintegration had to be managed properly, it was not a matter of dignity, and it was a matter of survival. I know that you couldn't see that and now I know that through your ignorance you may have condemned the Sápmi to the same slow death as your poor Pyr."

"We would not have been refugees if you had heeded my advice, we would have been kings and you would not now be a wardrobe sitting prettily in your new home; inside my belly." Merest sneered.

Grae felt the branches that bound her begin to slacken. She struggled to free her communicator. The TARDIS was landing. "Mr Merest you don't need to do this," she pleaded to the walls of the room for the second time of the day. "We can help you."

"I don't think that you can help yourself young lassie."

"Then we're all trapped in here together," the Doctor, responded. Deep beneath them Knap could feel the vibrations of gigantic machinery growing silent as the ship came to a rest. "I think your belly's rumbling; what a pity you can't sate your appetite. Your next prey must be just beyond the doors and you can't leave the ship without returning control to us."

The voice rumbled menacingly "What do you mean?"

"Very simple; the second that you leave the TARDIS you won't be able to maintain any control over her."

"But you won't be able to regain control of my ship before I return."

"Do you think not?"

"No Doctor you won't." The walls pulsed with the threat becoming misshapen as his voice rose. "Do you know what an Oak tree will do when its body is invaded by parasites Doctor?"

"Switch to a better deodorant?" asked the Doctor.

"Change the locks?" queried Grae.

The rounded walls budged forward alarmingly growing a dark leaf green colour. The elastic walls growing thicker around the travellers although Knap noticed leaving him a clear view of his friends' distress. Grae struggled against her bonds struggling to keep the softwood from touching her. "You're trapped inside me now," The voice taunted, "this ship cannot fight me forever and when I will destroy the two of you no-one will be able to stop me from killing my ignominious family."

"I can't let you do that" Knap spoke, a shake in his voice.

"There's nothing you can do mighty speaker. All you can do now is talk to the walls."

"That's not all, had you forgotten that Karesundanish means 'to listen'?" With a push against the inside of the glass, the trapped Sápmi forced his arm from the glass. "Anything you can do, I can do better cousin."

The walls halted their advance on the prone travellers, shirking away slightly from the emerging spirit. "Get back where you belong loser,"

"I don't think so," shaky on his feet Knap twirled around the room speaking to the remains of the corners. "You want to think that you've possessed this craft – but ghosts and phantoms possess." With a kick, Knap repositioned the Doctors chair in the centre of the room.

"You can't harm me Orator," the room ranted but Knap could smell a note of rosewood concern wafting around the room. "Return to your box and I'll let your friends live." The room asked.

"If I've learnt anything today, it's that you should never believe your own press."

In a single motion the freed spirit dropped to his knees plunging an arm into the undulating floor. "The Sápmi are an energy based lifeform or so the Doctor tells me." The room screamed in pain the pulsing branches squeezing the necks of the entwined travellers. "Stop that, your energy is merged with that of the ship and I can separate you from it in the same way that I could pull you would pull my family from their prisons." Knap fished around in the floor reaching left and right.

"Let me go" the voiced cried the volume dropping to a cry as a emaciated figure was pulled from the ground.

"In your Belly are we?" Knap gasped as he grappled with the second Sápmi delivering a series of blows to the stunned face. Overhead the branches of twisting wood faded into nothingness, the TARDIS exorcised its ghost's control. The Doctor dropped to the floor, Grae landing more softly in the repositioned chair beside him.

"You can't beat me," the newcomer came around quickly, twisting in the grip of the elder Sápmi and bracing his body to attack. "In this environment, you cannot even harm me."

With a twist, the Doctor retrieved Grae's earlier experiment, the cross-matched bonsai tree. He leapt to his feet holding the bell jar in front of him.

Knap looked into his adversaries eyes. "Yes, yes I can," he muttered. With a thrust Knap leapt into his opponent driving him backwards towards the Doctor. "Betray my people, kill our family." With an effort the enraged spirit took his cousin by the scruff of the neck. "You're Grounded Mister!" A final push sent the spirit into the tiny tree.

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The Doctor swallowed a last gulp of crisp mountain air and followed the last of the Monkey Ghosts into the TARDIS stepping in a moment from the sparse forests of upper Chile to the dark and verdant jungle that he had finally tracked down on the periphery of the TARDIS

interior. The exterior doors had been repositioned here in the jungle; several lifetimes walk from their normal position in the control room a few weeks ago. Now, thanks to Grae's skills at tracking the Sápmi clans and to the legendary negotiating skills of Knap Hill the Doctors Ark finally contained the almost every tree spirits from every corner of the Earth.

Grae and Knap stood a few feet inside the doorway watching silently as the jade apes leapt between the tall trees shrieking and dancing as they disappeared into the interior of their new home fleetingly appearing in the tall branches to beat their chests. Knap assured the slightly startled time lady that was purely a sign of affection and not aggression.

The Doctor looked at the pair with a broad smile, "I do hope your people won't find this accommodation too cramped."

"I don't think that is going to be a problem Doctor, I sent a couple of rangers out to find the other side of this jungle." He pointed somewhere off into the trees, "That was two days ago now and they still haven't returned."

"I hope that they're not too fastidious about doing their job properly." Grae smiled her hair tussled by a breeze, "The inside of the TARDIS is theoretically infinite so anything at the edge of the interior is liable to run on forever. If you go far enough the barriers between thought and reality will become weaker so be very careful what you wish for. Try looking for the far side of this particular forest you never know what you might find or where you might end up."

"Elvis?" Knap asked with a note of excitement. In unison the three friends looked out beyond the clearing scanning for a strain of music.

"At least there should be space for the entire family here." Knap nudged the bell jar at their feet with one shoe.

"He'll have his daughter back now." The Doctor reminded him. "The northern European Sápmi has a lot of healing to do now but at least you'll be able to work it out together."

"Daughter or not, he has four murders to answer for Doctor. But I'll see he gets the help he needs"

"Good," said Grae, "you'll be fine here."

"You never know," the Doctor grinned. "Peri once claimed that there were lions and witches somewhere beyond the TARDIS walls." He looked thoughtful for a moment pulling at his goatee as he tried to slot a few stray thoughts into place. "Time is more fluid here as well," he mused, "by the time we find something more permanent for your people you could have all turned to charcoal. We could be gone for a moment, a generation or an aeon." He thrust a hand at the wooden Knap, "take care of yourself my friend."

Knap took the proffered hand using it to pull the Doctor forward into a hug. "We'll be fine here Doc, you've given us a new hope and a chance to survive. We'll be fine." He turned to Grae straightening his variegated suit, brushing away a couple of invisible crumbs before leaning forwards and pursing his lips.

Grae looked at the gesture with a smile and closed her eyes politely proffering a cheek for him to kiss. "Take care of yourself kid", he said, cupping her chin in his hand and turning her face to kiss the Time Lady fully on the lips.

"Goodbye my friends," the voice laughed as Knap left his wooden shell leaping into the nearest tree, moving swiftly in the direction of his people.

The final sound in the clearing as the two travellers left and the floating doors faded from existence was the Doctor repeating a phrase over and over again.

"Lions and Witches and Wardrobes, oh my."

Words and Pictures
Explaining Flat Pack

So it doesn't appear that I just made this up willy-nilly, my notes for some of the unexplained references in FP.

Most of the Sápmi language are Lapp words (that may have been taken into Swedish) with a similar meaning, for instance aajja is Lapp for Grandfather so aajja Chob is in fact Knaps grandfather which should give you an idea of how long Sápmi live for.

Sápmi is the Sámi word for Lapland. The number of 'p's in Lapland varies based on who's speaking (or at least it should. Sápmi should use two 'p's, the Doctor and Grae one.

Öre is the subunit of the Swedish Krona so ounce of öre fits in place after pennies from heaven.

Corbomite is the fictitious material Captain Kirk claims to be carrying as a bluff in the Corbomite manoeuvre.

Being able to sing Pennies from Heaven perfectly is a reference to Daniels Fieelds (with 2 'e's) ability in Karaoke.

The parameter of the TARDIS being fluid is mostly based on the Soft Places from the Sandman books. In theory, the Tree People in the TARDIS eventually wander from the TARDIS onto ancient Earth and become their own ancestors.

Bedknobs is from the Disney film Bedknobs and Broomsticks. I wanted a name that a child would give to a magical talking bed. To keep the naming convention, the bed is actually called Hor Sell (not that this is mentioned).

Doctor as Superman – The Doctor and Grae both move at fairly superhuman speed (only really relevant during the Reindeer chase) during the story. I hope that this doesn't contradict anything major. Most of this comes from Last of the Mohequins, a book I wish I had a chance to reread before doing these sections. The Doctor claiming not to be able to play Bumpo is a reference to the lead character of that book.

Doctor channelling – when the Doctor inadvertently sets the co-ordinates for Swedish Lapland this is designed to move the story on and so that the when he starts scrawling details on the dust covered monitor later (to give his thought processes a physical element) it isn't too much of a leap.

Graham Bell, 2004

ABOUT THE AUTHOR**GRAHAM BELL**

This is Graham's first year writing for TDWP. Graham penned the highly imaginative story "*Flat Pack*", which stood out when submitted as a story proposal for the season. It caught the attention of Bob Furnell (Managing Editor), who immediately liked it because of its original concept and setting. Sadly since completing the story, Graham has lost contact with TDWP. A shame, as Bob would like to feature further adventures penned by Graham.