

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

THE WHITE DEATH

Miles Reid

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PROLOGUE

2154

“Come outside and look at the stars!”

Jay Falstead ran into the lounge and pulled his daughter Jane into his arms. Eau his wife walked in, glass of milk in hand. Jay grabbed Eau’s hand and pulled her outside into the street.

“Look, look up there!” he shouted, gesturing up at the stars. As they watched, red lights streaked across the sky, a meteor shower.

“They say it’s an event unique in history. This is happening the world over!”

Jay and his family laughed and marvelled over the meteor bombardment, little knowing that this would be the last truly happy moment they would ever have.

Two Months Later

“It hurts.”

Jay Falstead stroked his wife’s arm softly.

“I know it does.”

“Is there any hope?” she groaned weakly. Falstead rested his hand on hers and shook his head. His next words came out as silent as a whisper.

“I can make the pain stop, though. I can make sure you don’t suffer anymore.”

She looked over at the needle, then at the face of her husband. She nodded gently, and Falstead closed his eyes and reached for the needle.

“Just promise me one thing. Look after Jane.”

“I will always look after her, until the end.”

He pressed the needle into her arm.

“I love you, Eau. I always will,” whispered Falstead. Eau smiled and with the last of her strength blew him a kiss before falling into a dreamless, lifeless sleep.

“Daddy?”

Falstead turned to see a young girl, his daughter, standing behind him.

“Is Mummy asleep?”

Falstead wiped the tears from his eyes with his sleeve and sniffed.

“Yes. Mummy’s asleep.”

He crawled over to his daughter and held her tight. Wishing he could never let go.

Chapter 1

“I want to go home.”

The Doctor’s attention drifted from the TARDIS console to Taryn with a hint of not-really-listening.

“Earth... sounds wonderful. What year?”

“You misunderstand me, Doctor. I want to go Home-Home.”

“Home-Home? You want me to return you to the Cheyenne II?”

“No, I want to go back home to Earth, my time, my home, my family.”

The Doctor put down his neutron ram and strode around the console to the young woman.

“Why? Why do you want to go home... why stay home?” He paused, then his face lit up. “I know! We’ll go to the Eye of Orion, no...we’ll go to the Venusian Holiday Complex of the 17th Century, that’s the finest Venusian Dynasty.”

Taryn sighed and ran her hands through her hair.

“No, Doctor. No Eye of Orion, no Venusian Holiday Complexes, no Arcturean Pleasure Domes. Earth, my home time, not 1984, not 2001, I want to go back to my own home time. I want to go home. I want a life, I want my life back.”

“You have a life, a life on the TARDIS, with me, with Grae, with Tama... Why can’t you accept this as your home?”

“Because this isn’t a home, this isn’t a life! Travelling around time and space fighting alien empires, power mad dictators and super-intelligent fluidic blobs from the Paragon dimension! What kind of life is that?”

The Doctor smiled, but Taryn could see he was forcing himself.

“It’s my life.”

“It isn’t mine.”

“Daddy, it hurts.”

“We’re losing him!”

Professor Jay Falstead cried in anger.

“Don’t you dare tell me that! I want 200cc of Metaboost injected. We have to keep his body fighting!”

“We’ve already given him twice the safe dose,” shouted the Nurse, before the patient’s arm knocked her off her feet and into a wall. Falstead gestured to his assistants and the two men grabbed the convulsing young man’s arms and held him down while Falstead gave the patient another jolt with the Heart Stimulation Laser. The Nurse got to her feet, shaking from shock.

“It’s not going to work... the plague is shutting down his systems one by one, it didn’t work.”

“Daddy, it hurts.”

“No!” screamed Falstead. “I won’t accept that, I can’t accept that!” He gave the patient another laser jolt. Slowly the patient’s convulsing started to subside, as did the beating of his heart. There was a long silence as the medical watched the man die.

“Why didn’t it work? I was certain I’d made a breakthrough with the new vaccine. There were positive results, right?”

A young male voiced crackled over the intercom.

“Yes sir,” said Moore, Falstead’s eager research assistant. “For a few brief minutes, the plague’s progress slowed.”

“You see? Slowed! We managed to slow the plague’s process. That’s very different from ‘no effect’. It means we’ve made a breakthrough.”

“It isn’t much of a breakthrough,” said the nurse bitterly. “At this rate we’re going to run out of subjects before we find a cure.”

“Sadly, Nurse Tyler, with 60% of the Earth’s population showing signs of infection, it will be quite a while before we run out of test subjects.” Falstead moved into the decontamination chamber. Blue light glowed from above and he exhaled as the door shut behind him and a series of lasers descended from the ceiling and washed over him, disintegrating the Synthi-plastic protection suit, which covered his entire body like a second skin. The other door of the chamber opened and he stepped out into his laboratory, clad only in a pair of blue boxer shorts.

“Daddy, it hurts.”

Grabbing a surgical robe, Falstead did not bother waiting for Nurse Tyler and his medical to exit the surgery but strode into the nerve centre of Medi-Cure-5, the location that had been his home for a year, a home he was sick to death of. The faces of his staff looked at him, the familiar look of defeat on all their faces, a look that had become permanently etched onto their expressions like a scar. He moved past them like a shadow and shut the door to his office behind him, making sure to lock it.

“Daddy, it hurts.”

He slumped behind his desk and sighed, running his hand across the stubbly growth that had been spreading across his face since he stopped bothering to shave. He opened up his desk and reached for the drugs. His fingers drifted between the stimulants and the sleepers, both of which he had been using in abundance for as long as he could remember in this sterilised prison of a medical centre. He picked up a sleeper tab and pressed it against his skin. There was the brief sensation of a needle prick and soon the drug-induced drowsiness began to wash over him.

“Daddy, it hurts.”

If anything, he was thankful that while under the influence of sleepers he did not dream.

“Daddy, it hurts.”

For a good three months before he started taking the sleepers, all he had been dreaming of was the corpses.

“Daddy, it hu-

Grae walked into the console room and froze when she felt the tension hit her. Taryn and the Doctor stood on either side of the console, staring at each other.

“Doctor, this life of yours... it’s too dangerous. I know as soon as we land anywhere we’ll be thrown into some life-threatening crisis that needs averting. We know it’ll happen, but you just stride out regardless meeting everything that comes your way with a smile. And if you come across an Evil Empire, you overthrow it. I like that we help people, don’t get me wrong, but I can’t cope with the constant fear and danger I get thrown into. I want to help people, but not the way you help people. I’m a medical officer, I’m meant to stomp around a sickbay and cure people in the safe comfort and security of that environment. I’m not a battlefield medic and I’m pretty much useless when it comes to helping you.”

“That’s not true, Taryn, you’ve helped me plenty of times.”

There was a familiar thud as the TARDIS materialised. No one moved from his or her positions.

“If I go home, I can actually put my talents to good use and not be some third leg in the Doctor’s great crusade for galactic harmony.”

The Doctor glared and Taryn found herself almost cowering from the intensity of it.

“That isn’t fair. I don’t do this because I feel that I’m the only one who can save the universe from Daleks or Cybermen. This isn’t a crusade, as you call it, I do what I do because I believe it to be right. Don’t you think I get tired of all the battles and the danger and the death? Don’t you think I would like to go home once in a while and let the Universe go on without me? But I can’t sit idly by and ignore my duty when someone needs my help.”

“Yeah, your duty. See, I honestly don’t think you can, Doctor.”

Grae found herself stepping up to the console and checking the readings, desperate to break the tension.

“We’re on Earth, mid-22nd Century, all readings normal.”

Taryn pulled her eyes away from the Doctor and headed for the door.

“That’s good enough for me. I need to think for a little while, Doctor.”

Chapter 2

Taryn stepped out into the middle of an alleyway. The heat was sweltering and there was a vile stench in the air. It smelt like rotting meat. As she continued down the alley, her mind was full of thoughts of life at home and life with the Doctor. He had shown her the Universe and she couldn't cope with it. It wasn't cowardice on her part. Some people just couldn't cope with the things she had stumbled into.

She walked past some large rubbish bins, probably where the butcher put all the meat that had gone off. She covered her nose and crept to the end of the small passage and stepped out into what should have been a busy street in central London. What it turned out to be in fact was a corpse-filled street in central London. Rotting corpses lay everywhere, slumped against shop fronts, dangling out of apartment windows. On one side of the street two cars had crashed, the remains of the drivers entangled against each other like some sickening embrace.

The Doctor sighed and turned his back to the closed door, resting his hands on the console.

"She wants to leave, Grae."

Grae nodded and rested a hand gingerly on his shoulder.

"I know. I've known it for a while."

"You've known?"

"Well, it was never really confirmed. She hasn't secretly confided in me or anything, like she ever would. I could just tell, it was all in her body language. She's restless with us. What will you do?"

"Hmm? Oh... take her home. If she wants to go home, who am I to stop her?"

Grae tenderly stroked his shoulder before removing her hand.

"You can't make her travel with us against her will, can you?"

The Doctor smiled darkly.

"If I could, would you want me to? Maybe it would be the best thing for all of us."

Taryn wanted to scream. She had seen death before on many different scales, but never like this.

"Damn you, Doctor. Can't you do anything without bringing me face to face with this kind of thing?"

It was not flippancy or disrespect for the dead on her part, she was just tired of the Doctor and his dangerous life. Even when she wanted some time to think, he would bring her slap bang into the remains of a massacre. Better return to the TARDIS, talk again with the Doctor and ask him to take her home as soon as possible. She turned to go back the way she had come when she heard the sound of something moving behind her. She sighed under her breath and turned to look. Here we go again, she thought to herself.

It was some kind of security drone, six-legged like a giant robotic crab. From its body protruded two pincer arms and two arms equipped with what looked like primitive pulse blasters. From its head a red light shot out and waved over her eyes.

"YOU ARE UNAUTHORISED PERSONNEL. PLEASE STATE NAME AND PURPOSE IN THIS AREA," said a harsh, unemotional synthesised voice.

"Ah... I have no purpose here. My transport landed here and I wanted to take a walk. I can just... go back to my transport and we can leave... sorry to intrude."

She fluttered her eyelashes flirtatiously as a reflex. How many times in her youth had she pulled the same trick on a police officer? There was a whirring noise as the pulse blasters trained themselves upon her.

“YOU WILL COME WITH ME.”

The Doctor paced the TARDIS console room.

“I’m going to go look for her. She’s been gone half an hour. You never told me what year it was, Grae.”

Grae gazed at the chronometer.

“2157. Why is that important?”

“The date is always important,” said the Doctor, grabbing a long black leather jacket and putting it on. Then the Doctor froze, and Grae could swear that his face had gone pale.

“2157? Grae, please tell me you didn’t say 2157.”

Grae gazed over at the console. The year was indeed 2157.

“Yes, why?”

In a flash, the Doctor ran into one of the side rooms of the TARDIS, the room where the medical locker was stored. The next instant he had reappeared, opened the TARDIS doors and run full pelt out into the alley.

“Hurry up, Grae. If I’ve got my dates right Taryn is in mortal danger!”

Grae didn’t bother with a coat as she ran outside, following the Doctor down the alley.

“Mortal danger? Why?”

The Doctor did not turn back to look at her as he turned into the street and looked around for a sign of life.

“2157 is quite possibly the worst year for her to be. It’s the middle of the Da... the space plague.”

“The what?” cried Grae, finally reaching the Doctor. She gasped in horror as she saw the bodies.

“In the middle years of the 22nd Century, the Earth was thrown into the middle of a global pandemic. A pandemic, which began what is known in Taryn’s time as ‘Ten Years of Hell’. It originated from meteors that bombarded the Earth in 2154. The plague became airborne when the meteors cracked open on impact, then the blood of victims contaminated other humans, and it spread like wildfire when people started to dump bodies into rivers. Entire populations were wiped out: Asia, Africa, South America... But this was all just the beginning, the opening gambit of a cruel alien race planning domination of the Earth. I just pray that Taryn hasn’t got into any... ah...”

The Doctor reached a street corner and froze, Grae scrambling behind him.

“Ah? Why ‘ah’?”

She reached the top to find herself on the worst end of a pulse blaster.

“Oh, that’s why ‘ah,’” she muttered.

“Are these the aliens who invade?” asked Grae.

The Doctor and Grae stared at the two crab-legged security drones. The Doctor laughed grimly.

“If only. These are mere security robots. I don’t fear them the way I fear those who will come to claim Earth as their own.”

“So do we make a break for it?” she asked.

“No, 100% accuracy. We’d be dead before you could say ‘the mighty Quark from Googleplex 28’.”

“The what?”

“Never mind, I made that up. I think the drones are trying to see what we are. They’re programmed to identify human beings on sight. We’re just... not human.”

Indeed, as the Doctor had stated, both drones ran their red scanning beams over the two Time Lords.

“ALIEN LIFE FORMS... UPLINK WITH GOVERNMENTAL MAINFRAME FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.”

The Doctor sighed.

“We’re in trouble. They’re sending our data to the control mainframe to decide what should be done with us. I mean, we are aliens, they could think we’re the ones behind this.”

“Which means... what?” said Grae

“Well, a lot of nasty things which will probably all end in death. Likely interrogation, maybe a dose of police brutality. If we’re lucky they might just cut us open and investigate our organs or maybe they’ll just shoot us now and get it over with.”

“Why’s that lucky?” hissed Grae.

“They might like us and invite us to tea with the Royals... charming lot, but ever so boring!”

One of the security drones whirled to face the Doctor, its red eye glowing fiercely.

“Looks like they install patriotism circuits in these things,” murmured Grae slyly.

“YOU ARE THE ONE KNOWN AS THE DOCTOR, CORRECT?” asked the Drone.

“Ye-yes,” the Doctor stammered.

“YOUR DATA MATCHES ARCHIVAL FILES IN GOVERNMENT RECORDS. COME WITH US OR WE WILL BRING YOU BY FORCE.”

The Doctor smiled amiably and shrugged.

“Well, since you asked so nicely. Come on, Grae.”

With that, the two drones started to manoeuvre their way down the street with the Doctor and Grae sandwiched between them.

Chapter 3

“Daddy, it hurts.”

Jay Falstead was woken by the intense bleeping of his intercom. His hand snaked over to the console and pressed the flashing button. Moore’s face appeared on screen, his unshaven features wild-eyed with excitement.

“Yes, what is it?” he croaked, the effects of the sleepers draining slowly from him.

“One of the drones found someone outside and brought them in. The thing is, sir, she’s uncontaminated.”

Jay shot up in his chair,

“Not even a Stage 1?”

“No sir, she doesn’t seem to have any trace of the plague in her body whatsoever.”

Jay was shocked by this; everyone on the planet had Stage 1 contamination. It was only through time, illness or tainted blood that the plague advanced into its later, deadlier stages.

“Incredible. Bring her in immediately.”

“But what about de-contamination?”

“Screw that! We’ve got possibly the only fully unaffected human on the planet at our front door. We need her inside now!”

In a rush, Falstead grabbed for a plastic packet from his cupboard and tore it open, grabbing at the white overalls within.

To Taryn, it was clearly obvious that she was inside some kind of medical science facility. To her eyes it was an antiquated and barbaric setup, with quarantine chambers (no nanotine-germbusters yet) and quite possibly bulky laser surgery tools.

All quite interesting, but all incredibly primitive. The drone had hounded her into the building and promptly left to continue guarding the outside of the bunker. As she made her way through the numerous air locks towards the centre of the base, she realised that it shouldn’t be taken so quickly. With these kinds of operations, it would take a good few hours to make her way through the various de-contam procedures.

Eventually, she made her way through the last doors into a vast white lounge room with a variety of furniture which managed to combine the twin sins of trying to be as dull and lifeless as possible while yet trying to look strange and futuristic. Standing in the room was a group of white jumpsuited doctors, each one staring at her intently.

“Hi.” She smiled uneasily and gave a little wave.

Suddenly the door at the other end of the room opened and a figure bounded into the room that made Taryn’s jaw drop.

She knew him.

There wasn’t a single human being in the medical profession in her time who didn’t know him. Taryn was staring at possibly one of the most important men of the 22nd century. In an instant it all fell into place and she knew where she was and what was going on.

The TARDIS had dropped her in the most important period of 22nd century England. Not the Euro-American Wars, not the Invasion of the terrible Zogbots, but here. She had ended up in the days of the plague and she was meeting a man who was one of the reasons she had joined the medical profession in the first place. One of the most famous men in the medical profession, a legend in her time.

“Professor Falstead?”

She stepped forward nervously, like a young teenager approaching a pop star. The man advanced towards her.

“You know me?”

She shook his hand vigorously,

“Yes,” she gushed. “Yes, indeed I do.”

Suddenly there was a beep and a voice came over the PA.

“Sir? We’ve got more people being brought towards the base by our other drones, but the data we’re getting from them isn’t making any sense.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, all we’re getting from the drones is a government computer file on a man named ‘The Doctor’.”

Falstead’s eyes widened,

“The Doctor? Did you say the Doctor?”

Taryn gaped.

“You know the Doctor?”

“Well, only by reputation... and through an incredibly extensive file compiled by the old, defunct U.N. Why, do you know hi...wait a minute, that’s why you don’t carry any trace of the plague. The Doctor’s a time travelling alien, you’re not from this time.”

“Guilty.”

“Bring them through. I’d like to speak to the Doctor as soon as possible.”

The Doctor and Falstead shook hands.

“An honour to meet you, Doctor. If half of what your files have said about you is true, you’re quite possibly the reason we’re all still alive.”

“Oh, believe me, it’s an honour to meet you too,” said the Doctor excitedly. “I’ve always wanted to meet the man who sav... well, let’s just say your reputation precedes you.”

The Doctor, Taryn, Grae and Falstead stood in the spacious white chamber that served as a meeting room for the team of Medi-Cure-5. Falstead sat down in a large, comfortable chair and gestured for the others to sit. The Doctor and the others sat down to find the chairs automatically adjusting to their respective size, weight and posture to create maximum comfort. The Doctor shifted irritably in the chair and then removed his jacket and placed it on the table.

“These chairs always annoy me,” he said with a hint of embarrassment.

“So what brings you here?” asked Falstead.

“Just dropped in, if you don’t mind. As much as I’d like to sit and chew the hospital food, we should really be going.”

“Look... Doctor, can you stay a while? I mean, there can’t be anywhere else you have to be urgently.”

The Doctor stared at Falstead for a long time. His expression hardened.

“Don’t beat about the bush, what is it you want?”

Falstead leaned forward, resting his head on his raised hands.

“I see I can’t fool you. But Doctor, may I ask, you have been to the future, the far future, correct?”

“Once or twice. Nowhere special,” said the Doctor evasively.

“You’ve been to the future plenty of times,” piped up Taryn excitedly. “I’m from the future... I’m a medical officer on a starship...”

“Taryn!” scolded the Doctor angrily. “He’s not meant to know that.”

“Why not? I mean, why can’t we tell him that mankind survives the Plague?”

Grae winced at Taryn's blunder.

"Because he isn't meant to know. One can't know the future of one's own people."

"But... but... he's going to find the cure!" blurted Taryn. She froze and realised what had happened. She had just told Falstead his future and in so doing had placed it in great jeopardy. The Doctor had always told her about the dangers of people knowing too much about their future, a human (as he put it) is not capable of accepting his own future. It was why tarot cards and fortunetellers were always classified as foolish voodoo and not any kind of real magic.

"I... I do what?" whispered Falstead gently. The Doctor and Grae stood up.

"Well, it looks as if I can't take you anywhere Taryn," said the Doctor harshly. "We're leaving."

"I'm sorry!" cried Taryn. "But... don't you see what this is like for me? I'm confronted with an idol of mine. How do you think I'd react around him?"

"Well, with a little maturity I would've hoped. Come on, we should go before you do any more damage."

As the Doctor strode past, Falstead's hand grabbed at his coat.

"Doctor... how can I be any closer to finding the cure? I've made almost no progress at all. How can I cope with this?"

The Doctor brushed the hand away.

"I'm sorry, you're not meant to carry this burden. Just try and forget we were ever here."

"Doctor... do you... do you know the cure?"

The Doctor scowled.

"Even if I did, I wouldn't do as you want."

"What do you mean?" asked Taryn.

"Isn't it obvious? He wants me to give him the cure, but I can't. There are rules against such things, I can't alter history."

"But... if you give me the cure, how will you change history?" asked Falstead.

The Doctor looked into his eyes and saw a man on the verge of snapping. It was understandable, the death the man must be exposed to every day since this thing began. The pressure to find a cure for the plague. The ultimate burden that he had just been given to know that the very survival of the human race was on his shoulders and his alone. The Doctor considered what he would do in Falstead's situation and realised that once, long ago, he had been put in the exact same position.

"Sorry, I can't help you."

Falstead screamed in desperation and charged out of the room. Taryn instinctively ran after him, leaving the two Time Lords behind.

"He can't understand, I don't think even Taryn would understand," the Doctor said quietly. "If I gave him the cure now, years early, he'd save lives. He could save millions; millions of lives wouldn't be thrown away in such a waste. But it is those millions of lives who shouldn't be saved. This plague will take mankind to the abyss and from it, they will stand tall, a shattered race on the verge of extinction, and forge something great amongst the stars. But who knows how the equation could be changed with a few million added on? Maybe because of this mankind will travel in a new direction, one that would lead to something much worse, something horrific, a brutal and corrupt Empire, maybe a final war to wipe humanity off the galactic map? It's unpredictable. I could save lives now and destroy the tomorrow that people like Taryn will know. I can't do that... I can't play with the time stream in such a way. Oh Grae, sometimes I wish I had never left Gallifrey in the TARDIS. Part of me wishes I'd stayed at home like the others, they think me irresponsible

and maybe I am... But how can they know what I have to endure? I have to juggle time and space in my hand with each passing journey and each day I may be thrown a new ball, what'll happen if one day I just drop them? If I prevent a Dalek scheme in 2164, how will it affect the Earth of 2230, an Earth I've been to before I went to 2164? I want to help them, Grae, you know how much I hate death. But I can't, I must let history work on its own, I can't save humanity forever."

Grae's hand slowly clasped the Doctor's.

"You won't have to, I'll help. You'll have me around to help you."

"Will I, Grae? You can't say you'll be around forever to look after me."

Chapter 4

Falstead slumped in his chair and shot another stimulant into his bloodstream. His mood swings were linked to the drugs, he wasn't foolish enough to not know that. But his outburst at the Doctor... he was in the right, if the Doctor really cared about humanity, he'd help. He should help. His hand clasped around a syringe of blood. He had taken it from the last patient, a sample of the plague in its final stages. If it was injected into someone...

"So many deaths on my head because of my actions," he whimpered to himself. "Maybe if I wasn't around, someone else could do a better job. I don't want this burden anymore..."

"Professor?"

Taryn's head peered around the door. Falstead hid the syringe.

"I'm sorry. The Doctor gets like that when it comes to time paradoxes. But I have to admit, I shouldn't have said what I said. Don't get angry at the Doctor, get angry at me..."

Falstead looked at Taryn as she walked softly into the room. She was so beautiful; an angel from the future who had given him a message, a task, like Job. A task he didn't think he could achieve, then he thought of something.

"Taryn, is the plague still around in your future?"

"No, all inoculated, even after so many years. I guess I shouldn't be telling you this, but since you already know your future..."

"Yes... yes I do," said Falstead. He stood up, syringe behind his back. He knew what he had to do. He only hoped that when it was all over Taryn would forgive him.

The Doctor and Grae had left the waiting room, preferring to go and find Taryn instead of wait for her to return. Neither of them spoke. They had no wish to talk about his earlier outburst.

"We have to leave this place as soon as possible. It's dangerous for Taryn to be here. Not just because she seems quite content to open her mouth at inappropriate times, but because she may end up being contaminated by the plague."

"But surely, being from far enough in the future, her body would be inoculated against such a thing."

"Centuries have passed between the plague and Taryn's home time. Whatever immunity she has will be nothing if she comes into full contact with the plague. She'll have no need to fear airborne contamination, but a plague sufferer, that's another matter."

Grae noticed that Doctor fiddling with something in his pocket.

"What do you have there?" she asked.

The Doctor pulled out a glass phial of straw-coloured liquid.

"It's an anti-virus to the Space Plague. When Taryn first came with us on our 'adventures', I injected her with a vaccine of my own creation that would immunise any human against all natural disease, both Earth-based and space-based. After certain events involving a companion of mine and the common cold, I created it to prevent such a thing happening again. But the Space Plague is an artificial virus and thus my vaccine wouldn't be effective against it. This is actually the vaccine that Falstead will create; I picked it up on my travels. Taryn is at risk from contamination since her own immune system would be unable to take the virus full strength. But if I was to administer it here, we couldn't get out without someone trying to take a scan of Taryn's blood. If they synthesise the cure then the entire future of the human race will be changed. I can't meddle with such a thing recklessly, you know that. The Time Lords want yet another excuse to take me down for

good. I don't want Taryn to die, but I don't want to end up on trial a third time! I can't meddle with what's happened. I can't risk curing Taryn here, not without the possibility of being discovered."

"But we do it all the time! Do you honestly think you're meant to have ended up on planets like Skaro or Telos and done all you've done? We end up on the Planet Gloohak and we topple a terrible Empire, maybe we've altered the future of that planet, maybe the empire wasn't meant to have been toppled. We've done things all over the universe that could qualify as meddling and altering the future, but when we end up on Earth it's all 'we have to be careful not to alter history', especially in the past... How can you honestly stand here and say you'll let someone die, a friend, someone who isn't meant to be here, because you might change the future? What kind of damn hypocrisy is that, Doctor?"

"Earth history, I know it like the back of my hand," said the Doctor. "When it comes to anywhere else, I really don't know what is meant to happen. That's my excuse. I'm purposefully ignorant of nearly the entire history of the universe.

"That's it? You live with your hands over your ears so you can plead ignorance when you step on the toes of the Time Lords? Sorry, Doctor, but that is a terrible excuse."

"Oh, it's a stupid excuse, but it allows me to do what I want to do more than anything in the world."

"What is it you do, Doctor? Tell me."

The Doctor smiled faintly,

"I try to help people. No... I help people."

"Taryn, what's the future like?" asked Falstead, his voice quivering. Taryn sighed and sat down beside him on a white plastic sofa.

"I'm really not sure what to tell you. Mankind will survive until the very end of time and we will touch the stars one by one. We will have great Empires, which will rise, and fall, our greatest epoch of civilisation followed by our downfall and defeat. The Universe is a dangerous place, but mankind will always stand tall, even though in the great scale of the galaxy we are but grains of dust. There will be many trials, but mankind will stand tall and stand strong."

"Yes, yes, but what about medicine? What advances can there be? Surely Taryn, you can tell me. How can basic knowledge of future technology damage the timeline?"

Taryn ran her hands through her hair.

"I really shouldn't..." She was interrupted as she noticed Falstead fiddling with something in his hands. She leaned towards him and saw the syringe.

"What is that?" she asked.

"This place is a maze!" moaned the Doctor. It had not taken him long to get himself and Grae completely lost.

"How can we get lost in a hospital?"

"Oh, quite easily, when every single wall, floor and ceiling is the same sterile white colour. Everything has been stripped down and sterilised to create the ultimate medical environment."

"And that means it's easy to get lost?" said Grae disbelievingly.

The Doctor's hand stroked his temples.

"Terribly."

Grae smiled.

"Or it could mean you have a terrible sense of direction."

“Insult!” spluttered the Doctor. “I’m a Time Lord, my senses are 80/80... well, 70/59.”

“Which quite obviously means you have a terrible sense of direction,” smirked Grae.

“Are you trying to take my mind off everything?” said the Doctor.

“Yes, did it work?”

“A bit. But I have come to a decision. I’m going to take Taryn home, no dilly-dallying, no side tours. Her actions around Falstead prove that she cannot be trusted not to interfere in time. I tried to show her the wonders of the Universe and I failed, like so many others. Some humans don’t have the mind to accept the scale of what has been offered to them.”

“I have another question,” said Grae. “What’re we going to do about Falstead? You saw him earlier; he’s obviously on the verge of a nervous breakdown knowing what he now knows. There’s no telling what he might do.”

The Doctor nodded grimly,

“I know. I have an idea how to deal with Falstead, but you’re not going to like it. I don’t like it myself, but it may have to be done.”

“It’s blood,” said Falstead, his voice unsteady. “Contaminated blood.”

“Why have you got that?” asked Taryn nervously.

“Well, if I injected it into you, I wonder what would happen. If you’ve been inoculated as you say... maybe I will be able to gain the cure from your blood.”

Falstead lunged at Taryn, but she leapt up and away from him. Before she could rush to the door or cry for help, Falstead’s hand shot out and grabbed her. She struggled as she was pulled back down onto the sofa. Taryn tried to scream, but Falstead’s hand closed over her mouth and forced her onto her back. He removed his trembling hand and started to position the syringe. Taryn looked up at his face, she was now frozen in fear, she could see the sweat roll down his face as he started to bring the needle ever closer to her arm.

Chapter 5

Taryn forced herself to speak, but the words came out in almost a silent whisper.

“Don’t do this...”

“I have to... I have to save mankind. Please understand, this is the only choice I have left.”

Strength started to flow back into Taryn’s voice as she spoke.

“Would you sacrifice me to ensure your own glory?”

“I don’t want glory, I never wanted glory. I only wanted to stop the pain...”

“Daddy, it hurts.”

“I just want to stop the pain for everyone.”

“Daddy, it hurts.”

“Daddy, it hurts.”

Falstead remembered the day all too well, how can someone ever forget the day they killed their own daughter?

It was a Thursday, June, the plague had started to kill people only a few months before. Falstead had been one of the first to treat its sufferers and he was the first to see the plague’s true horror. Part of him could not believe that it was his daughter in front of him now. Her face had shrunk, her skin as rough and brittle as parchment, he wanted to stroke her face, wanted to tell her that everything was going to be all right, but he was gripped by terrible visions in his head of his once beautiful Jane crumbling like paper in his arms.

“Don’t worry, Jane. I have something for the pain, something that will make you sleep.”

The tears run down his face as he slowly reaches for the needle.

“I saw Mummy in my dreams last night,” sighs Jane.

“Yes, I see her too, Sweetie,” says Falstead nervously. He saw her in his dreams, but unlike Jane’s they were never happy dreams, they were always dreams of guilt, guilt that he couldn’t save her. He always felt the guilt of releasing her from the pain, just as he was about to release their daughter. She was the last part of her he had and now he was going to destroy it. But he only wanted to stop the pain. The needle goes in, the tears stream down Falstead’s face.

“Close your eyes, Jane, and dream of Mummy.”

Jane shifts into a sleep, breathing softly, and then, as soon as she starts to sleep, her breathing stops. Falstead slowly begins to cry as he reaches over and grabs his daughter and holds her. She does not disintegrate or crumble into dust, but it is too late now anyway.

“I just wanted to help people,” said Falstead, slowly putting down the needle. His grip on Taryn lessened. “I lost my wife and daughter to the plague and I don’t want any more people to suffer like I did. Is that wrong?”

“No. I’ve spent my whole life wanting to help people. But you have to understand, to me these people are already dead, you create the vaccine and save the world from the plague. I was never meant to come here, that means you will create the vaccine. My very existence is proof enough of that.”

Falstead smiled weakly.

“Yes, I suppose you’re right. But while I search for the cure, many more people will die.”

“People will die every day for as long as humanity exists,” said a voice from the doorway. Taryn looked over to see the Doctor and Grae standing in the room.

“And how long will that be?” asked Falstead, wiping at the sweat on his brow. The Doctor smiled.

“I suppose there isn’t any harm in telling you.” The Doctor walked over to Falstead and grasped his shoulder. “Mankind will never truly die. The Earth will burn as it is absorbed into the expanding Sun, billions of years into the future. Then at last mankind will throw off the shackles of flesh and they will be like bright stars and at that single moment, every single planet will look to the stars and they will see mankind shine.”

Falstead smiled,

“That doesn’t sound so bad.”

“No, it isn’t,” grinned the Doctor. “Maybe I should’ve brought my photo album.”

Taryn rose as the Doctor and Falstead both laughed falsely.

“I suppose,” she said, “That we better be heading back to the TARDIS.”

“Yes, indeed,” said the Doctor. “I have things to discuss with the Professor. You go on ahead and we’ll catch up with you.”

Taryn headed for the door, and the Doctor gasped as if he had suddenly remembered something of vital importance.

“Oh! Taryn! I left my jacket in the meeting room earlier. Could you make sure that you go and pick it up for me? It’s cold out. It will keep you warm.”

Taryn nodded, then she walked over to Falstead.

“I was glad to have met you,” she said. “I hope you find what you’re looking for.”

“I think I have,” said Falstead. “I think, meeting you, I have found hope that there will be a future for mankind.”

Taryn blushed and whispered a simple thank you. She held him briefly and then left the room, not looking at the Doctor or Grae. The Doctor waited until Taryn was out of sight and then shut the door.

“Professor Falstead, we must talk to you about the future,” said Grae softly as she removed her glasses and walked towards Falstead slowly.

Chapter 6

Taryn grabbed the Doctor's leather jacket and put it on. It was old and battered and warm. As she walked to the door, she put her hand in one of the jacket pockets and felt her hand wrap around a tube of glass. She pulled out a sealed test tube filled with a straw coloured liquid. On the side of the tube was the serial number - ANTI-DAL-PLA-00361. She knew what the serial number was, it was exactly what Falstead was looking for. It was a cure for the plague, in Falstead's hands it could save millions of people. Taryn knew the Doctor would be angry if he knew what she was planning.

The Doctor and Grae closed the door behind them.

"It's done, then?" asked Grae.

"Yes," said the Doctor. "I'm sorry that you had to do that. I know that kind of thing is distasteful to you."

"It had to be done, I can see why you sent Taryn on ahead. She'd become too attached to him, she would have told him anything she could if he wanted. I didn't like it, but I suppose I have to grow up and realise that sometimes people have to do things they don't like to ensure the proper order is maintained."

Taryn knew what could possibly happen if she gave the cure to Falstead. Together they would save millions of lives, mankind would not be so badly decimated, they could prepare against the coming storm. They could beat back the invaders and not be stamped underfoot like insects. She would ensure the beginning of a bright new future for humanity... But maybe in doing so she would ensure the destruction of mankind. What if in beating the first wave of invasion they forced the invaders to sterilise the Earth completely? Maybe through being almost wiped out and subjugated, mankind's fate was assured as a bright one. Now she could see why the Doctor took altering the future so seriously; any single change could result in the most dangerous consequences. But people were dying. She knew enough of her history to know what would happen to Earth, even though it could mean sacrificing her future. She knew what she had to do.

"So what will happen now?" asked Grae. The Doctor looked wistful

"Do you know any Earth history? Falstead will create the antidote to the Space Plague but it will be too late. The Earth gets invaded full force, the Earth gets subjugated, and that's when I start to get nostalgic."

"Ah yes, one of your earlier escapades if I recall."

The Doctor sighed.

"Yes, not something I like to talk about. It was a painful experience to go through and not all of my memories are things I like to relive."

There was a long silence. Grae looked into the Doctor's eyes and saw hints of a sadness she had never seen before, not even when Tamara died.

"So," she said, desperate to change the subject, "Why haven't we gone back to the TARDIS yet?"

"Because we're waiting," said the Doctor.

"Waiting for what?" asked Grae.

"To see Taryn's decision."

Taryn strode down the corridor. She would be Falstead's angel, give him the salvation he so desperately needed. Maybe this was how it was meant to be, maybe Falstead was always meant to have got the cure from her, maybe she was always meant to have travelled with the Doctor. This was the reason she had endured everything that she had gone through, so she could ensure the survival of humanity.

"Taryn's decision?" asked Grae

"Yes, I've given her a choice, and her whole future could depend on her decision."

Taryn found Falstead sitting in his office. She was amazed at how much he seemed to have changed in the short time since she had left him. He was calm and relaxed, more like the man she had idolised in her childhood than the wreck teetering on the verge of madness she had met face to face. She exhaled sharply and placed her hand in her jacket pocket. This was her moment of truth.

"Yes, can I help you, my dear lady?"

Taryn was surprised at his stiffness towards her, almost as if he had never met her.

"Got something to give to the good Professor?" said a voice behind her. She turned to look at the Doctor standing in the doorway, his eyes blazing a brilliant inferno of calm anger and disappointment. Taryn looked from the Doctor to Falstead, who stared at them both in bemusement.

"What's going on here?" asked Falstead, an annoyed tone in his voice. The Doctor nodded and took Taryn's arm.

"Sorry for the interruption, Professor Falstead, but my assistant gets so easily lost. Would forget her head if it wasn't part of her."

With a flourish, the Doctor pulled Taryn out of the room so hard that he almost twisted her arm out of its socket.

"TARDIS. Now." His tone was emotionless and hard.

The Doctor and Taryn walked silently together through the ruined streets of London. Grae had gone on ahead to set the coordinates for Taryn's home time and to keep out of the inevitable crossfire.

"You're going home, Taryn. Just like you always wanted," said the Doctor firmly.

"Good." Taryn stumbled over the debris of London before stopping in the middle of the street and turning on the Doctor.

"What did you do to Falstead?" she yelled.

"I had Grae use her hypnotic powers to erase his memory of all that happened today," the Doctor said. "He doesn't remember you, me or what you told him."

"You made him forget me?" Taryn screamed. "How could you do that?"

"Because of you, he knew too much about his destiny. You can't change history to suit your whims, Taryn. That includes telling one man his own future."

Taryn pulled out the cure from the jacket she was wearing.

"But this is his work! What's wrong with giving him something he created?"

"Because if you give it to him, where does it come from? How is it created? You've just created a temporal paradox; he never creates the cure because you simply gave him the finished work. The potential ramifications are unthinkable. I honestly never thought you would be so stupid, and all to satisfy a mere crush..."

"Crush?" Taryn was furious now. "You think I was going to give him this because of a schoolgirl crush? How little do you think of me, Doctor? I was going to do it to help the

man and help the world. You saw him, he was on the verge of despair. I could've saved the future, or made a better future!"

The Doctor took the cure from Taryn's hand, pulled back his arm and threw it like a cricket ball. The two watched the test tube twirl end over end through the sky as it rose and fell before smashing against the wall of a nearby building, the yellowish liquid staining the wall.

"That could have been what you did to mankind's future," said the Doctor.

"That's a risk I would happily take," said Taryn defiantly.

"That's admirable, Taryn. Truly admirable. But if you want to help create a better future for mankind then it will be in your own time. I'm taking you home immediately because if I can't trust then I have to watch you, and I don't have the time to waste."

"Are you going to erase my memories as well? To make sure I don't spoil anything?" asked Taryn bitterly.

The Doctor did not reply.

"It wasn't something I liked doing," he replied eventually, "But it had to be done to preserve his mental state. If it makes you feel any better, it's helped focus him, he'll start to get himself off drugs. He'll be able to do what history demands of him."

"And that justifies it?" asked Taryn.

"No," said the Doctor. "But sometimes these things have to be done."

He turned without a word and walked to the TARDIS.

EPILOGUE

The time rotor came to a halt as the TARDIS materialised at its programmed coordinates. The Doctor looked over the controls.

“Here you go, Taryn. Home.”

It had not taken Taryn long to gather together her few belongings and now she stood at the furthest end of the TARDIS console room, the Doctor and Grae standing together at the other side.

“Thank you,” said Taryn softly.

“Six months will have passed since you left, though. I advise you to come up with some kind of plausible cover story. Say you were recruited for top secret government work or something, that usually works.”

“Was that an attempt at being funny?” snapped Taryn.

“No, just the last bit of advice I’ll ever give you. Once you step through those doors, it’s goodbye.”

Taryn took a long look at the Doctor and Grae.

“This is hard for you, isn’t it? I can tell. How funny, the ever mighty Doctor defeated by a mere awkward goodbye.”

“There are worse things to be defeated by,” said the Doctor. “Like a funeral for a friend.”

“Will you be at mine?” asked Taryn softly.

“Yes,” said the Doctor. “For though we do not part on good terms, there was a time when I could call you a friend.”

Taryn smiled. She walked over to the Doctor and kissed him on the cheek, then she looked at Grae and merely nodded. Finally she walked to the TARDIS doors and opened them. She walked out without looking back.

The TARDIS doors shut automatically behind her and Taryn knew that her travels were over. She looked at the fabulous city before her, and the freshly fallen snow. The Doctor had brought her back in the middle of winter. Behind her, a familiar sound began to echo around the buildings, but she did not look back. The wind whirled around her and almost threatened to sweep her off her feet, but she did not look back. Instead she merely walked on. Into her future.

“It’s strange,” said the Doctor. “Things feel a lot better now that she’s gone.”

“Well, the tension between us was drowning the TARDIS,” said Grae. “It’s good that she’s gone.”

The Doctor sat down in a fine wicker chair. Grae busied herself with the console.

“Tell me, Grae, have you ever thought about leaving?”

There was a long pause. Grae laughed.

“Why, planning to kick me off?”

“No,” said the Doctor, but as the TARDIS whirled through the vortex he noticed that Grae did not answer.

Forty Years Later

“I have been to many funerals,” said the Doctor. “Too many funerals. Every human I’ve ever considered a friend, I’ve watched them buried.”

He looked up at the life-sized holographic representation of the young woman before him. True to form, Taryn’s choice of a last image for herself was a representation of her in her prime. The Doctor pulled a white rose from his jacket and laid it at her foot.

“I did wonder whether I would be welcome here, even at your grave. We never really had much of a bond, but we travelled together and I suppose I had to come and honour you. You did well, I must admit. You cured plagues, which had stricken whole solar systems, there are many babies with your name, quite funny really. But it’s strange, we didn’t leave each other’s company in friendship, but you have done much better with your life than others. Maybe my effect on people’s lives is detrimental to the future they create for themselves. When time and space has become nothing to you, how can you help but take life for granted?”

The Doctor stood up and look at the holographic memorial to Taryn. He bowed respectfully and then walked back to the TARDIS.

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Jay Falstead looked up at the sky, the last time he remembered looking up at the sky, it was the beginning of the end of the world. He remembered his wife and his daughter, but now the pain of what he had done and their loss had become less. They would never truly fade from his memory, but he knew that somehow, without really knowing why he felt this, that the future would be safe, that mankind’s future was somehow confirmed, and he was filled with an ultimate sense of hope.

As he turned to head back to Medi-Cure-5, he saw something catch his eye. A fragment of the bottom of a test tube. He bent down to examine it and cut his finger on a fragment of glass. He winced and carefully licked the blood off his finger, then picked up the remains of the test tube and looked at the straw coloured liquid within. Though he did not know why, he was filled with the urge to investigate. Carefully wrapping the fragment of glass tube and its contents in a sterile carrier reserved for medical samples, he began to walk slowly back to his work, little knowing that he carried the culmination of his goal in his pocket. He walked away, little knowing that he had found what he was looking for. He walked away, little knowing what was about to happen when saucers descended from overhead and an evil, alien intelligence began to make this world theirs.

But that, as is always a simple and accepted fact in the vast spectrum of time and space, is another story.

Miles Reid

Born in Hammersmith, England, 1983, Miles Reid is a huge science-fiction/fantasy enthusiast in nearly all forms of media and is probably one of the few people to count the major fictional inspirations in his life from a range as eclectic as Frank Herbert's *Dune*, the Fantasy stories of Michael Moorcock, Harlan Ellison, the New Wave period of writing, *Doctor Who* and the Japanese Anime Series - *Mobile Suit Gundam*. The newest writers to grab him are Hunter S. Thompson and Philip K. Dick. While this does paint the picture of man with no life, he lives an international jet setting lifestyle between his parent's house in Brighton and his Girlfriend's apartment in Eau Claire, Wisconsin in the USA. Eventually the Eau Claire, Wisconsin bit will become a much more permanent setting. He has a degree in Film Studies, Creative Writing and Video Production; he will do something with it soon. Without a haircut and when he wears glasses, he looks like a certain fictional teenage wizard but will deny it as much as possible. He likes ham, pineapple and mushrooms on his pizza.

