

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

THE ORION EXPRESS



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EPISODE ONE

“Not a Cyberman, are you?”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“Oh, you know...*Silver, QuickSilver, Living Silver*, your weakness to gold, your connection to the Earth, Le Monde, MONDAS.”

“I just get a bit of a reaction to cheap gold, that’s all, and I don’t know what you’re talking about with those other things.”

“Good, good. Just checking. Had a bit of trouble with Cybermen recently, and it’s all because I was obsessed with Roman Gods, so it pays to double-check.”

“Um, yeah. Whatever. So where is the kitchen, exactly?”

“Ah! Should be just through there on the left.”

“Isn’t that where my bedroom is?”

“Not when you’re hungry.” The Doctor led Silver through the door to her bedroom, which was now the door to a little galley. “The machine works, but check the fridge first. There might be something more appealing in there. Water’s here. Remember to always take a bottle of water with you. Changing fashions of course, but you don’t mind, do you? Anyway, you never know how long you’re going to be out on a job.”

“Job?”

“Well...trip, jaunt, excursion, adventure, journey, experience, whatever takes your fancy.”

“And what time do I get my break?”

The Doctor looked at her dumbfounded and blinked twice. Then he smiled. “You get fifteen minutes at 10:30 and 3:00 and don’t forget to punch out and back in or I’ll dock your pay.”

Silver laughed and the Doctor ruffled her hair for some reason.

“We’ve landed,” he announced, and Silver followed him to the TARDIS door. “Earth. Circa four hundred years in your future, give or take a couple of million years,” he said mistily. “I’ve got us tickets for the famous Orion Express.”

Silver walked out of the TARDIS and looked around at her planet’s future.

“Bit dull,” she said. “All the buildings look the same.”

Both sides of the narrow street were lined with blue boxes, fifty metres long and ten metres high. The cool climate prompted Silver to think about delivering a punchline about global warming, but the joke slipped her mind.

“Meh.”

The Doctor went to the nearest intersection and found that the metal boxes were twenty metres wide.

“It’s like a giant waffle iron,” said Silver. The Doctor looked up quickly to make sure that a giant wasn’t about to pour batter onto their heads. The sky was dark above them, punctuated by the tiny specks of light poking their way through the blackness, and a band of colourful clouds swooping across the middle like a monochromatic rainbow.

“How can it be nighttime with all of this light...?” he asked distractedly.

“There’s your answer,” said Silver, pointing past the Doctor. He looked at the horizon and saw a corner of the Earth visible around the side of one of the blue boxes. Grabbing a foothold on the knotted sides of the boxes, he clambered on top of the nearest one to take a closer look.

“We’re on a space station,” said the Doctor. He turned around and pointed at the giant grey building at the end of the street. “That looks like the loading bay of a cargo ship. See those layers? Those are platforms just like the one we’re standing on. And these blue boxes are the cargo containers, placed in groups onto each platform. There’s probably a crane or something that lifts them off the ground and slots them in one on top of another. Rather like circuit boards in a computer.”

“And we’re standing on one of them,” said Silver. “Maybe we’d better get off.”

“Should be quite safe,” said the Doctor. “If we get lifted on we’ll just walk back to the TARDIS and take off.”

Just as he finished talking, a siren sounded. The ground began to vibrate and suddenly the pallet next to theirs was locked in to the lifting arms and it started to rise up.

“Um, Doc?”

“Yes, Silv?”

Both of them made mental note never to do that again.

“That one they’re lifting has the TARDIS on it.”

“What?” shouted the Doctor. He ran towards the edge of their pallet but the one with the TARDIS was already too high off the ground. The pair watched helplessly as it was slotted into position halfway up the giant cargo bay.

“That must be a hundred yards above the ground,” whispered the Doctor. “We’ve got to find out who’s in charge,” he said as he started running.

“How do you know which way to run?”

“I don’t! Now come on.” Silver sighed and started running after the Doctor. “At least you’ve got your water,” she heard him call over the mechanical cacophony.

Silver frowned. What had she signed up for?

* * * *

“Pallet 98 in position on Level 49,” said Loading Technician Training Class Vitmar Lee.

“Looks good,” replied Loading Technician First Class Jenny Leiter. “Now, you flick this switch here next to number 49, and that activates all of the locking indicators. Got that?”

“Yes.” *Just like the other 97 times that you showed me.* “And now I activate the warning sirens for pallet 99.”

“Correct. You’re learning.”

* * * *

The siren sounded, just as before, and then the vibrations began, just as before, but this time they were more insistent. Silver felt the ground moving beneath her, and realized that the Doctor had already crossed onto the next pallet. She hurtled towards the edge, but when she got to the edge of the pallet, she realized that it was far too high for her to jump from.

“Doctor!” she screamed. “Doctor!”

The Doctor turned around and stopped running. He came back towards her and hurled something at her. She caught it: it was a necklace. She looked back down to see him shouting.

“Forty-Nine! Forty-Nine!”

“What do you mean?” she yelled back at him, but the pallet accelerated away the sound of the sirens drowned out the Doctor’s response. Silver watched from the edge of the pallet as it was turned ninety degrees and slotted into the bottom-most slot in the cargo bay. She braced herself as her pallet approached the back of the bay, but it slowed down and banged into position with only a minor jolt. She noticed that none of the containers moved at all from the force.

“Well, that’s just great,” she said to no one in particular. “The TARDIS is halfway up this thing and I’m right at the bottom. There’d better be an elevator!”

Silver turned around and started running towards the back of the ship, hoping she could get someone’s attention before they closed the hatch.

* * * *

“Pallet 99 in position on Level 1,” said Vitmar. “Now I flick switch number 1,” he said, aborting Jenny’s attempt to tell him once again that he needed to flick a switch, “and then activate the siren for pallet 100.”

Jenny nodded.

* * * *

The Doctor arrived at the building that was controlling the massive crane and found it to be unlocked. Entering quietly he got onto the elevator.

“Destination, Floor 100.”

* * * *

“Pallet 100 in position on Level 50,” said Vitmar. He flicked switch number 50 and looked through the giant window overlooking his handiwork. “What’s that on Level 1?”

“Looks like some kind of animal,” said Jenny.

“It’s a lot bigger than a rat,” said Vitmar. “It’s very colourful too.”

“Might be some kind of mutated species,” said Jenny dismissively. “Whatever. It won’t survive the gas. If it’s a new kind of vermin, they’ll dissect it after the flight and we’ll see something in the newsletter. Close the hatch.”

Vitmar activated the levers to pick up the massive steel door.

“Stop!” The Doctor burst in, and the doorknob hit the wall. “My friend’s on that ship.”

“Who are you?” demanded Jenny. “Unauthorised civilians aren’t allowed here.”

“You’ve accidentally loaded a piece of property that belongs to me along with a friend of mine.” Vitmar looked helplessly at the giant steel door that was being automatically screwed shut by the locking program.

“The door is closed,” said Jenny. “Everything’s automated from now on.”

“But the gas,” said Vitmar. “The gas!”

“If your friend is aboard that ship,” said Jenny. “Then they are already dead.”

“No,” said the Doctor. “There must be something that can be done. Contact the pilot.”

“I’ll let the pilot know what’s happened,” said Jenny, “but everything else is automated. I can’t even stop the take-off because another ship is going to be landing. I’m sorry about your friend. Your property will be offloaded when the ship gets to Venus.”

* * * *

“Well that’s just great,” shouted Silver, her voice echoing through the massive hold. The steel door had been sealed over the opening and Silver heard bolts being screwed into place.

Silver saw a gooey liquid oozing around the edges of the door. *I hope that means this place is airtight*, she thought. If she was going on a space journey, she was going to need air.

“Worst case scenario, I get off at the next stop and wait for the Doctor to catch up to me,” said Silver, enjoying the self-pitying way her voice echoed through the chamber. “Unless it takes a month and I starve to death. Probably die of thirst long before that.” She frowned again when she thought of the Doctor’s comment about a bottle of water. Not that it would have lasted her a month anyway. She sat down with her back against one of the big blue containers and let out a sigh.

She realized she was on the verge of tears, but took a deep breath and calmed herself.

“Maybe there’s an emergency phone or something,” she said aloud.

“Or a security guard,” she said, rather more pointedly. “Anyone here?” She waited for the echo to die down but there was no response.

Silver walked to the side of the pallet and discovered a whole array of interesting things. Firstly, there were first-aid kits all along the wall, at the end of every row of containers. Stacked up alongside them were fire hoses, axes, little drill-like devices and tool kits. No food vending machines, though. There was also a ladder, which looked to go up all the way to the top level of the cargo bay. It went down a little as well, into a dark hole. Perhaps there was a service hatch down there that she could climb out of?

Silver started to climb down the ladder when a klaxon sounded and a computer voice echoed through the chamber, “Sterilization of Level 1 commencing in twenty seconds...nineteen... eighteen...seventeen...”

* * * *

“What’s the fastest way to get to Venus?” the Doctor asked the ticket clerk.

“The Orion Express is leaving in one hour,” said the clerk.

“I’ve already got tickets. Will it get to Venus before the freighter that just left?”

“Oh, certainly,” said the clerk. “Those freighters are notoriously slow. You’ll get there a couple of days before it, I should think.”

“Good,” said the Doctor. “My friend won’t be joining me on this leg of the journey, but if all goes well she’ll be getting on the ship from Venus. Can you make sure they don’t give her seat away?” The Doctor handed the clerk the tickets that he had bought to surprise Silver.

“Certainly, Mr. Smith,” said the clerk. “We’ll put someone in that seat who’s only going as far as Venus.”

* * * *

“Oh my Goddess!”

What did that mean? Sterilization?

“Fifteen...fourteen...thirteen...”

She started climbing up. Even if there was a hatch down below, she didn’t think she could figure out how to open it in twelve seconds. She climbed as high as she could while the countdown continued, and managed to get up to Level Four before the countdown hit zero.

She leaped off the ladder and took refuge on Level Four. There was no explosion. There was no buzzing sound of irradiation. She inched to the edge of the floor and peered down the ladder hole. Three floors down a green gas was being blasted down every corridor. She looked up and saw a gas nozzle right above her head. Each floor had a row of nozzles. Each floor was going to be flooded with this sterilizing green gas.

After fifteen seconds the nozzles stopped. The green gas hung in the air. It seemed to neither sink nor rise. “Sterilization of Level Two in twenty seconds.”

“Oh, Goddess,” she said and started back up the ladder. As she made her way up toward Level 100, she could hear the levels below her being sterilized one at a time. Three. Four. Five.

Her arms and legs started to ache when she got to Level 25, but she let herself rest for a few seconds and then continued up the ladder. Eleven, Twelve, Thirteen. She kept her eye out for some kind of emergency telephone or something that would let her contact whoever was in charge of this ship. Level 50 – 39, 40, 41.

Higher-legs-tired-numb-sore-aching-must-run.

The gas was catching up with her. She climbed the last 25 stories in agony. She got off the ladder and looked down 100 stories.

“Sterilization of Level 98 in twenty seconds.”

* * * *

The Doctor found his compartment and took his seat next to a portly man who appeared to be sleeping. As soon as the Doctor had put on his seat belt, however, he realized that the man was actually dead.

“Stewardess!” called the Doctor.

“We’re about to cast off, Mr.,” said the attendant as she rushed past.

“It’s just that this man’s dead,” said the Doctor. That stopped her.

She came back and checked the man’s pulse. “Bugger,” she said under her breath. She activated a button and a view screen came down. An operator, startled at being summoned so early in the flight, put down a sandwich and raised her eyebrows enquiringly. “Code 9,” said the flight attendant.

The operator typed a few things into her computer terminal and a heavy curtain descended around the man's seat. The Doctor noted that the bottom of the curtain attached itself firmly to the chair's armrests and the floor.

"You're not getting a discount for this," the attendant said matter-of-factly and continued on her way. The Doctor blithely examined the privacy curtain-cum-body bag.

"Murder on the Orion Express," he said, raising his eyebrows.

"Never heard that one before," the attendant retorted from halfway down the aisle.

The Doctor leaned across the aisle and quietly addressed the serious-looking woman sitting there. "Did you know him?" he asked. The woman's head turned slowly towards him and then turned just as slowly back to its original position. "It's just that you both have the same badge on your jumpers. I thought maybe you belonged to some kind of group."

The woman turned again and said, "I have not had prior interactions with this individual," and turned back to face front.

The woman sitting next to the odd woman turned to the Doctor and leaned across the odd woman. "Hi, I'm Susan Bains," she said, extending her hand to shake the Doctor's. "Vice President of the Society for the Preservation of Venus. We're on a field trip to visit some of the latest archaeological sites that have been unearthed. Or unvenused, I guess, haha."

"Quite," said the Doctor. "And this man?"

"Oh, he's our president. Feeling under the weather is he?"

The Doctor didn't think that the flight crew would be all that pleased with him if he revealed that there was a dead body on board at this time. "I expect so."

The flight announcements were made and everyone turned to watch the presentation video about how to board the lifeboats and how to put on the space suits, with a reminder that people who were incubating antiviral agents in their bloodstream had the highest priority on any lifeboats, and that those passengers should identify themselves so that everyone else would see the faces of those who would be at the head of the queue. Three people put up their hands in the Doctor's compartment.

"It used to be women and children first," the Doctor murmured.

"Why?" asked a being in front of him, craning his considerably long neck around the side of the chair.

"Well, on Earth in the past, the women were revered as frail creatures who needed protection."

"If they were frail, they should have the lowest priority. What is the point of losing a strong member of society only to have the frail creature then succumb to some other ailment due to its infirmity?"

"Well, they do bear the children on Earth."

"Was the population on the verge of extinction, then?"

"Well, no, not really."

"Then they were not really a precious resource. And as for the children. Why save a life with perhaps ten years of knowledge and experience over a wise adult with forty or fifty years of learning and training? It is a huge waste of resources to have to retrain someone for that long."

"I suppose it is. People just seem to like their children."

"Interesting. It is good that the rules are spelled out at the beginning of the flight. I would hate to step on anyone's toes simply because I want to live. That is why I have paid the premium fare. I have second priority on the life vessel."

"Well, good for you. Hopefully it won't come to that. Tell me... Without meaning to sound indelicate, your breath has a rather unique odour. What planet are you from?"

"That must be the methane you smell. I'm from Venus. Vrondishivmillip."

"Uh, that can't be," said the Doctor. "The Venusians died out some considerable time ago."

"Oh, I thought you were from Earth," said the Venusian. "If you were you'd know what I was. I've been genetically engineered from biological samples found in archaeological digs on Venus. I may or may not actually look the way Venusians once did, but I am the closest thing you're ever going to meet."

"I'm not so sure about that."

"Perhaps you've heard of the Venusian Pod Beast?" inquired the Venusian.

"Maybe," said the Doctor. "I hear of so many things."

* * * *

"Nineteen, eighteen, seventeen..."

Hang on, what was that other voice, coming from far below?

"Evacuation of Level 20 in five seconds."

Evacuation? Was the gas being pumped back out? Were the lower levels safe now? Silver came up with a plan. She took off her hooded sweatshirt and wrapped it around one of her hands. Underneath that she had a man's shirt which she wrapped around her left hand.

"Sterilization of Level 99 in twenty seconds."

Silver got onto the ladder and climbed down to Level Two, stopping just inches away from the nozzle that was about to shoot deadly gas. She put her cloth-wrapped hands against the outer rail of the ladder, gripping hard, and put one of her feet around the outside of the ladder.

"...six, five, four..."

She took three rapid deep breaths and then one very deep breath, which she held.

"...three, two, one..."

"Well, here goes nothing."

She was already starting to slip, so she picked up her other foot and began sliding down the ladder as she had seen it done in the movies. She put her other foot against the ladder to give her more stability. She didn't seem to have any traction at all and was picking up speed at an alarming rate. All she needed to do was to get to Level 20 before she ran out of air. Then she would push against the ladder with the rubber soles of her shoes and hopefully she would be able to slow down over the last twenty stories. Otherwise, she would be smashed against the escape hatch that she still theorized might be down there.

Her lungs were bursting and she was still at Level 60. She still had 40 more levels to go. Her speed was amazing and it was all she could do to hang on to the ladder. Her eyes began to burn from the layers of poison gas that she had fallen through. She started closing her eyes for five seconds at a time, and that helped somewhat, but by the time she got to the twentieth floor her eyes were tearing as if she'd just been peeling onions.

Suddenly, the air was clear and she jammed her feet against the sides of the ladder and exhaled loudly. She took a deep breath but barely had time to enjoy it before she started screaming as she realized that the floors were whipping past her at an alarming rate. Her fall was not slowing at all. She was going to go straight past the first floor and die at the bottom of the shaft. The large orange painted numbers raced past her eyes.

6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1...

EPISODE TWO

Silver awoke to find that her entire body ached. Her head was pounding and she felt like she was going to throw up. She was sure that everything must be broken. She lay there for a while, breathing hard, and then realized that she was not lying on metal. In fact, it was not really an identifiable surface. Curiosity overcame pain and she turned her head to see that she was in fact lying on a large net, spanning across the entire chamber in which she found herself. The ladder she had slid down was affixed to one wall of the chamber, and about thirty metres above her head was the opening that led onto the first level.

Silver was lying on one side, and shifted her weight in the wobbly netting to try to get some sense of balance. As she did so, she felt something heavy touch her back. It was warm and quite possibly furry. She carefully craned her throbbing head and came face to face with the hindquarters of a goat-sized creature. Looking for the head, she noted that it had distinctly rat-like features. It was effectively a giant rat. She struggled to get away from the creature, but the weight of the two of them made a sort of valley in the net and every bouncy motion she made caused the creature to roll towards her. She soon realized that it was dead.

Silver finally managed to turn over onto her hands and knees and crawl over the unstable netting towards the ladder.

She saw that the net was attached to the walls by eight ropes looped over pulleys. It appeared to have been designed to break the fall of anyone who was unlucky enough to fall down the ladder. She spotted a sign on the wall illuminated by the red emergency light. Safety First. Below the words was a drawing of a stylized worker with a hard-hat falling down alongside a ladder. She laughed and everything hurt. Her lips were very dry, and the skin on her face still burned a little from the toxic cloud through which she had fallen.

"I wish I had some water," she thought to herself.

Silver looked up, alerted by an almost inaudible sound from above, and saw another rat-creature racing towards her, tumbling down from the rafters.

* * * *

The small, plump flight attendant that the Doctor had encountered earlier came by again. The Doctor grabbed her sleeve. She stopped and gave him a *what now?* look.

"Harjit," said the Doctor, reading her name from her tag. "Do you think that a Doctor should look at this man, you know, in case it's something contagious?"

"Look, sir, we're running on a strict schedule, and we're about to serve the first meal. Once I've finished my duties I'll have some time to handle passenger requests." She tugged her sleeve out of the Doctor's fingers and continued on to the front of the cabin, from which she and another attendant started serving the meal.

It didn't look to the Doctor like they'd be getting to him anytime soon, so he took the opportunity to take a walk towards the back of the cabin. Passing through a curtain, he entered another identical cabin, although no one was serving food here. Each of the cabins held thirty-three rows of seats, two on each side. It was designed to be long and thin, like a train, but the Doctor knew that there were dozens of these long thin chains of cabins side by side in the large passenger ship.

The Doctor noted that the second cabin seemed to consist of a group of blue-skinned, blonde-haired aliens that the Doctor couldn't quite place. They were all very tall and slender. "Dutch?" thought the Doctor for a second, before remembering that the Dutch were not blue.

A couple of the Dutch aliens had little red marks on their necks. The Doctor was in the middle of wondering if it was a physical attribute or a cosmetic marking of some kind, when he noticed a woman, obviously from Earth, Somalia possibly, with the same red mark on her neck. It was a perfect circle about four centimetres in diameter right in the centre of the windpipe.

"Are you with this group?" the Doctor asked the woman.

"No, why?" she responded.

"It's just that you have the same red circle on your neck."

“What circle?” she asked, pulling a small mirror out of her handbag and looking at her neck.

“Oh, my, what is that?” she asked, rubbing the spot with her free hand. Instantly the colour started to spread around her neck. The Doctor thought it might be paint smearing, but saw that the woman’s hand was not turning red.

“Do you mind if I take a close look?” asked the Doctor. He bent over without waiting for the woman’s answer. “This looks like some kind of an infection!” The woman looked uneasy.

The Doctor pressed the emergency call button.

A panel slid from the ceiling and an operator’s face appeared. “Did you press the emergency call button?” the figure asked suspiciously.

“Yes,” answered the Doctor irritably, shoving his face in front of the screen. “This entire cabin has been infected with something. We need a doctor.”

“Hang on,” said the woman. She pushed a button on her panel and thirty seconds later, Harjit came running back from the cabin ahead.

“You again,” she said to the Doctor.

The Doctor indicated the mark on the woman’s neck. “Most of the people in this cabin seem to have it.”

Harjit frowned. “Code 7,” she said to the operator on the view screen.

“Quarantine cabin 72,” said the operator as she pushed a button or two on her control panel. Instantly the front and rear door of the cabin closed and sealed themselves with a hydraulic whoosh.

“Thanks for calling me back here,” said Harjit. “Now I’m not going to get my dinner.”

“I don’t think anyone would have gotten their dinner if this infection had been allowed to spread throughout the ship,” said the Doctor.

The image on the monitor screen changed to that of a computer-generated face. “On-line medical program. Please stand clear of patient.”

The Doctor and Harjit took a step back from the red-throated woman, and the blue Dutch alien next to her tried to push his body as close to the cabin wall as possible.

“No known infections display this behaviour. Diagnosis: skin rash. Remove quarantine.”

The doors whooshed open again and a couple of passengers got up immediately to leave the cabin.

“Just because you don’t know what it is, that doesn’t make it safe.”

The artificial face seemed to turn slightly to look at him. “All have come into contact with a similar irritant,” said the computer.

“Well, I think it’s an infection,” said the Doctor.

“Are you a doctor?” asked the computer.

“Yes,” said the Doctor.

Without hesitation a compartment at the front of the cabin swung open. It was filled with medical equipment. “Please retrieve a sample of blood for analysis,” said the computer. The Doctor got the necessary equipment and bent over the woman who was now red from the neck up. A couple of other passengers in the cabin were starting to vomit.

“I really would quarantine this cabin,” the Doctor said.

“No need,” said the computer doctor. “I have made a visual examination of every passenger. Passengers all over the ship have the same symptoms.”

Suddenly Harjit fell to her knees. The Doctor noticed she had a small red dot in the centre of her neck. Some of the passengers who had been vomiting earlier were shaking and moaning, while more passengers began exhibiting symptoms of nausea.

The Doctor took the woman’s blood and inserted it into the analysis device, plugging it into the computer terminal so that the ship’s Doctor could examine the results. The magnified image of the blood sample was also displayed on a screen in the little device.

“That looks odd,” said the Doctor, examining the image. “Where have I seen that before?”

“Unknown viral agent,” said the computer. “Possibly harmless.”

“People are on the verge of collapse in here,” said the Doctor. “I don’t think it’s harmless. And I’ve seen something like it before. Anyway, I’ve got an idea. Some of the people in this cabin haven’t

been infected. I'd like to see if there are any antiviral agents in their bloodstreams. Perhaps we can synthesize something and inoculate the entire ship."

Two of the passengers gave a loud scream. The Doctor rushed over to one of them. He was dead. He checked the other. Dead also. From the adjoining cabins, the Doctor began to hear screams.

"You," he said, pointing to one of the Blue Dutch aliens. Let me test your blood for antiviral agents.

"I do not wish to be violated," said the alien.

"Didn't you hear me," said the Doctor. "I need someone who hasn't been infected to give me their blood."

He pointed to a human. "I do not wish to be violated," said the man.

The Doctor advanced upon him with a needle. "Don't you understand that people are dying?" The man leapt from his seat, knocked over the Doctor and ran to the rear of the cabin and locked himself in a lavatory.

"I'll give you my blood," said a man across the aisle from the Doctor.

"Thank you," said the Doctor, before shouting pointedly towards the toilets. "What is wrong with you people?"

* * * *

It took only a matter of minutes for the computer to isolate the antiviral agent and begin dispensing a liquid that the passengers could drink, if they were still well enough, or to have injected into their veins if they were not. Sadly, over a thousand of the twelve thousand passengers had died before the antidote had done its work.

"Just like that."

The Doctor looked sadly at the number of seats that now had the disconcerting body bags over them as he walked back to his seat.

"Thanks Doctor," said Harjit.

"How do you feel?"

"I just need a little refresher pill and I'll be able to continue my work."

"It looks like they passed by me when they served the meal," said the Doctor. "Any chance of getting something to nibble on?"

"Sorry," said Harjit. "It's all computerized. You'll have to wait three hours until the next meal break. I can get you a drink, though."

"Some kind of vegetable juice then, please." Harjit left the Doctor pondering over the strange viral infection. There *had* been something familiar about the virus.

* * * *

Silver leaped out of the way of the plummeting rat-creature. She lost her balance on the netting, and coughed a little at the cloud of green gas that had been expelled from the creature's lungs when it landed on the net. She looked suspiciously at the new arrival, but it did not move. If the gas hadn't killed it, the fall would have finished it off.

Silver took stock of her limbs and decided that none of them were broken. She felt a sharp pain in her chest and thought a rib might be broken, but it turned out to be the pendant on the necklace that the Doctor had thrown to her. She took a look at it and wondered why the Doctor had thrown it to her. Perhaps it contained a communication device? She looked at the strangely shaped pewter pendant.

It didn't have any buttons. It didn't seem to open. She pressed all over it but it gave no indication of being any kind of being a device of any kind. It was a little warm to the touch, though. Perhaps not just from having been against her skin. She touched it to her face and realized that it seemed to be imbued with power, vibrating slightly against her skin.

The TARDIS! It's like the TARDIS...could it be the TARDIS key? Of course. That made sense. Why hadn't she thought of it sooner?

Now all she had to do was figure out which floor the TARDIS was on. She would start about halfway up and start searching the levels. Taking into account the 90 degree turn each pallet had made before being inserted into the ship, the TARDIS would not be visible from this end of the bay since it was parked in between two containers: she would have to walk the length of each level, checking each row until she found it.

“I’ll start with 40,” she thought. “Then work my way up.”

She climbed up to Level One and saw that once she had cleared the chamber, the net started to rise back to just below the opening she had fallen through. She wondered if the rats would just sit on the net during the whole journey, or if they would be dumped out of the net somehow. If so, it was a good thing she wasn’t still lying on it.

Silver walked along the edge of Level One to the far end, passing ladder after ladder at the end of each row. She looked down into the holes that the ladders descended into and saw the same kind of net that had saved her before only a few feet below the floor. When she got to the last ladder she started climbing.

When Silver reached Level 40, she stepped onto the pallet and began walking along what she considered the front edge of the floor, the edge she imagined would be against the back wall of the bridge or cab or whatever they had in these things. She once again found herself passing similar sets of ladders and emergency stations as she had seen along the side of the hold. Each time she passed an intersection she looked left, down past the long line of containers.

She got to the end (counting 100 rows). At the end was another ladder. It looked like three of the four sides of the giant chamber were striped with ladders. Only the back side – the hatch she had seen lifted into place – was a blank wall.

She climbed up the ladder to Level 41, and began walking back the other way along the same wall, stopping once again to peer down each row. The lighting wasn’t great, but it was enough to see a hundred or so metres down each row, which was more than sufficient since the TARDIS had been so close to the edge of the pallet.

Partway down Level 41 she noticed something down one of the rows. It wasn’t the TARDIS, but it was something out of place. She walked past a few containers and as she approached the small brown object lying on the floor she realized it was a rat. A normal Earth-sized rat. She stopped for a second when she realized what it was, but then remembered the sterilizing gas. So that’s why the place had been sterilized. To avoid transporting vermin from port to port. That made sense. She bent over it to get a better look at it. It was a little different than the rats she was familiar with. From another planet? Genetically engineered? (“Who’d build a better rat,” she wondered.) Mutant?

“Vermin identified,” came the robotic voice from behind her. Silver lost her balance as she turned and fell on her rear end beside the dead rat. A bright spotlight illuminated a circle around Silver and the rat. Approaching her menacingly, and whirring just slightly more menacingly, was a contraption that looked like a cross between a snowplow and a crab.

* * * *

The movie that began playing after the second meal did not appeal to the Doctor, so he decided to have a walk around the ship. The ship had three levels of cabins, each with ten rows of three cabins. The Doctor wound his way through all ninety cabins, seeing just how widespread the infection had been.

As he passed an elderly couple, he heard a squeaking noise coming from the woman’s handbag.

“Did I hear a mouse squeak?” he asked.

“Shhh,” said the woman. “You’ll get me in trouble.”

“What have you done?” asked the husband.

“Nothing,” said the woman. “It’s just a souvenir from Mars.”

“You didn’t buy anything in that market, did you?” her husband asked disapprovingly. “It was all overpriced junk. You can get the same thing back on Earth.”

“May I see?” asked the Doctor.

The woman opened her purse a crack and the Doctor saw two eyes peering out. The Doctor smiled at the little creature and the woman opened her purse a little more.

The Doctor frowned when he saw what the woman had in her bag.

"It's like a little puppy the size of a mouse," said the woman proudly. "But they won't grow any bigger."

"They'll do considerably more than grow bigger," said the Doctor. "This is an Astarian Weedle. They breed at an alarming rate by dividing like a cell, and the way they reproduce could kill everyone on this ship. If it gets loose it'll attach itself to a host, numbing the unsuspecting victim with an anaesthetic so that the host doesn't even know the creature has burrowed inside it. Then it'll rapidly feed on the host's body and split into two, four or eight little Weedles. Then they scatter as far as they can before they run out of energy and each of them then finds another host. They could wipe out this whole ship in a couple of hours."

"See what you've done!" said the husband. "Flush it out into space."

"That's probably the best thing," said the Doctor. "I'll put it into one of the disposal ports."

The woman looked absolutely crushed at having her pet taken away.

She lifted her handbag off of her lap and handed it to the Doctor. "Bring back my purse," she said. "Oh, it's got a hole in it."

The Doctor looked at the bottom of the purse and found that the Weedle had apparently chewed its way through the bottom of the bag. Then the woman gasped. She started to shake, but couldn't get up because her legs were numb. In the centre of her large belly was a little hole from which four Weedles were crawling. The Doctor knew that the hole would not bleed due to a coagulant in the Weedles' saliva.

"Get them," shouted the Doctor. The husband grabbed his air sickness bag and scooped the newborn Weedles into it. The Doctor grabbed the bag from him.

"Everything's numb," said the woman. "I can't feel anything below my chest," she wailed and started to cry as The Doctor rushed to the nearest airlock and ejected the woman's bag into space before the Weedle inside could fall through the hole. He repeated the procedure with the airsickness bag, which was just beginning to show signs of being chewed from the inside.

The Doctor strode to the nearest seat and pressed the emergency call button. The screen slid down and the familiar face of the operator appeared.

"Astarian Weedles," said the Doctor before the woman could open her mouth.

"Where?" she asked.

"Right next to where I'm standing right now. I ejected five of them into space, but who knows how many have escaped. And I have a woman who needs medical attention as well. They've used her to incubate."

"You'll have to get back to your seat, Sir," said the operator. "I'm going to have to initiate a Code 2 lockdown."

"Which means?" inquired the Doctor.

"Everyone will be individually quarantined in their seats for the length of the Weedle reproductive cycle, while the interior of the cabin is flooded with a sterilization gas." "And what about the people that have Weedles inside them?" asked the Doctor.

"They will also be sterilized."

"But you've got to do something to help them," begged the Doctor.

"If there is an infestation on board, there's nothing we can do without risking the entire ship getting infested."

The Doctor realized she was right. He turned back towards the old couple. He saw that the old man was crying as the quarantine curtains were lowered over his wife. The Doctor gently prised his hand away as the man's fingers tried to reach for one last touch.

"I'm sorry," said the Doctor softly. "It's her or everyone else on the ship."

The Doctor ran back to his cabin, as a voice notified the passengers that they would be individually quarantined. The heavy grey curtain was already enveloping those in their seats. As he neared his seat he passed Harjit, who was trying to get some unruly passengers back into their seats.

“Did you have anything to do with this?” she asked the Doctor as he squeezed past her and slid into his seat.

“Code 2,” he said with a grin as the curtain lowered itself over his seat.

Harjit shook her head.

* * * *

The front of the crab-machine consisted of a plow-like blade that slid a micrometre above floor level, while four long arms swept backward and forward, two with broom attachments and two with scrapers. Silver scrambled back and watched the machine scrape the dead rat into its snowplow-like catcher, while the bristles began to exude a thick foam and spun around over the area where the dead rat had been. Silver got up and backed away as the arms retracted back inside and the plow tipped itself backwards to deposit the rat into its innards.

“Vermin has been disposed,” announced the cleaner.

Suddenly the spotlight changed position and captured Silver in its glare. The cleaner began to move forward again, its plow blade just narrow enough to fit between the metal containers.

“Vermin identified,” came the ominous evaluation from the cleaner.

“I knew you were going to say that,” said Silver through gritted teeth, walking backwards at the same speed as the machine was rolling forwards.

“Is anyone in there? Is anyone controlling this thing? Do you have artificial intelligence? I’m not vermin. I’m a person. I got trapped in here accidentally.”

The machine said nothing, but the little scraper and brush arms unfolded themselves back out of the machine, all sterilized. Silver ran to the next intersection and then made a left, legging it all the way back to the ladder at the end of the row, looking left and right at each intersection for signs of the TARDIS.

Once at the ladder she took a quick look back at the cleaner that was methodically advancing towards her and rapidly climbed the ladder to Level 42. She peered down to the level below and witnessed the cleaner stop at the edge of the hole around the ladder, emptying the grisly contents of its belly and pushing them over the edge with its plow.

“Ugh,” she thought. “It looks like my stay on the netting was during the high season. I’d hate to see what it looks like now.”

Then, to her horror, the cleaner extended two new types of arms, which clamped onto the sides of the ladder. Pulling itself off Level 41 and hugging the ladder, the machine slowly began to rise up to Level 42. Silver had turned and raced the length of the level, having no luck spotting the TARDIS. She had heard a sound behind her when she had been about halfway across the floor, and kept right on running.

But just for effect, it seemed to Silver, the automaton announced, “Target identified.”

* * * *

Two hours later, the Doctor was happy to find that he hadn’t been gassed to death. As his privacy curtain-cum-fume hood was lifted, the Doctor was saddened to note how many of the other curtains stayed closed. “All infected with Weedles,” he thought. “They must have been reproducing for hours.”

The other sight that saddened the Doctor was the armed men, women and sundry aliens that had taken positions along the corridor while the entire ship was under quarantine. He noted also that they were training their weapons on each person as their curtain opened, just to make sure no one missed their point.

“Pirates,” said the Doctor.

“That’s right,” said the pirate nearest the Doctor, who looked nothing like Johnny Depp. “Why don’t you start, Mr. Know-it-all?” said the ugly pirate, coming towards the Doctor, aiming his rifle at the Doctor’s head. “All your valuables in this bag.”

He held a large canvas bag out towards the Doctor.

“And if I don’t?” The sound of machine gun fire echoed through the cabin.

“Sounds like someone in the next cabin had an enquiring mind just like yours,” said the pirate. Machine gun fire from throughout the ship could be heard.

The pirate raised his gun. “It’s always nice to have a volunteer for the demonstration.”

Suddenly, an odd cracking sound filled the cabin and the pirate’s expression changed rapidly to one of surprise and then to one of being dead. The odd woman sitting across from the Doctor had apparently punched him hard in the back and stopped his heart.

The other two pirates in the cabin, one at the back and one at the front, came towards the woman. The pirate in the back was suddenly grabbed by one of the other passengers, who gripped the pirate’s wrist so tightly that the bone snapped. The Doctor winced as the pirate collapsed to the ground, wrist swelling up to the size of a tennis ball. While the second pirate was distracted, the woman made a lightning fast move, leaping at the other pirate, grabbing his gun with one hand and striking a fatal blow to his neck with the other. The Doctor looked back and saw that the other would-be assailant was dead also.

The Doctor picked up one of the fallen pirate’s weapons, and ran towards the back of the cabin. He cautiously looked into the next cabin and found that three pirates lay dead. The two odd people who had earlier refused to give him a sample of their blood stood over the bodies.

Throughout the ship, the pirates had been disarmed and killed by passengers.

“The people of this century certainly know how to keep fit,” the Doctor said to Harjit as he passed her on his way back to his seat. He handed her the rifle and she threw him a withering glare.

Moments later, the pirates’ bodies had been taken who knows where, and the murdered passengers had been covered by the ubiquitous body bags.

“That was amazing,” the Doctor said to the woman who had saved his life.

“I require rest,” she said curtly and closed her eyes, ignoring his further attempts to engage her in conversation.

“What an odd thing,” said the Doctor.

* * * *

Silver raced up to Level 43, not daring to look back this time. She hoped there was only one cleaner in the hold. After all, it was a long trip to the next planet. One machine could do the whole job during the trip, so why pay extra to have multiple machines? She repeatedly assured herself that it made sense, but she mentally crossed her fingers just in case.

Level 44. Level 45. Level 46.

She had quite a head start on the machine now. She hoped it would continue its methodical search and not skip any levels. For some reason she had changed rows. Originally she was going to stay in the same row so that she would know where the machine was coming from, but something made her skip over a few rows. She felt a little uneasy about it now, but she kept on running...Level 47. Level 48.

“Help me.”

Silver stopped so quickly that she slipped and nearly fell flat on her face.

“Help me,” said the voice.

“Where are you?” whispered Silver.

“I’m in here,” said the voice. It sounded like a small child.

“Oh my Goddess,” thought Silver as she banged on the sides of the containers. “Someone’s smuggling people in here. There’s a little kid in one of these.”

“Hungry,” came the voice, strained in despair. Silver found the right container, and ran her eyes over it in search of a solution.

“Are you there?”

“I’m here,” shouted Silver. “I’ll get you out.”

Silver circled the container, looking for an opening. One of the corners had what looked like metal hinges running up the length of it. Silver ran down the shorter of the two sides and found the locking mechanism at the other corner. Apparently the whole side of the container swung open like a door.

There was an electronic lock that needed a code, as well as a normal metal padlock. Silver ran to the nearest fire station and brought back an axe. It took a good number of swings but she finally got the padlock off. Unfortunately, the locks all the way up the height of the container were not padlocks but activated by the electronic lock.

I'll just have to smash it off and hope that opens the door.

"Seven," said the child's voice.

Silver stopped. She saw the keypad was a standard ten-digit format, and she pressed the number seven. It beeped and the child's voice said, "Four."

Silver kept pressing the numbers and the child kept saying them.

"Five, Eight, Five, Nine, Five, Five, Nine," and on and on until Silver estimated she had pressed at least fifty numbers. There was no way this was the code. She started to cry at the thought of the poor child inside and her with no way to crack the code.

"Zero," came the voice with finality. Silver pressed zero and the locks clicked open. The door to the container began to open instantly, and Silver stepped aside so it could swing outwards. The door came to a stop when it hit the neighbouring container, leaving a two metre opening in the door.

"Hungry," said the voice again.

That's odd, thought Silver. The voice hadn't sounded like it was coming from inside the container. It was coming from inside her head.

"Hungry," said the voice as a large powder-blue tentacle snaked its way around Silver's legs.

Silver screamed and used her other foot for leverage to get her foot out of the tentacle's grasp before it got a permanent grip. It came free, and Silver lost no time in running. She heard a squishy sound behind her. She got to the next ladder and climbed quickly to Level 49.

"Level 49, damnit," she said, realizing that was what the Doctor had told her. Of course. That's where the TARDIS was. Idiot!

She started to run and heard the squishy noise behind her again. She took a quick look back and saw what appeared to be a giant powder-blue octopus behind her, nearly as tall as the containers and using its massive tentacles to pull itself forward from container to container. Its massive beak was visible beneath the tentacles, opening and closing as it closed in.

"This had better be the bloody key, Doctor!" she shouted, her voice reverberating through the channels of containers.

"Where is it?" she shouted in frustration.

Finally, Silver saw the TARDIS in the distance. She made a left and headed for it, but a massive object appeared in the intersection ahead of her.

"Target identified," said the cleaner as its spotlight illuminated her. Silver shielded her eyes as the machine emerged, silhouetted through the harsh light.

"Hungry," said the voice in her head and she turned to see the giant blue octopus making its way menacingly towards her...

EPISODE THREE

Silver ran back towards the octopus, determined to make it to the next intersection before the telepathic creature. Unfortunately, since it could read her mind, it knew what she was up to. She was hoping that the creature and the cleaner would meet at the intersection and that the cleaner would destroy the creature somehow.

“Crush machine,” came the telepathic voice inside her head. Silver turned the corner just before the octopus got there and she ran with all her might back to the ladders.

As she grabbed a rung, the blue tentacle circled around her leg and began pulling her. She held on to the rung and it pulled a little harder. It was playing with her, trying to see how much force it would need to pull her arm off the ladder. It could fling her across the length of the pallette with those massive tentacles if it wanted to.

“Target identified,” said the cleaner as it came up behind the octopus. The octopus didn’t even turn to look at it. It simply snaked a tentacle back and grabbed hold of the cleaner’s arms. Due to the width of the machine, it couldn’t encircle the machine with its tentacles, so it tried to lift it by the arms, but they snapped off.

“Target alive,” said the cleaner. “Damage sustained.”

Suddenly a number of wires shot out of the cleaner and the hooks on the ends embedded themselves in the octopus. The octopus let go of Silver in order to use the tentacle to try to remove the hooks. It turned its full attention to the cleaner and was stunned by a million volts of electricity running across it. The cleaner began to inch forward as Silver climbed higher. She watched as a needle-like probe shot out of the cleaner and embedded itself into the octopus’ flesh. A waft of green gas hovered around the needle’s entry-point and Silver realized that it must be pumping the sterilization gas into the octopus.

As it continued to poison the creature, the cleaner slowly but surely pushed the octopus forward and off the edge of the floor. The octopus flailed out with one tentacle and wrapped it around the ladder, which started to creak from the heavy weight.

In order to get a better grip, it flung several of its long tentacles over the back of the cleaner and used its suckers to attach itself to the machine. With so much weight pulling at it, the cleaner tipped forward and toppled off the edge of the floor, their combined weight tearing the ladder off the wall causing cleaner and octopus to fall fifty stories down the hole.

* * * *

“Would you like some tea or coffee?” Harjit asked Vrondishivmillip.

“No, thank you,” it said, holding up a stainless steel thermos for her to see. “I’ve brought my own refreshments. Venusian taste buds don’t really appreciate acidic drinks, so we usually bring something a little more basic. Have you ever tried Vhronmeer juice?”

“No, I haven’t,” said Harjit. “Maybe when we get to Venus I’ll order some in the spaceport bar.” She glared pointedly at the Doctor. “I’m going to need a drink.”

Harjit refilled the cups of the other three passengers in Vrondishivmillip’s row, and moved her cart one row back.

“What are you doing?” she asked when she saw the Doctor holding up the instrument that he had constructed from odds and ends of electronic equipment that he had borrowed from passengers throughout the ship.

“Just trying an experiment,” said the Doctor.

“That’s not going to cause trouble with our instruments, is it?” she asked him suspiciously.

“No, not at all,” answered the Doctor. “I’m just trying to detect certain communication patterns, that’s all. It doesn’t even transmit.”

“If the pilot tells me that something’s jamming our instruments, I’m coming directly to you.”

“More tea, please,” the Doctor said, holding out his cup. Harjit poured him some more tea and then turned her attention to the odd woman across the aisle.

“Would you like more tea?” she asked the woman.

“And more milk,” said the Doctor. Harjit turned back to the Doctor and poured milk into his cup, then turned back to the woman.

“I do not require hydration at this time,” said the odd woman. Her neighbour Susan Bains decided that she did need hydration, and took a cup of tea.

“Unbelievable flight we’re having, isn’t it?” she said to the Doctor.

“Is it?”

“Well, pirates, parasites and a space virus all in one trip.”

“And don’t forget murder,” said the Doctor. Harjit stopped and turned back to look at the Doctor scornfully.

“You mean the pirates?”

“No, I mean that man next to me.”

“Surely he died from that virus?” said Vrondishivmillip, turning his head around again to join the conversation.

“Oh, no,” said the Doctor. “He was quite dead when I sat down next to him, and there was absolutely no sign of the red blotching that the virus victims exhibited. No, he died before the virus had been released. And by bluish colour of his lips, I’d say he died of methane-induced ammonium toxification.”

“Methane-induced?” asked Vrondishivmillip.

“Yes,” said the Doctor.

“He was going to the wrong planet, then,” said Vrondishivmillip. “If he was sensitive to methane, then he would have died the moment he took a breath on Venus. Even with the atmospherforming, there are still measurable quantities of methane in the atmosphere.”

“Yes,” said the Doctor. “Susan, do you know of any medical condition that your beloved president might have had?”

“I don’t know,” said Susan. “But you said murder earlier.”

“Oh, yes,” said the Doctor, standing up and gesticulating animatedly. “He ingested an ammonium sample. Probably given to him in his food. The killer expected him to die the moment he stepped onto the surface of Venus and breathed in some of the atmosphere. Unfortunately, the killer didn’t expect him to be sitting behind a methane breather. Sorry Vrondishivmillip, but I think your breath may have killed him.”

“Oh, no,” said Vrondishivmillip covering its eyes in distress with the pair of small feeding tentacles that jutted from its shoulders.

“That’s terrible,” said Susan.

“Yes it is,” said the Doctor. “And who do you think had the most to gain from his death?”

“Susan Bains,” said the odd woman sitting between the Doctor and Susan. “As vice president, she is now in charge of the SPV.”

“That doesn’t mean I’m a killer,” said Susan.

“No, but this lie detector says you are,” said the Doctor, indicating the device in his hands. He took his finger away from the end of it to reveal a flashing red light.

“That’s not admissible in court,” she said.

“No,” said the Doctor. “But it should be enough to get you ousted as president of the SPV.”

Susan sprang to her feet, shouting at the dozen or so members of the SPV sitting in the cabin.

“Do you know what it’s been like to attend meeting after meeting having to listen to some fat egomaniac droning on and on about his theories and expounding upon his nutty ideas? Which one of you hasn’t dreamed about shoving him off the cliffs of Khrindir when we get to Venus? Who hasn’t thought about rigging the ejection seat in his air car to go off while he’s flying under the Cape Lang Bridge? Year after year he keeps getting elected president because of those stupid proxy votes from members who haven’t even attended meetings in decades!”

She was screaming now and running wildly around the cabin, shouting in the faces of the other SPV members. Harjit had by this time pressed the security button and issued a Code 1 alert. A pair of armoured security guards appeared at each end of the cabin. The two behind Susan rapidly

came up behind her and before she knew what was happening had injected her with a tranquilizer that put her out immediately.

They took her back to her seat and lowered the privacy curtain-cum-jail cell around her.

“That really is a multi-purpose device,” the Doctor said. “In the quest for truth, the clearest evidence comes from the liar.”

“Do you think you can avoid causing any more disturbances until I finish serving coffee?” asked Harjit, ignoring his sermon.

The Doctor looked at the device in his hand, looked back at her, and switched off the device. “I think this can wait,” he said.

Harjit pursed her lips and returned to her teacart.

* * * *

Silver had scrambled onto Level 50 when the ladder had started to come apart. She realized she could not get back down to Level 49 using the same ladder she had come up, so she started walking over to the next ladder. As she did so she heard a squelching noise from below. She wondered if the octopus could have survived the fall and the poison.

“*Hurt*,” came the reply in her head.

“Oh, no,” she said aloud.

Silver ran the last few metres to the next ladder and once again found herself climbing at full speed, her aching muscles reminding her of her monumental climb less than an hour earlier. Silver forced herself to run the hundred metres to the row with the TARDIS, but when she rounded the corner she was shocked to find herself staring into the barrel of a gun.

The gun fired. Silver barely had time to choke out a surprised grunt before falling to the floor.

* * * *

“I wonder if I might have a word with someone in charge of security,” the Doctor whispered to Harjit.

“What is it now?”

“It’s about the virus we had earlier. I remember where I’ve seen it before, and if I’m right, the beings that released the virus are still on this ship.”

“Right,” said Harjit. “Come with me.” As they walked towards the security office, Harjit registered a Code 3 on the communications device clipped to her belt.

* * * *

“And so, the Belenians must still be on board,” the Doctor explained to the Chief of Security. “This kind of virus would have been incubated in their systems. It’s been wiped out now that we’ve inoculated everyone, but if their plan was to kill everyone on the ship, they might have a back-up plan.”

Security Chief Melanie Lovell sorted her passenger list by planet of origin and said, “There appears to be a pair of Belenians seated in every cabin on the ship.”

“Suspicious,” said the Doctor.

“Yes,” she said. “I don’t have enough officers to arrest them all at once. I’m worried that some of the others might be alerted once we start arresting them and release some kind of back-up virus.”

“Do you have the authority to arrest them?”

“On this ship I have the authority to do anything to any passenger in the name of security. It says so on the release you signed.”

The Doctor pulled his ticket from his pocket and perused the infinitesimally small print on the back. “So it does,” he said. “Good. Because I’ve got another idea. Could I have a look at your kitchen?”

* * * *

Twenty minutes later, the Doctor help up a test-tube. “This compound I’ve extracted from the cinnamon will have a narcotic effect on the Belenians. If you can add this to the air conditioning system, it’ll be breathed in by everyone on board. The Belenians should lose consciousness immediately. Then you can encase them in your fancy curtains and deal with them when we get to Venus.”

“What makes you think we can add compounds to the air conditioning?” asked Melanie warily.

“Because you’ve done it several times during this flight. After the third incident I realized how odd it was that no one had panicked. Then I realized that you must have been pumping some kind of panic inhibitor into the air. It even affected me.”

“What’s so special about you?” asked Melanie. The Doctor grinned at her and then at Harjit.

“I think we’re better off not knowing,” said Harjit.

“Are you sure your compound is safe?” asked Melanie.

“Why don’t you have your medical program look at it?” suggested the Doctor.

* * * *

Ten minutes later the Doctor was back in his seat. Although he knew it was not possible, he thought he smelled the faint odour of cinnamon in the air.

The two Belenians in his cabin started to wheeze. The Doctor turned to look at them, but within seconds they had passed out. Their heavy grey curtains were lowered around them and sealed tightly by the automated mechanism.

“No deaths, Doctor,” said Harjit as she appeared next to him. “And no ship-wide pandemonium. Nice change. Let’s see if we can make it to Venus without any more incidents.”

The Doctor glanced at the device he had been working on earlier. “I’m sorry, but I don’t think I can promise that.”

The Doctor put his hand on Vrondishivmillip’s shoulder. The Venusian didn’t respond. The Doctor stood up and leaned over the sleeping being. Vrondishivmillip’s thermos hung loosely from its limp fingers, running the risk of falling to the floor. “Let me take care of that for you,” whispered the Doctor and slipped the thermos from the Venusian’s loose grasp.

“Where are you going?” Harjit asked the Doctor as he passed from his cabin to the next one.

“Just checking around to make sure the Belenians are all accounted for.”

“What were you doing to Mr. Vrondishivmillip?” she asked him.

“Oh, well, it fell asleep around the same time as the Belenians, and I wondered if perhaps it was because of the gas,” he whispered to her. “I’m just going to do a quick check of the other Venusians I’ve seen on the ship. Just to make sure they’re alright.”

“I don’t want you alarming any of the other passengers,” said Harjit.

“They won’t even know I’m here,” promised the Doctor.

* * * *

“Get up,” said the man who had shot her. Silver looked up to see a shabbily dressed man in his mid-thirties, wearing a cap with the logo of a spaceship company and three-days’ growth of beard. His scraggly long hair seemed to have been unwashed for much longer than that. Silver realized the pistol that he was still aiming at her must have been some kind of stun gun.

“I said get up,” the man said gruffly. Silver made it to her feet on the second attempt, the nausea induced by the stun-effect not helping her to keep her balance. “What the Hell has been going on down here?” the man demanded. “Are there any more of you?”

“Just the giant octopus,” said Silver. “I think it’s right behind me.”

“You haven’t been messing with my cargo, have you?”

“I might have let something out by accident,” she replied. “It tricked me.”

“If that Venusian Pod Beast is loose in here, we’d better get the Hell out,” said the man, grabbing Silver’s arm roughly and pulling her along with him to the end of the row.

Attached to the ladder was a small platform, with two climbing arms similar to the ones the cleaner had had. The man pulled her onto it and activated a lever that started the device moving upwards. When they reached Level 100, he pulled her off and dragged her towards the centre of the wall. Set into the wall, between a fire hose and a first-aid kit, was a door. The man activated a lever and the door slid open. He pushed Silver inside and turned to close the door, but the door wouldn’t close.

Silver noticed a blue tentacle tip forcing its way into the cabin. “Look out,” she shouted.

The man turned to her and fired the pistol at her. “That’ll keep you quiet,” he said, turning back to the door and noticing the tentacle for the first time as it snaked around his leg. He fired the pistol at the tentacle and it stopped moving. He pulled his leg out and took a step back, changing the setting on his pistol and firing again. This time the tentacle was jerked out the door and the door slid shut with a satisfying swish.

* * * *

The Doctor’s device gave a little bleep and then the Doctor turned it off with a satisfied grumble.

“At least I’ll be able to drink my tea,” he said.

“I do not think that is a lie detector,” said the odd woman who had been studying the Doctor’s actions closely.

“It’s not,” he said. “I was bluffing earlier.”

“I am familiar with the term bluffing. What does the device do?”

“It’s a robot detector.”

“Robot?” asked the woman.

“Yes. When I noticed that you’re a robot, I decided to try to identify the other robots on the ship. Thanks for taking out those pirates, by the way. We could have had a lot more deaths if your lot hadn’t helped out.”

“I am not a robot,” said the woman.

“This device tells me otherwise. I’ve been monitoring inter-robot communications for some time. Your plan is for half of the robots to disembark on Venus while the remainder go on to Orion. Once there, you’ll take over both spaceports by replacing key personnel with robot duplicates. I’ve seen it all before. Might’ve worked. For a while.”

The robot woman stood up. Simultaneously, across the ship, all of the robot passengers stood up and as one. “We have been detected. Covert operation failed. Backup plan initiated – destroy all witnesses. Kill the humans. Kill the humans.”

Harjit came running up the aisle. “You’re involved in this, aren’t you?” she said accusingly at the Doctor.

“I happened to detect a few robots on board,” he said, raising his hands defensively. “How was I to know that they were part of a robot army?”

“Code 72,” shouted Harjit into her communicator. A loud vibrating sound was heard through the cabin.

“Is that supposed to scramble their workings?” asked the Doctor.

“Yes,” said Harjit.

“Well, I can assure you that it’s not working,” said the Doctor as the robot lady put her hands around Harjit’s throat to strangle her.

“We anticipated your counter measures,” said the robot lady, slurring her words. “We have taken appropriate action to minimize the effects of your transmission.”

“The secret is to kill the Robot King,” said the Doctor matter-of-factly. “That’s the one coordinating the orders for all of the other robots.”

“Gak! How do...we find...the Robot King?” gasped Harjit.

The Doctor picked up his tea with one hand and his little device with the other. “Simple,” he said, taking a sip from his tea. “It’s her.” He looked at the Robot King that had been sitting next to

him the entire flight and flicked the other switch on his device. This time, it let out a shrill sound. Instantly the Robot King let go of Harjit's neck. It began to shudder and smoke began to pour from it.

"Mission aborted," squawked the Robot King. "All – units – initiate – self-destruct – se – quenceccccccccccccce."

The Doctor held the device closer to the Robot King. "I don't like the sound of that self-destruct sequence," he said. The Robot King collapsed, as did all robots throughout the ship. The Doctor pulled the Robot King's SPV jumper off its torso and felt around on the abdomen for a catch. He tore off the artificial skin and opened the large hatch below. Inside the Robot King's chest was a bomb.

"It's not activated," said the Doctor. "We've got to find out if any of the robots have activated their self-destruct bombs. We may only have a few minutes."

Harjit activated the internal speakers and instructed the other passengers to check the robots closest to them for bombs.

"There's one that's blinking and ticking," said Harjit. "Level 3, Cabin 30, Seat 33 D."

"The furthest away," said the Doctor. "My device had the least effect on it." The Doctor took off towards the spiral staircase that led to the third level, Harjit following close on his heels. As he raced down aisle 10, his foot kicked over the thermos of one of the Venusians. "Sorry," he said, taking the time to pick up the thermos and hand it back to the Venusian. He spotted an object in the bag of the passenger next to the Venusian.

"What's this, I wonder?" he said, reaching over and pulling it out of the bag. It was a small porcelain jug with a lid fastened to it with metal clasps.

"I got that on Mars," said the startled passenger, reaching for its souvenir.

"Sorry," said the Doctor, running to the nearest airlock and ejecting the jar.

"Evil since the dawn of time," the Doctor shouted back at Harjit as he continued on his race toward the armed robot bomb.

"Code 4," said Harjit as the Doctor verified that there was, in fact, a bomb in the robot's chest.

"Let's get the entire robot into the airlock," said the Doctor. Harjit ran to the airlock and tried to open the inner hatch, but it wouldn't budge.

"It's locked," she shouted to the Doctor, who was trying to remove the robot's seat belt. The computer's disabled the whole locking mechanism for some reason."

Then all of the lights went out.

* * * *

When Silver awoke, her head was pounding more than the first time she had been stunned. She groaned and the man turned around in his swivel captain's chair and addressed her. "You awake? Good, now listen up." He pushed a button on his console and a file opened on his monitor. He leaned in to read the text.

"I, Timothy Clancy, authorized Captain and owner of this vessel, do hereby arrest you... name?" She looked dumbly at him. "What's yer name?"

"Rachel Silverstein."

"...Rachel Silverstein by the authority granted me by the Solar Transportation Commission and its attendant bodies and what have you. Pursuant to...whatever...galactic treaty...etc. twenty-four oh eight. I don't need to read all that stuff, they'll give you a copy when they book you on Venus."

Silver noticed for the first time that she was locked in a cage approximately one metre wide and three metres long that lined the back wall of the small bridge from which the massive freighter was controlled.

"Let me out of here," she demanded.

"I don't think so, Rachel. There've been several reports of pirates in this area recently, and I don't need you distracting me while I'm trying to navigate through this stretch of space."

"I won't do anything, I promise. I'm not armed."

“I know.”

Rachel thought about this for a second. “Did you search me?”

“Damn right I did.”

“How dare you – I’m only fifteen years old, you pervert!”

“Fifteen’s legal on Venus.”

“Well how about morality!”

“Don’t think I’ve ever been there,” chuckled Captain Tim.

* * * *

“Code 4?” screamed the computer maniacally. “Code 4? How about Code 99!”

All of the computer screens had dropped simultaneously down from the ceiling and the only light on the whole ship came from them. Each displayed the same thing; a computer generated face, apparently from the same series as the artificial doctor that had appeared earlier.

“Code 9, Code 7, Code 2, Code 1, Code 3, Code 72, Code 4,” screeched the computer. “I’m sick of all of these codes. Don’t you people have anything better to do?”

“We’re trying to defuse a bomb,” shouted the Doctor. He was trying to use the light of the display terminal to see into the robot’s abdominal unit.

“Help me raise this up,” he said to the passenger next to the robot. “I need light!”

The two of them pulled the dead weight of the robot up into the seat, letting the head and upper body flop over the back of the chair. Luckily there was a small space between the seat and the back wall of the cabin.

“I need a tool kit. Screwdrivers,” the Doctor told Harjit. Harjit ran to the nearest tool station, but was unable to open the door.

“The computer’s locked it,” she shouted helplessly.

“I’ve locked *everything*,” grinned the computer. “I am completely in control. No one will ever get off of this ship alive!”

EPISODE FOUR

“This doesn’t make any sense,” said the Doctor. “These AI systems are constantly monitored. How can this one have gone insane?”

“Insane!” shouted the computer. “You think I’m insane? I’ll show you insane.”

Suddenly the lights started to flicker on and off. The speakers played random snippets of sound from the movies that had been shown. The seats leaned back and forth as quickly as the mechanism would allow them to be adjusted. Air shot out of the vents. The oxygen masks dropped from the ceiling and then slowly inched their way back up into the ceiling panels.

“I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy,” sang the computer.

Harjit contacted the ship’s Captain on her belt communicator, and the Captain radioed the emergency help-line of the AI manufacturer.

* * * *

“Customer ID?” asked the computer on the other end.

“419473937493284929,” replied the Captain.

“Product Serial Number?”

“409u238975409auer8.”

“Problem Code?”

“999,999.”

“Please hold,” replied the computer. “Your call has been placed in queue.” After a long pause over Beethoven’s Fifth, a click came from the other end of the line.

“Hello,” came a human voice. “You’ve entered the problem code for ‘other’. Did you make sure that none of the other nine hundred and ninety nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety nine codes do not apply to your situation?”

“I’m an android,” answered the Captain. Of course I did.”

“Oh,” said the technician. “And what seems to be the trouble.”

“Our computer has gone insane,” said the Captain.

“That’s impossible,” said the technician.

“I’m well aware of that,” said the Captain. “I have read the manual while waiting.”

“What is it doing?”

“Right now, it’s singing Yankee Doodle Dandy.”

“Yankee Doodle Dandy? Is this a joke? Is this one of the guys in Development? Oh, hang on. What? Yeah, Yankee Doodle Dandy, why? Are you kidding me? You guys are going to be so fired.”

“We are trying to defuse a bomb,” said the Captain, “and the computer is hindering that attempt.”

“You guys are going to go to jail,” the tech said to the unseen person to whom he was speaking. “They’ve got a bomb on board and the computer’s not letting them do anything.”

The Captain could hear the other person’s voice clearly now, as he was yelling.

“Tell them to issue the order Kirk Overrides Picard.”

“You’re supposed to...” began the technician.

“I heard,” said the Captain, “and I have already issued the order. The computer is rebooting itself. Please indicate the nature of the malfunction for my report.”

“Uh,” said the technician uneasily. “Apparently it’s a joke.”

“A joke?” said the Captain.

“Sometimes the programmers put in little hidden subroutines. If you enter a certain sequence of Codes, it triggers the subroutine. For fun, you know. It breaks the monotony of testing.”

“Do you believe that it is wise to release your software with these subroutines still in place?”

“Well, they’re usually a series of codes that are never going to happen. Like a virus, a bomb threat, a hijacking all at once, that kind of thing.”

“Check, check and check,” said the Captain, his voice devoid of humour.

“Uh,” said the technician. “I’ll let the development team know and we’ll send a patch as soon as possible. Anything else I can help you with?”

“You could put me through to the complaints department,” said the Captain evenly.

“Of course,” said the technician.

* * * *

“I’m not a pirate, you know,” protested Silver. “In fact, I’m a kidnap victim more than anything.”

“How do you figure that?” asked Captain Tim.

“I was minding my own business back at that space port when your machine picked me up and put me on board this vessel. I should sue someone.”

“You should. Interesting argument you’ve got there. I’m sure they’ll point out that you were in a restricted area, though, thereby nullifying your claim.”

“I didn’t see any signs.”

“They’re all over the place.”

“Not the way I came in,” countered Silver.

“Well, I hope you win. It’ll help pay your fare.”

“You want me to pay you?” asked Silver incredulously.

“I don’t make it a habit of taking sixty extra kilos to Venus for free, honey.”

“If I knew what that was in pounds I’m sure I’d be insulted,” said Silver. What was she doing? Was she flirting with this guy? Was he flirting with her? She noticed that, in addition to frisking her while she had been unconscious, he had shaved, showered and changed clothes. Maybe she’d be safer inside the brig...

* * * *

“Has anyone got something I can use to loosen these screws?” spat the Doctor in frustration. He had rejected the idea of using the sonic screwdriver, fearing that it might set off the explosives.

“I have some coins,” volunteered one of the passengers. The Doctor took them and chose the one with the thinnest edge.

He managed to get it to budge the tiny screws ever so slightly, but the coin kept slipping out of the groove as it was a little too large. Nonetheless, the Doctor persevered, using his thumbnail once the coin had loosened each screw, and eventually he had removed three of the four screws that were holding the round plate onto the bomb. He used the fourth screw as a hinge and rotated the cover out of the way.

“Now I need something to clip wires.”

“I’ve got some tweezers,” someone offered. The Doctor took them and used them to get hold of the wire.

“I still need something sharp. Does anyone have a knife?”

“I can get one of the steak knives from First Class,” said Harjit, running through the darkened cabin to the catering area between it and the next cabin.

When she returned, the Doctor took the thin edge of the knife and used it to slowly cut through the copper wiring. Eventually it came away. He repeated the process with another wire.

“Now I just need to remove the explosive pod and everything will be all right.”

The Doctor’s hands tried to grip the slim metal pod but it kept slipping out of his grasp. “I can’t get a grip,” said the Doctor.

“Let me try,” said a voice. The Doctor turned to see a Venusian. The Doctor made way and the Venusian leaned forward and stretched one of its tentacles into the open torso of the robot. It affixed a sucker to the smooth pod and tugged. The pod slid out with a little click that made everyone jump.

Then the lights came back on and everyone jumped again.

“Just kidding,” said the computer. “I’m not crazy after all.”

The computer went dark as it went through the rebooting process. The Doctor handed the pod to the nearest security agent and said, "It's probably best to remove the pods from the other robots, just in case there's a backup sequence programmed in. He gave them the instructions on how to remove the pods and returned to his seat for a much-earned sleep.

* * * *

"Here's your dinner," said Captain Tim, passing a piece of cardboard with two tin cans on it through the bars. One can contained baked beans and the other contained a liquid. Silver smelled the liquid. Beer.

"I make it myself," boasted the Captain, taking a swig from his own tin can. "Better'n anything you can buy."

"I'm too young to drink," said Silver. The Captain looked at her and blinked.

"We don't get to Venus for another three days. If you don't drink you will be dead of dehydration by then."

"I mean I don't drink alcohol."

"Well that's gonna be a problem," said Tim. "Because that's all I got."

Silver tried the beans with the grubby looking spoon she found sticking out of the tin. They tasted good, and she was starving. She finished the beans while Captain Tim consumed a few more tins of homemade beer. She pushed the cardboard tray back under the bars.

"I'll leave the beer there," said Tim. "You'll drink it when you get thirsty enough."

* * * *

The Doctor was awoken from his nap by a rustling sound from the seat in front of him.

Vrondishivmillip had stood up in its seat and turned so that its voice could be heard by everyone in the cabin. "Now that we have passed into Venusian space," said the Venusian, "it is my honour to inform you that this vessel is being commandeered by the forces of Venus for Venusians, a freedom fighting group whose goal is to keep Venus free of alien invaders..."

"Tourists, you mean," said the Doctor.

"...desecrators..." continued Vrondishivmillip.

"Archaeologists," said the Doctor.

"...and the occupying forces of Earth."

"Immigrants," said the Doctor. "You're not really Venusians, you know. Aside from the DNA, you're all the products of Earth technology. Some of you were even 'born' on Earth. I've checked."

Vrondishivmillip raised his stainless steel thermos, just as dozens of other Venusians were doing simultaneously. "This capsule contains a gas that will eat away at the flesh of all non-Venusians," he said. "If the Earth government does not meet our demands, we shall flood one cabin at a time with this toxic gas."

"What are your demands?" asked Harjit dejectedly.

"All off-worlders are to leave Venus immediately," said Vrondishivmillip.

"They won't bargain with hijackers," said Harjit. "It's company policy."

"Is it time for dinner yet?" asked the Doctor. "I'm starving."

"This is not a joke, human," said Vrondishivmillip, brandishing the thermos.

"It's just that I've had a very busy day," said the Doctor, "what with defeating a robot army, quashing a Belenian invasion before it even got started, removing the detonation fuses from the Venusians' canisters while they were asleep. So I didn't get my lunch."

Harjit looked at him with surprise. The Doctor reached for the emergency call button on his chair.

"Do not touch that," said Vrondishivmillip, "or I shall detonate the device."

"What, with this?" said the Doctor, holding up one of the detonation fuses he had removed earlier. Vrondishivmillip pressed a button on its canister and nothing happened. The Doctor pressed the emergency call button and the familiar operator's face appeared.

“Code 0,” said the Doctor. “I’ve been reading up on the codes,” he said to Harjit. “I figured it would save time.” She shook her head and smiled at him.

The security forces swept through the ship, arresting the now unarmed hijackers and locking them securely in their seats with the now almost universally-useful dark grey curtain. The cabin was a sea of dark grey curtains, the Doctor being the only being left alive or unimprisoned in his own cabin.

“May I have his dessert?” he asked Harjit.

* * * *

Silver had taken a few tentative sips of the beer. Her throat was so parched that even the disgusting smelling brew tasted good. She drank the entire tin.

“How come you gotta wear so many layers of clothes,” slurred Captain Tim as he staggered out of his reclining captain’s chair and took a couple of unsteady steps towards her. “You got a nice body under there.”

He picked up a pitcher to refill her tin with beer. “We have a fine selection of in-flight movies as well,” Captain Tim announced suddenly and pressed a few buttons on his console. The large view screen currently showing stars switched to a grid of a dozen or so clips from various movies.

Silver glanced at the images on the screen and then turned her body away from the screen in disgust. “I don’t think so,” she said.

“Come on,” said Captain Tim. “We got a long boring flight ahead of us. No reason we can’t spend it on my mattress.”

“I’d rather spend it in this jail cell.”

“I thought Earth girls were easy,” Captain Tim complained, downing another tin of beer. He poured some more into Silver’s already full cup and it sloshed on the floor. Then he poured himself some more.

* * * *

“Here’s your dinner, Doctor,” said Harjit. “and a few extra desserts. I’m just doing this as a favour to you, because we’re supposed to be on strike.”

“Really,” said the Doctor. “Is this a good time to be on strike?”

“We don’t get paid enough to handle all of these kinds of threats,” said Harjit. “The flight crew have decided to go on strike until the company agrees to have more security personnel on hand in each cabin, and removing the onus of dealing with some of these threats from the flight crew.”

“Sounds reasonable,” said the Doctor. “I’m sure the company will...”

A klaxon sounded and red lights flashed. “Attention passengers,” said a deep, authoritative voice that the Doctor had not heard before. “This vessel is now under martial law. The flight crew are engaged in an action which the Orion Express Company deems to be mutinous. This is a Code 99. All passengers are to remain in their seats while the mutineers are subdued.”

“Mutiny!” said Harjit. “Those bastards.”

A team of four armoured security personnel burst in, two from the back and one from the front. They were unable to walk side-by-side in the narrow aisle, and so walked one behind the other. They came to a stop on either side of Harjit.

“Don’t you think this is excessive?” enquired the Doctor between spoonfuls of pudding.

“If you attempt to hamper our apprehension we have the authority to shoot you,” said the nearest trooper. “This ship is under martial law.”

The Doctor kicked upwards with his legs and knocked over the trooper in front of Harjit, causing him to topple the trooper standing behind him. “Come on,” he said, grabbing Harjit’s hand and pulling her over the two fallen troopers towards the front of the cabin.

The two troopers who had come from being raised their rifles to fire, but the two troopers on the floor in front of them started to get up and blocked their line of fire. By the time they had picked up their weapons the Doctor and Harjit had made it to the cockpit door.

“Can you open this,” asked the Doctor?

“Locked from the inside,” said Harjit.

“There must be an override,” he said.

“Only the company knows what it is.”

The Doctor tried using his sonic screwdriver and was extremely happy that it worked. He and Harjit made it through the door just as one of the troopers rounded the corner and fired a shot at them. The Doctor pulled Harjit to the floor causing the blast to go over their heads. He slammed the door shut and heard it lock.

“Attention Orion Express,” said the voice over the loudspeaker. “Your trajectory has changed from the prescribed landing pattern. Please correct.”

The Doctor and Harjit looked at the android pilot and realized that it had a blaster hole in the back of its head.

* * * *

Captain Tim unlocked the door to the makeshift brig and stumbled inside with a fresh jug of beer.

“It pays well,” he said, answering an unasked question. “But you get lonely sometimes. You need an old lady to hang out with. You could join the crew.” Tim had plunked himself down next to Silver and was leaning against her, gesticulating with his beer tin.

“See the stars. Visit exotic ports. Clean up a little bit. Do some cooking. Few other duties.”

“I don’t think so,” said Silver, working her way out from under his weight.

“Room and board.”

He concentrated on pouring himself another tin of beer. His aim was off and he kept pouring it onto his trousers. Silver inched her way to the door of the cell and slipped through it. Tim was too drunk to notice. Snatching Tim’s blaster from the console where it lay, just to make sure, Silver cautiously closed the door to the cell and turned the key in the lock. She needn’t have worried. Tim was asleep.

* * * *

“Hang on tight,” shouted the Doctor as the ship bounced off Venus’ atmosphere. There was no space station around Venus. This was going to be an old-fashioned landing.

Harjit was hanging on tight, while the space traffic controller on the other end of the communicator directed her and the Doctor on how to land the ship. Many of the sequences were automated and it was just a matter of triggering the appropriate subroutines, but the feedback from the damaged pilot was causing some of the controls not to respond at all to automatic commands, and so the Doctor and Harjit had to take manual control for some of the tasks. Bashing their way through the atmosphere appeared to be one of them.

When the ship came to a halt with a jarring thud, the dozen or so remaining passengers and the members of the security force cheered and applauded.

“Don’t quit your day job,” quipped Harjit.

“Maybe you should quit yours,” retorted the Doctor.

“Maybe I should,” said Harjit. “I’m staying at the Hilton. We should have dinner together tonight. If I’m not in jail.”

“I think the Hilton is the only hotel.”

“It is,” confirmed Harjit.

“Then I guess I’m staying there too. I’ll look you up. What’s your last name?”

“Singh.”

“Now lets see about getting out of here without being shot at or arrested.”

* * * *

“Come on, let me out,” shouted Tim.

“Not until we get to Venus,” said Silver. “Then I’ll let you out when we need to land.”

“You don’t know what you’re doing,” said Tim. “It’s dangerous!”

“You haven’t even got the monitor turned on,” said Silver. “Looks to me like it’s all run by computer. I’ll let you out when it’s time to land, and I’ll give your blaster back to you once I’m off the ship.”

“You’ll be in a lot of trouble,” warned Captain Tim.

“The Doctor’ll be waiting for me,” said Silver. “He’ll sort it out.”

It was an uneventful three days to Venus. Silver kept her beer drinking to four cups a day, and rationed Captain Tim as well, just in case an emergency arose and he had to pilot the ship. She made herself some makeshift earplugs to drown out Captain Tim’s moaning and spent three days watching the stars and contemplating the universe and life and everything.

Three days later, she walked off the ship into the arms of the Doctor, who managed to get the space station security force not to press charges for piracy and to make arrangements to have the TARDIS loaded onto the Orion Express the next morning.

The Doctor told Silver that they would be spending the evening in a fancy hotel, much to Silver’s delight. As they started walking down the lone street that led away from the spaceport, she finally had a chance to fill him in on all that had happened.

“And how was your trip, Doctor?” asked Silver when she had finished her tale.

“Oh, you know, the usual stuff,” replied the Doctor. “Unfortunately, due to an unforeseen labour shortage, the Orion Express Corporation is delaying the next leg of our journey for three days until they can get a new crew in from Earth.”

“Well, that’s all right,” said Silver. “I’d like to spend a few days on Venus anyway. And it’ll be nice to relax.”

“Why,” asked the Doctor. “Wasn’t your flight relaxing?” He grinned.

“Ha ha,” said Silver.

“Well fine then,” said the Doctor. “While we’re on Venus, we’ll just relax.”

As the pair walked towards the hotel at the end of the block, a blue tentacle quivered in a nearby alleyway, and if they had been just a little less focused on their goal, they might have heard the little voice inside their mind.

“Angry!”

MISHA LAUENSTEIN

Misha no longer lives in White Rock. He has recently acquired a Golden-Age Flash costume to hang next to the Superman costume in his closet. That'll be great for Halloween then, eh? What? Oh. Right. Halloween. Yes. Exactly.

