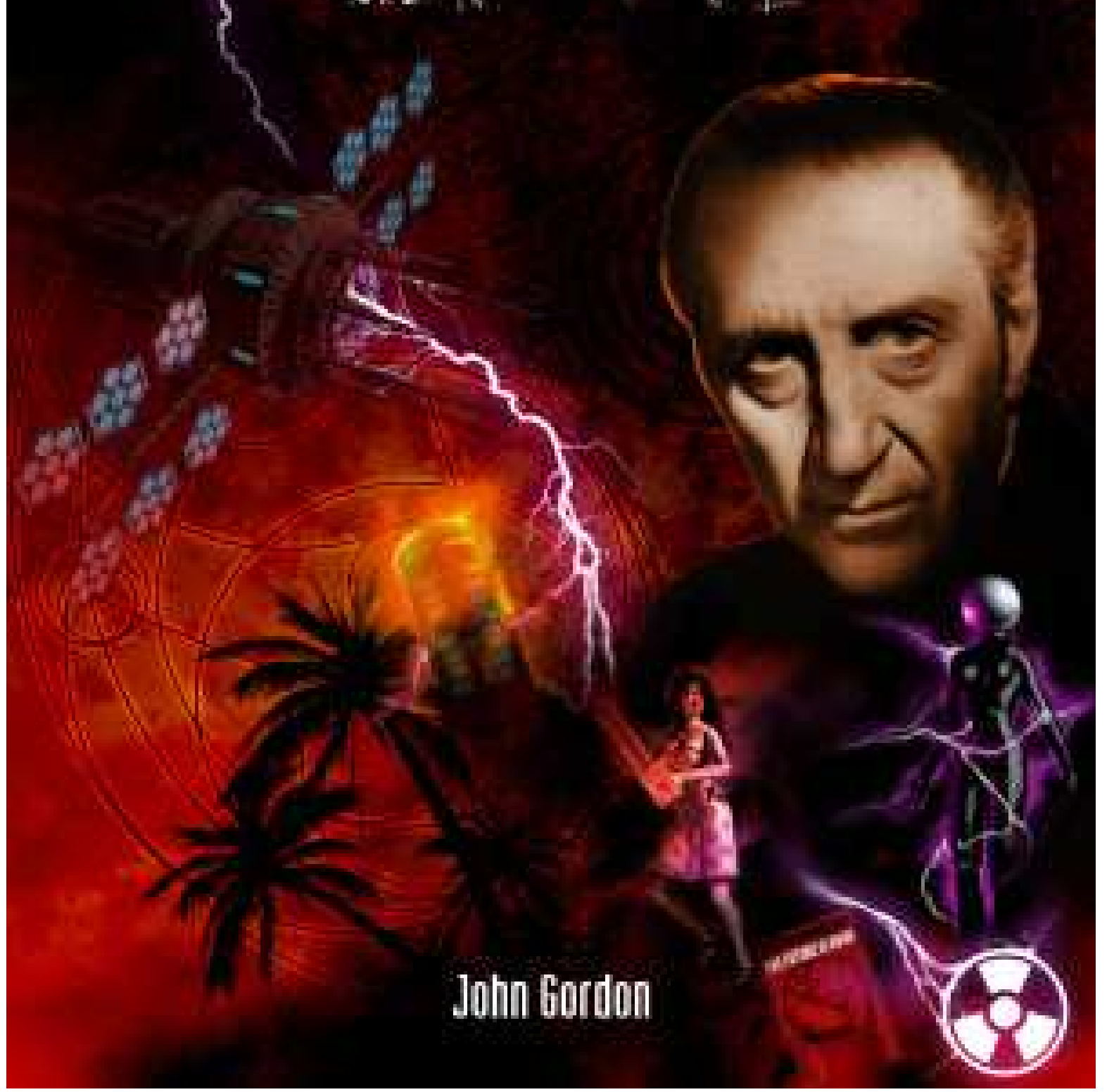


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JOURNEY'S END



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Prologue

Cardinal Phractus sighed in concert with the ancient portcullis as it slid slowly up on its energy coils into the dark recesses of the stone wall. Beaten metal faces glided up into the shadows, opening a dark hole in the rugose, weather-beaten blocks of sedimentary rock. The way to the Cloister of Choices was clear. Phractus hobbled painfully up the worn steps and underneath the massive teeth of the portcullis, cursing yet again his ageing body and its many mortal frailties. He gathered his robes around him to ward off the Cloister's chill as the great engines in the stonework behind him ground the portcullis back into its settings, sealing the Cloisters off once more from the outer city. The Cloisters were dark, wreathed in neglect and steeped in the must of centuries of abandonment. Generations of vines coiled ophidian-like across the battered stonework, encircling columns, choking balustrades and suffocating the deep-carved stone fretwork. In the centre of the Cloister, the Fountain of Many Hours, dust caking the bowl, corrosion furring the metal pipes spouting from dry, gargoyle mouths. Phractus blinked. How long had it been since the Warder had visited this part of the College, he wondered? He stepped gingerly around the twisted creepers, shuffling through the mounded leaf-mould and crept under the archways and towards the fountain. Creatures from forgotten myth-cycles wound in stone procession around the fountain: Nemesis, the Singhe, the twisted face of the Great Vampire, a spiral of Lloigor... Phractus shivered. Their staring, ancient eyes hardly made him feel at ease.

He sensed something – a flutter on the Time Winds, a stirring in the ether of space-time. Something approached. He fumbled with the Zero Generator at his wrist, hastily scrolling the bejewelled carapace until the power-tube activated. The Zero Effect pulsed. A bubble of no-space, no-time swirled outwards and enveloped the Cloister, sheltering it, shielding it – hiding it, and its visitors. Phractus winced as the splinter of future time prickled his cerebral cortex. Then... it was now; it was here. Something had arrived. It materialised with a subtle, wheezing groan. Darkness – a pool of darkness, upright, and with the flickering, unpleasant suggestions of arms, claws, tentacles, pincers, spikes, eyes, antennae, feelers. The darkness coalesced; a shrouded form, as if robed. In the darkness of its cowl, lights formed. Cuboid flickers of dim, amber fire, clicking on and off, shifting position and alignment. Fronds of darkness – feelers; tentacles? – shifted and twittered underneath the cowed lights. Sound formed around the shrouded shape. It spoke. Phractus shivered once more. It was as if a dark, elder terror from the Fountain had suddenly unwound itself and taken on life.

“We... are here, Cardinal Phractus. We... are here...”

* * * * *

i. Dawn

Sunrise sifted in through the slats in the bamboo blinds. Soft amber light traced the curve of Hitomi's back, dark honey shadows pooling in the hollow of her spine, the sun picking out the faint galaxy of moles across her shoulders. Channing ran one finger softly up the long line of her back and down over the curve of her shoulder, past the flecked scars that she never mentioned – and he never commented on. She stirred sleepily, mumbling softly and wordlessly into the pillow. Channing drew the short crop of black hair back from the nape of her neck and kissed it gently, breathing in the warm, exotic musk of her sleeping skin. He slid gently off the edge of the futon and pressed down on the button between the bedside clock's bells, cancelling the alarm. It seemed too cruel to wake her. He flipped the calendar over one more day. He had circled the date in red pen months ago when the timetable had been set: November 22nd, 1963. Today was the day.

The shower's eccentric plumbing clanked and rattled. How could something as simple as a gravity feed from black metal tank on the roof be so prone to problems? He shaved carefully, watching his lean face turn left and right in the crooked mirror. He combed his hair with the same precision as he had shaved, using just enough hair-cream to keep the awkward cowlick at the back of his skull down. He talced his feet and under his arms, rinsing his hands as he heard the kettle whistling in the little kitchen off the bedroom. He smiled and pushed back the curtain that acted as bathroom door. Hitomi was awake, curled up on the bed a bowl of tea already cupped in her slim hands. The radio next to the clock was on and a newscaster muttered gently about the price of cocoa and the latest West Indies cricket scores. Morning sun drifted into the tiny room bringing with it the charcoal scent of morning cooking fires and the unmistakable smell of the sea and the distant rumble of the surf.

Channing watched Hitomi Ruyo as he poured hot water into his own single teapot. The carelessly draped bedsheets over the girl's knees were unable to hide all those lines and curves that Channing found so irresistible. He liked the fact that she was such a mystery to him, liked the fact that she was unlike any other girl he'd ever met – English or foreign. He knew others at the base turned a dark eye on fraternisation like this, but Channing didn't care.

Hitomi sipped her tea and looked up at Channing with dark eyes half-hooded behind her heavy lashes. She smiled.

“Always first to the shower, eh Commander?” she said, her voice slightly mocking.

“Privileges of rank and position,” Channing chuckled.

Hitomi raised one dark eyebrow. “Position?” She kicked back the sheets gently. “Would you care to discuss your position in further detail, Commander?”

Channing grinned and shook his head. “I'm running late as it is, Hitomi,” he groaned. “Tyrell and Collins are picking me up by car. Big day today, you know,” he finished as Hitomi pulled the sheets back up to under her arms, shrugging and nosing her bowl of tea.

He poured his tea regretfully, and turned. Hitomi uncurled from the bed with a conciliatory half-smile on her face and stood silhouetted in the dawn light, a golden halo outlining every smooth, sharply muscled curve and dark detail. She shook her hair and padded across the wooden floor, slipping her hands around Channing's waist. Channing encircled her and kissed her smooth, pale lips before she laughed gently and spun away out of his grasp and into the bathroom.

Channing dressed while the shower rumbled. He stood in front of the long mirror at the back of the bedroom and adjusted the line of his jacket and inched his tie more firmly

around his collar. From the shelf under the portrait of his grandfather he took his cap and brushed it gently. Commander. The title still felt unfamiliar. A deep, embarrassing pride filled Channing. The title meant everything to him: second-in-command to the nuclear SS Spearhead. It was almost more than Channing could ever have hoped for. He stared up into the oilpaint eyes of his grandfather – a naval man himself, lost at sea before his grandson had been born. Channing touched the simple frame, wondering what his grandfather would think if he could see his grandson now. He shook his head and settled the cap on his head.

He turned to find Hitomi leaning against the doorframe to the bedroom, her eyes dark, watching him, towel wrapped around her chest, water dripping to the wooden floor. Channing straightened and smiled.

“Long day, I’m afraid. The reactor doesn’t get fired up until eight this evening. I probably won’t be back until midnight,” he apologised.

Hitomi opened her mouth to reply and was interrupted by the hooting of a car horn from outside. She nodded towards the door. “Your friends – you should go.”

Channing bent and kissed her. Hitomi curled her fingers in a half-wave as he vanished out to the car. She crossed to the slatted blind and watched the three other Royal Navy officers in the car greet the Commander. She watched and waited as the driver revved the engine rev and launched the car back onto the road in a spin of dust from the tyres. Then she crossed to the small dressing table on the far side of the bedroom and opened up a small vanity box, removing a metal mirrored compact. She pressed her thumb into the inner compartment and a faint blue light flared within the metal.

“What is it, Ruyo?” a voice drifted from the compact.

“Eight o’clock,” Hitomi said, her voice excited.

“You’re sure?”

“Positive. Channing just said the reactor was to be switched on at eight p.m.”

There was a pause at the other end of the contact. “That’s it – Galloway’s just confirmed it! Then we have less than twelve hours,” the voice concluded, as excited as Hitomi’s. “Better come in – we’ve got plans to make.”

Hitomi closed the compact and sat for a few seconds without moving. Through the shaded window, she caught a glimpse of a dark cat watching her with mirror-dark eyes. Hitomi stored the compact. She could hardly believe it – today was the day. Today. Finally. In less than twelve hours it might all be over. Finally.

* * * * *

The bare-earth streets were silent save for the click-click of land crabs as they scuttled from their burrows underneath the rows of palms. Beyond the back of the sagging clapboard buildings, the sea rushed back and forth endlessly against the silver sand. Out across the mirrored surface of the bay, the first, yellow glimmers of morning sun rustled along the tops of rippling, white-topped waves. From behind the faded clapboard buildings, dark cats watched him pass by.

Joachim walked with slow, soft footsteps, ignoring the skulking bands of thin-bellied dogs that loped along the deserted streets in the morning shadows. He stepped quickly to avoid the scraps of rubbish the dogs had dragged out of the alleyways, careful not to allow any dirt or mud to splash against his freshly-polished shoes and clean suit trousers. He smoothed his father’s old green tie down against the front of his white, short-sleeved shirt. The tie was carefully looped so that the worn patch was hidden at the back of the neck. Folded over in his pocket was the cheaply printed poster with its bold proclamation, the one that his father had printed two days ago – the one that promised so much for the future. We

Will be Free! The National League for Democracy Demands a Popular Assembly. Let the Workers Unite. The meeting was later this morning, and Joachim would be there. He would show his father he was ready to be a man – ready to think for himself, to make things happen.

He passed by the church of Our Lady of the Angels, the blue lamp on its spire a familiar beacon. Father Ignatius waved to him from the worn clapboard porch as he passed. Always feeding his cats. Dark mirror eyes watched the young man now as he walked on past the church towards the Naval station. Above the Dock Road, the island spread out around him, braised red and orange in the sunrise: the fort, the lighthouse and its dark cliffs, the jungled mountains beyond. Joachim's fingers stole to the poster in his pocket.

Today was the day. Yes, Joachim thought – he would make things happen today. Today was the day.

* * * * *

Sir Henry White paused on the edge of the pavement opposite Commonwealth House to let a battered white Austin and two laden donkey carts circle each other and rumble down the cobbled street. He re-folded his handkerchief, dabbing at the sweat beading on his temples. Nine years and he hadn't got used to the island's heat – his hand suddenly slapped at the back of his neck: or its mosquitoes, he thought miserably. He hurried across the street through the cloud of petrol smoke, stepping with practised lightness around a lazy dog and a wandering chicken. He settled the white panama back on his thinning hair and stopped as his heel hit the pavement outside Commonwealth House.

"Bloody vandals," he scowled. There was another poster slapped across the stone gatepost. Free Us Now. Independence. Support the National League for Democracy. It irritated him that they thought they could slap their flysheets wherever they liked. Here! On the very gates of Commonwealth House. The wallpaper paste on it was still damp. He would send the gardeners out to remove it later this afternoon. But then something inside Sir Henry suddenly flared, angrily. Damnation! Why should he put up with this? Reaching out, he grabbed at one top corner and tore the poster savagely in half, exposing the damp, paste-smearred brass of Commonwealth House's nameplate.

"Lunatics," Sir Henry muttered, wadding the offending sugar-paper into a soggy ball. "Bloody vandalising lunatic communists. Give them a taste of power and they'd be at each other's throats in a heartbeat. Bloody island's a bloody tinderbox. Bloody League for Democracy? Bloody recipe for disaster, if you ask me." He chucked the remains of the poster into the gutter and wiped the paste from his fingers. The dark silhouette of a cat crossed the edge of the garden, dark-mirror eyes fixed on him from the shadows. Sir Henry looked up. A dozen black faces watched him silently and wordlessly from the street. A woman carrying a baby and a bundle of callaloo, stared at him, her squalling child suddenly silent. An old man with a damp cigar and a fishing rod looked at Sir Henry from under the battered straw brim of his hat, his watery eyes thin and grey in the shadow. A streetsweeper in a patched uniform and creased cap pushed his cart slowly forward through the tableau and bent with infinite patient dignity to retrieve the ball of paper. Sir Henry stared back at them all, nervously wiping his fingers.

"Don't look at me," he snapped. "I'm only the bloody Commonwealth Commissioner – nothing I can do!" Something in the silent faces suddenly frightened him and he turned and up the broad sweep of the limestone steps. A dark-eyed cat watched from the shadows of the garden.

He hurried across the colonnaded veranda and through the windowed double doors into the marginally cooler interior. Up in the ceiling, a lazy fan swirled the tepid air, not making much of a difference to the temperature. Sir Henry sagged, pulling at his collar and his Cranborne tie. He let out a sudden string of obscenities – a burst of pent-up frustration at the heat, the mosquitoes, the island, and the islanders.

“I beg your pardon, Commissioner?” came a prim voice from the far end of the lobby. Miss Merriweather crossed the wood and carpet lightly, arms full of manila files.

Sir Henry sighed. “I said... damn this bloody island,” he muttered, toning down his invective considerably in the retelling.

Ms. Merriweather cocked an eyebrow at the Commissioner. She knew him far too well. It had been Merriweather who had picked up the pieces in Rangoon after all those horrid headlines in the Morning Examiner, Merriweather who had managed to convince the F.O. that what Sir Henry needed was another foreign posting, not burying in London in a useless office job. It was Merriweather who, over the years, had stayed loyally by when even friends, colleagues and superiors dismissed him as nothing more than a washed-up drunk, a casualty of the vagaries and cruelties of colonial service. It was Merriweather too, who, despite years of being ignored and taken for granted, still harboured hidden hopes of one day being noticed, of one day -

“Is everything all right, Sir Henry?” she asked, a note of concern drifting into her voice.

Sir Henry shot Merriweather a look. He patted his pockets, looking for his cigarette case. “Nothing good can come of all this,” he muttered mournfully, fumbling for a damp woodbine and lighting it with his old army lighter. He drew a nervous breath of smoke and dabbed at the sweat pooling again on his brow. He caught sight of Merriweather’s load and eyed the files suspiciously.

“Did you want something in particular, Merriweather?” he asked weakly.

Ms. Merriweather patted the manila folders apologetically. “I have the files on the West Key development budget and the harvest forecasts for you to review before your meeting with the Economic Committee at three this afternoon.”

Sir Henry screwed up his face. “Oh... bother. I had completely managed to forget all about that.”

His secretary’s face indicated that she had expected no less.

Sir Henry sagged even further. He glanced at his watch. “Ten-thirty. I suppose it’s late to think of some reason why I have to be somewhere else?” he mumbled.

“And don’t forget you’re meeting Peter DeVries for lunch at the Regatta Club.”

“Ah!” Sir Henry’s face brightened. “Good old Peter.” He checked his watch again. “Ten-thirty. Just time to freshen up and head over to the Club for a quick one before lunch. Excellent.” Somewhat revitalised by the news, Sir Henry hurried towards his office.

“Commissioner!” The flat, guttural bellow halted Sir Henry in his tracks. There was only one person on the island with a voice like that – and only one person who would consider using it to barrack Sir Henry within the walls of Commonwealth House. Captain Pierre-Jacques Toussaint was a great barrel of a man. He was over six feet tall, built like a Japanese wrestler – a thick layer of fat hiding solid muscle. His green police uniform was stretched awkwardly over those muscles, seemingly held together by the white holster belt at his waist. His face was broad and squat, and his crisply-pressed cap with its ridiculous overabundance of red and gold braid sat low on his brow.

Sir Henry disliked Toussaint, disliked everything about him from the moment he first met him. He was a thug, a dangerous thug; a dangerous thug with a great deal of power. The police were the only ones on the island with any real, on-the-ground authority,

and Toussaint knew it. He ran his part of the island like an old-fashioned gangster boss.

Nothing happened in his territory unless he allowed it – and unless he personally profited by it. Sir Henry knew for a fact that he had a pretty profitable protection racket running on both of the island's big hotels, the marina at the end of the bay and the Corrado Casino. But he had fingers in smaller, baser pies. He preyed on the stevedores on the docks, from the plantation overseers, the taxi-drivers, the street-sweepers, the market-stall holders. Cards, knives, drugs, prostitution, protection, smuggling – Toussaint's baleful, brutish eye kept watch over it all. He treated his little chunk of the island as his own private fiefdom. Smart people avoided running afoul of Toussaint; others soon learned.

Toussaint clattered across the limestone floor with heavy, precise steps. A shadow of four police sergeants kept step a respectful distance behind him, their low faces twisted into mirrors of their boss' contemptuous snarl. Toussaint raised his ebony baton in a salute, tapping the glossy brim of his cap with its ivory and gold tip.

"Commissioner," the Captain barked. "You saw the poster this morning." It was not a question, it was a statement, flat and perfunctory.

Sir Henry pulled the cigarette from his lips. "Er, ah, yes – I did, as a matter of –"

Toussaint snarled. "You will agree with me, I think, Commissioner. That rabble would bring chaos to the island."

Sir Henry thoroughly agreed, but damned if he was going to fall in line with Toussaint.

"I'm sure they feel they have the island's best interests at –"

"They have only their own interests at heart," Toussaint interrupted dismissively. "You are a fool if you cannot see that."

"Now see here," Sir Henry bridled. He would not be spoken to in this manner, not by Toussaint, not by anyone – not in Commonwealth House, and not in front of Carol.

The Police Captain slapped his baton against the red piping on his smartly-ironed trousers. He took a step closer to Sir Henry, his brightly-polished shoes scuffing the white limestone.

"No, Sir Henry White," Toussaint growled. "You see here. You see things from my position. These so-called democrats – these Communists - are threatening the very foundation of law and order on this island with their concessions." Sir Henry thought that statement was a bit rich, coming from as corrupt a beast as Toussaint. "You know what the Communists want: revolution, bloody revolution, Sir. You've seen what they've done to Cuba. They'll do it here, Sir Henry. Is that what you want – seizure of property? Forced nationalisation of British and local interests? Hangings, beatings, murder? Blood on the streets?"

"No, no, of course not, but hang on one bally –"

There was the sound of shouts from outside. Toussaint and Sir Henry turned towards the double doors.

Sir Henry pulled open the double doors and looked out. A crowd of about a dozen men had gathered at the foot of the wide limestone steps at the front of Commonwealth House. They were shouting and gesticulating. One of them held up the wadded poster Sir Henry had torn from the gatepost five minutes earlier. He shook it in the air angrily. Sir Henry looked contemptuously down at the knot of rabble-rousers.

"What the devil -?"

The men saw the Commissioner and turned against him as one. They hurled abuse. Then someone threw a stone. It smacked against the oak door frame and ricocheted into the entrance lobby, clipping Sir Henry on the hip. He cursed and winced. Carol Merriweather let out a short, sharp cry as Sir Henry retreated into the shadow of the entrance lobby. The

single missile now became a rain of rocks and filth picked up off the street. The wadded-up poster flew up the steps and slapped wetly on the stone. There was a crack of glass as one stone found a pane in the door. Toussaint snarled wordlessly and pulled at the silver whistle hung around his neck. His escort of four sergeants hurled themselves down the steps, heavy ash batons raised as Toussaint blew three long blasts on the whistle. More police moved, running down the street from the station and the customs post near the docks. The crowd shouted, their anger now split between Sir Henry and the on-coming police. Batons were raised, and Sir Henry saw three or four of the protesters fall to the street, blood streaming from split skin. The rest fled, the police in pursuit. Toussaint surveyed the scene, gesturing sharply with his baton to his sergeants to arrest and remove the subdued and injured men. He turned to Sir Henry. The diplomat suddenly looked old, cowed. Toussaint bent and picked up the wadded-up poster.

“You see, Sir Henry? These are your ‘democrats’ and your supporters of ‘independence,’” he said, his eyes narrow, his voice low. “Agitators. Rioters. Revolutionaries. How soon now before they start throwing grenades instead of rocks?” His porcine eyes glinted. “Give me the authority to move against them, Sir Henry. I have lists. I have informers. I can move quickly. Arrests, detentions – all this –“ he waved his baton out at the street, “- can be eliminated within hours.”

Sir Henry looked bleakly out from the shadows, his face pale, shock etched into his face. His hand rubbed at his bruised hip. “But... but, I...,” he stuttered. “I’m only the Commonwealth Commissioner. I don’t have that kind of authority... It’s nothing to do with me... The Governor-General in Jamaica, he...”

“Jamaica is a long way away, Sir Henry. All I need is a word, a nod. If it is known that I act with your approval, support for this kind of dangerous civil agitation will fade. The streets will be safe – you will be safe, Sir Henry.”

Sir Henry nodded vaguely, slowly, the images of the sudden, random flare of violence still playing in front of his eyes.

A faint smile flickered over Toussaint’s broad lips. He raised his baton sharply to the brim of his cap in salute and turned on his heel, racing down the steps of Commonwealth House to his waiting sergeants and the shocked calm of the street outside.

Sir Henry blinked slowly, his drawn face watching the barrel-shape of Toussaint vanish out of Commonwealth House, the double doors swinging closed behind him. A strange silence filled the entrance lobby. Carol Merriweather moved slowly to stand behind Sir Henry. The Commissioner glanced over his shoulder at his secretary and licked his dry lips. “Any plans for the afternoon, Merriweather?” he asked.

“Nothing in particular, Sir,” his secretary answered quickly, keeping her voice low and everyday. “Although I’m meeting up with some of the girls at the Green House for dinner, and I was thinking of popping out to Long Vale at five to pick up a new hat.”

Sir Henry nodded slowly at the information, his eyes still on the patch of sunlight between the slowly closing double doors. “Take the whole afternoon off, Carol,” he said softly.

Ms. Merriweather bit her lip. “And what shall I do with these files?” she pressed, clearly wishing she could allow Sir Henry to forget them.

A beleaguered look crept over Sir Henry. “Pop them on my desk before you go out, would you?” He asked weakly. His gaze crept back to the steps and the scattering of rubbish and stones. He touched the edge of the cracked pane of glass. “And have the gardeners come around the front and clear up... this...,” he waved vaguely at the despoiled steps. A dark-eyed cat peered at the Commissioner from the dank shrubbery crowding around the veranda.

Sir Henry consulted his watch for the third time, hands moving instinctively over the ironed cuff now softened and shapeless in the humid heat. He blinked at the face of the watch.

“Better hurry along to the Club,” he replied quietly. “Lots to talk about, Peter and me...,” he smiled nervously, his smile twitching and fading as his voice trailed off and he vanished into the sanctuary of his office.

Carol Merriweather sighed and watched him go. The last of the old-world diplomats, counting out his days until he could finally retire on his Foreign Office pension. Last of the gentlemen, perhaps, left marooned in a world grown alien and incomprehensible.

“Yes, Sir,” she said softly to the closing door, hearing the sad clink of gin bottle against glass.

* * * * *

“You promise?”

“I promise,” the Doctor chuckled, flicking two more switches and peering at a blinking readout on the console. He tapped his long, elegant fingers patiently on the controls. He pursed his thin lips as Silver kicked her Doc Martins out of the way.

“Pink beaches?” Silver pressed him, setting the Doctor’s cup of tea on one of the closed tool-boxes and her own mug on the bottom tread of the library steps. The console room was a mess. Something had prompted the Doctor to indulge in a whirlwind of long-overdue repairs. Even that flickering light next to the bathroom had been fixed, although seeing how the TARDIS was able to take care of itself so well, she wondered why that light in particular needed the Doctor’s personal attention. He had even made good on his long-overdue promise to take her to somewhere she’d seen pictures of in an old book in the TARDIS library.

“Is it real?” she asked, wrinkling her nose at the lurid colours bleeding off the pages. The Doctor had peered at the page in question over the tops of his half-moon spectacles.

“Oh yes,” he confirmed. He turned back the front of the book to read the title page. “Colluphid’s Extraordinary Guide?” He frowned. “Where did you pick that up? I didn’t think there was a copy of it in the library.”

“There isn’t – or, there wasn’t until I bought this in the market on Valexis Prime,” Silver said.

The Doctor smiled. “Was that before or after you fell into the gowzat soup stall?”

Silver groaned. “Don’t remind me – I had to throw that tee-shirt away: the smell!”

“Mm. Gowzat’s pretty ripe stuff.” He chuckled at the memory. “And that woman on the tram – you should have seen her face when she realised where the smell was coming from.”

Silver laughed.

The Doctor frowned slightly at the book’s bright, polychrome cover. “Still, you could have asked me for a better guidebook to the Ninth Sector – something a little less... sensational, perhaps.”

The problem with the Doctor’s taste in books, Silver had soon realised, was that he was just a bit too fond of sensible, grown-up publications with lots of text and hardly any pictures. The Extraordinary Guide was exactly the opposite – cheap, full of dubious facts and suspect reportage, and with plenty of bright, moving pictures on every page. It was great. No wonder the Doctor didn’t have a copy in his library.

It was the section labelled, entertainingly, *Freaks, Aliens and Other Bug-Eyed Monsters* that had particularly grabbed Silver’s attention. The section’s moving pictures

were just as bizarre, lurid and peeping-through-one-eye gross as the title promised. One set of pictures had Silver searching for the book's brightness, contrast and hue controls.

"No, there's nothing wrong with the book – that's what the planet looks like," the Doctor told her. That smile of his returned. "Want to go and have a look in person?"

Stupid question. Exercising a display of common-sense borne of sorry experience travelling with the Doctor, Silver had pulled out her old rucksack and stuffed it full of various practical necessities. You never knew where – or when – you were going to end up with the Doctor, and there was nothing worse than being stranded on some disastrously hostile alien moon facing certain death in the dungeons of the Zorg Emperor or whatever and being constantly reminded every time you opened your mouth to plead with the Zorg torturers not to throw you into the lava pits that you hadn't brushed your teeth in three days. So, toothbrush, lipsalve, hair-bobbles, toilet roll, spare knickers, clean socks.

Despite all the hype in the guidebook – perhaps because of it – Silver couldn't quite believe that the planet was as weirdly-coloured as the pictures had suggested. But the Doctor had promised she wouldn't be disappointed.

"And green sky, yes," the Doctor nodded. He pulled a pocketwatch from his waistcoat pocket and flipped open the catch, timing the pulsing lights on the readout. He frowned, twisted a dial on the next console segment and then closed his watch with a satisfactory click as the readout's timing fell into line. "And golden oceans, blue rocky mountains, transparent trees and purple grass," he continued, rolling up his shirtsleeves, pulling open a detachable panel on the console and plunging his arm into the twisted nest of wire and cable. "It will all be there – I promise you." He tapped a thing on the console panel that looked like half an hour-glass and twiddled a few knobs next to it.

"The colours are due to arrhythmic refraction in the upper six zones of the atmosphere owing to an overabundance of mu-particles left over from the pre-Hogensborgian Phase comet clustering. The entire atmospheric system betrays similarly unusual phenomena, and combined with the high thaleron radiation output from the local triple-star –"

Silver smiled as the Doctor rambled on, clearly not expecting anyone to follow or absorb his monologue. He had the front panels of one half of the console open now, and was rummaging around inside, up to his elbows in flickering wires and knots of cables. From his usual post on the edge of the console top, Mortimer looked lazily down at the Doctor, his long back curled around the slowly-spinning rotor. His eyes glinted as if reflecting distant stars. Silver leaned over and scratched behind his ears.

"Fancy hunting blue striped mice in the purple grass?" Silver asked him.

Mortimer purred deeply and stretched, black fur with a hidden hint of golden tabby shifting like serpent scales in the console room's even light.

"And horse-people," Silver interrupted the Doctor's science lecture. "You promised horse-people, too." She hopped up onto the library steps, that elegant twist of oak stairs pinched long ago from some forgotten great house. Silver loved the worn red velvet rope handle and the intricately carved newel post, and the way the steps bowed with wear in the middle, brass-headed nails smoothed by centuries of people looking for lost books. She set the Extraordinary Guide down on a lower step and clipped the other hooped earring into her earlobe, checking her reflection critically in the LCD mirror and wondered if the earrings were level. The mirror obligingly generated a view of both ears for her. Silver pulled at the streak of blue in her hair. Would it clash with the grass, she wondered. She slipped the mirror into her canvas backpack and tugged her cropped tee-shirt down a little, settling the fashionably-torn neckline loosely around her shoulders. She dumped the mirror

on top of the guide. She drummed the heels of her trainers against the side of the library steps. She should really change into her boots.

“Not ‘horse-people’,” the Doctor chided, frowning as his fingers searched for something hidden deep inside the TARDIS console, “They’re Equanoids - H’nun’kd in their own tongue,” he corrected her, the name sounding like hoofs clopping over warm earth. His fingers made contact at last and he pulled out a bundle of wiring and began to sort through it like gambler rifling through cards. His sonic screwdriver chirped and whirred, adjusting circuitry. “Purple with yellow dots – rather lurid to our eyes, I suppose, but believe me, on H’nun’koa they blend right in – on the purple plains you can’t see them at –”

Everything went black.

Not just dark, but black. Silent. Still. The blackness was entire, utter. Every source of light in the TARDIS vanished. Every sound swallowed up, consumed by a solid, cold blackness.

“Doctor?” Silver’s voice cracked. The air seemed to be sucked out of her lungs as she spoke. Bitter, aching cold suddenly creaked around her, snapping at the moisture on her cheeks. There was a scratching sound, and the thin, wavering light of a match flared in the Doctor’s cupped hands.

The TARDIS was dead. Everything had stopped. No sound, no light, no movement. The rotor was frozen in mid stroke. The soft light from the roundels was gone. The winking, buzzing, clicking and flickering of the console controls silenced. Frost rimed everything, cracking, crackling – growing. Silver watched in astonishment as a floreate burst of ice crystals blistered across her tea, garrotting the haze of steam virtually in mid-wisp. Mortimer growled, his eyes flashing in the match-light, his fur bristling.

The Doctor’s eyes reflected the dead interior of the console room. His face was drawn, long, cold shadows gathering in the hollows.

“Out,” he said softly, his old face suddenly older. The ice advanced, snapping, popping, searing, cutting. The Doctor backed around the console, hands flashing out at the freezing controls. Crystals flowed across the time-rotor, seizing it in mid-rise. “Out! Out – now!” The Doctor thundered.

Silver jumped down from the library steps, her muscles cramping in the gathering cold. She pulled her pack onto her shoulder and skidded around the icy console towards the closed main door. Mortimer leapt down and scrabbled at her ankles. The Doctor backed away from the dead controls, match in one hand, sonic screwdriver in the other. He turned the settings on the screwdriver and pressed it close to the door. Something clicked.

“Pull!” the Doctor urged, his voice vanishing in the cold darkness. Silver grabbed at a roundel, ice crisping around her fingers. She pulled. The Doctor dropped his match. It burned on the floor between them, its little endless flame flickering weakly against the onslaught of the dark. Mortimer hissed as the ice crackled. Silver and the Doctor strained against the left-hand door panel, their fingers scratching for purchase on the frost. The door creaked open with infinite slowness, protesting hinges fast freezing solid. Light and heat-haze flared in the narrow gap and was sucked away into the dark. Something now rushed up behind them, a wall of cold blackness like the emptiness of space. The interior of the TARDIS was vanishing under its advance. Walls, columns, floor, doorways all compressing, flattening, fading. The nothingness ate through everything, leaving only blankness in its wake. The Doctor shouted something, but it was consumed by the darkness. Silver felt a strange temperature-less paralysis spreading through her. Her vision blurred –

- and then she was tumbling across damp stone, her lungs billowing with hot, humid air. She stumbled, fell and sprawled out over rough, mossy rock. Silver gasped, rolling over on her back, her elbows grazed underneath her.

The TARDIS stood behind her, its door open the barest of cracks. Through the gap fell the Doctor, Mortimer a blur of black fur between his legs. As the Doctor tumbled forward, match and sonic screwdriver skitting across the ground, the TARDIS... changed. Colour drained from its battered blue exterior. Wood, glass, the printed signs, the brass handles, all became a horrible, lifeless grey. With a rattle like the empty, dead clattering of gravel, the last of the blue faded away. Dust sifted from the filled-in gap between the door-leaves. Silver stared at the still, silent grey block. The TARDIS had turned to stone.

Interlude

Spirals of nacre-tinted energy blossomed around the vessel. The beak-like prow sheared through the disruptions, violet spumes of radiance erupting from the central artron coil. Below the coil, the curving tail of the bent-spike vessel cut against a galvanic storm of vortex matter. Real-time vanished behind the wounded ship as it fled the spinning cloud of stars.

In the darkened bridge, the Pilot gazed into the command tanks with its cluster of softly-glowing eyes. The reptilian face watched impassively as, one by one, lights winked out in the depths of the tank's electroluminescent fluid. The Pilot turned its massive, ursine body to face the Aurarch standing behind him.

"We are the last, Sire," the Pilot growled softly, its tongue running along the crocodilian teeth. "All the other ships have fallen."

The Aurarch, leader of the last of its kind, keened a death-song. The clustering eyes above the ridged muzzle scales flickered. "Then we alone guard the Life Tree. We alone." It turned its gaze to the cryonic tanks lining the dim walls of the chamber. The deck was panelled in laamar wood, taken from the forests of a dead homeworld, the panels framed in zhost metal, mined on asteroids now driven, burning, into the hearts of suns. "The Xalm have all but won," the Aurarch barked hoarsely. "We must find a haven, find a refuge. We must go where the Xalm will not follow. We must rebuild our race, spawn a new generation of warriors who will bring vengeance –"

The dark shadows of the deck rippled and parted. Something flashed and writhed in the darkness, two mirrored shapes that flickered and shifted. In the blink of a moment, the mirrored things peeled apart the Pilot and the Aurarch and devoured them, then turned their iridescent attention to the vessel's controls.

ii. Morning

The white Austin roared down the side-street. Lieutenant Tyrell spun the leather-clad wheel and skidded the car around the corner and down into the High Street.

“Watch it, Lieutenant,” Channing barked, laughing.

Tyrell grinned. “Aye, Commander!” he snapped in his broad, Australian twang, and pressed the accelerator down harder. The car leapt down the town’s main street, past the traders piling food and goods high on their market stalls and the gathering crowds of morning shoppers. He braked and pulled around a police truck outside Commonwealth House, scowling at the uniformed policemen blocking the pavement.

Channing glanced in the rear-view mirror as Tyrell spun the Austin down a side street and headed for the dock road. The police truck rumbled into life and headed off in the opposite direction.

The Austin made quick work of the dock road, spinning around the entrance to the quays and the gangs of stevedores unloading crates from the rusty tramp freighters crowding the cargo piers. Channing waved to Max, pushing a broom outside the Harbour Café. The stooped old Negro waved at the passing car, shifting the unlit cigar in his mouth to the opposite cheek. A dark-eyed cat leapt up onto one of the café tables, eyes locked on the passing car. Up ahead, the tall spire of the island lighthouse rose up out of the spine of volcanic rock that divided the main bay from Silver Bay beyond. The dock road curled away from the town, around the spine and the morning shadow of the lighthouse, and out the other side, back into the sunshine.

The Commonwealth Maritime Research Station crowded at the base of the rocky spine, the long, tranquil sweep of Silver Bay running away to the north, the lighthouse keeping guard above. They left the thin dock road behind and turned onto a broad access drive that ran along the base of the volcanic spine towards the fenced cluster of low-roofed metal huts and long hangers. Guards at the gates checked their names on the roster and raised the black and white painted barrier to let the car pass.

A young man walked along the pavement from the gate beside the car. Tyrell saluted.

“G’day, Jo!” he called. The young boy nodded his pale face quickly and turned into one of the wooden office blocks.

Channing frowned. “You shouldn’t be so familiar, Mike,” he said. Tyrell pulled a shrugging grin.

“Aw, Jo’s a good kid,” he said, pulling hard on the handbrake as he turned the Austin into a parking slot. “Smart. Quick. Runs plans like no one else. Never makes a mistake.”

“He makes me uneasy,” Channing said, unsure exactly why. He searched for a reason as they grabbed their briefcases and headed for the C.O.’s office. “His father’s a Union steward on the docks.”

“So? Old man’s gotta make a living,” Tyrell replied, reasonably.

“He’s a Communist. I saw one of his leaflets – Jo was carrying it.”

“Getting political in your old age, mate?” Tyrell grinned.

Channing let it drop. He glanced back towards the planning office. There was Jo, rolls of blueprints under his arms, hurrying towards the hangers. He frowned. He couldn’t explain it – couldn’t put his finger on just what it was... but something about the boy bothered him.

* * * * *

Silver ran the tips of her fingers across the rough, pockmarked surface. It was stone – it was as stone now as it had been wood before. Her fingers picked out the edge of the lettering now carved into the weathered surface: Officers And Cars Respond To Urgent Calls. Pull To Open. Impossible. Impossible! The stone TARDIS bled smoothly into the stone underfoot, as if it were one and the same – as if it had always been there. All the details were preserved, transformed into solid rock. The door was still ajar, but instead of the usual interdimensional blackness in the gap, just a pitted infill of cut stone.

The Doctor just sat in the receding shadow of the palm trees, staring at it as if he were unable to quite take in what had just happened. Silver knew better than to ask him what he thought was going on. Either he would just baffle her with science-y gobbledegook or he wouldn't say anything at all – she sometimes didn't know which was worse. Mortimer padded among the roots of the Manchineel trees, sniffing and scratching as if he was picking up the scent of other cats.

Silver let her hand drop from the stone corner post and ran the back of her other hand across her forehead. It was hot. It was very, very hot – and humid. A cold memory skittered across her mind – like New Orleans had been. No. No, this was different – the air was humid with a salty tang to it. The Mississippi swamp had reeked of decay and death, but the air here was smooth and clean. There was even a faint, hot breeze twitching the palm trees. Silver blinked the sweat out of her eyes. It seemed crap to be thinking about clothes when the TARDIS had just – well, been turned to stone - but she wished she'd worn something other than leggings. She felt unpleasantly sticky all over, her hair clinging to her cheeks in lank, damp strands, the back of her tee-shirt under the rucksack soaked with sweat.

The TARDIS had landed – or would crashed be more accurate? – in the middle of a ruin. Creepers and vines shrouded the pale volcanic stone blocks that lay strewn in a weathered tumble of collapse. There had once been upright stone walls – buildings, towers and arches, but now everything was slipping slowly into the jungle's remorseless embrace. The twisted arms of low-growing bushes clawed their way through the fallen stone. A carpet of moss and rich humus gathered in the lows and dips in the crumbling masonry. Whatever the ruin had once been was being inexorably consumed by the advancing greenery. A thick ring of palm trees surrounded what had clearly once been an open plaza where the TARDIS had materialised. The remains of a stone wall sagged to one side, vines and creepers flowing over it in a curtain of enveloping leaves and fronds. The flagstones underfoot were lifted and disjointed by sprouting clumps of lichen and moss. Giant ferns and spindly bamboo clustered between the palms on the other three sides of the plaza. Up in the treetops, birds chattered and called. The sun filtered down from a cloudless early morning sky, bringing with it waves of sultry, humid heat.

Silver peered between the clumps of bamboo, following Mortimer's careful advance between the palms. There was more light beyond – perhaps she could see where they were. She kicked at the bamboo and squeezed past the dew-damp ferns. The flagstones underfoot had almost entirely vanished underneath the suffocating carpet of moss and dark brown humus. Silver pushed through a thickly-tangled clump of bamboo. Mortimer called to her – half-meow, half-growl. She elbowed aside a veil of bamboo leaves and blinked as she broke through the undergrowth and stood out in the beating sun.

The ruin was a fort – had been a fort. Silver could see tiered battlements descending in front of her, choked and swamped by the encroaching jungle. Behind them, the empty copper spire of a small, disused lighthouse rose up out of the fort's stone emplacements. The heat and the humidity lifted a rich perfume from the red-flowered flamboyant trees and

draping curtains of jasmine below. A path, narrow and threatening to vanish under the advancing jungle, coiled its way down through the crumbling escarpment. Below the fort, maybe about a half a mile away, began a scattering of brightly-painted houses, soon clustering together into a largish town as they neared a perfect turquoise sea. Beyond the beach and the town's quay, the languid sea was studded with tiny fishing boats and the crystal-white lines of distant reefs. Silver cupped her hands around her eyes, shading them from the sun.

"I suppose," she murmured wryly, "If you have to be marooned, what a place to be marooned in!"

Mortimer padded ahead down the path, stopping to look back at Silver and give another half-growl.

Silver nodded, sighing. "I'll fetch him, don't worry."

The Doctor still sat in the lee of the palms, chin propped up on nested hands, eyes fixed blankly at the stone TARDIS in the ruined clearing.

Silver stepped softly into the remains of the plaza. "Doctor?"

He almost didn't look like the Doctor. He looked like an old man – an old man beaten back by time. The lines on his temples were deeper, the hollows under his eyes darker. His impossible age now seemed to be breaking through. He seemed grey and empty. He glanced up at Silver.

"Null-Time," he murmured, his shoulders slumping with resignation.

Silver frowned. "What?"

"Null-Time – a kind of Omega wave energy." The Doctor sighed and sat up straight, his hands dangling down against his knees. "Left over from the dawn of time, cosmic flotsam; one of the rarest hazards in the Vortex. A lump of the stuff of beginnings and endings. And we just banged straight into it – no warning, nothing." He bowed his head.

"But we can – I don't know, get around it or something, right?" Silver insisted. "You can figure out a way, can't you?"

The Doctor pressed his fingertips to the bridge of his nose, saying nothing.

Silver knelt down and scooped up the sonic screwdriver and the ever-burning match, twisting the bottom of the little brass stove. The flame winked out. "You know: where there's life, there's –"

"The TARDIS is dead, Silver," the Doctor snapped, the corner of his mouth twitching close to a snarl. "Collapsed in on itself. Impaled on a rift of Zero-Point energy. There is nothing to fix, nothing to get around, no way to be figured out," he barked.

Silver set her jaw, her eyes narrowing. "All right, all right. Don't shout at me," she snapped back. She slapped the sonic screwdriver and the match into the Doctor's hand. She stood up. The Doctor softened, raising the palms of his hands placatingly.

"I'm sorry – I'm sorry, Silver," he said, his voice heavy. "But there's nothing more to say, nothing more that can be done. This is it. The end of our journeys." He looked back at the stone TARDIS. "To have travelled so far, for so long – it doesn't seem possible that it could just all... end. No bang, just a whimper." He stood up and slipped his tools into his waistcoat pocket. He stretched out his hands. "But..." He waited, as if expecting the TARDIS to react, to respond in some way. Nothing. A hummingbird darted from the jasmine flowers and circled the dead TARDIS, pausing at one corner and then vanishing back into the encircling forest.

The Doctor shook his head, a soft, sorrowful expression filling his ancient face.

"After all we've been through – this is finally it. Nothing more than the clothes we're standing up in." He looked mournfully down at his shirtsleeves. "And I didn't even have a chance to grab my coat," he smiled sadly.

Silver smiled with him nervously and shook her head. “But I can’t believe it – I just can’t. There must be something you can do.”

The Doctor shrugged, puffing out his cheeks. He rolled up his shirtsleeves. “The end is the end, Silver. I suppose it’s just possible we might manage to flag down another passing time-traveller – after all, Earth’s a popular place. But...,” his voice trailed off.

Mortimer curled around his legs. The Doctor scratched the ruff of the cat’s neck.

Silver shook his arm, trying to snap his mood. “I still don’t believe there’s nothing you can do,” she protested, but then held up her hands as the Doctor opened his mouth to launch into another explanation. “But okay, okay – I won’t argue the point. You’re the Timelord, not me.” She smiled shyly. “Even if we don’t have anything else, we still have each other.”

Silver clipped his shoulder with a playful punch.

“You and I are in this for the long-haul, right? Neither rain nor sleet nor snow, in sickness and in health – y’know?”

The Doctor managed a quick, gruff smile.

“But listen, we can’t just mope around here.” She pointed down through the undergrowth. “There’s a way down through there. And a town. And a beach,” she added temptingly.

The Doctor looked up with a faint smile. “A pink one?”

Silver returned his smile and took him by the hand. They paused at the edge of the palms and the Doctor looked back. Already the TARDIS seemed as dead and lifeless and forgotten as the crumbling stone fort.

The Doctor bowed his head and let Silver lead him away.

* * * * *

The thin-faced man bent close to the monitor. He squinted, grimaced and made some adjustments to the cluster of blue-lit controls underneath it.

“It’s hard to say...,”

“Come on, Galloway,” a woman’s voice sighed. “You’re supposed to be the ‘Tech...’”

The thin-faced man’s face twitched. “I’m doing the best I can, Captain,” he snapped. “But we’re on half power – if that – and this equipment –“ he slammed the back of his palm against the triangular control pad, its illuminated buttons clearly not made for human digits.

A man with a scarred, oriental face and a ragged handlebar moustache leaned closer to the monitor. “But the probability curve is still holding?”

“Sometime around noon,” Galloway confirmed, pointing to the waveform in the monitor readout. “High – very high readings: the highest I’ve seen. It looks as if your hunch about that meeting was right, Soloman.”

“It was Hitomi’s hunch, not mine,” Soloman replied. He looked back towards the woman, standing in the shadows out of the monitor’s glow. “But that’s it, then: the meeting has got to be linked in somehow, doesn’t it?” He stood up, away from the light of the screen.

“Then I should make sure I’m at that meeting; see what happens...”

* * * * *

Channing looked around the mess hall. The C.O. had asked for the entire team to assemble for a final planning meeting. Everyone was here: the engineers, the design group, the crew, the command staff. Even the research boffins from over in Hut Six – Dr. Strang and the

rest of his nuclear scientists – had deigned to mix with the rest of the team. Chairs and tables had been pushed back to the walls to make room for everyone. A muted ripple of conversation filtered through the room. Channing watched the group. You could feel the excitement in the air. Everyone knew that this was the proverbial it – the day when they would know whether the Spearhead had been worth seven years of their blood, sweat and tears.

Commodore Nelson entered the room. He had limped heavily ever since the fuelling accident in '59. In the past few months, his health had begun to deteriorate with alarming speed. His wheelchair was slim-bodied, and the yeoman pushing it discreet, but no one could have any doubts that the Commodore was now permanently crippled. The radiation had destroyed his bone-marrow, so they said, and was now eating away at his liver and his lungs. But a fiery determination still burned in the Commodore's jaundiced eyes – a determination to see the Spearhead launched and Great Britain's navy rebuilt once more. "Let the Yanks and the Russians fight over outer space," he had once said dismissively to Channing, years ago. "Britain is a naval power – always has been, always will be. Two-thirds of the globe is spanned by water. Whoever controls the oceans controls the world." Channing had believed him. Most of the officers at the station had been recruited through the Commonwealth naval exchange programme. But it was Nelson's personal commitment and enthusiasm that had convinced a wavering Channing to surrender his regular navy posting and join the Marine Research group.

"You're exactly the kind of man we're looking for," Nelson had said over lunch at the Admiralty Club in the middle of a rainy October, ten years previously. "You have the engineering and technical expertise – Suez, wasn't it? El Gamil?"

"That's correct, Sir," Channing had replied, taken off-guard – but perhaps not entirely surprised – by Nelson's knowledge of his career. "My department drew up the adaptation plans for the LCM landing craft that delivered Nos. 40 and 42 Commando groups to the airfield."

Nelson took another bite of his Dover sole. "I was extremely impressed with your understanding of the project's requirements – and the speed with which your department completed both the drafting and the engineering alterations."

"Thank you, Sir," Channing said, flattered. They ate in silence for a while longer. Finally, Nelson outlined his proposal.

"A nuclear-powered submarine – a British version of the United States' Nautilus. There are plans for four prototypes, each one with slight variations in the reactor/propulsion design. The hulls are being constructed in Britain – at Barrow-in-Furness, and the reactor components are being assembled at by UK Atomic Energy Authority engineers at the Admiralty Research Station HMS Vulcan, Dounreay. However," Nelson waited until the waiter had cleared their sole and poured more wine. "Each of the four reactor variants is to be installed and embarked separately, in remote Research Stations to minimise the danger of accidents. I'm heading a design and fit group in the Caribbean to install the S5aW reactor in prototype S104 – the HMS Spearhead. I've assembled most of the project team but I need a second-in-command, someone who understands both the military side and the engineering side." He looked up over the arriving stilton and water crackers. "Interested?"

Interested?

Channing suddenly saw his whole career blossoming into new life. After the disaster of Suez, he imagined that budget cuts and political running for cover would spell out the end of big-scale naval engineering. Just days before the meeting with Nelson he had drafted a letter of resignation, wondering if there were more demand for engineers in civvy street.

Instead, Nelson's praise and enthusiasm ringing in his ears, he had, within forty-eight hours of that lunch, boarded a naval transport heading for Jamaica and the Commonwealth Maritime Research Station on the island of Petit Cerique.

For seven long, hard years, the S5aW nuclear reactor became his life. All other things took second place. His marriage inevitably collapsed – Marian complained bitterly that he seemed to show no interest either in her or the children after his posting, and rarely came back home for leave. He withdrew from his family – his mother and his brother took Marian's side, and Peter became a favourite uncle and substitute father to Channing's estranged son and daughter. He lost touch with friends and colleagues – even naval comrades from his days at the academy.

And now, here he was – there they were – seven years later, everything bar the final system checks on the Spearhead complete. Channing felt more proud than he had done after the birth of his children. The four-thousand tons of iron and steel sitting at half-dock in the hanger – that was his true child, the true inheritor of his labours.

He stood at the front of the mess, between Nelson in his chair and Dr. Strang and his physicists as the Commodore began his speech. Channing noticed Nelson wince as he spoke. He was obviously in a great deal of pain. Doctor Harper had spoken privately with Channing the previous week and had said he was prescribing more morphine. Channing wondered if the Commodore had refused to take his morning draught, wanting a clear head for his address to the group.

“Ladies and gentlemen, officers and men, staff and colleagues. Today is a great day. Today marks the end of an old era and the beginning of a new. For today, in less than –” Nelson looked up at the mess clock. 11:38am. “- nine hours, the atomic reactor of the HMS Spearhead will be initialised for the first time.” He smiled a thin, exhausted smile. “I cannot tell you how much today means to me – but then,” he glanced up at Channing. “I imagine for many of you it means almost as much. The Spearhead project represents not simply a great technical and engineering achievement. It is not just the first British nuclear submarine to incorporate both a British-made hull and a British-made reactor,” A subtle reminder that the pioneering S101 - HMS Dreadnought – was powered by an American-built reactor, “It is also the first submarine vessel to incorporate an entirely British nuclear protocol. Commander Channing's design and construction team and Doctor Julius Strang's cadre of nuclear specialists have managed to produce a comprehensively re-engineered reactor timing system coupled to revolutionary new saltwater ion transduction and an isometric cooling and thermal re-cycling process – elements critical in helping us achieve what I believe will be a new speed record for a submarinal vessel.” He paused, his eyes glinting with excitement. “I confidently expect that HMS Spearhead will, on its trial run tonight, reach speeds in excess of... thirty-five knots.”

There were hushed gasps at the boldness of Nelson's prediction. Even Channing thought they might be hard-pressed to maintain such speeds. But he admired the Commodore's confidence.

Nelson held up his hand to silence the assembly, nodding in agreement. “An ambitious expectation, to be sure,” he acknowledged. “But let us be clear: the Spearhead project was never simply about copying existing nuclear submarine designs. It was never even simply about building a faster, more powerful naval vessel. The Spearhead project was about the future. It was about thinking beyond what we can already build, and thinking beyond that which we can already achieve. It was about daring to imagine a whole new generation of submarinal technology. Two-thirds of the world's surface is covered by ocean, and we have mapped and explored only a tiny fraction of this. Humanity is closer to putting a man on the surface of the Moon than establishing a permanent presence on the ocean

floor. But what we do today may change all that. The success of Spearhead brings us one step closer to a dream of finally properly inhabiting the world's oceans. Beyond Spearhead, I can foresee a day when great Seabases will colonise the underwater realms. These cities beneath the waves will be research stations, factories, civilian settlements and naval submarine docks all in one. A chain of such Seabases could encircle the globe, once more establishing British naval supremacy across – and beneath – the oceans of the world, bringing peace and security to our strife-ridden seas.” Nelson paused for breath, his face pale. “Such a dream is no mere fantasy. The successful initialisation of S104’s adapted reactor paves the way to turning this dream into reality. Who knows, but the end of this century, we may well be raising the Union Jack at the deepest depths of the ocean floor, claiming the waters of Earth for Great Britain in a gesture of unity and peace.”

Nelson turned now to the clock, it’s hands approaching noon. He gestured towards the sweeping minutes.

“As our countdown to initialisation begins, we bring our long journey to a close – and start a new one. We stand at a cross-roads – at a junction between the past and the present. When S5aW goes on-line, we will be writing the first words in a new chapter of human history.”

All eyes in the room were fixed on the clock. Silence filled the hall. The minute hand clicked to twelve.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Nelson said quietly to his spellbound audience. “We are at T-eight hours. The countdown to the future... has begun.”

* * * * *

“Namaiki iun-ja naiyo! Nan-dayo omae-wa!”

Hitomi Ruyo spat as she backed out of the way of a cocky youth on a battered scooter. Muddy saltwater splashed across the pavement, narrowly missing her feet. She had tried to leap faster, but the stupid dress had restricted the movement of her legs. She hated wearing it, but running around the streets in her combat gear just wasn’t an option – not for a fully-trained Culture Tech, anyway.

“Tansho!” Hitomi ground her teeth and hurried across the road. She knew the kid on his bike couldn’t hear her – and wouldn’t have had a clue what she was saying in any case, but it made her feel better just to spit the obscenities out at his disappearing back.

A cat nipped around her legs, its dark-mirror eyes flashing silver as it darted into the shadows behind the Harbour Café. Max looked up from polishing his tables, nodding to her. Wordlessly, Hitomi pulled a bottle of Mauby Cola from the refrigerator at the corner of the bar and placed a small handful of coins on the bar. Max smiled and waved his cloth as she popped off the cap, waving back as she rounded past the red telephone box, heading up the hill past the school, towards the fort.

“Morning, Miss Ruyo,” Mr. Walker Moses said to her as he got out of his parked car. Next to him, Jill Tarrant nodded politely enough as she gathered the children in through the school gate. Hitomi bowed slightly to them both. Her relationship with Channing was an open secret in the ex-pat community. No one approved of course, but they had little choice but to accept it. At least Jill had the good grace to acknowledge her when they passed on the street, Hitomi thought. Some of the British wives could be real *kono amai*, she had learned...

The path up to the fort trailed out of the back streets behind the Museum and the old fish market. It bypassed the road, climbing up a series of steps straight up the side of the cliff. Pulling the hem of her dress up as high as she dared, Hitomi leapt up the stone

flags, revelling in the unconstrained physicality of her movements. She had nothing against the twentieth-century, but its expectations of women were, to say the least, bizarrely and contradictorily primitive.

* * * * *

The town nestled in the gentle curve of a bay at the bottom of the steep mountain slope. The commanding position of the fort could clearly be seen as they reached the bottom of the half-hidden path and joined a rutted dirt road that lead down into town. Silver flagged down a minibus taxi and the three of them bundled into the crowded van, Mortimer perched happily on Silver's lap, haughtily ignoring the curious stares from the rest of the passengers. She wasn't sure what they could possibly find so interesting in an old man, a cat and a girl with blue streak in her hair travelling together. Silver decided the only possible course of action was to try and imitate Mortimer's cool detachment. The minibus bumped its way into the town, so slowly it might have been quicker to walk. Silver tapped the Doctor on the shoulder and pointed to a battered metal sign listing by the side of the road.

"Port Elizabeth – on the West Indian island of Petit Cerique," she said. The Doctor nodded. Not to be outdone, he held up a discarded newspaper.

"1963," he said, underscoring the date at the top of the printed sheet.

"The nineteen-sixties?" Silver wrinkled her nose. "That's ancient history!" She thought for a minute and tried to see if she could remember anything about 1963. "What happened in the world in 1963?" she asked.

The Doctor looked at her with a mixture of scorn and shock. "You - are you pulling my leg?" he frowned.

Silver rolled her eyes. "Look, History 101 was never really my strong point, you know. I was too busy having a mis-spent youth."

"But, 1963?" the Doctor sounded faintly flabbergasted and not a little disappointed. "Don't tell me you can't think of a single memorable event that happened in 1963?"

"All right, Mister Wikipedia," Silver growled. "So you know it all and I don't – big deal: how important can one year be?" She slumped in her seat and turned away from the Doctor, clearly signalling the conversation was ended. The Doctor shook his head sadly. Silver could tell even without looking at him that he had that infuriating what-DID-you-learn-in-school-then? expression on his face, the one that made him look like a grade school principal.

Silver watched Port Elizabeth grow around them as the minibus jolted along the rutted track. Okay, okay – it was pretty shocking that she was so ignorant, even after all this time carting around with the Doctor. And his blatant disappointment in her ignorance made her feel pretty small. 1963, 1963. She churned the date over in her head, desperately trying to dredge up something from the depths of her memory. Ah-ha –

"The Kinks formed in 1963, and The Who get together next year," she informed the Doctor with some pride. She ignored his dismissive sigh and the overly-dramatic roll of his eyes. Okay, so it wasn't Presidents being shot or world-famous speeches being made or wars being fought, but it was a start. Besides which, wasn't time-travel supposed to be educational as well as entertaining? What was the point of visiting the past if you weren't going to learn something from it?

Port Elizabeth looked interesting. At some point the small city had been the beneficiary of a large number of well-built stuccoed buildings, but these were now crowded up against by sprawling concrete blocs in a variety of alarmingly vibrant paint schemes.

Signs and wires cluttered every frontage. Shops and houses and business premises vied for space. The sidewalks were dotted with elaborately ramshackle stalls piled high with fruit, spices, clothes, shoes, umbrellas, and an unlimited amount of random junk. The minibus driver leaned on his horn and hooted his way through a swarming riot of shoppers and tourists wandering all over the street. Children ran in amongst the traffic; women with loads of coconuts and bags of nutmeg plodded through the melee; men carrying fish strung on long poles. Other cars and minibuses blared their own horns. Shrieking gulls wheeled overhead; dogs barked; the crowd yelled and jostled and ebbed and flowed. Silver grinned. It was fantastic; she loved markets. The press of people, the colour and the chaos. A market like this made a town feel properly alive.

The minibus came to an awkward halt at the edge of a busy central square and disgorged its passengers. The Doctor and Silver scrambled out with the rest of the bus' occupants, and Silver haggled with the driver for a minute before reluctantly parting with two tattered US dollars she'd excavated from the old wallet lodged at the bottom of her rucksack. Mortimer took the opportunity to vanish into the crowd, presumably chasing after something – chicken, most likely.

They were left standing in the town's central square. Elderly stone buildings crowded around a once-ornate fountain now mostly obscured by market stalls and political posters. A much-corroded statue of a man on horseback, streaked with gull guano, poked up out of the tangle of plastic tarpaulin roofs. There were a couple of red British telephone boxes on the far side of the market square. Silver reckoned that meant this was – or had been, maybe – a British colony. See? She was learning something. Fish and ears of sweet corn grilled on smoking charcoal braziers. A woman swung a machete next to them with worrying speed, cutting off the tops of coconuts and sticking straws into the exposed pools of sweet milk. A sleepy dog wandered by, oblivious to the torments of a pair of mischievous children. Vendors shouted at them from all sides, hawking everything from plastic sandals to strings of dried chillies. The crowd swept around them. Silver wiped a line of sweat from her brow.

“Well,” she said. “Here we are.” She looked down at the random assortment of battered coins and bills she'd found in her bag. “How much have you got on you?” she asked, but the Doctor wasn't paying attention. He was staring across the square, his gaze locked on something – the fountain? The market stalls? The gulls? The church steeple with its strangely familiar-looking blue beacon? Back across the tumble of town roofs, to the hazy silhouette of the jungle-draped fort and its metal lighthouse? Or was he just deep in thought, lost somewhere inside that brilliant brain of his, Silver wondered.

The Doctor mumbled something Silver didn't quite catch – something about a light shining somewhere, or something.

She jingled the coins in his face. “Hello? Earth calling Doctor. Money?”

The Doctor blinked, a puzzled look on his face. He stared down at the money and cocked his head, as if completely – annoyingly - somewhere else entirely. Then he blinked again, and his eyes cleared. He laughed – no, he barked a quick ha!, as if something had suddenly amused him. He rubbed his hands together. Silver narrowed her eyes. She knew that gesture – it was the kind of thing he did when plans started coming together in his head. An hour ago he was playing the sorrowful refugee - what had suddenly perked him up? The Doctor poked Silver's hand.

“Come along,” he asked impatiently. “How much have you got on you, then?”

Silver sighed. She emptied her Duct Tape wallet, counting the grubby notes and coins into her hands. “Eight dollars and sixty-seven cents in US currency that won't be printed for almost another thirty years, a Canadian quarter, twelve Euros, a six-cred

Federation currency chip, five George V shillings and three octagonal coins that look distinctly alien to me and I don't recall putting in my wallet."

"They're Janjanxan Okbits," the Doctor muttered, squinting and looking around the town square. "Ah-ha," he pointed. Silver followed his finger to a café nestled in the far corner under a weathered church tower.

"A café – very nice," Silver said patiently. "But how many cups of coffee do you think we're going to be able to buy with a Janjanxan Okbit?"

The Doctor smiled and pointed to the left of the café, to the elaborately-signed frontage of the Royal Bank of the West Indies. He winked. "Oh, I think we can do better than that. To quote old Willie Sutton, you have to go where the money is..."

* * * * *

Pierre closed the door quietly behind the last man, turned the sign to Closed and pulled down the dark canvas roll-blind. Outside, a dark-eyed cat twitched its tail in the shadows, watching the door shut. He turned the key in the lock and nodded back to Walker Moses. The small group of men shuffled nervously in the dark newspaper offices. Moses pushed open the door at the rear of the office that led to the supply room.

"Come. Let's go into the back," he said, leading the way. There were eight of them. Pierre brought up the rear, pulling the door to the office shut carefully behind him. Moses switched on the supply room light. The bare bulb near the ceiling spilled its harsh, unfiltered light through the cavernous storage area. The Cerique Post-Herald shared this space with The Virtuous Grocery Store next door and the Excellent Dry Cleaners and Automatic Laundry in the annexe. Sacks of flour, cans of processed peas and boxes of crackers shared shelf space with reams of paper, vats of printer ink and clothes rails hung with clusters of wire coat-hangers. The damp air was hot and oppressive on the lungs, saturated with the heavy tang of naphthalene from the laundry. Pierre plugged in a fan set up on the ledge of the newspaper-covered window, and the metal blades creaked into motion, pushing the chemically air around in lazy gusts. The scrawny little teenager Jo Mendoza and his old man from the Dockers Union, Raoul, pulled up eight battered chairs around a rickety card-table.

Moses sat at the head of the group. He laid his palms down on the peeling, stained baize surface.

"They arrested Doctor Fitzpatrick about half an hour ago," he said without introduction. There were murmurs around the table.

"There was some kind of disturbance around Commonwealth House. Someone started throwing stones at Sir Henry White, and the police moved in. Some heads were cracked, and some boys taken off to the station. Next thing I hear is the police breaking down Galloway's surgery door."

"They arrested him?" Raoul shook his head. "I can't believe it. Why?"

"Because of what he's said – because of what he believes," spat the tall, heavy-set man in army fatigues. Garvyn Turner leaned forward, the card-table creaking under his elbows. "Comrade Fitzpatrick was an intellectual, a man who knows how the capitalist systems works, who understands how it corrupts, demeans and exploits the worker. Comrade Fitzpatrick was the kind of man who could show others the true nature of their slavery, and who could clearly outline a way for them to free themselves of their shackles through armed uprising and the institution of a socialist republic dedicated to the redistribution –"

“All right, Garvyn,” Moses said firmly, raising his hand. The heavy-set man clamped his mouth shut and leaned back heavily in his chair, arms folded over his thick chest. Moses smoothed his dark tie and nodded. “But he’s right – Doctor Galloway was almost certainly arrested because of his backing of the independence movement and his support for a more equitable social order.” Moses surveyed the little group. “Other arrests will surely follow. This is what we’ve feared for months.”

Raoul Mendoza frowned. “But I don’t understand. The Speaker announced only last week that he was directing the Assembly to explore the National League’s concerns. He seemed on the verge of acceding to our request to form a Popular Committee. I don’t understand. How can arrests be possible now?”

“It’s not the Assembly – this comes from Toussaint.” He spat the name. “The man is an animal.” He looked darkly around at the hushed, nervous faces. “Someone needs to deal with him.”

Sitting beside Garvyn, Jo leapt forward on the edge of his seat. “He’s a fascist pig!”

Moses frowned in irritation. “Rhetoric is one thing, but we need to decide what we’re going to do – and we need to decide now.”

The man who called himself only Soloman drew his chair a little closer to the table. He was an oriental-looking man, thin and silent, with a pockmarked face, a thin, drooping moustache and closely-cropped hair. He said little, only ever seeming to observe. But he was quick to put his hand in his pocket when the nascent independence group had needed money. Moses knew very little about him. He worked on the docks occasionally, so Raoul had said. Kept himself to himself. Had a small group of friends on the island.

“What would you suggest?” Soloman asked.

“Get rid of Toussaint,” snapped Garvyn. Walker Moses frowned.

“Violence is not to be our way, Garvyn,” he said firmly. “We need to gain popular support for our movement. We need to make our voices heard. We need ordinary people to understand that we speak for them – for their lives, their futures.” He nodded to Raoul. “Would your union be prepared to strike to protest the arrests?”

Raoul nodded. “Very probably.” He looked at his son, Jo. “And others at the Navy base, too. If Toussaint is ordering arrests, then things could very soon get out of hand. No one wants to see the chaos of Cuba here.”

“The revolution in Cuba was a glorious triumph for the workers, who –“

Moses cut Garvyn off in mid-flow. “And what about the plantation workers, Garvyn. Do you think you could convince your fellow overseers and labour managers that a strike in support of Doctor Fitzpatrick and the other arrested protesters would be to their long-term advantage?”

Garvyn grumbled. “Possibly. They’ll be worried about their bonuses if they allow a strike. Only nationalisation of our native resources and industries can –“

“We must leave economic theory for another day, Garvyn,” Moses chided, a little wearily. “For now, we need a popular demonstration of support.”

“A public rally?” Pierre suggested. “On the day of the strike?”

Walker Moses nodded. “I think so. That will show the Assembly, the Federation representative and the Commonwealth Commissioner not only that we mean business, but that we represent the will of the people. Even Toussaint will have to come to understand that.”

“There’s only one thing Toussaint will ever understand,” growled Garvyn, miming holding a gun to his temple. Jo watched him with beady, breathless eyes. “And that’s –“

There was a splintering crash from beyond the supply room door. The shrill sound of a whistle cut through the hot, damp air. There were shouts, the stamping of feet and the

crashing of furniture. Everyone knew what it meant. Eight men leapt up from the card-table, toppling chairs.

“Police!” Garvyn shouted. The supply-room door burst open. Three officers in green uniforms ploughed through the doorway, batons raised. Garvyn roared and hurled his chair at them. The heavy truncheons descended, battering the man to the floor. He swung his fists, snapping one of the officers across the face. He spun around and flew into the shelves, smashing face-first into a stack of boxed dry goods. The shelf collapsed under his weight, throwing piled groceries across the floor. The whistle sounded again. More officers pushed into the room, followed by the huge black bulk of Captain Toussaint.

“Don’t move! Stay where you are! You’re all under arrest!” he bellowed. Moses stayed where he was, arms raised. A police officer skirted around the collapsing shelf and drove his baton hard into the slim man’s back. Walker Moses crumpled with an agonised groan over the card table. The group fled, scrambling towards the back of the supply room, making for the warrenous rear and its assorted exits. The rear door to the street flew open and two more officers roared into the storage area, truncheons raised.

Jo Mendoza ran down between two long shelves, an officer behind him. He grabbed at one of the rails of laundry coathangers and spun it in his path. The police officer collided with it and tipped it over. Coathangers like caltrops tangled themselves around his feet. The officer stumbled, skidded and fell forward onto a drum of ink. The drum burst under his weight, exploding in a sticky dark blue stain. Mendoza threw himself through the gap between two shelves, scattering boxes of cereal over the ink. He rolled into the next aisle. A dead end. Two more officers changed direction and charged. Jo felt his guts turn to jelly, anticipating the beating.

Suddenly the dark figure of the silent Soloman jumped up from behind a roll of newsprint. As the officers charged, he pointed a – Jo didn’t know what it was. Some kind of box, or tube. There was a low pop and something like a bubble of blue light shot from the tube. It enveloped the two officers, who seemed to shake and quiver as the light hit them. They crumpled and were thrown back against the shelves. A sack of flour toppled from the shelf above, bursting as it hit the floor and erupting into a billowing white cloud.

Toussaint watched his two officers go flying. “Stop them!” Toussaint shouted. “Stop them all!” He ran forward, pulling a revolver from his holster. He fired two shots. The bullets slammed into Soloman, spinning him around and throwing him back against another shelf. It crashed down around him, salt and sugar and cocoa powder flying up in the air. The tube in his hand went spinning through the ink and the flour, skidding across the concrete floor towards Jo. Without thinking, he grabbed it, and, leaping through the floury smoke-screen, disappeared through the door to the laundry.

* * * * *

“Ah, just here – just here. Stop the car,” Sir Henry suddenly ordered. He had no idea why – he just wanted the car to stop. Something urgent and claustrophobic battered at his heart. He needed to clear his head. The driver looked up into the rear-view mirror in surprise. He had thought they were heading for the Regatta Club. This was the middle of nowhere – a junction overlooked by a burying ground on a dirt track halfway up a mountainside. The Commonwealth House Jaguar pulled over softly to the side of the dirt track. The geared-down engine idled, a thick, throaty purr that cut through the still noon air. Sir Henry pushed open the door and eased himself out of the vehicle. He leaned down and spoke firmly to the driver.

“Wait for me at the Regatta Club,” he said, closing the door on the driver’s protests, waving the man on. He stood by the side of the road and watched the car drive off unhappily through the dust, vanishing over the crest of the hill.

Sir Henry stood and let the oppressive heat, the whirring of cicadas and the endless croaking of tree-frogs closing in around him. The road was a sliver of open sky cut through the tangle of the jungle. It climbed away in four different directions at the crossroads. A maze of headstones, half-consumed by greenery, squatted on one corner of the junction. A tall lich-gate, listing to one side in a losing battle with vines and jasmine, beckoned the elderly diplomat. Two large crows clacked and called from the gate’s mossy uprights.

Sir Henry straightened and smoothed the lapels of his linen suit. His eyes drifted from the line of sky, to the tops of the damp-leaved trees, to the tombs and headstones, to the dark thread of the rutted roads leading off into the darkness of the forests. Why had he stopped the driver? Why had he gotten out of the car? The urgent and claustrophobic knocking in his chest seemed to have faded. He felt calm, strangely so. Why would standing alone by himself on a forest road for the first time in – well, when had he ever done it? – ease those deep, insoluble anxieties or lighten the heavy, hidden burdens rooted deeply in his heart?

He fanned his panama in front of his face, the stirred air shifting flies and mosquitoes. The smell of the jungle – the heady, rich aroma of decay and regeneration – rose up out of the crowded trees like a mist. It reminded Sir Henry of something that he couldn’t quite put his finger on. It made him happy. It drove out the horrifying sight of a knot of men throwing rubbish and stones at him as he stood in front of Commonwealth House. It drove away that familiar, humiliating sense of failure. He wondered if he was remembering his childhood in India, or those happy days in Rangoon before... No. He shook his head ever so slightly, brushing the dark memory to one side, searching for a deeper, happier resonance. He breathed deeply, absorbing the fertile scents around him.

Without plan, without way or intention, Sir Henry began to walk. He let his feet direct him, let some deeply-buried instinct set his pace and direction. He walked along the track into the hills, letting the greenery envelop him, and the hot, damp musty breath of the jungle wash through him like a cleansing balm. A flutter of bright butterflies guided him up between the ruts of the shaded track. The dark road twisted, and within a minute, the pale suited shadow of Sir Henry White was lost from view, watched carefully by the dark-eyed cat crouched in the lee of a jasmine-entwined tombstone.

Interlude

They met as the second sun dropped languidly behind the Mountains of The Three, forests of crystal flowers reflecting the last blue and green rays of second sunset, and the first faint light of first sunrise. Eight tiny moons circled the empty globe of the sky like a necklace of precious stones. The balcony from the Hall of Stars jutted out like all the others, out above the citadel, over colleges and houses and all of the ancient, unchanging city of Time. Phractus moved the sliding controls on the Zero Generator at his waist, and the bubble of no-time swirled outwards, enveloping the balcony. He turned to Chancellor Nemus. The tall, thin Chancellor's death-mask face was almost lost in the blue-green shadows of sunset.

"Well?" Phractus inquired. "We have little time remaining, Chancellor. We must have your decision now."

Nemus closed his eyes, contemplating the darkness into which he was stepping. He opened them again, filling them with the glory of the citadel. What heroes, what tyrants, what terrors had their eternal city witnessed? What great and terrible things were intertwined in its immemorable history? The Chancellor gripped his staff. And now they stood on the edge of an abyss, poised at the threshold of a final terror. He, Nemus, Peldin and the others were prepared to write the ultimate page in the history of Gallifrey – to gamble with the future of the infinite Universe, and wager the entire destiny of time and space.

What would his decision be?

Chancellor Nemus turned. His fellow Cardinal was old and bent, weighed down by ten lifetimes of knowledge and wisdom. It had been Phractus who had uncovered the first hints of that terrible truth; Phractus who had dared peel apart the leaves of the Black Scrolls to confirm them; Phractus who had made Contact; Phractus who had considered the plan now laid before them. But it was Nemus who would make the decision. If there was ever a history written of these events, if there was ever a future in which a history could be written, it would be recorded that it was Nemus who would start the game, Nemus who would roll the dice, Nemus who would make the first move.

And yet, that decision was already made – for what choice did the Chancellor truly have?

Chancellor Nemus nodded. "We have decided, Phractus: let us begin..."

iii. Noon

Silver broke the surface of the water in a cloud of bubbles and spray. She wiped the salty water from her face and bobbed happily in the waves. She had been determined to have a swim before lunchtime. Turning her head, she struck out for the shore, arms curving in long strokes, legs kicking against the perfectly turquoise water. Her toes tapped the bay's soft sand and she dropped to her feet, walking through the shallows up onto the beach. She adjusted the straps of her pale swimsuit and un-clipped the snorkel and goggles to her waist, tossing them onto the sand by her towel. Mortimer glanced up from licking his rear paws to regard her with a slightly disdainful look. Silver shooed him off the towel and ran it through her hair and then wrapped it around her waist. She squinted up into the long rays of the afternoon sun and rummaged in her rucksack for her rather cool new retro-look sunglasses. No, not retro-look – real retro. She popped the genuine Ray-Bans onto her nose with a great feeling of satisfaction. Perhaps there might be an upside to being stuck in the past. Silver hoiked up her rucksack and picked up her flip-flops.

She set off back up the beach, heading towards the hotel, Mortimer padding along through the sand behind her. He'd just suddenly turned up of his own accord, meeting Silver on the beach as if it had all been planned. Silver wondered if he'd been in a fight – the fur along his back was pocked and a bit bedraggled.

Silver had no real idea what she was going to do if the Doctor couldn't fix the TARDIS. If it truly was dead, if the only way off the Earth in 1963 was by catching a ride with some other time-traveller – what would she do? Would she stay? Would she go? She shook her head. At least they had money and a place to stay now. The Royal Hotel Elizabeth sat about half a mile from the town on the bay, overlooking the long stretch of beach that curved away to the far side of the island. Surrounded by palm trees and twisted mangroves, the hotel was an elderly building that the Doctor said had been built by the British as a hospital in the eighteenth century. He recounted the fact almost as if he had been there at the time. Silver shrugged. For all she knew, he had.

All that money was a bit of a thing, wasn't it? She reckoned he must have bank accounts stashed here and there all the way across the cosmos. Wasn't there that thing about depositing a penny and then travelling forward in time a hundred years to collect the interest? Had the Doctor set up some kind of bank account in the Caribbean in 1863 just in case he ever got marooned there a hundred years later? You know what, Silver told herself, that was just about possible – just about something the Doctor would actually do. Well, anyway, she was grateful for the money. It certainly made life easier. All the Doctor had done was politely request to see the bank's manager and had then withdrawn a wallet-full of West Indian pounds, shillings and pence without a hitch – more than enough to set them up a pair of decent hotel rooms, for Silver to indulge in a little trans-temporal retail therapy, and for the Doctor to suddenly disappear on a mysterious errand of his own. She had felt smug before about packing her rucksack – now with all this money, it felt a little silly.

What had so caught his attention in the market square? Silver had the distinct impression that obscure ideas were beginning to percolate through the Doctor's mysterious mind. She hoped that was a good thing.

Stone steps led up the slope at the back of the beach. The trees closed in around her, making a dark tunnel of foliage up to the gated arch in the Hotel's garden wall. She pushed through the worn wooden door, its peeling blue paint cool to the touch. Mortimer slipped in ahead of her and snuck off into the bushes once more on another one of his own secret little missions. Something suddenly caught Silver's eye. A pair of boots. A pair of boots hanging

from the twisted tree by the door. How weird. Silver peered at the boots. They were Doc Martins – like her boots; like the boots she'd left behind in the TARDIS. How weird – to see a pair of boots just like hers. She shook her head and pushed through the garden door.

The hotel poked up out of the patioed garden, discreet tables, chairs and umbrellas tucked away in various nooks and corners. The tables were clustered with guests sitting down to lunch. The smell of grilled crab and frying fish sifted out over the chatting tables. Silver climbed up the twisting steps and across the main plaza around the hotel's pool. A heavily-tanned American dove into the artificially-blue waters. Three women draped over their sunloungers watched, laughed and gossiped. There weren't many tourists, but Silver caught the distinct whiff of dilettante wealth; these were rich people at the edge of a rich person's playground. The big double doors into the lobby gave access to a slightly musty world of old marble and fading carpets. Fans looping near the ceiling made her skin ripple with goosebumps. The old man behind reception was asleep, a portable television on the table behind him flashing black and white pictures of a parade. The sound of the old man's gentle snores followed her as she hurried up the wide, carpeted stairs.

Their rooms were up on the third floor, at the end of the corridor – the Doctor's on one corner, hers on the other. Silver banged on the door to the Doctor's room, but there was no reply. She hadn't seen him since his bank heist earlier in the day. She shook her head and went into her own room. The bathroom was a symphony in white and turquoise tile – the shower an antique from the 1920s at least. Still, she somehow managed to coax enough tepid water out of it to wash out the last of the sea-salt from her hair. By the time she was dressed, the morning warmth had matured to a hot noon sun glittering in a tropical haze beyond the long French doors to her room's balcony. A warm breeze was sifting across the sand and between the palms, bringing with it the scent of jasmine and honeysuckle.

Silver slipped into another of the morning's purchases, a skinny-fit, off-the-shoulder brown and white dress cut somewhat shorter than she would usually wear. The retro – to her, retro to her, she corrected herself – look satisfied the critical eye of her inner fashionista. There was a kind of embroidery thing going on with the material that she wasn't entirely convinced by, and she worried about the fringe-y effect on the hem, but – hey – it was the sixties, right? You had to be prepared to compromise where past fashion was concerned. It was the kind of dress she might have bought at the Waverley Market Goodwill stall round the corner from the Greyhound terminal. Her hair was a bit of a problem, though. It had gone virtually straight as a die in the heat, and they didn't seem to have invented conditioner yet. She let it fall free – what else could she do? The final touch was a loose, chunky necklace of carved nutmeg shell from the market around her neck. She hung it alongside her silver Green Man talisman and the Goddess Star on its silver chain. Kicking aside her trainers, which were way too much in this heat, she slipped on open-toed espadrilles.

Not bad, she thought, turning to check her reflection in the room's antique mirror. No one back home would credit her in a dress, perhaps – but she reckoned it suited her well enough. Peering into the mirror's cracked and peeling glass, she stroked on a dash of kohl and eyeshadow and adjusted her hooped earrings. Yeah, she told herself, not bad at all.

There was one last thing. Silver took the TARDIS key – her TARDIS key – from the pocket of her jeans and turned it over in her hands, tracing the strange shape with her fingers. Like a memory, the key seemed now alien and unknown, a forgotten thing – a relic of something that had passed by. She slipped it around her neck, and it nestled easily with the other symbols and mythical icons. Like a memory, a thing of legend and distant ages long vanished into the dust and gloom of the past. She touched it once more, sadly, tucking it into the top hem of the dress.

There was a perfunctory knock at her door. Before Silver had a chance to tell whoever it was to come in, the Doctor barged through. Something of the old fire was back in his eyes. A grim smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

“Good – good. Hoped I’d find you here.” He stopped on a sixpence and stood beside the mirror. He rubbed his hands together and adjusted the front of his waistcoat. He looked expectantly at Silver. “Well?”

Silver pulled a face. “Yes, thanks,” she replied sarcastically, knowing that wasn’t what he was asking.

That familiar puzzlement flickered across the Doctor’s face. He tut-tutted. “Well?” He repeated. “Aren’t you going to ask me what I’ve been up to all day?”

Silver raised an eyebrow. “That’s a contraction – you’re slipping.” She sighed, knowing full well what ancient comeback awaited her. “All right – what have you been up to all day?”

The Doctor grinned and snapped his fingers. “I thought you’d never ask!” He grabbed Silver and whisked her out across the hallway and into his own hotel room.

“Um...,” Silver hesitated at the doorway. The Doctor marched into the darkened room ahead of her. Silver stepped cautiously across the threshold. She looked left, right, up and down. The Doctor had been busy – although Silver hadn’t a clue what he might have accomplished. The room was draped in wire. Copper strands zig-zagged backwards and forwards across the room from one wall to the other, creating a bizarre cable net about a foot down from the high ceiling. The wire descended in skeins to what appeared to be the bed’s steel frame, partly dismantled and set up on end in the centre of the room. A spool of cable led to a stack of various electronic boxes crowded onto the antique desk against the room’s far wall. The tangy scent of ozone seeped from the wires. Sparks fluttered along the copper lengths overhead, and jumped between the springs on the bedframe.

“Well?” the Doctor insisted, opening his arms wide to encompass his handiwork. “What do you think?”

Silver leaned hard against the door, shutting it behind her. “I think housekeeping’s going to have a fit,” she mumbled.

* * * * *

Toussaint strode along the station’s corridor with thumping, deliberate steps. Police officers snapped to attention, pressing themselves up against the damp concrete walls out of his way.

He pushed through the cells, basking in the pleas and cries that burst from his prisoners. It had been a good morning. Teachers, students – the nest of union troublemakers detained at the newspaper offices; Toussaint sneered at them all. Communist agitators determined to undermine the rule of Law and Order. Toussaint would not stand for it. He stormed into the office at the far end of the building. One of his attending sergeants closed the door behind him carefully. Toussaint threw himself into the chair behind the desk and placed his baton on the desk in front of him. He surveyed the small stack of forms on the leather blotter.

“These are the charges, Sergeant?” he barked. The weasel-faced Sergeant standing to one side of the desk nodded.

Toussaint flipped through the papers. Good. Conspiracy to damage public works, conspiracy to compromise public order, resisting arrest – and all charges properly witnessed by his officers. Toussaint ran his finger down the list of the arrested. These were his enemies, he knew: the people who opposed the kind of law and order he stood for, the people

who, in agitating for freedom, democracy and independence, threatened his own private status quo.

The Sergeant coughed gently for Toussaint's attention.

The Captain narrowed his eyes. He disliked Malmaitre, but his devious efficiency had its uses. "Yes?" he growled.

"The... security volunteers are still waiting for payment," he reminded the Captain. Toussaint grunted and waved. Malmaitre correctly interpreted his boss' command and snapped his fingers at two officers by the far door. They opened it and admitted a collection of civilians – the crowd who had pelted the front of Commonwealth House earlier that morning. Several clutched bandages to their heads and nursed truncheon bruises.

Toussaint pulled a large wad of cash from a pocket. He peeled off a handful of bills one by one and threw them down on the table. He nodded to Malmaitre to distribute them. He moved to return the remaining wad to his pocket, then paused, reconsidered, and peeled of several more bills. He gestured to them.

"For the injured ones," he said, generously. He folded his hard fingers on the table. "And, Sergeant," he said to Malmaitre, his voice dangerously even. "Remind the volunteers of the clandestine nature of their employment and the consequences of breaking the terms of their engagement."

The men did not look as if they needed reminding. Toussaint nodded to them. They had done well at Commonwealth House; Sir Henry had been convinced by the performance, and that was all that mattered.

"Dismiss them," he said to Malmaitre, standing up from his desk. The volunteers shuffled backwards. "But make sure they know that they must be ready for further operations over the coming days." The volunteers left the office.

"And the man whom I shot in the raid on the newspaper offices?" Toussaint asked. "Still no sign of injury?"

Malmaitre shook his head. "No blood – not even a graze." The Sergeant dropped his voice, hesitating to mention it. "You must have missed him, Sir," he concluded, apologetically. "He is still unconscious, however," he finished hurriedly, aware that he was pushing dangerously at the edge of the Captain's professional pride.

Toussaint grunted. It didn't really matter. The docker was his prisoner now. So was Moses and the rest of his gang. They were all safely locked up out of harm's way. By hook or by crook, Toussaint said to himself, he would keep control of the island. He grabbed his baton and marched from the room, back through the cells, back to the officers waiting to conduct another raid. Nothing would stop him. Nothing and no one.

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C

hanning ticked the last of the items on the checklist and signed it. He glanced at his watch – 1:45pm – and wrote the time in the box, handing pen and clipboard back to Yeoman Rand. She took it with a smile and hurried out of the busy room, through the chatter of typewriters and teletype machines. Channing watched her go, idly sipping at his cup of lukewarm tea. Funny how even out in the tropics, you wanted real, piping-hot, tea. And funny, too, how it always seemed to go colder more quickly in the heat.

He cricked his shoulder and turned to the window. Gulls squabbled outside over scraps around the picnic tables. The girls from the typing pool sat at the table kicking their heels in the sand, huddled over their lunchboxes, earnestly discussing something. Channing's stomach rumbled. It was time for his own lunch. He wondered whether he could sign out for an hour or so and head up to the Regatta Club. Some people had taken their

lunch-break early, so as to keep the offices as fully-manned as possible. He'd seen that scrawny kid, Mendoza, leave not long after the C.O.'s speech. Channing frowned, he still didn't –

He suddenly became aware of the hubbub in the room – a change in the busy tempo of the room. People were leaving their chairs, hurrying over to a radio set up by the door. Channing scowled. They were on a tight schedule, working towards a vitally urgent deadline. There was no time to waste catching up on cricket scores. He strode over to the knot by the radio, hand already reaching to switch it off, ready to order them all back to work.

Then he caught sight of their faces and heard the announcer's voice, and the slow, awful details of the bulletin.

* * * * *

Hitomi looked at the strange block of carved stone. She shook her head. "What is it?"

The silver-haired woman in the close-fitting polycarbide combat vest shook her head. "An obvious question. Galloway didn't know. You're Culture - any suggestions?"

Hitomi walked around the block once more, running her hands over the uneven surface. It was carved from pockmarked limestone and stood just over the height of a tall man. It was rectangular, and each face was detailed with sunken panels and what looked like twin, six-paned windows high up against a cornice. On the top of the block perched a carved stone lantern. Cut into the cornice on each face were the enigmatic words: Police Public Call Box. Vines twisted around its base; moss grew out of the lines of the sunken panels. Whatever it was, it hadn't been there yesterday evening when she'd checked in with Zhao.

"How did it get here?"

Jac Zhao ran a gloved hand through her shock of silvery-white hair. She shrugged, the looping animated dragon tattoos on her broad shoulders curling and weaving along the movement of her muscles. "No idea." She tapped the readouts on a wrist-mounted scanner. "Probability curves are off the scale, though."

Hitomi frowned. "Does that mean it's something to do with the event?"

"Until Galloway finishes running his scan sequences, your guess is as good as mine." He looked up at the strange legend carved into the block's cornice. "You've spent time in-culture," she asked. "Do those words mean anything to you?"

The younger woman frowned. "Not really, Captain. I mean, the thing looks a bit like a telephone kiosk – a public comm terminal. But the design's slightly different. And why carve one out of stone and put it up here in the middle of the night? Maybe it's meant to be... art."

Zhao frowned. "Some kind of sculpture?" She regarded the block thoughtfully. "Do you think it's worth anything?"

The greenery at the edge of the overgrown plaza parted like a ripple passing across the surface of a pond. Galloway appeared, pushing through the undergrowth, swatting with irritation at the mosquitoes.

Captain Zhao looked over at Galloway. "Well? Scan complete?"

The tech nodded, frowning, a baffled look crossing his thin, gaunt face. He held up the datapad with the results.

"You're not going to believe this....," he replied slowly.

* * * * *

Silver looked up at the flickering wires and the electronic chaos the Doctor had unleashed on his hotel room. She shook her head. “What is it?”

The Doctor smiled a crafty smile. “An obvious but not unintelligent question.” Silver could detect the enthusiasm in his voice. He pointed to a pair of flickering screens on one of the electronic boxes. Wave patterns flashed across them, rising and falling, flickering stronger and weaker. “Zero-Point energy – a sort of variable wave anti-chronon bombardment. Like the background noise of cosmic radiation, but emanating from a terrestrial source.” His eyes flashed. “A nearby terrestrial source.” He tapped at a few keys. “And look at the harmonics.” A moving bar-chart of thousands of coloured cubes popped up on the screen. Silver looked at it blankly. The Doctor banged the screen with a pointing finger excitedly. “It’s a secondary Noether pattern.” Silver still looked blank. “A reversion curve extending beyond the eight prime four-vector scalar potentials – in other words: a Null-Event. Or, to be more precise, the future echo of one.”

“Can we go back and start from the bit where I asked what this was?” Silver said weakly. Sometimes the Doctor’s answers sounded as if he’d forgotten to include the middle bit – the bit that actually made sense. “I think I lost you when you said –”

“It doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter,” the Doctor grinned, waving his hands. He sat down heavily in a spindly-looking chair and leaned back, steeping his long fingers in front of his face. “What’s important is this: the Zero-Point energy that impaled the TARDIS was not a random burst bouncing around the cosmos.”

“It wasn’t?” Silver repeated.

“No – if it had been, then the reversion curve would have been contained within the four-vector potentials and not extended beyond them.”

“All of which means...,” prompted Silver, sagging onto a patched leather ottoman, leaning forward onto her knees.

The Doctor’s face became drawn and severe. The flickering electrical currents sparking along the wires overhead cast a strange, strobing light down onto his sharp features.

“The event was not natural: it was created, engineered, manipulated – caused.”

Silver suddenly realised what the Doctor was saying. “Someone did it on purpose!” The Doctor nodded. Silver caught his eye. “A trap?” A logical conclusion, but the Doctor held up a warning finger.

“We don’t know for certain that it was directed at us – only that the Null-Event was shaped by artificial means. What we do know, however, is that it hasn’t happened yet. The impact of the collision closed the TARDIS down and bounced us back into the past by a matter of, oh -” the Doctor consulted a notepad thickly calligraphed with equations that seemed to have as many symbols as numbers in them, “Ten or twelve hours or so.”

Silver turned bits and pieces of the Doctor’s incomprehensible explanations over in her head, struggling to make sense of them. Her head had begun to spin. There was a mew and a sudden shaking of the flamboyant tree outside the Doctor’s balcony. Mortimer appeared, dropping down to the bedroom’s carpet in a flurry of dislodged blossom. He trotted over and hopped up onto the desk, perching himself beside the computers. He gave them a sly look and began licking the ragged patch of fur on his shoulder. Silver frowned. He had been in a fight, there was no question of it. She stroked Mortimer gently along his cheek and turned back to the Doctor.

“Ten or twelve hours,” she repeated. “But ten or twelve hours in the future – as in, ten or twelve hours from when we arrived?”

The Doctor nodded.

“But that means –“ Silver looked at her watch – then remembered she’d left it on the bedside table in her room on board the TARDIS – and looked around the chaotic bedroom for a clock. The Doctor held up the hotel room’s alarm clock.

“Yes,” he said, tapping the round glass over the clock’s face. “We landed sometime early this morning, didn’t we? Eight o’clock or thereabouts. Ten or twelve hours from then would be sometime this evening. It’s almost two o’clock now, so that doesn’t give us much time.”

“Time?” Silver had followed his logic until then. “Time for, uh, what?”

“Time to locate the event and prevent it happening!”

Silver shook her head. “But how can we prevent it happening? It already did happen, didn’t it? I mean it made us crash here, so it must have already – wait, I mean, not ‘already’, since it’s going to happen, but I mean ‘already’ as far as it will have – I mean, will be going to have...” she trailed off, the knotted logic of time-travel defeating her grammar.

The Doctor grinned. “You’re absolutely right. The only thing to be affected thus far is us. But because we were still in-flight, in the Vortex (in flux, as it were) our present state – and, more importantly – the present state of the TARDIS, isn’t dependent on our past experience of future events.” His grin became a smug smile. “We’re Unreal - causally non-dependent,” he finished, as if that explained it. Mortimer’s ears suddenly pricked up, and his leapt from the desk and out the French windows. The flamboyant tree shook as he vanished into its branches.

Silver grappled with his explanation. “And if I can just put that into English for those of us without a Doctorate in gobbledygook, that means that if we can stop this event – whatever it is – from happening, the TARDIS won’t have been effected, and so won’t be frozen or turned to stone or whatever happened to it?” She paused, partly for breath, partly uncertain if she had managed to excavate the kernel of the Doctor’s explanation properly. “Right?” She looked up at the Doctor keenly.

“Died,” the Doctor said with solemn simplicity. “Not turned to stone or frozen – died. The TARDIS is dead, Silver.” An awful silence descended. “But,” the Doctor continued, “You’re absolutely right once again. If we can prevent the event from happening, the TARDIS will never have died. More importantly,” he said, his face pressed with urgency. “We can prevent something even worse – the potential for a viral temporal paradox spreading outwards from the event. If such a paradox gets started, then it will ultimately unravel –“ he waved his hands.

“Everything?” Silver finished quietly.

“Everything,” the Doctor concluded unhappily. Silence filled the hotel room. The Doctor slapped his palms on his knees. “But we’ve got a chance – a slim chance, but a fighting one.” He narrowed his gaze and then clapped his hands, sitting forward with a sudden warm smile.

“You were right, Silver,” he said, his eyes twinkling, the etched lines across his temples seeming to soften and fade. He seemed almost younger.

“I was?” Silver asked. “About what?”

“It’s not over – this isn’t the end of our journey.” He looked at her with that look that sometimes made Silver shiver. The warm smile spread up to his starlight grey eyes. “Where there’s life...”

Silver grinned. Yes! That was the Doctor back again.

“...there’s hope,” she finished happily.

* * * * *

Jo crouched in the shadows of the Manchineel trees, the hot damp air clinging to him like a shroud. He panted from his run and wiped sweat and dirt from his brow. The thing Soloman had held was buried in his fist, his fingers tight around the strangely rounded black plastic object. He blinked and waited, watching the road behind him that crawled up from the back of the town. No one had followed him. The police officers hadn't given chase past the laundromat's front door. Jo had barrelled out of the laundry, turned quickly and skidded along the street, crossed it in front of a honking lorry laden with sand, and then zig-zagged through the alleyways on the far side of the road, finally taking to a dirt track that climbed laboriously up the jungle-choked hills towards the mountains. He finally ran out of breath as the road twisted its way past the overgrown cemetery at the edge of the old French fort. He sought refuge in the silent, wooded shadows cloaking the ruin and the burying yard.

A black and white goat plodded between the gravestones, picking at grass and cankerweed shoots, the bell on its nodding neck clapping with every bite. A ghost-pale cockerel puffed and clucked on the top of a white limestone tomb, pecking at insects between struts. Joachim knew these animals – the domestic spirits of the graveyard; the guardians of the dead, the familiars of Papa de Baron Samedi. He had no reason to fear them – others would have crossed themselves three times in superstitious fear, but Joachim knew that Our Lady watched over him, enfolding him in the wings of Her angels. Father Ignatius always said that Our Lady saw everything.

She had watched over him at the meeting, guiding his feet and his instincts – placing the strange device that Soloman had used to fell the two police men into his hands. A gun of some kind? He glanced down at the object now, turning it over in his palm. It was a flattened tube of matte black plastic, about the length of a long altar-candle. One end was open, a curious inverted cone drilled into the flat. The other was slightly moulded to fit into the grip. Joachim folded his fingers and thumb into the soft depressions. His index finger found a slight depression. He stroked it, barely moving his finger.

There was a pop – a strange sonic envelope that hummed and snapped. A bolt of blue light shot out of the open end of the gun's tube, racing over the graveyard in the blink of an eye, blossoming around the goat. It shook and its legs folded underneath, its slit-pupiled eyes rolling up white into its sockets. The creature collapsed, immobile. The cockerel squawked and flapped its wings, clattering up in the air and vanishing into the bushes. Was the goat dead? Joachim dropped the black object in horror, his eyes wide and fixed on the crumbled animal. He crossed over to it slowly, creeping through the tangled vines. No, not dead, he realised. The goat's ribs rose and fell with slumbering breath. It was simply rendered unconscious. Stunned.

Joachim retreated back to the shadows and reclaimed the black object – the stun gun. He waited patiently, watching the goat. Twenty minutes or so passed, and then the animal twitched, flailed about, and got unsteadily back onto its legs, a bathetic and confused look passing over its base features. It wailed a disgruntled cry and tottered off rapidly between the headstones, tearing through the vines.

The stun gun was light and smooth in his grasp. Joachim stared at it with amazement. Where had Soloman found such a weapon? What was he planning to do with it? He turned the gun over in his palm. But Soloman had been arrested. Soloman had no doubt been scooped up by the Police Captain, Toussaint, and been thrown into a holding cell at the station – along with everyone else at the meeting. Along with Joachim's father...

The young man stared down at the gun, as if seeing it afresh – seeing it's potential. A sudden, dark and triumphant thought occurred to him. Joachim felt as if Our Lady's

arms were around him, and Her angels standing at his shoulder. He stepped out into the sunlight, his purpose suddenly clear.

* * * * *

“So how do these things work?” Silver asked, turning the radio-box-thing over in her hands. She paused on the stairs, hunching her rucksack onto her shoulder as the Doctor pulled out the two aerials from the top of the construction.

“Like this,” he said, moving the box from side to side. “I’ve adapted the crystals to function as a resonant wave –“

Silver held up her hand. “Whoa,” she said. “Remember: eleventh-grade science comprehension level, please,” she insisted firmly.

The Doctor sighed – but with the hint of a smile creeping across his lips. He tapped the box. “Energy. Energy waves given off by the Null-Time event.” He flicked the on switch, and a little oscilloscope screen flickered into life. A looping pattern of light flashed across the circular panel of glass. “There you go,” he said, pointing at the pattern. “The energy reading we need.”

“And this info gets beamed back to your ham radio set-up in your bedroom,” Silver said, turning on her own box.

“It is transmitted back to the main receptor, yes – but then the transmission is boosted and amplified. The more readings we take, the more precise a map of the Null-Time field we’ll generate. It won’t be a time-distortion map, unfortunately, which is what we really need, but –“ the Doctor patted his radio box, “It’s the best I can do with current technology.”

“Don’t worry,” Silver grinned, “I’m sure your mid-terms will reflect your effort and can-do attitude!”

“What would I do without your sarcasm?” the Doctor queried dryly. Silver pulled a face and shifted the rucksack on her back.

“So now, out onto the streets?”

“If you don’t mind,” the Doctor said as they continued down the worn steps towards the lobby. “We need to distribute ourselves across a fairly wide geographic area. The greater the distance between readings, the more complete our map will become. I hope that after several hours I’ll be able to download the master readouts into my unit and determine the locus of the Null-Time event. With any luck that will still give us time to physically get to the locus and try and halt the event.” He raised a finger, suddenly remembering something. “And I’ve even built a signal coder into the units,” he said, smugly. He pushed a button on his radio box, and a light flashed on Silver’s. She pushed her corresponding button and a light flashed on the Doctor’s unit.

“I’ll signal you when I’ve determined the locus,” the Doctor said. “And you can signal me if you run into any problems.”

Silver frowned. “Are you expecting me to?” she asked, suspiciously.

“No,” the Doctor said blithely, “But you never know. Anything can happen...,”

“...And usually does,” Silver muttered.

They headed past a group of guests huddled around the front desk and headed out into the sunlight. Silver looked back at the knot of foreign travellers and tourists gathered at the front desk. They all seemed to be glued to the portable television. What were they so keen on catching a glimpse of? Silver wondered. The moon landings? Nah – that didn’t happen until 1971; even she knew that.

Out on the street, the Doctor was already heading off down the street, his eyes fixed to his radio box. Silver sighed, pulled her unit from her bag and set off in the opposite direction, towards the market square. The dark-mirror eyes of an alley-cat flashed at her from behind a shadow-draped pile of rubbish. It prompted Silver to wonder where Mortimer had gotten to.

Interlude

The Matrix chamber was unpleasant. Phractus had expected something with more sense of its own importance, somehow. The vaulted half-sphere was dark and crawled with unnatural shadows. Sounds slipped and scuttled in the deep recesses between the heavy pilasters and columns. Phractus sensed voices nibbling at the edge of his senses, unpleasant, half-heard screams and laughter, fragments of pain and joy, little splinters of experience echoing in the cold, whispering darkness. The vaulted space smelled dank and musty, as forgotten as a tomb, as neglected as a desert.

In the centre of the vault, surrounded by thick-based, fluted columns, stood a single block of green-black mirrored stone. Slow, muted lights winked on and off on its slanted top surface. Phractus followed the Chancellor across the dusty flagstones towards the centre of the Matrix chamber.

The shadows behind the control block parted, and the oleaginous form of Keeper Peldin rolled out from the gloom. He wore a set of belts around his dark green robe, his cap pulled snugly down over his balding pate. He blinked his fat-rimmed eyes, and his jowls wobbled as he eased his bulk out of the darkness. Peldin wave his pudgy hand.

“I am ready, Your Excellency,” he wheezed.

Phractus glanced uneasily around the chamber. Would his Zero module cover such a space? Peldin seemed to anticipate his concern.

“Have no fear, Cardinal,” he said thickly, “The excrescence from the Matrix will cover our conversations as effectively as a Zero Generator. We cannot be sensed, scanned or overheard here.”

Chancellor Nemus nodded, leaning on his staff. “You say you are ready, Keeper?”

Peldin stroked the control block, indicating three circuit wafers. “I am, Chancellor. At your instruction, I have identified a suitable, pre-existing time-space event into which we can insert the Null-Time event.” He spun his pudgy palm across a command ball, and a holoscopic image shimmered into life above the block. A titanic craft drifted across a whirling miasma of space. “A Bhargav refugee ship, drifting damaged through para-space, fleeing the Final War with the Xalm. The ship intersects with the orbit of planet Earth relative date 314.343.04. A small fusion reaction on the planet Earth, emanating from a submarinautical transport engine, destroys the Bhargav ship, resulting in a temporal microfracture of magnitude 842 – relative, that is.”

The Chancellor frowned. “And an event of that magnitude will be sufficient to disguise the placement of the Null-Time event and the passage of the Time Scoop?”

“Once the event has secured his TARDIS, I can use my agents to guide the Time-Scoop without detection. Have no fear, Chancellor,” Peldin’s eyes narrowed in his flabby face. “No one will know that the Doctor will soon be returned to Gallifrey...”

iv. Afternoon

Carol Merriweather bit her lip and clutched the phone closer to her ear. “No, Jim – I haven’t seen him, not since he left for the Regatta Club before lunch.” The voice on the other end of the phone rumbled. “I told you: he ordered the driver to drop him on one of the back roads and to meet him at the Club. He hasn’t showed up. He was supposed to have lunch with Peter DeVries, but he didn’t turn up. Peter phoned me about an hour ago – just after... just after we heard the news from America.”

It was all over the island. The reports had started coming in just before two o’clock. At first it was a whispered rumour, a dark sliver of shocking, unsubstantiated gossip. Then, as radios were tuned in and televisions switched on, the rumour became fact. The official channels knew no more than the newscasters and the reporters broadcasting their scant facts across the airwaves.

“I had to cancel his afternoon meetings –“ Merriweather bit back a little half-sob. Jim’s voice came down the line, calm and light and even.

“Listen, Carol, don’t worry. I’ll phone ‘round and see if he’s dropped in on some of the lads. You know what Sir H. can be like – head in the clouds.”

Merriweather nodded. “Yes,” she admitted. “That’s always possible, I suppose.”

“In the meantime,” Jim suggested. “Why don’t you think about up to the house? Jill will be back from the school in half an hour or so – they’re closing early today because of the news from America. Instead of waiting around town, you can wait for him to turn up at ours. I’ll get someone to pick you up. What do you say?”

“Thank you, Jim,” Merriweather managed a little smile. “You’re a brick.” She put the phone down.

Yes. Henry was upset about the disturbance this morning. He probably forgot all about the meetings. Merriweather dabbed at the corners of her eyes with an embroidered hanky. She’d lock up Commonwealth House and drive up to the Tarrant’s villa – that would be best.

She looked out between the slats of the venetian blinds, out at the near-empty street. A man in shirtsleeves walked by, his attention locked on a double-aeriated transistor radio. No doubt he was listening to the latest news reports from America. The market was virtually deserted. You could almost feel the shock in the air.

He is dead, murdered by an assassin. The world mourns. The world waits...

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The prison was a drab block of stone and concrete at the end of the long narrow wooden line of the police station, a perfunctory coat of paint blistered of its worn walls. Around it, officers stood in little groups in the well of shade at the front of the station, their faces hard and suspicious, their gazes combing hot dust the empty boulevard. The long street was virtually empty. Everyone had gone, vanished into bars and homes, crowded around radios and television sets, waiting with stunned, bated breath for the latest news bulletin. The radio in front of the Desk Sergeant crackled. ... have confirmed that death was pronounced at 1:30, Central Standard U.S. time. At Bethesda Naval hospital, doctors are preparing...

Captain Toussaint stared out unblinking from the dark shadows of the station lobby. His hands were clasped behind his back, twisting the ebony and silver baton in his grasp. His eyes were almost lost under the jut of his brow, but his pupils reflected back the hot, empty streets outside – every detail surveyed, every flicker of motion recorded. A new poster had been plastered over the wall of the rum shack opposite: Freedom Now! Unity

Now! A line of daubed red paint beneath it bearing a single, treacherous word: Strike. Toussaint knew it had to be coming. He could feel it in his bones – the first palpable stirrings of malcontent. The troublemakers who had been whispering their snake-tongued sedition in the dark would now be encouraged by the terrible news from America. They would suddenly imagine that the time for revolution was now. They would seize their opportunity, make their desperate grasp for power under cover of any hint of leaderlessness or confusion. The forces of Law and Order had to remain vigilant. It would be up to men like Toussaint to preserve domestic security in the face of Communist agitation. It was up to Toussaint to preserve the future.

He paced up and down in front of the heavy desk. He felt as if he were waiting, as if someone other than he were about to make a first move. Toussaint slapped the baton against his boot with every step, grinding his teeth and pausing every so often to survey the desolate streets outside. Nothing moved save a black cat slinking between the shadows on the other side of the road.

The air shuddered. There was a silent, heart-stopping explosion. The ground shook. Toussaint was thrown to the floor. The lamp on the desk behind him flared and burst, showering thin glass across the floor. The Desk Sergeant collapsed backwards on his chair. There was a terrific sound of crashing stone and crumbling concrete. Toussaint half-staggered, half-crawled to the front door of the station, his fingers scrabbling at the doorframe for support and at the holster on his belt for his pistol.

The front of the police station sagged. Stone and concrete tumbled slowly into piles of scattered rubble across the gravel of the station's front yard. Dust billowed. A Landrover lay tipped onto one side, pushed over by the force of whatever blast had brought down the front wall of the building. Leaking petrol from the vehicle suddenly caught fire, and a streamer of black smoke twisted up into the sky. The prison block gaped open, a ragged hole torn through stone, mortar and cement. Four police officers lay prone beyond the gathering spread of rubble, moaning and mumbling as a slow billow of dust rolled over them. The wooden beams of the station roof hung splintered into the dark hole, shingles dropping one by one onto the pile of stone.

Toussaint's jaw dropped. His mind spun. Had someone thrown a bomb at the station? Or had someone rammed it with a truck? His eyes blurred as he pulled himself to his feet, trying to figure out what had just happened. He shouted, his voice hoarse and catching in his throat. Behind him, the Desk Sergeant lurched out from behind the desk, pushing his cap straight on his head. Toussaint turned to him and barked a hoarse command to grab a rifle.

Figures appeared in the dark hole leading to the remains of the prison. The prisoners!

Whatever caused it, Toussaint now knew this was nothing more than a simple prison break. He could see Walker Moses picking his way up over the pile of broken stone, his glasses and tie askew. And behind him, Garvyn Turner, the docker, the boy and his father all stumbling out of the ruined block. The fallen officers sprawled in the gravel were beginning to recover, finding their feet and turning to face the gaping ruins of the block behind them. Toussaint bellowed at them, finding his voice and shouting at them to halt the prisoners. He pulled his pistol from his holster and pointed it at the struggling knot of escapees. There was another soundless blast, and a wave of blue light shot out and struck the wooden veranda columns next to Toussaint, bursting them into a cloud of splinters. An invisible blow spun the Captain backwards into the Desk Sergeant as the balcony creaked and tumbled to the ground.

* * * * *

Soloman threw himself at the boy and tore the sonic blaster from his stunned hands. As glad as he was to have recovered it, the child had wreaked havoc on the prison block, fragmenting the wall and blowing apart the steel doors with random blasts. He had no concept of how to control the weapon. Soloman wrestled it from the boy's grasp before he killed someone. On the other side of the courtyard, the front veranda of the police station sagged into a cloud of sawdust and dry, splintered wood. The police captain appeared to have been hurled back into the building. Soloman quickly appraised the situation. The local political situation seemed to be deteriorating rapidly. He wondered whether it had anything to do with the death of the tribal leader to the north. He didn't understand the complex clan allegiances that had governed the ancient world; he only knew that the meeting this morning was a probability nexus, and that Zhao wanted someone there to take detailed readings. Soloman had obtained the readings. That part of the job was done. Being shot during a raid by the local security was exactly the kind of hazard he should have expected in operations in such primitive eras – only this time, Soloman had failed to anticipate it. The projectile bullets had been halted by his inertial shield, but the shield's energy dissipation had knocked him out. When he finally came to and found himself locked up, the only thing that made him feel any more an amateur was discovering that he had somehow managed to lose his sonic blaster.

And now to find it again – in the hands of a child!

A shot rang out across the yard. Another hazard. Soloman's fellow-prisoners were beginning to absorb the reality of their newly-found freedom. They were running. Good, Soloman thought. They were sensible men, then. But the local security operatives were also quickly taking stock of the situation. They had issued weapons and were using them. These were the ubiquitous projectile devices that were the standard offensive weaponry of the period. Soloman's inertial shield was enough to slow down to manageable speeds the impact of one or two more impacts, but a volley of projectiles could overwhelm it – at that point Soloman would be as vulnerable as any of the unshielded primitives around him.

They obviously realised their vulnerability, and were seeking cover. The boy stood beside Soloman, still in shock. He was beginning to shake. A projectile ricochet whined across the stone. Soloman raised his stunner. Chikusho! The boy had drained the recharge unit. Not enough power for a proper shot yet. Soloman pocketed the sonic blaster and grabbed the boy by the shoulder.

"We have to get under cover – now!"

Two more shots cracked their way. One projectile struck the fallen stones. A shard of rock flew upwards from the bullet-strike, narrowly missing the child. Soloman realised he had to act. He grabbed the boy and skidded down the pile of rubble with him in tow. He pulled in around the corner of a wooden building. A grey cat scooted away from the wall. Soloman could hear shouting and more shots beyond the pile of prison-wall rubble. There were civilians coming down the street, pulled in by the noise.

"Baka-da!" Soloman muttered. It hardly made any difference any more. He had to get back to the fort; Captain Zhao would need his readings. He took a step around the corner of the building. The local security goons were rushing all over the place, firing wildly at anything that moved. Soloman cursed long and hard.

He dragged the boy up to his feet. "Run!" he hissed, pushing the boy down the alleyway. The kid stumbled off. Soloman had to believe he would be okay. He couldn't take responsibility for anyone other than himself and the team. There was no time for sentiment; he had to look after his own. The indigenous locals weren't anything to do with

him. A shot whined past and Soloman felt a shearing blaze of pain against his thigh. He twisted and fell, the bullet tearing through his failing shield. Blood spat down his leg. The graze was deep and ragged, and painful. Soloman shouted, clutching his wounded leg. That was it. He had to go - now. Down the alleyway, the boy collapsed against a wall, looking back at Soloman with wide, frightened eyes.

“Run!” Soloman shouted at the boy. He cursed again and lurched off in the opposite direction, his boots pounding the dust, his wounded leg dragging behind him.

* * * * *

The Doctor rested on the fallen tumble of mossy rubble and set the little scanning unit beside him. He smoothed out the discarded newspaper on his lap, his long, tapering fingers resting on the printed date. November 22nd, 1963. Surely it couldn't be a coincidence? Not with the readings he was seeing? No, he sighed to himself, it couldn't be a coincidence. On an official plane, a man stood next to a widow, blood spots still on her coat, right hand raised before him, and took an oath. Fear stained the air, the consequences of the terrible event still uncertain.

He had scented it down in the market-place, an unmistakable tang, a cat-like whisper on the Time Winds, a disturbance flickering on the edge of his senses. Nine lifetimes of travel gave one a certain sensitivity, a certain kind of perception. They were here, of that he was certain. Their paw-prints were dotted all over events. He could feel the characteristic twists of their devious, dubious little plans and schemes. The very air carried the whiff of their convoluted and sly manipulations, their secret duplicities. There was something disturbing about the lack of subtlety in their insertion into this place and time, the absence of tact and almost laughably basic attempts at concealment. If he hadn't had been so distracted by the TARDIS' fatal collision, he would have spotted their roughshod set-up immediately.

The Doctor refolded the newspaper and slipped it into his pocket. He had, as someone had once said, a very bad feeling about all this...

* * * * *

Silver plucked at the top hem of her dress, shifting her rucksack to a more comfortable position. Almost forgotten in her hands, the little scanner winked and beeped, taking its readings. She stared at the wooden shack perched on the back edge of the beach. It was a pretty ordinary shack – a cobbler's shack, with brightly painted scenes of black men sitting around a long table laden with food, a doubtful-looking lion at one end. The shutters of the shop were down, and rows of sandals and slippers were laid out along the wooden panels. Behind them, in the darkness of the hut, Silver could hear the cobbler tap-tap-tapping away on yet another pair. But it wasn't the shoes that caught and held Silver's gaze; it wasn't the brightly-painted scenes daubed onto the hut walls that made her blink and wonder if she had somehow gotten a touch of sunstroke. She slid her Ray-Bans down to the end of her nose, just to check.

It was the back wall of the hut, the un-painted clapboard wall that faced out towards the beach, the wall partially obscured by crowding palm-fronds, the wall with three white roundels set into it. TARDIS roundels.

Silver stared at the roundels, then turned sharply on her heels. She needed to find the Doctor, and fast.

* * * * *

The Doctor squinted through the dappled shade, wishing not for the first time that he still carried a hat. Or sunglasses. He'd had a good old walk, though. He turned his attention to the scanner and the readings. Silver had clearly been all over town and up and down the beaches to take her readings. The Doctor smiled at the evidence of her persistence. He, however, had let that strange, niggling instinct whispering at the back of his head since the morning guide him up – up into the hills... and back up to the fort. He had wandered back up the road that had originally led them into Port Elizabeth that morning, passing by little houses half-eaten up by the encroaching jungle. Each one fought a constant battle with creeper and tree-root to retain its independence from the inexorable choke of greenery. Stone and wood houses clung onto the sides of the dirt road, small field hacked out behind them studded with carefully-tended banana trees and lines of corn. Goats and dogs and donkeys shared the cleared land. Shaded, suspicious faces watched the Doctor as he passed.

He thought he heard the sound of padding cat-paws in amongst the tangled trees and glimpsed their dark-mirrored eyes tracking him.

He turned the scanner over in his hands and almost smirked with his own cleverness. The device worked perfectly – but one could almost say he had built it too well. In a sense, there was almost too much data. He had his readings, yes. He had Silver's, too. But data is not an answer in and of itself. The map of the Null-Event was emerging slowly through the multiple readings. And there was something else there, too – not that he was entirely sure what it was. Not yet. Data flickered through the little scanning unit sitting in his lap, relayed from the primitive lash-up in his bedroom. Patterns were emerging – the Doctor could see them. The readings revealed the scattered Null-Time energy, the pre-event fallout that announced the oncoming disaster. The readings were like a shout, a war-cry. But their very loudness concealed. Behind the trumpet-blast of the Null-Time event and its interleaved networks of possibility; behind the complex web of events and circumstances that were slowly, inexorably meshing together; behind the ticking causality that pressed on, second by second, towards that future conclusion, coalescing from potential to actual with each inevitable moment – there was something else.

The Doctor shouldered his scanner and jumped up from his temporary seat. The haphazard tiers of ruined fortress walls climbed up the volcanic spine above him. A few more minutes and he would be at its summit. He'd find them up at the summit, no doubt - in the decaying metal lighthouse; that would suit their particular brand of arrogance. The Doctor grimaced. He had thought about collecting Silver before heading up to the fort, but decided against it. He knew it was patronising to think it, but for all her experiences, Silver had no defences against them. He didn't relish her falling under their darkly dubious influence.

They would no doubt choose the moment of their confrontation, and the Doctor would have to face them alone. Without the TARDIS at his back, he felt distinctly under-equipped. Never mind: they would have answers – they'd better have answers. But to be honest, he told himself angrily, there was only one question they needed to answer: what in the name of the Untempered Schism did they think they were doing here?

* * * * *

Nelson replaced the phone in its cradle. He looked up at the senior officers gathered on the far side of his office.

“That was Henderson at the F.O. – it's been confirmed, I'm afraid.”

“Dead?” Collins asked. The Commodore nodded.

“Good God,” whispered Tyrell. Channing shook his head. It was almost too much to take in. For a few long moments the room was silent, the sound of the waves outside slipping in through the screened window.

Channing voiced the question that was on everyone’s lips. “And what about the Spearhead? Did they say whether we should proceed?”

Commodore Nelson nodded. “Yes.” There was almost a sigh of relief that whispered through the room. As terrible as the American news was, no one wanted to call off the countdown now. Not with only six hours to go.

The Commodore sighed. “Henderson also gave me a warning: things may yet become worse.” He held up his hand at the sudden hubbub. “Yes – worse. Rumours are circulating that the gunman was a member of the Communist party. Rumours suggesting that the Secret Service believes this may be a Communist plot, hatched possibly in Cuba, using a fifth-column of disaffected liberal sympathisers in the United States. The F.O. are taking these rumours seriously, and have suggested that there may be repercussions for H.M., NATO, Commonwealth and other western interests in the Americas. Henderson implied that they are sufficiently concerned about the safety of all operations in the Caribbean to order embarkation of troops and vessels in sensitive areas to guard against the risk of opportunistic political unrest.”

“Is the F.O. seriously suggesting that there’s going to be some kind of... Americas-wide Communist revolution as a result of this tragedy?” Tyrell asked, incredulously.

Nelson shrugged. “Possibly. Everything seems to be in a state of flux at the moment,” he replied. “In any case, Henderson has contacted Commonwealth Naval Command and agreed with them that we should proceed with our timetable absolutely. And once the reactor has been initialised, the Spearhead is to depart port immediately and take up a position off-shore until the situation is more stable. These may become desperate times, Gentlemen.” He turned to Channing. “We need mobilisation of the crew at once. I want them on board the moment we have a green light from the reactor. Launch will take place at no later than T+1.”

Channing raised his eyebrows. “One hour to load the crew and prepare for a trial run?”

“Make as ready as you can between now and then,” Nelson ordered, “But I don’t want Spearhead in dock if there’s any possibility of trouble.”

“Aye, Sir,” Channing saluted, heading for the door.

Channing pulled up his office phone as he finished giving Nelson’s orders to his two staff Lieutenants. He dialled Hitomi’s number. It rang and rang. No answer. Channing bit his lip, setting the phone down on the cradle. It rang almost as soon as he had replaced it – he scooped it up, hoping for Hitomi’s voice.

“Channing. Is that you, Hitomi?”

“No, John – it’s Jim Tarrant. Listen, old man, I’ve had a call from Carol Merriweather over at Commonwealth House. She says Sir Henry’s gone missing...”

* * * * *

Silver felt rather than heard it. That was wrong - she knew that much. It felt like an earthquake, but it was completely silent. Silver had done enough time-travelling to know when to listen to her instincts, and those spidey-senses were tingling like a school’s-out-for-summer bell. Whatever had caused the soundless explosion, it had very un-1960s written all over it. The sound – the wave? - had come from the centre of town, back towards the

hotel. Silver trotted along the road. It was weird – the town was almost totally deserted, leaving the skulking cats in command of the streets. She'd caught sight of people in the back rooms of the bars and rum shacks gathered around radios and television sets. What had happened? Some bad news? Silver still couldn't think of any significant event from 1963 – beyond her useless music trivia, that is, and she really didn't think people were crowded together to listen to "Please Please Me" getting to number one. She wondered if it had anything at all to do with the roundels on the hut wall. What was that all about? She asked herself.

But the streets were filling up a bit now. Now one, now two – now half-a-dozen worried, curious faces had emerged from shadowy bars and back-rooms. Other people had heard – or felt, perhaps – the weird explosion, and were clearly coming out to see what was going on. There were proper sounds now, too. There was a rumbling and cracking and grinding that sounded for all the world like a building falling down. People began to shout and run down the street. A thin column of black smoke began to rise up into the cloudless sky, twisting through the afternoon heat. Suddenly there were other sounds: whip-like cracks that snapped through the air like the pops of firecrackers. But Silver knew they weren't firecrackers. They were shots. Gunshots. She ducked, instinctively. Other people ducked, too. Suddenly the crowd began to splinter, a strange herd-panic scattering them into alleyways and off the main road. Silver ran down a side-street. The shots were coming faster now. She skirted around the back of a grocery and liquor store and caught a glimpse of the edge of the market square. Smoke and rubble defaced the front of the police station. Officers were gathered outside the crumbled, collapsed entrance to the building, firing their rifles at whatever targets they could find. Silver couldn't tell what had happened. Had someone tried to break out of jail? Or rob a bank? All she knew was that it wasn't a smart place to hang around. She ran down the street towards the dock road, espadrilles pounding against the concrete and cobbles underfoot. Behind her, the crowd also began to disperse – but there were angry shouts now, too: the sound of the crowd beginning to find its voice.

Silver skidded to a halt in front of the hotel, panting in the heat and looking back over her shoulder. Guests had gathered on the wide steps, concerned faces staring down the road into the centre of town. The manager was doing his best to reassure them – and bring them back inside. Staff were swinging the heavy iron gates at the foot of the drive closed. Silver nipped through the gap. A grey cat hurried out of her way, its dark eyes flashing. Silver glanced over her shoulder again. Smoke was rising from the town. Clearly not all was well in Port Elizabeth tonight - well, obviously. Silver wished she knew what was going on – the Doctor would know, of course. She wondered if he was back yet. She wondered, too, if she'd taken enough readings. How long had she been out for? Surely between the two of them they'd have enough to complete the time-map or whatever it was the Doctor had been talking about. She shivered. She certainly didn't want to hang around while this particular chunk of paradise descended into Banana Republic-style chaos.

Silver pushed through the crowd of tourists gathered at the top of the steps and into the cool of the lobby. A woman in a triangular-fronted floral bathingsuit and beach-robe muttered something as Silver passed. The half-heard words stopped Silver in her tracks. She grabbed at the woman's sleeve.

"What? What did you just say?"

* * * * *

"Missing?" Commodore Nelson repeated, his voice worried.

“So Jim Tarrant said, Sir,” Channing confirmed. “Said he went off to the Regatta Club for lunch and never came back.”

The Commodore drummed his fingers on his desk. Tyrell and Collins exchanged glances. Sir Henry missing at a time like this: Communist plot? Or drunken mishap?

“The crew orders have been given, Sir,” Channing continued. “Sergeant Richards and Warrant-Officer Frazier are supervising embarkation preparations. Perhaps,” he suggested, “I should nip over to Commonwealth House and have a quick chat with Ms. Merriweather. Clear this up.” After all, he thought, who else on the island would bother to go looking for the old soak?

Nelson stoked his chin. “Not a bad thought, Commander. Take a couple of Marines with you – just in case there’s trouble.” He turned to Tyrell. “Take charge of the crew until Channing returns, Lieutenant.” Tyrell saluted.

“I’ll be as quick as I can, Sir,” Channing reassured the Commodore. Nelson looked out the window. Over across the flat horizon of the sea, dark clouds were gathering. There was rain on its way. He felt the weight of his own words from lunchtime. History was happening around them. The launch of the Spearhead suddenly felt very small. Would an even greater future swallow it – and them – up? Nelson suddenly felt very old and very tired. He was so close – so close to accomplishing something great, so close to achieving everything he had ever set out to achieve. He felt history and destiny – great twinned, monstrous angels – at his shoulders, and he shivered. It was not a gentle feeling. He looked up at Channing, the man in whose hands Nelson now sensed the future seemed to rest.

“Don’t take any chances, John,” he said quietly.

* * * * *

The Director turned the key in the lock and banged the steel gate firmly.

“There you are – locked.”

Garvyn peered at the grille. Beyond the gate, the boilers ticked themselves cool, the turbines spun into silence.

“And no one can restart them without getting through this door?” Garvyn asked.

Carlos Lopez straightened up. He was a tall man with wide shoulders. He had worked for Westinghouse in Nicaragua. He’d also been a party organiser for the FSLN, fleeing the country after the death of Somoza. His wore his socialist credentials proudly.

“No one can restart them without first getting through me,” he stated firmly.

Garvyn smiled darkly and nodded. “Then the town will remain without power until Toussaint has been... dealt with. That man is poison.”

Lopez nodded. “What about the Federation Representative?”

The burly plantation overseer shrugged. “We’ll put our demands to him and the Commonwealth Commissioner once Toussaint is out of the way. After that – well, we’ll have to see.” Garvyn glanced through the tall power-plant windows. Almost two hundred people were gathered outside the building – plantation workers, overseers, salt-labourers, diggers in the sand-pits and the limestone quarries. And more were coming. The news of Garvyn’s arrest had spread like wildfire. Toussaint had underestimated the island’s workers, Garvyn thought with grim satisfaction.

“The revolution begins now,” Garvyn said. Lopez shook his hand. Outside, the crowd rumbled. Inside the power plant, a dark-eyed cat watched from the shadows.

* * * * *

Commonwealth House glowed in the afternoon sun, pale marble and bleached limestone a shimmer of white against the darker, muddled shadow of the town. Carol Merriweather sat alone and silent in her small office. The power had gone, and the fan on top of the filing cabinets had coughed and spun to a halt, leaving the air in the office heavy, hot and stale. There was still no sign of Sir Henry. There had been no more sounds since the explosion; the streets were quiet. Policemen roamed the pavements, batons swinging. Some of them held rifles or pistols. Merriweather could hardly believe that things had turned so ugly so quickly. Beyond the quay, out over the still, watery horizon, dark clouds gathered.

A sharp rapping cut through the silence of the office. The front door. It would be Jim or one of the crew from the Club. Merriweather hurried into the marble-floored lobby. A dark shadow filled the glass panes of the front door. It wasn't Jim. It was Toussaint, his baton against the newly-repaired window glass. Merriweather hesitated, her pace slowing. Behind the heavy bulk of the Police Captain were two armed sergeants. She fumbled with the key, unlocking the door and opening it cautiously. Toussaint pushed both leaves open and advanced into the lobby. Merriweather backed away. His clothes were dusty and scarred with tears. Blood streaked down from cuts on his forehead, marring his dark skin.

"Where is Sir Henry?" the Captain barked. His small eyes narrowed, glancing suspiciously up and down the hallway. "I need to speak with him."

Carol was acutely aware of a sharp, breathless edge to Toussaint's demand. "I – I'm sorry, Captain," she said, as calmly as she could manage. "Sir Henry... is not here at the moment."

Toussaint's lip curled. "Not here?" he repeated. His hands gripped the ebony baton, fingers picking at the silver cap. "Why not? Where is he?"

Merriweather swallowed, taking an unconscious further step backwards. The two armed sergeants bullied their way through the open door. Merriweather stood in the shadow of the three police officers. "He – he's been called away. Urgently," she said, unwilling to confess to the brutish Captain that Sir Henry had vanished. Somehow she knew Sir Henry would approve.

The Police Captain snarled. "You will tell me where he has gone!" His eyes flashed with unpleasant light, his wide nostrils ticked.

"I'm sorry, Captain," Merriweather bit her lip. "I can't – I really can't."

"Tell me, woman!" Toussaint bellowed. "I need Sir Henry! I need his authority!" He leaned close, pushing his sweating face close to Merriweather. "Do you know what is happening out there?" He jerked his baton in the direction of the street. "That beast Garvyn Turner is bringing his Communist rats out of the hills. They are marching on the town! They blew up the prison! Do you know what they will do, woman? Do you know what happened in Cuba? They will burn us! Those peasants are like animals!" He pointed up at the still fans and the dark lightbulbs. "Where is the electricity? They have stormed the power-plant – cut us off. Can you doubt that the director of the plant is swinging at this moment from the end of a noose?" he spat. His face shook. "Tell me where Sir Henry is! Tell me! Tell me!" he shouted.

Merriweather sobbed and stumbled back. "I – I –"

"Arrest her!" Toussaint screamed at his officers. They moved forward eagerly. Merriweather tripped on the edge of a table and fell to one knee.

"Please, Captain, this is –" she started, dropping her purse.

The officers grabbed Merriweather by her arms and pulled her to her feet, dragging her through the double doors and out onto the steps.

"Miss Merriweather?"

Carol looked down at the sun-drenched street in front of her. A tall black figure stood in the dust, robe whispering in the hot breeze blowing in from the dark, stormy sea.

“Father?”

Father Ignatius stepped forward, into the gateway of Commonwealth House. Behind him, a knot of Doctors and nurses carried stretchers bearing the wounded away from the police station. He held out his hands.

“Captain Toussaint – this must stop. Now,” the elderly priest said firmly. Behind him, the stretcher party paused, silent, eyes watching the drama unfold.

“Back off, Priest!” snarled Toussaint, waving his baton. Father Ignatius took another step forward, his dark sandals on the lowest step of Commonwealth House. The police officers released Merriweather and raised their rifles with a clatter. Father Ignatius raised his hands, his eyes clear and unafraid.

“Do you really want this, Captain?” he asked softly. The rifles didn’t waver. “There is no need for this violence,” Father Ignatius said, taking one more step. “Choose to end this now.” He took another step. “Call off your men. Talk to Garvyn. No one wants more bloodshed.”

Toussaint panted, his eyes narrow, darting down to the street. More people had gathered behind the stretcher party. The police officers shifted nervously, looking to Toussaint for orders. Father Ignatius took one more step. The rifles twitched.

“I said: back off, Priest,” Toussaint hissed.

There was a sudden roar and a screech of tyres. A Royal Navy Landrover pulled up on the street. The attention of the soldiers was suddenly broken. Father Ignatius leaned up quickly, reaching for Carol. One of the rifles flared, and the crack of a shot rang out. Father Ignatius jerked and fell backwards, slipping and falling down the steps. Merriweather screamed. The crowd roared, the stretcher parties hurried for cover. A grey cat bolted through the House garden. Toussaint shouted. The officers spun their rifles from side to side in panic. Merriweather rushed down the stairs to the bloodstained body of the Priest crumpled at the foot of the steps. The shocked crowd retreated and parted as Channing and three armed Marines rushed across the street. Channing knelt with Merriweather. Father Ignatius blinked up at him. Channing pressed at the pooling blood on the Priest’s chest.

“Get him into the Landrover,” Channing barked at the Marines. They lifted the Priest. “Go with him, Carol,” Channing said. Merriweather rushed after the Marines. Toussaint hurtled down the steps.

“You’re all under arrest,” he foamed, waving his baton.

“Don’t be a bloody idiot,” Channing snapped. The police officers stood at the gates of Commonwealth House, their rifles covering the darkening, angry crowd. It was growing – fast. Channing could hear the whispers spreading the news of the Priest’s shooting. Things were getting beyond ugly. Toussaint turned to the crowd.

“Disperse! Back to your homes – all of you!” he shouted, waving his baton. “That’s an order! Disperse!”

The crowd stood still. Then, organically, like the slow spread of a pool of water, they began to move forward.

“Disperse! Disperse!” Toussaint bellowed. Beside him, the police officers wavered. They lowered the muzzles of their rifles and scooted back in time with the crowd’s advance. The slow press flexed in a sudden surge. The police officers pull-back became a retreat. A wave of anger surged through the line of faces. A murmur coursed through it, becoming a low, hot rumble of voices. The police officers broke into a backwards trot, and then a run, their retreat becoming a rout.

“Disperse! Disperse!” Toussaint shrieked, pulling out his pistol and firing wildly into the air. He looked around for his officers, now tearing off down the road. The pistol shots jerked the crowd to a halt, and then, finding renewed anger, they burst forward once more. Stones flew through the air. The angry murmur now swelled to the baying of a mob. Toussaint fired, but his shots had no more effect. The Landrover’s engine roared into life.

“Get in, Captain!” Channing called, now acutely aware that some imperceptible line had been crossed. If the crowd got hold of Toussaint they would tear him to pieces. “Get in!”

The cold, desperate logic of his position suddenly enveloped Toussaint. He dropped his pistol and his baton and threw himself at the moving Landrover, his hat flying off under the charge of the mob behind. Channing let the clutch slip and the Landrover jerked forward, speeding off to the dock road. Behind, the mob roared and gathered new momentum. Channing watched them make for the police station.

* * * * *

Silver rushed up the stairs as the lights overhead flickered out. She felt stupid – and guilty, which was even more stupid. But she felt like she should have remembered, and that somehow it was all the more worse for having not. Of course she should have known; of course she should have remembered what made 1963 important. How could she have forgotten? She bit her lip. Stupid, stupid girl. Stupid, stupid, stupid – worried about dresses and beaches and crap when she should have been paying attention; should have been worrying about the really important stuff. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

She threw open the door to the Doctor’s bedroom.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she shouted, weird tears catching in her throat. She had no idea why it made her upset. From her point of view, of course, it had already happened – she already knew the consequences of it all; she’d seen JFK and watched that episode of *The X-Files*. Would anyone in 1963 guess that today’s events would become one of the future’s biggest conspiracy theories? Bizarrely, she knew exactly what her parents were both doing at this exact moment. They’d told her when that Oliver Stone film came out. Her Dad was in D.C. His whole office expected the Russians to drop a bomb at any moment. He said he’d spent most of the next twenty-four hours praying he wouldn’t die in some pointless atomic holocaust. Her Mom would be right now milling around Washington Square Arch in Greenwich Village, crying and lighting candles. Apparently she’d stayed there for four days. She’d told Silver once it felt like the future had died. Maybe it was those memories that made her feel all choked up – after all, for her this was all history, history so ancient it only existed in films and TV shows.

The bedroom was silent and shrouded in darkness. The Doctor’s bedspring computer was a dead silhouette against the sunlight streaking through the French windows. Silver slammed the lightswitch. No power. How long had it been out? Did this mean that all the walking around she’d done taking readings had been for nothing. Anyway, the Doctor clearly wasn’t here. Presumably he was still out somewhere.

Silver picked her way through the mess to the balcony. The afternoon sunlight was fading under the darkness of an oncoming storm. Clouds had gathered out to sea. The first flashes of lightning were beginning to spark on the horizon. A drumroll of distant thunder rumbled in from the advancing storm. Silver gripped the iron railing and bowed her head in the hot sunlight, still feeling foolish and sad.

“Oh, Doctor,” she sighed. “You should have told me...” She flicked half-formed tears from the corners of her eyes, embarrassed at being upset about something that happened nearly twenty-five years before she was born. She wasn’t sure why it seemed to matter, but

it did. She unlooped the scanner from her shoulder and set it down on one of the musty ottomans.

“I wouldn’t have wanted you to worry,” came a soft, achingly familiar voice.

Silver shrieked, jumping out of her skin, whirling around to face the darkness of the bedroom. A figure uncurled itself from an armchair, rising like a ghost. An impossible figure. Impossible.

“Oh God,” she whispered as the figure stepped forward, raking fingers of sunlight catching his face. “No... It can’t be...”

* * * * *

Of course they’d be in the lighthouse. It had that combination of synchronicity and blatant chutzpah that both irked and pleased the Doctor. He parted the low-growing treeferns and stepped out into the sunlit plaza. He glanced at the stone block of the TARDIS, and traced his fingers lightly over the mossy surface. The stone block sat undisturbed, unremarkable in the centre of the rough paving stones, caught like a fly in amber, fossilised and trapped, utterly silent, utterly still. No, the Doctor thought grimly. No time to think about the old girl right now. He turned his back on the petrified time-ship and strode with clear, definite purpose out of the plaza and up the collapsing flight of steps that led up to the next tier of fortress walls.

Beyond the lower plaza, the palms and creepers had less a hold. Out of the cover of the trees, a breeze blew in from the turquoise sea – a breeze tinged with the first warnings of a tropical storm. Two more tiers of broad open plaza and low walls pierced with gun-emplacements crowned the hill. The flat courts were marred by the collapsed walls and tumbled turrets of former fort buildings. Above the low ruins, perched on the cliff edge, rose the thin spire of the lighthouse. It was French in design, but characteristically British in the execution of its position. The Doctor supposed that it had been moved from one of the outlying reefs and re-positioned here when the emboldened British claimed the island from the Revolution-weakened French at the end of the eighteenth century. It was a splendid structure – a copper and iron construction as graceful and as sound as anything Bartholdi, Eiffel and Viollet-le-Duc had ever presented to the northern half of the continent. The fluted base was bolted into the living rock, and rose in a tapering spar to a flared summit and elaborately-caged lamp. A marvellously ornate kupellon dome with a wide shade capped the tower. A flag-shaped weather vane, rusted into immobility, still graced the very peak. The lamp’s glass was fractured with age and neglect, and the body of the lighthouse was streaked with verdigris and blossoms of rust where the scroll-embossed copper cladding had broken away to reveal the iron skeleton within. But, weathered and abandoned though it was, it retained some echo of its former glory. The Doctor imagined it as it must have been a century before, the lamplight shining out over the waters, a confident beacon of Imperial supremacy, shining boldly into the future.

They’d be inside, of course, squatting in its basement, playing at being time-masters. The Doctor ground his teeth. There was nothing for it: he would have to beard them in their den, “have it out with them”, as Silver would no doubt have colloquially phrased it. He stomped across the open flagstones of the court to the metal base and pounded heavily on the copper panels of the lighthouse.

“All right – come on out!” he boomed, his voice echoing metallicly against the lighthouse’s salt-greened skin. “I know you’re in there!” He drummed his fist against the panel. “Out you come!”

A silver-haired head peered up over the rocks. It blinked. The Doctor blinked back.

“I say, old man,” the head inquired softly. “Can I help you?”

* * * * *

The gates squealed shut behind the Landrover. Channing had radioed ahead, and three medical orderlies and the station’s Doctor ran out with a stretcher. Gasping, his breath weak, Father Ignatius was hurried off to the Sick Bay. Merriweather rushed with him. The two Marines stood guard over the huddled, broken figure of the Police Captain.

The Commodore wheeled himself out onto the veranda of Hut One. He nodded to the Marines.

“Take him to Hut Seven and keep an eye on him,” he ordered. Without a word, Toussaint allowed himself to be lead off by his armed guards. The Commodore turned to Channing.

“What’s the situation in town?” he asked.

Channing shook his head. “Things took a decided turn for the worse, Sir,” he reported. “Once the Priest had been shot, the crowd just went mad – turned on the police. I couldn’t just leave the Captain, Sir. They would have torn him apart.”

Nelson nodded. “I understand, Commander.” He frowned. “We can’t keep him here, however. I’ve tried to telephone the Federation Representative, but the lines are down – and the town’s power has been shut off.”

“We’re running on generators, Sir?” asked Channing.

“I’ve checked our fuel supplies,” Nelson reassured him. “We’ve enough to see the Spearhead safely out of port. I’ve contacted the Governor-General in Jamaica and the F.O. – they know the situation. There’s a frigate heading our way - the HMS Holmes; should be here in about twelve hours’ time. If the situation in town gets any worse we’re under orders to ship out with the Holmes and transfer to Station Eleven-Zebra on Jamaica.”

“I understand, Sir,” Channing nodded.

“Any sign of Sir Henry?” the Commodore asked quietly. Channing shook his head. “Damn,” the Commodore swore. “Damn the old soak. Time like this, he’s a positive liability.”

* * * * *

The Doctor stepped carefully down to the thin ledge of salt-roughened rock. The old man had chosen a precarious place from which to watch the gathering clouds. The toes of his polished brogues hung out over the stone lip.

“There’s a storm coming,” the old man said, thoughtfully. The Doctor followed his gaze. He wondered if he was being literal or metaphorical. The smear of grey had rolled closer to the island, the boiling anvil-head of the stormcloud rising up into the clear air like a dark fist. The Doctor could see the first flares of lightning beginning to flash through its heart. The storm drove a rising wave of hot, wet air before it. The black arrow of a Frigate-bird arced overhead, heading for shelter. Gulls whined and cried around the cliff.

“There are always storms on the horizon,” the Doctor replied, being far more metaphorical than literal himself. The old man nodded, his eyes glazed and slightly blank. He smiled faintly.

“That’s the trouble with the weather,” he said, his moustache curling. “You never quite know what to expect.”

The Doctor nodded in agreement. “It’s always –“

He was interrupted by the high whine of a powered-up blaster in his ear, and the dull prod of a muzzle in the back of his neck. The Doctor glanced quickly over his shoulder. Two figures in dark combat suits and a third in an oriental dress.

“ – a surprise,” the Doctor finished.

* * * * *

“Chilaka!”

Soloman panted and dropped to the ground behind the wooden building. His flight from the street battles in the town had left him winded. He gulped down lungfuls of damp air. The sky overhead had bruised to dark, unpleasant grey, and the wind had picked up. There was a storm brewing. Ever since that disastrous hunt in the Permian, Soloman hated rain. It reminded him too much of being drowned. He winced at the pain from the projectile wound. Blood smeared the leg of his trousers. He wasn't badly injured, but Soloman knew he needed some attention from a med-pod – soon.

He thought fast. He needed some shelter – somewhere with some local medical supplies, perhaps. The docks were up ahead – and the market square. There was a pharmaceutical outlet in the square, wasn't there? A – he searched for the local word; chemists. He wondered if there would be a local equivalent to a med-pod enough there. It was the best option he had. Grabbing his wounded leg, he stumbled down the darkening back street, his lurching progress observed from the shadows by dark-eyed cats.

Interlude

Keeper Peldin stroked the control circuits, coaxing shifting algorithms under his pudgy fingertips. The cloying shadows of the Matrix chamber shifted as the Keeper made a slow circle around the control block, eyes alight, fingers dancing. Things were summoned from deep within the Matrix – data, information, facts, shape, form, sense, feeling, emotion, experience. Peldin’s circuits ranged through the collected wisdom of a thousand thousand generations of Timelords, browsing, sifting, selecting. Patterns were matched; analyses confirmed. Peldin paused, steepling his fleshy palms. He smiled. He had his archetypes.

Two dark-mirror spheres shimmered into existence above the control block, each one filled with stolen life. Shaydes.

Peldin licked his lips, his rheumy eyes peering into the dark, hidden depths of the mirrored spheres. “The Chancellor and the Cardinal have given you your instructions?” he asked.

Dim light flashed in the heart of the spheres.

“Good,” Peldin whispered. “Then go. We will await your signal.”

Energy danced over the ebon surface of the spheres, and they were gone, vanished into the distant corners of space-time.

Peldin twitched, turning to glance over his shoulder. He narrowed his eyes, near-white irises almost vanishing, his pupils pinpricks of black in the middle of his pallid, fleshy face. At the edge of the Matrix chamber, something groaned and pulsed, engines groaning with the strain of temporal transference. A box began to materialise – a red box, red paint chipping and peeling from its cast-metal frame. Above the door, a lighted sign: Public Telephone. The box solidified, the door creaked open, and a figure stepped from it and into the dim light surrounding the control block.

Peldin faced the arrival. The man was tall, his face was elegant – handsome, even; framed by hair that curled carelessly to his shoulders. A carefully-clipped goatee beard graced his chin; syenite-blue eyes flashed clear and bright. He wore a collar-less white shirt, loose at the throat, dark boots and trousers, and a waistcoat across which spun a celestial dance of stars. Peldin eyed the man, pulling his dark green robe around him.

“And are you ready?”

The new arrival nodded. “I am – ready to make my sacrifice, Keeper.”

Peldin spread his hands. “As am I. You know what is at stake here.” Peldin’s marble-white eyes were hard as steel. He nodded his head towards the box. “The Interstitial Shunt will allow you to make the transfer to the Bhargav vessel. Use it sparingly, lest you should be detected.”

The man with the goatee shook his head. “I have studied the relevant data. It should not be necessary to make the journey more than once – as soon as I locate the key.”

Peldin closed his eyes, his face weary. “Yes. The key – the choice...,” he muttered. He sagged, tiredness closing in around him. “Go. Go now...”

The man with the goatee stepped back inside the Telephone Box. The engines rumbled and groaned, and it faded away.

v. Evening

A distant tremor of thunder echoed through the bedroom. The faint strobe of lightning sent a graze of hot, bright light whickering away from the French windows.

The face was the same as it ever had been. Bright eyes smiled out at Silver. It was as if he had never died, never changed. The beard – trimmed just-so, comfortable without being untidy; the hair – longer, curling against his neck; the wry smile, the clear blue gaze and the little forked lines that clustered at the edges of his eyelids; everything was the same. He even wore his old clothes, the ones that had been soaked in New Orleans mud, stained damp and heavy with his own blood. The waistcoat with its ever-changing pattern of stars glinted and twinkled, unblemished against the fresh cotton of his white shirt.

Impossible.

Even his hands – God! Silver’s throat tightened. Even his hands were the same – not the old, thin-fingered hands he had now, but the broad, strong hands he’d had then. One rested on the back of the armchair he had been sitting in, the other stretched out towards Silver.

Impossible.

Silver stared at the creature that wore that old, familiar face and body. She felt herself shake. This spectre – this phantasm: could it... could it be... Could it really be.. him?

Impossible.

“I saw...,” Silver’s mouth was dry, a terrible hoarse catching in the back of her throat, part fear, part hope. “I saw... you die...,” she whispered. “I killed you. I saw you die. I dragged...,” she broke off. She had dragged his cold, lifeless body back to the TARDIS, stretched it out in the console room as if laying him out in a tomb, and then –

“I saw... you change.” What other word was there? He had changed. His body had morphed and transformed, and the old Doctor had vanished, swallowed up into the form and personality of another man entirely. “You became all – all Sherlock Holmes.”

The Doctor stepped out of the shadows. It was him – there was no question about it. His mouth curled in that half-grin, half-frown that made Silver’s heart crack.

“But here I am,” he said gently, the familiar cadence there in his voice. He held out both hands now, as if daring Silver to hold them, to see if he was solid; to see if he was real.

“But... how?” Silver breathed, taking the palms in hers. There was an electricity in his touch. Her shaking subsided. She felt the warm double pulse at the base of his thumbs as she closed her hands around his. This close, now – she could see his chest rise and fall, feel the faint trace of his breath against her hair. She dared herself to shut her eyes, terrified that he might disappear once more.

Lightning flared beyond the French windows. She opened her eyes. No, he was still here. Still solid. Still real. Still the Doctor – still her Doctor. She wrapped her arms around his waist and held him, his waistcoat buttons pressing into her cheek. Long, long moments passed.

“But how?” Silver asked, finally stepping back. “How?”

The Doctor stroked his beard. They stood at the balcony. “This is a time of flux, Silver – of beginnings and endings. Of things coming together and falling apart. This is a time when Universes will be made – and destroyed.”

“So, what, are you going backwards into your own personal past or something? Back to your own beginning?”

The Doctor smiled. “That’s an intriguing possibility,” he admitted. The sunlight was fading rapidly, and the stormclouds massing closer to the shore. A dark wind sprung up, whipping the palms into a hissing wave.

“Or is it something to do with the TARDIS?” Silver carried on, quickly.

“The TARDIS?” the Doctor repeated, his dark eyebrows creased in a frown.

“Yeah – I found bits of the TARDIS stuck in a hut on the beach. What’s that all about? And what about the readings?” Silver pressed on. “Did you get enough to figure out what’s going on? Can you make your time-map, or whatever?”

The Doctor considered. “I know where the locus is, if that’s what you mean. I know when it is – I know where it is. But in order to stop the Null-Time event happening, I’m going to need your help.” He looked at Silver, his eyes flashing as lightning streaked across the blackened sky.

“My help?” The hot storm-wind rushed through the open French doors, whirling Silver’s hair around her shoulders. She peeled the blue streak out of her face and tucked it behind her ears. The Doctor’s gaze was hypnotic. He smiled.

“Tell me, Silver,” he asked, his voice a soft, even murmur. “Speaking of bits of the TARDIS, Do you still have your TARDIS key?”

Silver touched the top of her dress, where that small memento of her travels nestled, precious and safe as a memory. “Why?” she asked, her fingers tracing the edge of the key.

The Doctor grinned, an old glint in his eye. He held out his hand. “Why, to help save the Universe of course – why else?”

* * * * *

The Doctor looked around the interior of the lighthouse from his vantage point half-way down the spiral stairs.

“I knew you’d be skulking about in the cellar,” he observed with some satisfaction. The blaster prodded into his back.

“Just keep moving,” the voice said, unruffled.

The interior of the lighthouse was as preposterously ornate as the exterior – perhaps more so. The combat-suited duo and the girl in the Chinese dress had rounded up the Doctor and the old man and herded them inside. The air in the structure was thick with the throat-cloyingly sweet taste of oxidised iron. A spiralled stair case led both up into the scaffolded summit of the lighthouse, and down, into its rock-cut foundation. They had been prodded across the metal and wood floor to the downward spiral. The iron framework tunnelled down into the dank well. The interior had once been lined with wooden panels. Much of it now fallen way, claimed by rot and beetles. A few mouldering planks still clung to the iron framework. It was dark. Pools of light glowed at one end of the hollow space, shedding a pale illumination onto some hastily-erected electronica and what looked like a random assortment of junk. The interior of the iron framework incorporated a high dome to the ceiling, marking the boundary between the ground-floor space and the upper stories. Under each skeletal arm of the dome was an iron bracket, and on each bracket perched a cast copper statue. Sailors, saints, pioneering lighthouse-keepers and designers – the gallery of luminaries peered down from out of the darkness with verdigris-rimed eyes. They were a splendid detail. They simply didn’t build lighthouses like this anymore, the Doctor thought – and he should know.

The Doctor moved as the cool voice instructed. They reached the bottom of the stairs. Hands still held up by his shoulders, the Doctor marched towards the clustered pools of light. He could see now it was a very random assortment of junk – very random. There was

a squat table with a large leonine face carved onto the top, a plaster Corinthian column, a pair of eighteenth century duelling rapiers in a rather nice velvet-lined oak chest, a Sha'al Imperium Martian war-tiki carved from Olympos Mons basalt, a pair Yuan Dynasty celadon shoulder pots with a fine decorative band of intertwined peonies and lotus flowers, a Moravian tapestry bearing the arms of Vladislaus II, a 1505 portrait of Count Tancredi – the collection was delightfully eclectic: a looter's treasure-trove. But the stacks of electronic equipment were even more interesting.

"That's far enough," the calm voice ordered. The Doctor turned around.

"I must admit," he said, frowning. "I came up here expecting someone else entirely."

The voice with the gun was a very tall, bulked-out woman with spiky silver-white hair. Her features were smooth, characterless – almost androgynous. She wore a combat vest, leggings and heavy combat boots. Across her shoulders moved a sinuous animated dragon tattoo. The dragon regarded the Doctor balefully and puffed a tattooed flame out between its inky teeth. The other character in combat gear was shorter, thinner, dark-haired and male – though still with the characteristic androgyny and lack of ethnic differentiation of their home time-period. He was lankier and less bulked with muscle – a tech-operative, no doubt. He wore a combat jacket; like the silver-haired leader, he held a weapon. A Villengard compact sonic blaster, no less. A-series, by the looks of it.

"Ah," the Doctor murmured, folding his hands at the identification of the blaster. "That explains it," he said to himself quietly. He smiled in what he hoped was a – ha, ha – disarming fashion. "I find the 394-A series prone to cascading software glitches in digital mode," the Doctor observed. "Drains the battery rather quickly, doesn't it?"

The scrawny-faced tech looked puzzled. "How do you -?"

The leader smiled grimly. "Shut it, Galloway." She glanced at the Doctor, not lowering her own blaster. "Don't you recognise competition when you see it?"

The Doctor snorted derisively. "Competition? My dear woman, don't flatter yourself. You and I aren't even in the same league. You're more....," the Doctor tried to find an appropriate comparison. "Bognor Regis Town than Manchester United, really, aren't you?"

The woman's gun never wavered.

"But I suppose one must never forget one's manners. I'm the Doctor," he said, bowing ever so slightly. "And this is –" he turned to the old man, and then realised he didn't have a clue who he was.

"Sir Henry White," the girl in the Chinese dress said, stepping forward. "Commonwealth Commissioner for the island of Petit Cerique. I'm sorry, Sir Henry," she said, frowning, "I'm not quite sure what we're going to do with you."

Sir Henry looked at Hitomi blankly. He smiled feebly, unsure quite what to do with himself either.

"Now, no reason to be shy, you three," the Doctor continued, encouragingly. "You are –?"

The leader's stare thinned. "I don't know what kind of Time Agent you are, Doctor, but –"

She was quite unprepared for the Doctor's mocking laugh. "Time Agent? Me?" he chuckled. "It's a day for mistaken identities, isn't it? Ah well, never mind – I suppose someone had to take me for one eventually." He lowered his hands and rubbed them together. "But as engaging as all this chit-chat might be, we have other things to think about. It's not every day you bump into a Null-Time event, is it? Now – I suggest we get to work, hm?" The Doctor swung around and headed for the lights at the far end of the room.

"Just you stay where you –" the leader snapped, but the scrawny man interrupted her.

“No, wait – if he can help. I mean...,” he spread his hands, indicating their current situation. The leader scowled, but lowered her blaster.

“Ah-ha,” the Doctor grinned. “A man of sense. Galloway, wasn’t it?”

“Texai-Callon Galloway, yeah,” the man said, following the Doctor. “Listen, if you’re not a Time Agent...”

The Doctor shook his head, surveying the jumble of equipment. “I’m not a Time Agent in the way that you mean, not exactly.” He picked up a remote scanning unit. “Xenium-3 circuitry?” He sniffed the plastic-looking exterior and ran his fingers over the non-human keys. “De-polymerised exo-carbonite casing – and a tri-binary, hectadecimal input coding.” He frowned. “That’s not very 51st century,” he observed.

Galloway nodded. “No, it’s not – twenty-clicks earlier, by my reckoning. We picked up this stuff off an abandoned temporal orbiter near Jupiter six months ago. Search and retrieval mission.”

“It’s Third-Zone manufacture,” the Doctor said, tapping a few keys experimentally. “How very interesting,” he murmured, his eyes lighting up, a theory suddenly being confirmed.

“Yeah, well, it’s all we’ve got now,” Galloway said, grimacing.

The Doctor hovered over the equipment.

“Now?” The Doctor handed Galloway the scanner. “Ah - since your crash.”

“How do you know about that?” the white-haired leader asked.

“It’s the reason you’re here – it’s the only reason you have to be here. You crashed – I crashed,” the Doctor said. He looked at the woman archly. “And don’t you have a name?”

“Captain Jac Zhao,” the white-haired woman replied, grudgingly. “And that’s Hitomi Ruyo,” she finished, nodding towards the woman in the Chinese dress.

“There,” the Doctor smiled faintly. “Isn’t that more civilised?”

“What did you mean: it’s the only reason we have to be here?” Zhao asked, folding her arms. The dragon coiled and hissed on her shoulders.

The Doctor spread his hands expansively, encompassing the collection of antiquities. “Even pirates like you –”

“We’re not pirates,” Galloway objected. The Doctor glared. He knew exactly what they were.

“Even pirates like you,” he continued, “Wouldn’t dare interfere with such a vital nexus point as Earth, circa 1963. Too many possibility curves intersect here. This time-zone is too important and too vital to risk damaging with your particular brand of amateur looting and pillaging.”

“We don’t loot, Doctor,” snapped Zhao.

“Oh, please – let’s not bandy semantics,” the Doctor scoffed.

“We preserve,” Zhao insisted. The Doctor said nothing, but gave Zhao a withering look. “Ask Hitomi,” insisted Zhao, “She’s our cultural expert.”

“We’re government-sponsored antaeologists, Doctor,” Hitomi said, crossing to the bottom of the staircase. “We try and save as much of the past as we can. Granted,” she admitted, “There are some who do plunder, who do loot – but not us. We save what we can for the benefit of a grateful and admiring future. We’re public servants, Doctor, operating legally under the auspices of the 4904 Temporal Antiquities (Amended) Act.”

The Doctor tapped his foot.

“We could show you identification – if any of it had survived the crash,” Hitomi continued.

“Your Letters of Marque? Time-pirates, temporal-privateers,” the Doctor waved his hand dismissively. “It hardly matters now, does it? What matters is you’re here. The Null-

Time event,” the Doctor said, “Must have dropped you into the twentieth century like a dumpling into hot stew.”

“It came out of - well, literally: nowhere.” Zhao shook her head and grimaced. “I’ve been a temporal pilot for almost three lives, Doctor, and I’ve never seen anything like it before. Pow.” She popped her fingers in a starburst of digits; the dragon tattoo puffed smoke. “The ship disintegrated. The event ate through the whole vessel - there was nothing left, not even the shell.”

“Yours survived, though, didn’t it?” Galloway asked. “That’s it outside: the public communications box-thing.”

The Doctor sighed. “Made of mathematically-stronger stuff, I imagine.” He sighed. “Chameleon circuit jarred at the last moment, worming it’s way into the local reality matrix, trying to find safe harbour –“ he theorised, then shook his head. “But yes, you’re right. That’s my ship – or what’s left of her.”

“It took about three days for ours to finally burn out,” Zhao recalled. “It sat out there – on the rock, next to where your ship crashed - phasing in and out across the timelines. We managed to pull out some stuff, but...,” she indicated the random assortment scattered in front of them. None of it looked terribly sophisticated. Most of it didn’t even look like it was working. “We managed to get some zeitonic power up and running, and put up some screens and scans – but it’s not enough to get us out of here. Not even close.”

The Doctor folded his arms. “But you’ve identified the event locus, haven’t you?”

Galloway glanced up at Zhao.

“Oh come, come,” the Doctor said, fanning one hand. “There’s no advantage to be had in coyness. You’ve identified the locus: so have I. Physically it’s strangely diffuse, as if shielded by something. But temporally it’s very specific: 20:01:26 – one minute and twenty-six seconds past eight o’clock this evening, local time.”

“That’s very specific,” Zhao admitted.

“But why?” the Doctor began to pace, one finger tapping his pursed lips. “Why is the temporal locus so easy to identify? Why is the physical locus so apparently diffuse?” He glanced at Galloway. “It’s importance to both of us is undisputed, of course: whatever that event might be, we can anticipate it and use it to re-power our vessels – or, in your case,” the Doctor noted, “As you’ve no vessel left to re-power, you can simply pass the energy output through that zeitonic core of yours and generate a relatively stable wormhole leading back home.” He glanced up at the three time-travellers. “That is what you’re planning to do, I take it?”

Galloway glanced at Zhao, who nodded.

“It’s what we’re hoping to do, yes,” Galloway confirmed. “Assuming the event actually takes place...”

The Doctor halted in his tracks, his eyes flashing a question.

“Probability cusps are – well, all over the place,” Galloway explained, pointing to readouts on his various monitors and scanners. The Doctor leaned closer, his eyes flicking from one scrolling dataset to another. He nodded.

“Yes, yes,” he murmured, almost to himself. “I should have thought of that. The Null-Time event is composed of unreal energies – causally non-dependent.”

Galloway nodded eagerly. “Yeah – exactly,” he agreed. “That’s why I configured our scanners to identify the probability curves emanating backwards from the event. But because the event is in flux, the overall probability of it actually happening keeps rising and falling as various situations on the island evolve and develop.”

“Of course: anomalies and paradoxes spreading outwards from the event. Small at first, then growing, exponentially – snowballing.” The Doctor looked at him sharply. “You

haven't been influencing things on the island then? Trying to make sure the Null-Time event happens?"

"No, no," Galloway reassured him, quickly. "Just keeping an eye on them. But we can't take the chance that the event might not happen."

"If we miss it somehow..." Zhao said.

"Yes," the Doctor muttered. "I understand, believe me: that would be it – for all of us. A literal once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

There was a small cough. The Doctor, Zhao, Hitomi and Galloway turned to see Sir Henry White standing lost, patient and almost apologetic behind them.

"I do beg your pardon," he said, the ordinariness of his voice strangely pathetic in the midst of the hi-tech discussion ranging around him. Sir Henry looked around at the peculiar people in whose company he had suddenly found himself.

The Doctor smiled warmly, reassuringly. "Well now," he said, rocking back on his heels. "Let's see how much you've picked up during your enforced stay in 1963. I don't suppose you could supply your visitors with some tea?"

* * * * *

Channing scanned the darkened town through binoculars. Tyrell watched beside him. Through the gates they could both see the ruddy, fiery glow enveloping the police station in the centre of the town.

"Looks rough, doesn't it," Tyrell said. "Have you managed to raise Hitomi?"

Channing shook his head. "Phones are still down," he said, curtly. Tyrell wished he'd held his tongue.

They watched the town in silence. The wind rose, now bringing the first rain from the storm's leading edge.

"Stupid bastard," Channing muttered, as the drops began to fall.

"Toussaint?"

"That's what all this is about," Channing said, lowering the binoculars. "That trigger-happy thug letting loose a couple of rounds into the Priest."

"Doc's confident he'll pull through," Tyrell said.

Channing frowned. "That's not the point, though."

"No – no, you're right, of course. I doubt anyone out there –" Tyrell nodded towards the dark silhouette of Port Elizabeth. "- will be quick to forgive him."

The Commander trained his torch on his watch. "Two and a half hours to initialisation."

"Crew's all ready," Tyrell affirmed. Channing nodded.

"Good. I can't help but think things are going to get worse here before –"

Tyrell suddenly pointed out into the darkness along the dock road.

"Just a minute, Sir. What's that?"

Channing pulled up the binoculars. He scanned the road. Little pinpricks of light amidst a small sea of dark shapes.

"Damn." He had been right; too right.

"Go and get the Commodore," he ordered. "And get the Marines to take up full defensive positions at the gate." He looked out into the darkness, at the wavering line of torch-light now marching down the dock road towards the station. "We've got an angry mob on our hands..."

* * * * *

The Doctor consulted a pocketwatch nestling in the front of his starry waistcoat. “Not long now,” he muttered. “Not long at all.”

“Not long until what?” Silver whispered, peering around the palm trunk. The Doctor popped the pocketwatch back into his waistcoat.

“Come on,” he said, quickly.

Silver followed the Doctor, hurrying out of the shadows at the back of the hotel and rattling down the stone steps to the beach. The Doctor halted at the edge of the white sand, peering into the darkness. Rain began to drum down. Lightning cracked overhead.

“With any luck, the damp will drive everyone inside,” the Doctor said hopefully. “At least it seems to have put out the fire at the police station.” Black even against the dusk, a soggy cloud of smoke wisped up from the centre of the town.

“What’s going on?” Silver asked. “Everyone seems to have taken a dose of crazy pills all of a sudden.”

The Doctor sighed, leading the way down the beach. “Revolution. Transition. Change. The turn of the political wheel. Beginnings and endings, Silver – beginnings and endings. It’s 1963, and the world is changing. These former colonies are fast finding their own feet in a new world order. The transition from slave-run plantation island to nationhood and political entity can never be an easy one – ask the Janxian colonists or the Mogarians or the Prelates of Clom. It can be painful, deadly – even fatal. But it is necessary. The future is built on change, after all.”

“And so that’s what’s going on now?” Silver asked, wiping rain from her eyes – and probably smearing her makeup into the bargain, she realised mournfully.

“Indeed. The future of this island is being shaped with chaos and passion. And why not?” the Doctor grinned in the darkness. “After all, isn’t that what life is all about?”

Silver grinned back. She’d missed the way he used to talk.

They halted for a second behind a pair of fishing boats dragged up onto the beach. The town was silent and still, sleeping – resting. But there was movement ahead: a dark shadow lurching and swaying along the Dock Road. It was a mob – a ragged crowd, pushed on by anger. Torches flared in the darkness, and Silver could make out waving machetes, pitchforks and red-painted flags and banners hung from makeshift poles. The mob was gathered by the warehouses, quays and moored tramp freighters of the docks and was clearly heading to somewhere on beyond the end of Port Elizabeth.

“Ah,” the Doctor said, his face growing long. “It seems our way is blocked.”

“Blocked?” Silver asked. “Where are we going, anyway?”

The Doctor pointed out towards the end of the dark promontory as a flash of lightning seared through the rain and the cloud overhead. Along the spine of the promontory, the fort (and the TARDIS, Silver realised) and the bent silhouette of a tower – a lighthouse? And down at its base, the arms of jetties and quays extending into the far corner of the bay, some kind of naval complex.

“What is it? Why there?”

“So many questions,” the Doctor murmured, skirting the fishing boats. Silver loped after him, her soaked espadrilles squidding in the wet sand.

“Well, you told me it was the only way to learn anything.”

“And how right I was,” the Doctor replied. They reached a small rowing boat. “Perfect.”

“Perfect?”

The Doctor started to push the leaky ketch out into the chopping waters of the bay.

“First bank fraud and now piracy,” Silver said, pulling off her espadrilles and throwing them into the boat. She helped him shove the wooden vessel down the sand. “I always had you down as a much more law-abiding citizen of the cosmos.”

“Needs must,” the Doctor grunted, holding the boat fast as Silver clambered over the side. He followed, the little vessel rocking underneath them. He grabbed an oar and pushed them out into the dark waters. Lightning flashed above. The Doctor lowered the outboard motor and rubbed his hands.

“Right, now, let’s see if –“ he pulled hard on the cord. The engine coughed into life.

“Ha! Success!”

The boat chugged out into the darkness. Water splashing heavily over the side. Silver squeezed her feet back into her soggy espadrilles. She looked over at the Doctor, watching him pilot the little vessel out into the unknown. She could barely suppress a grin. The Doctor glanced back, noticing her smile.

“What?” he asked, the corners of his beard twitching.

Silver shook her head. “Nothing,” she laughed lightly. “Nothing – just... I never thought I’d be doing this again – with you, I mean. I mean, you you – you know?”

She scooted back against the gunwales of the boat, and her heel banged against something. A coil of rope – no, something else. Something boxy. She bent and fished it out of the damp skeins of rope. It was plastic, about the size of a book, dusted with damp sand. Silver brushed it off. The lurid cover was unmistakable.

It was a copy of the Extraordinary Guide. Her copy of the Extraordinary Guide.

* * * * *

Merriweather sat nursing a cold cup of tea. The hut’s shutters banged, driving warm, humid storm-air in to curl uncomfortably around her shoulders. The single bare bulb overhead flickered as the generators outside coughed. The partition door swung in. Doctor Harper stepped into the small ante-room, pulling the mask down from his face.

“Doctor!” Merriweather jumped up from the uncomfortable wooden chair, searching the medic’s expression. Harper looked sad and grim. He shook his head. Merriweather crumpled, sagging back into the chair. Tears trickled down her cheeks.

Harper looked around the room. The telephone wouldn’t be working – he’d have to go and tell the Commodore in person. It would be up to him to deal with the murdering swine.

* * * * *

The Doctor stirred his tea and took a sip. He grimaced. It was terrible; clearly this lot hadn’t learned very much in their enforced stay in the twentieth century. He watched them now, deep in discussion. Finding a bunch of fifty-first century amateurs here instead of – well, instead of anything more familiar, arguably more professional and certainly worse – had been something of a surprise. In fact, the Doctor admitted to himself, it was an absolute surprise. He wondered what he was going to do with them. He took another sip of the horrible tea and handed a cup to Sir Henry.

Zhao looked over at the Doctor, standing talking calmly and quietly to Sir Henry on the far side of the chamber. Next to her, the little tech-operative followed the Captain’s gaze.

“I think we should tell him,” Galloway hissed. Hitomi shook her head in disagreement.

“I don’t trust him,” she countered.

Galloway’s face scrunched up in a query. “Why not?” he asked, exasperated.

“I don’t know.” Hitomi watched the Doctor coaxing Sir Henry out of whatever strangely detached state he was in. “I don’t think he’s telling us everything. If he’s not a Time-Agent then he’s got to be another independent, and that makes him competition.” She looked at Zhao and Galloway. “What else could he be?”

Galloway shrugged. “I don’t know. An alien? A time-walker?”

“Next you’ll be saying he’s a Time Lord,” Hitomi snorted.

“I couldn’t care less if he’s a feathered time monster from Atlantis,” Galloway snapped. “He’s the closest thing we’ve got to an ally at the moment – and we need all the allies we can get.”

“The real problem,” Zhao interrupted, cutting across the whispered argument. “Is that we’ve done our calculations down to the last zote: our core will hold just enough energy to transport us back – just enough. If the Doctor starts siphoning off power from the event to bring that stone box of his back online, we might very well lose the chance to create our wormhole.”

“We don’t know that,” Galloway put in.

“No, but I’m not willing to risk the alternative,” Zhao said. “Do you want to live out the rest of your life in the twenty-first century?” Galloway was silent. “I thought not. Neither do I.”

“Perhaps the Doctor doesn’t want to, either,” Galloway said, pointedly.

“I realise that – but what else can we do?” Zhao finished. The three looked at each other in a silent, confirmed vote. Galloway sighed.

“Okay, okay...”

“So we keep quiet about the reactor,” Hitomi concluded. The Captain nodded.

“We have to. When that fusion chain-reaction gets going – it’s ours.”

The Doctor patted Sir Henry awkwardly on the shoulder. The man seemed more than a little dazed by circumstances. He set the remains of the undrinkable tea down and picked up his scanner, striding over to the knot of time-hoppers.

“Right, then,” he said, dropping the scanner onto Galloway’s pile of assorted alien electronics. “Let’s get to work, shall we?”

* * * * *

The rain started to blow in heavily from the bay, whipping around the brick warehouses. The torches of the crowd sputtered in the rising storm wind. In the lee of the loading dock, Garvyn Turner strapped the machete-belt around his waist, pulling the lapels of his long coat clear. He drew the cutlass-machete and examined the blade. He glanced over at the school teacher, pulling the raincoat over his thin, aching shoulders.

“Are you certain about this, Walker?”

The thin man nodded and pushed his spectacles up on his thin nose. “Absolutely,” he said, his voice weakened by pain. “I watched from Mrs. Mendoza’s rooms above the laundrette,” he nodded towards Joachim and Raoul standing at the other end of the dock.

“We saw it too,” Raoul Mendoza confirmed. “Toussaint shot Father Ignatius. One of the officers from the Naval station took him away.”

“Afraid of what might have happened to Toussaint if he’d been left at the mercy of the crowd,” Walker Moses said, wincing as he tightened the trenchcoat’s belt around his bruised stomach.

Garvyn Turner fingered the blade of his cutlass-machete. “Then we should go to the station,” he said softly.

“Give Toussaint the justice he deserves,” cried Joachim. Raoul gripped his son’s fervent shoulders.

Walker and Garvyn exchanged a look.

“Is this what you want?” Garvyn asked the school-teacher.

Moses licked his lips. He looked back at the crowd of plantation workers gathered behind the warehouse. He knew what they wanted to hear. He knew what he had to say. There was only one answer – only one choice that could be made.

He nodded. A sigh settled through the crowd. Garvyn turned the blade in his hand. The sleek edge caught the flicker of torchlight. He looked in turn at Joachim, Raoul and Walker, then looked out over the crowd.

“Then... let justice be done.”

* * * * *

Galloway watched the data from the scanner unit feed into his monitor. “This is extremely rich data, Doctor,” he said, admiringly.

The Doctor smiled modestly. “Not bad for a lash-up – ah!” He poked the screen as a set of oscillating wavelines began to scroll up the screen. “That’s what I picked up.”

Galloway frowned. “I’ve never seen readings like that before,” he said, making adjustments to the controls. A second monitor flickered on, isolating the Doctor’s anomalous readings. “What are they?”

The Doctor shrugged. “I’ve no idea. I couldn’t make much of them with my temporary set-up. I’m rather hoping we might be able to make sense out of it with your equipment.”

Hitomi watched the data unfurl. “It looks like a separate and distinctive time-signal to me.”

The Doctor nodded, patting Hitomi on the shoulder. “That’s exactly what I thought. When I walked in here, I thought it might be you – but it’s not. It’s not me, either – that signal isn’t produced by the sort of temporal technology my people use,” he murmured.

“Your people?” Zhao raised an eyebrow. “Just who –”

Her comm-unit beeped insistently. She tapped the controls. “It’s Soloman!”

Hitomi and Galloway looked up.

“What’s the situation, Soloman?” Zhao asked, quickly.

The Doctor crossed the floor in long strides, setting his poorly-made cup of tea on top of the Martian tiki. He frowned a query at Galloway with his eyebrows.

“Soloman Ushek,” Galloway whispered. “Security. Down in town taking a final set of probability readings.”

“Not good,” came a voice hushed through a crackle of static. “Local security forces raided that meeting. I got the readings, but took a couple of hits from projectile weapons. Ended up being dragged off to prison while unconscious. Managed to get out, but the whole town’s in the grip of civil disturbance. I saw one mob burning down security headquarters, and a second mob heading through the town now. Something’s upset everyone – no idea what, though. I’m holed up in one of the town buildings. My blaster’s exhausted, my shield’s about dead and I’ve picked up a projectile injury. I’ve been laying low, waiting until things settle down somewhat.”

“Silver,” the Doctor whispered, guiltily. He turned to Zhao. “How bad are things? Ask your man: has he seen a young girl wandering around with an energy wave scanner? She would have looked like a tourist, not a local.”

“Soloman’s not very good on cultural details, Doctor,” Zhao warned him.

The Doctor grabbed Zhao’s wrist. “Well? Any sign of the girl? She had a streak of blue in her hair. Or was it green?” he tried to remember. “And a cat – a black cat?”

“A girl? A cat?” Soloman’s baffled reply crackled over the comm. “El khara dah? Who is this?”

“Never mind, Soloman,” said Zhao. “Listen, just get back here as soon as you can, we’re –” There was a clatter as the Doctor raced towards the rusted spiral stairs. “Doctor? Where do you think you’re going?”

“I’ve two travelling companions to try and locate, Captain,” the Doctor called over his shoulder, new priorities suddenly taking precedence. “I need to round them up before anything happens to them.” He turned to Galloway. “See what you can make of these readings, Galloway. I have a feeling they might surprise you.”

Galloway looked surprised anyway. The Doctor bounded across the room, nodding to the Commissioner. “Come along, Sir Henry,” the Doctor waved him up the spiral stairs. “I might need your help.”

Sir Henry blinked. “Me?” he asked.

“But of course,” the Doctor replied, reasonably, bounding up the rusted iron stairs. “No better man to have in a crisis than Sir Henry White, Commonwealth Commissioner for Petit Cerique!” He paused at the top and leaned over the railing.

“Don’t worry, Captain – I’ll be back in plenty of time for the main event...”

* * * * *

Soloman slumped against the cabinet. “For fanden...,” he swore, weakly. The projectile wound on his leg was worse than he suspected. It was deep, and the edges were ragged and torn. He had lost a fair amount of blood – more than enough to make him feel light-headed. He’d smashed the window of the pharmaceutical outlet and found suitable bandages to staunch the bleeding, but he really needed a med-pod, he knew that. He bent and tightened the last twist of crepe around his leg, gritting his teeth. He suspected that the projectile was actually still in the wound, that would account for the pain.

He turned off his comm unit to conserve power. At least the Captain knew he was on his way back. If everything went according to plan, they would be on their way within a couple of hours. At last. Soloman couldn’t wait. When he got back to Central Present he was going to have a viz, find some nengta to have a long UV bath with, and then go down to Kermo-Five and get utterly, riotously drunk.

He lurched to his feet, barking at the pain, sweat beading his brow. Trouble was that right now, Central Present seemed a long, long way away. Andskotinn! He knew they never should have taken this job...

Soloman paused at the door, watching the silent town. The square outside was choked with toppled vending stalls and abandoned vehicles. Soloman frowned – then grinned. Of course. A vehicle...

* * * * *

The rain was heavy now, striking the broad leaves of the palms with a persistent drumming. The Doctor and Sir Henry skidded unevenly down the path. Below them, the Dock Road curved around the pale sand of the main bay, the town a dark shadow behind.

“No lights,” Sir Henry observed, stumbling to a halt. Then he saw the glow of the fire. “Good God,” he muttered, panting to catch his breath. They paused at a final tumbled line of fallen blocks of stone and looked out over the town. They could see the fire burning in the police station. The sharp, unmistakable crack of gunshots split the air. The spit of powder-flare flickered around the station square and from the upper windows of the smouldering building. Far along the Dock Road, at the gates of the Naval Station, a dark mass moved – a crowd, holding torches and hastily-constructed banners.

“Good God,” Sir Henry repeated. He had been right. Chaos – bloody chaos. “I tried to tell them,” he whispered sadly. “I tried to warn them: bloodshed in the streets. I tried to warn them all.” He watched the town descend into madness, his eyes the eyes of a man in mourning.

The Doctor frowned at the dark panorama. “How very odd. It’s certainly a lot worse than I remember...” He grimaced. “I can’t guarantee your safety down there now, Sir Henry,” he said to the old diplomat. “I’d better go on alone. Get back to the fort – the others will look after you.”

“I’d much rather come with you,” Sir Henry grumbled. It seemed impolite to add that the odd people in the lighthouse rather gave him the willies.

“No,” the Doctor shook his head. “I really don’t think that’s a good idea,” he said. “I wouldn’t want you to get shot –” he suddenly broke off, as if something had just occurred to him. “Sir Henry White,” the Doctor muttered, “Sir Henry White... Sir Henry –” He stopped suddenly, his boots digging into the damp earth. He turned to the diplomat behind him. “Not Sir Henry Everett White, late of the Chancellery in Rangoon?” Sir Henry nodded. “Ah... well, yes. Yes, that’s me, precisely.”

The Doctor frowned, his eyes greying in the darkness. “Sir Henry Everett White, now Commonwealth Commissioner for Petit Cerique...”

“Er... that’s right,” Sir Henry confirmed, wondering why this eccentric man was so interested in his name. Sir Henry felt as if the events of the past hour were happening to someone else. Who was this strange man? What had he and the peculiar people in the lighthouse been talking about? Was any of this actually real? It all seemed so strange – so... unreal. And now, racing down the side of the ruined fortress, descending into a town in the grip of apparent chaos. It seemed so distant from the calm of the morning, from the moment of sudden decision when he had torn the poster from the gatepost of Commonwealth House.

“Why do you ask?” Sir Henry ventured. Lightning flashed across the darkness overhead. The rain now started in earnest. Gunfire rattled through the wet dusk. The Doctor suddenly snapped his fingers.

“Sir Henry Everett White! Of course!” he shouted. The Commissioner jumped, startled.

The Doctor glared at the old man with sudden intensity. “Sir Henry Everett White – you shouldn’t be here.”

“No?” Sir Henry queried, nervously. “Ah – where should I be?”

“Nowhere,” said the Doctor with calm certainty. “Nowhere at all.” He smiled grimly, turning and leaping down the remainder of the hill, now at twice the pace. He skidded on the stones, his boot heels kicking up the wet ground. He looked back at Sir Henry, the rain pooling down his long nose as he tapped it.

“By rights, Sir Henry, you should be dead – and I think I’m beginning to understand why you’re not.”

* * * * *

The tiny boat thumped against the concrete jetty. A few dim lights winked in the sprawl of huts along the edge of the quays. Beyond, the dim, unlit bulk of a long hanger stretched out, a corrugated iron backdrop to the wooden huts. The Doctor threw a painter line and secured their borrowed craft to the capstan. He reached out and helped Silver jump across to the jetty.

“Are you sure we’re not going to be arrested or anything?” Silver hissed, crouching low, wondering if an MP was going to burst out of the rainy darkness and keelhaul her. The Doctor wiped the rain from his face and pointed down the length of the jetty towards the front gates of the station. A crowd had gathered – an angry crowd, not cowed or disheartened by the rain.

“I think everyone here is a little preoccupied at the moment,” he said.

“Hey, listen, Doctor,” Silver whispered, grabbing him by the shirtsleeve and banging the Extraordinary Guide against his elbow. “Before we go stomping through some secret military base, what’s this all about?” She shook the guidebook. “I left this on the TARDIS. How did it get here?”

The Doctor smiled thinly. “All in good time, Silver – all in good time.” He peered over the capstan. “Come on – this way.” Silver scowled, not appreciating the lack of answer at all.

They ran down the jetty, splashing through puddles. Lightning forked and thunder tore in the dark clouds over their heads. The rain drove in from the sea in sheets, borne on the back of a rapidly-cooling wind. Silver shivered, chilled to the bone.

They raced between the huts, the Doctor leading the way. Hut One: C.O. and General Staff. Hut Two: Radio. Hut Three: Officer’s Mess. Hut Four: Canteen and First Aid. Hut Five: Medical.

The door to Hut Five swung open. A woman stood framed in the dim light – a soft-faced woman whose cheeks were damp not with rain, but with tears. She clutched a thin wool cardigan over a muted red dress. She flipped up an umbrella as she caught sight of the Doctor and Silver.

“Oh, Doctor Strang,” she started. “I – I’m sorry, I didn’t notice you.”

Strang? Silver scrunched up her nose. Did the Doctor have a double?

The Doctor blinked and then smiled. “Miss Merriweather, isn’t it? From Commonwealth House?”

The woman nodded. “I – I’m sorry about your missed appointment this afternoon,” she stammered. Silver wondered, given the rioting going on in the town right now, whether this wasn’t quite the time to worry about rescheduling meetings. How very British, she thought.

“Don’t mention it,” the Doctor waved his hands, politeness itself despite being drenched. “Any sign of Sir Henry yet?”

Carol Merriweather bit her lip. The Doctor frowned.

“Never mind, Ms. Merriweather,” he tried to console her. “The old man’s tougher than any of us. I’m sure he’s perfectly capable of looking after himself.” The social niceties obeyed, conversation lapsed. The Doctor rubbed his hands and glanced at Silver. “Well, er –” he fumbled. “Don’t let us detain you, Ms. Merriweather.”

“No, no – I understand. You have work to do.” The woman smiled faintly out into the rain. “Good luck with the launch, Doctor Strang.”

The Doctor nodded, took a few steps backwards and then trotted off, Silver in tow, towards Hut Six. Silver glanced over her shoulder at the woman, standing in the doorway, watching them fade away into the darkness from under the shelter of her umbrella.

“Strang?” Silver queried. “Who did she think you were?”

The Doctor mumbled something dismissive that was lost in a peal of thunder and a strobe-flare of lightning.

The lightning illuminated the front of Hut Six. Science Division. No Unauthorised Access. To the left of the door sat a battered red telephone kiosk, its windows covered over on the inside with sheets of brown parcel paper. An Out of Order sign hung on a thumbtack pinned into the red-painted mullions. The Doctor fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a Yale key – and pushed it into the lock on the telephone box.

“Wait a minute,” Silver spluttered, hugging her arms around her to conserve some warmth. “You’re going in there?”

“Naturally,” the Doctor smiled, pushing the telephone box door inwards. “After you.”

Silver shook her head, spraying rain. “What, are we doing one of those how-many-college-students-can-you-fit-into-a-phone-box things? There’s barely room for one of us in there, let alone –” Silver suddenly listened to what she was saying. She clocked the Doctor’s grin. Her eyes widened. “You don’t mean –” Of course he did; it wasn’t a phone box at all, was it.

“Not the TARDIS, I know,” the Doctor admitted, “But it’ll do as a substitute for the moment. Come on – we haven’t much time.” Silver nipped inside. The Doctor followed, grabbing the sign as he closed the door.

The air shivered, and a roaring, groaning, wheezing sound spiralled out from the red telephone box. A light flashed on behind the telephone sign. The red painted box began to fade, the rain falling through it, drumming onto the dry ground where it once had sat. The sound faded, and the telephone box was gone.

* * * * *

Galloway peered at his monitors, watching the data feed in from the Doctor’s scanner. He swore – a curse even Hitomi didn’t know.

“What is it?”

Galloway pointed at the data. A swirl of probability arced through the readings. He hardly knew how to articulate what he was seeing.

“Well?” Zhao insisted.

Galloway gulped. “It’s... it’s got to be impossible, Captain – it’s just got to be...” His fingers punched and stabbed at the alien controls. “Let me try and get – there...”

The three watched the data loop and unfold into a visual. Something hovered at the edge of space-time: a thing like a bent, beaked spike surrounding a ring of flickering temporal energy. A vessel. A space-time vessel. An alien time-ship.

The scanner readings were checked, re-checked, calibrated and re-calibrated. There was no error.

“Sweet Mother of Marx,” the Tech breathed. He looked up at Hitomi and the Captain. “This... this changes everything...,” Galloway whispered.

* * * * *

Sir Henry staggered down the last of the hill, his breath coming in gasps. He hung his head, catching his breath. The rain hammered down, beating, beating like maroon drums.

“What did you mean?” Sir Henry finally asked, crying out over the sound of the drumming rain. “I should be dead? What did you mean?”

The Doctor sighed. “You’re a lucky man, Sir Henry Everett White,” he said at last, raising his voice and blinking in the rain. “A very lucky man indeed. History records you being shot on the steps of your own Commonwealth House sometime this afternoon, gunned down accidentally by a man named Toussaint.”

“Toussaint?”

The Doctor nodded. “You took a bullet meant for a local priest. Your death prompted the British Embassy in Jamaica to insist upon military action to secure the safety of Her Majesty’s citizens and business interests on Petit Cerique, and Royal Navy marines landed on the island two days later, arresting Toussaint and dispersing a nascent worker’s uprising.” The Doctor shook water from the cuffs of his shirt. “The West Indian Federation agreed the following year to the establishment of a British Resident and a measure of self-rule. The Resident enacts generous concessions in favour of British companies. By the late 1990s, Petit Cerique will become one of the wealthiest tax-havens in the Caribbean – and all because you got shot.” The Doctor glanced over at the Commissioner. “If it’s any consolation, I believe they erect a rather impressive statue of you outside Commonwealth House in 1982.” He swept a hand up over his forehead and through his hair, shedding rainwater. “Toussaint, I believe, went into exile in Panama and was eventually taken into custody when the Americans swooped on Noriega in 1989. Released in 2007 when Noriega was extradited to France, died of complications arising from diabetes in 2009 in a motel room in Miami. A sad and lonely end.”

The wind roared. Palm trees swayed in the face of the storm. Leaves skittered down the road.

The bedraggled Commissioner looked utterly baffled. “You – you’re pulling my leg,” he stammered at last.

“Unfortunately, Sir Henry,” the Doctor said, shaking his head sadly. “I’m not. You can check – it’s all there in the history books. Or at least, it will be. Or –“ he corrected himself once more. “At least it should be. And therein,” he finished, his eyes dark, “Lies the rub. It should be in there, but won’t be, not now you haven’t been shot. The first stain of the spreading paradox.”

“But... but shot? Me?”

The Doctor pondered the situation, the wind and rain whipping around them. “Did you by any chance do anything... unusual this morning? Anything spontaneous? Anything uncharacteristic?”

Sir Henry thought. “I suppose I did – I stopped my driver and decided to go for a head-clearing walk up to the Fort rather than go to the Regatta Club for lunch.”

The Doctor nodded. “That might be enough, I suppose.” He shrugged. “Any complex enough temporal node would have started to unravel sooner or later. Interesting to see how it’s all beginning.” He peered through the driving rain. “The coast seems to be clear. Let’s go, shall we? I want to try the hotel first.”

Sir Henry stood perfectly still, the rising violence of the storm roaring around him. The old man looked adrift. “You’re mad – you have to be.” He passed the back of his hand over his brow. “I can’t believe anything of what you just said.” He was shouting now, his voice disappearing under the tumult of the storm.

“That really doesn’t matter, Sir Henry. If I’m right, it’s not worth worrying about at this stage anyway. In just over an hour, you and I will be juggling with the fate of universes. Whether or not you and I live or die will become irrelevant on a truly cosmic

scale.” He smiled grimly, rain pouring down his face. “How’s that for a soul-crushing sense of perspective? Come on...”

“I can’t!” Sir Henry cried. “I can’t!” He slumped to his knees, bowed down by a huge, crushing weight in his heart. His hands clutched at his chest. A wave of terrible pain engulfed him, squeezing his left arm and his ribcage. He cried out in agony, pitching forward as lightning burst through the rain over the road.

“Sir Henry!” the Doctor shouted, racing down the pavement towards the collapsed old man. He skidded down to his knees, blinking lines of rain out of his eyes.

The old man panted. “Sorry, Doctor.” His face was ashen. Sweat beaded on his forehead, merging with the rain. “Dicky ticker.” He gulped. “Give me a moment.” He fumbled in his pocket for some pills, chewing them with practised urgency. “Old blood-box’s taken a bit of a battering over the years,” he whispered.

“You can’t die now, Sir Henry!” the Doctor urged, his voice vanishing in the rising of the storm.

A laugh. A pair of laughs.

“So much concern...,” came a voice.

“For a dead man!” came another.

The Doctor whipped around. From out of the wind and the rain, trotted two cats, eyes like little shards of black mirror in the storm. One grey, one black, they padded slowly towards the morbid scene. The Doctor wiped his face, not quite sure what he was seeing. The cats began to shift, to morph, a quicksilver shimmer, a fluid transformation. They flowed up, becoming taller, thinner, arms and legs extending, growing. Their bodies glistened and sparkled with reflective darkness, like black mirrors coming to life. Then they acquired texture, colour – skin, hair, eyes, clothing rapidly swirling into detail. Form and shape solidified; the mirror-eyed cats had become people.

But not any people.

Two people.

Two impossible people.

The Doctor stared, rising to his feet, facing the two terrifying shapes in front of him. They smiled, and their pleasure was the twisted grinning of daemons. The Doctor shook his head, not wanting to believe what he was seeing.

“You!”

Interlude

Chancellor Nemus trembled. His gaunt face twitched as he watched Cardinal Phractus slip the black gloves over his thin hands. The Cardinal paused. Around him, the lights of the forbidden controls blinked and glittered softly, filling the terrible chamber with a dull, roseate glow. Cardinal Phractus turned to the Chancellor, pinpricks of light glinting in his eyes.

“I am ready, Chancellor,” he said quietly. The Chancellor gripped his staff of office more closely. Behind him, a coven of Council members shifted disquietly, as uncomfortable as he at the realities of their choices. To be here – in this forbidden, blasphemous chamber! They knew as well as the Chancellor, as well as Cardinal Phractus, that they were casting their die, making the first move. From this moment on, nothing would be certain – from this moment on, the past would vanish, and the future would become unwritten.

Chancellor Nemus straightened, certain in his decision, clutching the staff like a sceptre. He knew what they were doing was right – had to be right. They had no choice. He nodded to the Cardinal.

“Then, begin, Cardinal...”

Phractus reached out, his black gloved hand poised above the yellow-marked, dull ebon sphere in the centre of the black control panel. He licked his lips, a final sign of nervousness. He let his fingers fall, dropping to the control ball, and felt the dark power of the ancient relic resonate under his touch. He rotated the ball, the pattern of the yellow lines shifting. Power breathed through the device as he made his commands.

The Timescoop was activated. Nothing could stop events now.

vi. Night

They wheeled the Commodore's chair out into the night, his raincoat wrapped around him. Tyrell and Channing stood on either side, the wind whipping their rain-soaked coats around their ankles. Eight marines armed with semi-automatic rifles stood in firing-ready poses, the muzzles of their weapons pointed at the ground just in front of the crowd on the other side of the gate.

Beyond the metal chains, Garvyn Turner stood like a general at the front of the silent mob. Rain soaked his long coat and broad-brimmed hat. He was armed – a pistol in one hand, a cutlass-machete in the other. Jo and Raoul Mendoza stood on either side. The older docker swung a makeshift club. Behind the three, his shirt still spattered with blood from his beating, Walker Moses. Beyond the four, the torches of the mob guttered and spat in the downpour. The Commodore spoke through the fence.

"We've no quarrel with you, Commodore," Turner said slowly, eyeing the Marines. He raised his voice above the howl of the storm. "We just want Toussaint."

The old man nodded. "I understand. But understand my position, Mr. Turner: that man is a government official, answerable to the Governor-General in Jamaica, not to me, not to you and not to the rule of a mob."

Turner's lip curled. "That is the old hierarchy of command, Commodore – but tonight a new order is being born. We, the workers," he enunciated clearly, speaking as much to those behind as in front of him, "The common people, shall command – and Toussaint shall answer to us and us alone."

Nelson's lips tightened. He gripped the arms of his chair. "I cannot allow that, Mr. Turner."

"You oppose the will of the people?" Turner asked softly, dangerously. "It is the will of the future, Captain. Be careful if you chose to stand against it – few survive such a challenge."

The Commodore licked his lips. His only thought now was to protect the Spearhead. Beside him, Channing shifting, blinking the driving storm water from his eyes. He surveyed the crowd, his gaze lighting on familiar faces: Jo – and his Union-organising father from the Docks. On either side of Garvyn, they looked like a guard of honour.

"Perhaps..." Nelson offered carefully, raising his eyes to the weather. "You and I should discuss our options inside – out of the storm."

Turner smiled. "Divide and conquer, Commodore?" He shook his head, rain spraying from the brim of his hat. "I will stand here until you give us Toussaint. The storm, the winds – these are nothing to me. I am a man of principle, Commodore." Behind Turner, a rumble passed through the crowd – a murmur of assent. The sputtering, fading torches waved, and the banners snapped.

"A man of principle? You are an animal," spat a voice. The Commodore jerked his head. It was Toussaint. How the hell?... He saw two Marines stumbling out of the darkness, from the direction of the furthest hut, their expressions dazed, their uniforms askew, bruises wealing on their faces. Nelson gritted his teeth.

"Police Captain Toussaint," he said coolly. "You are to regard yourself as under my arrest! I order you to be returned to confinement!"

The Marines caught up with the escaped Police Captain. He threw off their restraining grip.

"You dare, Garvyn Turner, to face down the rule of law on this island? You dare to challenge order? If you are to face anyone, Garvyn Turner, you will face me! I am the rule of law! I am the power of order! I answer to no man," the Captain raged. He turned to the

Commodore. “Not to you, not to the Commonwealth Commissioner, not to the Governor-General in Jamaica!” Toussaint snarled. “I bow to none but my equals.” He turned to Turner. “And you, Garvyn Turner, are no equal of mine. Your only purpose is to destroy – to pillage! To tear down, gut and defile. You are a thing of chaos!”

Nelson turned to Channing. “Commander, restrain that man!” he bellowed. The storm cracked overhead, lightning flaring the sky.

The two Marines moved forward, Channing reaching for his pistol.

Toussaint roared, his thick arms grabbing and twisting at one of the Marines. The guard’s rifle was suddenly in his hands. The mob froze. Toussaint jerked the rifle.

The muzzle spat, and shots splintered the storm. Garvyn raised his hands instinctively. Beside him, Joachim Mendoza twisted, his shoulders spinning backwards. Raoul shouted something incoherent as the rifle in Toussaint’s hands roared a second time. He dove forward, and the second shot caught him. He jerked, his feet giving way, and he fell to the wet ground next to his silent son. The mob sagged and split, and then burst forward, anger welling up inside the gathered horde and exploding outwards. The gateway was shattered, the metal fence ripped aside, and they rushed into the gap. The Marines fired, uselessly, into the air. Screaming filled the darkness. Chaos rolled through the Naval station.

* * * * *

Lightning flashed, running pale light over familiar features.

The Doctor snarled through the rain. “You are nothing but phantasms – illusions! Shadows!”

The two faces smiled, an evil twinning.

“But Doctor,” the first said. “We thought you might like it.”

“A chance to,” the second searched for the apposite phrase, “Re-meet old friends.” Her smile broadened. “We were so sure you would be pleased.”

“I am disgusted,” the Doctor whispered, the wind tearing away his words.

Sir Henry struggled to his feet, the Doctor’s arms on his shoulders. Two women had appeared from nowhere. They stood in the middle of the road, the driving rain scarcely seeming to touch them. Both women were young, wearing black, functional suits that clung to their silhouettes. One was dark-skinned, with cropped hair and a sharp, athletic-looking face. The other seemed more bookish, somehow, with long pale hair that swooped around petite features. Both women’s eyes were skinned in black mirror. Their voices were hard and unpleasant. They were like things that had seeped up from hell.

“Who... what are they?” Sir Henry murmured, scrabbling upright, rain streaking down his sallow cheeks. He felt his weakened heart skip a beat.

“Shaydes,” the Doctor spat. Matrix-born golems, things of stolen memories and plundered experiences.

“Shades?” Sir Henry repeated, nervously. “Ghosts?” He was prepared now to believe almost anything.

“In a sense,” the Doctor said, nodding. The two women looked peevishly displeased.

“In no sense, Doctor,” the dark-skinned woman chided. She turned to Sir Henry. “We are as real as you, Sir Henry.”

“Perhaps even more so,” smiled the blonde woman. “I am Grae,”

“And I am Tamara,” finished the dark-skinned woman.

The Doctor’s eyes were like flint. “You are no such persons. They are nothing but phantoms, Sir Henry... using the appearance of the dead and the long-gone.” He shook his

head. “To what end? To what devious end?” He stepped forward. “You have no right to wear those bodies. No right at all. It is... an abomination.”

“Oh, Doctor,” frowned the Shayde-Tamara mockingly. “And we tried so hard.”

The Shayde-Grae raised one perfect eyebrow. “Are you not even the tiniest bit curious as to why we are here?”

The Doctor wiped the rain from his face. “I knew I smelled the stench of the High Council in all this – the stench of hypocritical and self-serving meddling.”

“The High Council?” the Grae-Shayde laughed, her black-mirror eyes glinting in the lighting. “Oh, Doctor, how wonderfully naive you have become in your old age.”

“Are you here at their bidding?” the Doctor continued. “Have they dressed you in those stolen forms the better to twist my arm? Have they wrapped you up in my memories so that you can tempt me? Beguile me? Pathetic,” he spat scornfully. “They should have known better. Go on – crawl back to whatever malignant members of the Council you call Masters and tell them you’ve failed.”

The Tamara-Shayde twitched. “You’re beginning to become tiresome, Doctor,” she hissed, warningly. The storm shrilled in the sky above them, driving rain in spears down the road. The Doctor and Sir Henry backed away to the palms bordering the tarmac.

“None of this would have happened, Doctor, if you had been paying attention,” Grae scolded. “What on earth were you doing?”

“Polemicising, no doubt,” Tamara sneered. “In that patronising, pedagogical manner of yours – so utterly infuriating.” She smiled unpleasantly. “Tamara hated it, you know. Hated always being wrong. Hated you always being right.”

“You lie,” the Doctor whispered, his protest almost lost in the fierceness of the storm. Tamara’s unpleasant smile didn’t waver.

“I know. Her memories, her experiences – they are all that I am. I know, Doctor – I am her, now.”

The Grae-Shayde waved her hand, frowning. “Enough.” She stepped forward. “Your carelessness never ceases to amaze, Doctor,” she sighed. “Anyone else would have spotted the Null-Event and stopped. Not you – you ploughed right into it.”

“Ploughed right in and bounced right off,” Tamara continued. “I expected it of your time-faring friends in the lighthouse – but you!” She chuckled, a dry, unlovely sound.

“It took us quite some time to finally locate you.” Grae said. “Only a matter of hours, I know – but it’s such a complicated temporal nexus; you could have been anywhere!”

“So it was you who planted the Null-Time event,” the Doctor nodded.

“Who did you think it was?” Tamara replied, petulantly. “Those fifty-first century marauders?” She rolled her eyes. “Almost as careless as yourselves – to have been caught up in the wake like that.” She pursed her lips. “And yet, it added a certain... piquancy to watch them floundering around for so long.” She laughed. “They bounced even further than you did!”

“Stop it!” barked the Doctor. “This is obscene!” he hissed. “Why are you doing this? Detonating a Null-Time event in the middle of such a fragile moment in Earth’s history? You must be insane! Even the most unhinged lunatics on the High Council wouldn’t dare – couldn’t dare! The very fabric of Earth’s causality is unwinding!” He whipped out a hand, pointing to Sir Henry. “It’s started to unravel already! This man is alive – but he should be dead. What else has changed? What other paradoxes, anomalies, inconsistencies and parallels has this spawned?”

Grae folded her arms. “If you had been paying more attention to your driving, none of this would have happened.”

“Our plan was perfect,” Tamara sulked. “Is perfect – still.”

“It had to be,” Grae agreed. “Too much remains at stake.”
The Doctor frowned. “At stake?” His eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”
“Oh,” Grae shrugged breezily. “The Universe. The Future. Everything – you know how it is.”

* * * * *

“Are you certain?” Zhao pressed.

Galloway nodded. “No question. This is what the Doctor was talking about – this third set of readings. It’s not some extension of the Null-Time event – it’s something separate. A temporal entity. A whole time-space vessel just hanging out there at the edge of continual space. It’s just sitting there – poised on the edge of the Null-Event.”

“Not being pulled into it – like we were?” Zhao asked. “Or the Doctor?”

“No,” Galloway gulped. “And that’s the thing. The energy potential of that craft must be... astronomical to resist the drag of the Null-Time event, a billion-billion times greater than our ship was, or the Doctor’s. And it’s not just any kind of energy. To resist the time-space pull of the Null-Event, that energy potential must have future momentum.” Galloway let his words sink in. “That ship out there,” he nodded to the spiky craft. “Is a future time-vessel.” He looked pale. “We can’t let that reactor blow now – not under any circumstances. If the reactor goes up, it’ll destabilise that future potential and take us and about fifty million years of established history out with it.”

The Captain frowned. “Can’t our zeiton core simply absorb the energy? Just a few minutes ago we were all worried about not having enough power.”

“Look, that core’s tiny – the warping effect of a detonating fission reactor, yes. But the warping effect of a detonating space-time drive? There’s no possible way the core could absorb that, Captain. Local space-time has already been damaged by the Null-Time event. If that other vessel gets caught up in the latent temporal warping field of an exploding fission reactor it’ll punch a hole right into the vortex. Nothing will survive. That is the Null-Event – the detonation of this future time vessel. We need to stop that reactor exploding – and fast.”

“Shak...” Zhao whispered. She pursed her lips, looking around. Less than an hour to stop something they’d been trying for months to make happen. “Okay – combat suits and weapons. We’re going down there to pull the plug on the Spearhead.”

* * * * *

It was mostly dark – the kind of endless, featureless dark you get in dreams, not the empty, void-dark of space. It went on forever, the pipework, tubing and cables spilling off into nothingness and vanishing in its boundless shadow. Yet at the same time, it felt cramped and confined, as tiny as the boxy space inside the Telephone Box should have been. The Doctor looked over at Silver from the far side of the columnar control array. She smiled weakly. The interior of the Box made her feel claustrophobic. The control array poked out of a metal floor plate. On all sides, a nest of wires and tubes and unclear mechanics pressed in around the floor panel. On one side, like part of a stage set, there was a set of doors – red painted cast-iron with the windows papered over. Apart from the endless cables and pistons and sparking wiring, that seemed to be the sum of the Telephone Box’s interior.

“Almost there,” the Doctor said, the rich baritone clearly trying to be reassuring. Silver flashed him her weak smile. She was soaking wet and freezing cold. The interior of the box had a chill, clinical atmosphere, like a hospital.

“So, er,” she fumbled, tucking a damp strand of hair back behind one ear and wrapping her arms around her waist. “Where did you get this...?” Thing? Ship? TARDIS? Silver had no idea what to call it. It was as much a mystery as the sudden appearance of the Extraordinary Guide.

“Interstitial Shunt,” the Doctor said, hands dancing over the narrow control array. A complex column of metal tubes and glassy cylinders juddered above the console. “Not strictly speaking a time-space vessel, more a –“ he waved one hand, searching for the right phrase. “Series of doors, linking various points on a complex temporal node.” He grinned. “Clear?”

Yeah. As mud. As usual. Silver winced slightly as the control array began to vibrate with a high-pitched whine. “But, I mean, where did you –“ The whine rose suddenly. “Ow!” Silver clapped her hands to her ears. There was a belly-thumping thud, and the whine stopped. She lowered her hands carefully. The Doctor scooted around the control array.

“We’re here,” he said softly. He looked at the talismans hung around Silver’s neck. “Still got the key?”

Silver nodded quickly, a little irritated. “Yes, but –“

“No time to lose,” said the Doctor, his eyes flashing. He pushed open the Telephone Box door.

* * * * *

“A nuclear submarine?” the Doctor repeated.

Grae sighed. “For such a reputed genius,” she said dryly, “You display a remarkable lack of insight. Yes – a nuclear submarine. S104 – the HMS Spearhead, sister vessel – and in the same series - to the HMS Dreadnought.”

“But one with a flaw in the reactor,” Tamara warned, her mirror eyes gleaming sadistically. She waved her hand through the rain, down the road in the general direction of the Naval station.

“Hot-headed townfolk are, at this moment, running through the base, shooting and killing and generally behaving much as primitives do the Universe over,” Tamara continued. “Little do they realise, however, what their actions will precipitate.”

“A nuclear explosion,” the Doctor breathed. The Shayde-Grae nodded.

“Unfortunate, perhaps, but there you go. You can’t make an omelette –“

“Don’t,” the Doctor glared. She snapped her mouth shut.

“The point is,” Tamara said. “That the explosion itself is incidental.”

The Doctor nodded, the full horror of the situation becoming apparent. “The third set of readings!”

“A Bhargav time-ship,” smiled Grae. “Moored at the future edge of the causal nexus already unravelling backwards from the Null-Event. Clever, don’t you think?”

The Doctor stared at the pair of Shaydes. “And the detonating reactor will destabilise the future potential of the vessel –“

“- and create the Null-Time event!” Grae smiled. “Boom! Paradox resolved!”

“Except for one thing,” the Doctor said quickly. “There never was a nuclear incident in the Caribbean in 1963. And there never was an HMS Spearhead! There were only three nuclear submarines developed by the British Navy: S101 – S103.” He stared in open-mouthed horror at the Shaydes. “How long have you been creating this event? How many years? How many alterations have you made to history? Small, tiny alterations – building up, accumulating. A man kept alive here,” he looked at Sir Henry. “A career shifted there...” He shook his head, almost at a loss for words. “It’s staggering – staggering...”

Grae shrugged. “History is so easy to manipulate – nothing more than a simple chain of cause and effect, Doctor.”

“Alter a cause, alter an effect – child’s play!” Tamara concluded.

“History is so much more!” exclaimed the Doctor. “It is the subtle interplay of destinies and possibilities! It is the interleaving of pasts and futures, the complex weaving together of what if with what is. It is the actions and reactions of living, thinking people. It is the evolution of consequence. It is every insignificant event being given manifest significance by virtue of a million unforeseen interactions and connections. It is like a set of stories written by a dozen different authors, each writer’s voice merging with the others, each stroke of a dozen pens shaping characters and building worlds. You cannot simply tear up one page or expunge select lines here and there. History is a totality, a sum, not a collection of options and extras. You cannot pick and choose which parts of the timestream best suit you.”

“Yes we can,” interjected Grae, smugly.

“No you cannot,” snapped the Doctor firmly. “Six thousand miles away, a man lies murdered – “

“We didn’t do it,” the Shaydes protested in unison.

“- yet that death is woven into the fabric of events here and across the globe, just as events here will resonate back to the men and women who even now make plans and shape futures in the wake of that murder. Can you not see that the changes you make will spread like a virus, corrupting the history of the Earth for millennia? Why are you doing it? Why?” He repeated the simple, plaintive question, rain pouring down his face. “Why?”

Grae and Tamara exchanged a glance and shrugged.

“How should we know?”

* * * * *

It was warm, dry and smelled of the forest. Silver stepped away from the Telephone Box, leaving damp footprints on the wooden panels underfoot. They were in a large, vaulted space. Low amber light sifted in from some concealed source overhead. Arcs of solid, metal vaulting, glowing softly in the amber light like burnished bronze, curved above them. In between the arms were curved panels of dark wood, polished to a soft sheen, their broad surfaces marked with endless columns of stroke-like figures. Between the columns, strange crystal pods hung against the walls. The long wooden floor stretched down to a point at one end, the walls, floor and ceiling terminating in a point. Wide control surfaces winked slowly in the low light. Above them, hexagonal panels – viewing screens? – and in their dull surfaces, the slowly-spinning ball of planet Earth.

“Where are we?” Silver whispered, hardly daring to let her voice puncture the cathedral-like hush.

The Doctor closed the door to the Telephone Box. He looked around the empty chamber, a sadness drifting into his eyes. “This is the last ship of the Bhargav,” he replied quietly. “A refugee ship, fleeing from the wars with the Xalm.” He walked slowly across the wooden floor, his footsteps vanishing into the hush. Silver followed.

On each wall, the pods loomed, twice Silver’s height – three times. The Doctor walked slowly closer. Light shifted inside them, refracting on their polished surfaces. Shadows lurked within – great ursine shapes with reptilian jaws and clusters of glowing, spider’s eyes. Fur and scales and teeth and talons: the slumbering shapes of nightmare monsters, trapped within the crystals, as if in amber.

“The last of the Bhargav – an ancient race, one of the mightiest races ever to ply the Time Winds,” the Doctor continued. “But gone now. Dead. Lost in the dim mists of myth and legend. Consumed by their war with the Xalm. This ship is now all that is left of their kind. A relic of a future past, no longer remembered.”

Silver frowned. “You’re losing me again, Doc,” she warned him. “Future past? What does that mean?”

The Doctor shook his head. He turned his dark eyes on Silver. “My past, Silver – your future.” He shook his head. “Never mind. It’s not important. What is important is that key,” he nodded towards Silver’s neck. “We can end all this now – come on.” He headed down towards the far end of the chamber, away from the control panels and the image of the Earth.

Silver was bursting with questions. Something was wrong here – something was weirdly, strangely wrong. She couldn’t put her finger on it, somehow, but something didn’t add up.

“Listen, Doctor,” she insisted. “I’m really kind of out to sea, here – what with the new/old body thing, the 1963 thing, the TARDIS crashing thing. I don’t... I mean, I just don’t get it. What’s really going on? Where did you get that Telephone Box from? Why do you need the TARDIS key so much?” A sudden thought struck her. “Why can’t you use your own key?”

The Doctor didn’t answer. The chamber suddenly narrowed, shrinking down to a low-ceilinged corridor, lined with more wooden panels decorated with columns of scratch-like marks.

“Hey, Doc!” Silver snapped. “I’m asking my best questions here – what’s going on?”

The corridor split, one fork rising up, the other dipping down. Brass-like metal bands encircled each soft, organic opening. Two more openings gaped on either side, curving away, up and down. The Doctor turned into one, his pace increasing.

“Doctor?” Silver now had to trot to keep up with him. “Hey! I’m talking to you, Doctor! This question and answer session is getting just a bit too one-sided for my liking!”

Something caught her eye. There, on the floor, resting incongruously on the oiled wooden panels. She stopped, reached out, fully expecting the illusion to melt away and vanish. But it didn’t. Her fingers touched the worn black plastic strap, the friendship bracelet still wound around one side. It was still running, too – the little mouse-hands ticking slowly across Mickey’s face. Her watch. She had left it in her room in the TARDIS. But here it was, sitting on the floor of an alien spaceship. Like the roundels and the boots she found on the beach. They had been her boots! She looked down the curved corridor. Standing at the next junction, a curve of stairs around a tall newel post: the library steps. Silver wandered over to them, letting her hands rest on the velvet cushion on the top step. How was this possible?

She snorted. Like enough impossible things hadn’t happened to her today. But if her watch was here, if the library steps were here – she ran, ran after the vanishing figure of the Doctor, down the curve corridor...

Then she skidded to a halt, almost bumping into the Doctor’s stilled back.

“Whoa...,” she breathed.

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. “Now do you see?” he asked quietly.

Buried in the wooden panels in front of them, surrounded by the organic, undulating bands of brass and the calligraph of claw-mark scratches, was –

“The TARDIS...,” whispered Silver.

The familiar blue painted door, its frosted glass windows, and the enigmatic signs. The front door to the TARDIS.

* * * * *

They slid down the rain-soaked hillside, mud grinding underneath their boots and into the creases of their combat suits. Leaves and branches slapped at their arms. They pulled down their hoods, UV lenses sliding into position, breathing vanes hushing across their mouths.

Hitomi skidded around a tumble of fallen stones from the final fortress wall. She had no idea what they were going to do – how they were going to stop the Spearhead from launching. They had to find Channing, had to convince him to delay things. It was their only hope.

Lightning arced and roared across the cliff above.

* * * * *

“What do you mean – how should you know?” the Doctor gaped. “This is all your doing – the paradoxes, the Null-Time event: everything!”

Grae sighed. “But we’re Shaydes, Doctor – nothing more.”

“We do,” Tamara said simply. “We act.”

“You know we don’t plan,” finished Grae.

“We found the derelict Bhargav ship, we transported it to the nexus, we set in motion the Spearhead development, we detonated the Null-Time Event - but these were someone else’s plans, Doctor, not ours,” Tamara finished lightly. “The only reason we’re here is because something went wrong.”

“You... bounced,” Grae smiled, a little apologetically.

“But,” Tamara smiled also. “Time marches on. Not long now, and the detonation will occur – then this whole little situation will be resolved.”

“But what happens now?” the Doctor pressed, hoarsely. “What happens at the moment of detonation?”

“Ah – well, that would be telling,” Grae admitted.

“But you’re right, of course, Doctor,” Tamara said, grudgingly. “Something is going to happen, something even you would never exp –”

There was a roar and a screech, and a shadow slid out of the darkness. Rubber shrieked on soaked tar. Headlights flared, catching the two Shaydes in their halo. They turned, their faces burning bright in the glare. Then there was a bang – a horrific sound of smashing and breaking, of shredding matter and shattering glass. The vehicle roared through where they had been standing, its bonnet splintered, the headlights exploding. The tyres skidded long and loud across the paving, aquaplaning on the pooling rain. The vehicle lurched into the ditch at the side of the road, and the sound of its engine died.

The Doctor and Sir Henry pounded through the wind and rain towards the crashed car.

* * * * *

“The hanger!” the Commodore roared, his feet catching on the veranda. He and Tyrell crashed into the side of the hut. “The hanger – the Spearhead!” His hands clutched the damp air, pleading with Channing. “Protect the Spearhead!”

A rattle of shots clipped the edge of the hut, spraying them with a shower of splintered wood. Tyrell dragged the Commodore in through the gaping door. Channing fired into the darkness. It was chaos. Toussaint had vanished, bolting into the dark warren of the

Naval station. The crowd had surged through the gates, disappearing into the storm. There was an explosion, and Hut Seven burst into flame. The mob was no longer simply a protesting crowd – it was a deadly beast, unleashed into the heart of a nuclear facility. Channing grappled with the new situation.

“Get the Commodore under cover,” he barked to Tyrell. “Don’t worry, Sir,” he shouted. “Leave it to me!”

He barrelled out across the veranda, dodging stray gunfire. He rounded up the three stunned Marines by the gate and made for the hanger.

* * * * *

Soloman dragged himself from the controls, shaking the confusion from his head. “Harder to pilot than they look,” he mumbled, lurching away from the listing metal box. The Doctor slipped to a halt in front of him, blowing rain off the end of his nose. He stared at the man in the combat suit limping out of the sagging Cooper. The flickering inertial shield, the wound on his leg – it could only be one man.

“Soloman Ushek!” he cried.

Soloman frowned, then recognised the voice. “You’re the one looking for the girl and the cat!” he concluded, puzzled. “But –?”

The Doctor grabbed his arm. “No time – no time.” He patted the man down. “Nothing broken?”

Soloman shook his head. “I don’t think so – just the vehicle. No auto-controls – harder to steer than I supposed in this rain.” He scowled. “I hate rain.”

“Doctor,” Sir Henry trotted up behind them. “The two women – the ghosts. They’ve gone!”

The Doctor scanned the road. “Just so, just so. Disturbed their block-transfer shells, no doubt. They’ll reform in a few minutes, Sir Henry – which gives us a chance to get one step ahead of them.”

Sir Henry blinked and shook his head, confusion mounting on confusion. The Doctor leapt to Soloman’s stolen vehicle.

“Seems you’re not as bad a driver as you look, Mister Soloman,” the Doctor said happily. “No real damage done – hop in, you two!”

Soloman and Sir Henry exchanged a glance. “What are we going to do now?” Sir Henry inquired tentatively.

“We’re going to stop the end of the world,” smiled the Doctor grimly, turning the key in the ignition. The engine coughed to life. “What else?”

* * * * *

Channing panted. He motioned the three Marines to stay back in the shadows. He peered around the door of the hanger. The sleek, black arrow of the Spearhead loomed up out of the dock. Water lapped at its flanks. It was all ready to go. There was only the technical crew aboard, waiting to activate the reactor.

There were shouts from the top of the submarine. A shot rang out. There was a scream, and a man toppled off the gantry and slid down the metal skin of the submarine, disappearing with a splash into the water. More shots were fired. Someone leapt from a gantry onto the conning tower, his coat flaring behind him. It was Turner.

Channing fingered his pistol. He almost dared not fire. A stray shot could cause irreparable damage. But the Spearhead had to be protected. He raised his revolver, stilling his breathing, training his sights on the gang following Turner's lead.

A black-gloved hand descended, pushing his revolver down. Channing jerked. Hitomi's face loomed out of the blackness. She was dressed in some strange, slick suit, a goggled helmet pulled back from her face. She smiled, and raised a wand-like device towards the men on the conning tower. There was a soundless rumble, as if the air itself had been shaken. A flare of blue light enveloped the rioters, and they slumped unconscious onto the gantry.

Channing stared at Hitomi. Two black-suited figures slipped out of the shadows to join her. Hitomi smiled grimly, grabbing her lover's hand.

"John? John – listen to me. We've got to stop the reactor from being initialised..."

* * * * *

Toussaint blinked. Turner and his men vanished from the hatch, a blue light flooding over them. He gripped the scruff of the scientist's neck, jamming the pistol harder into the man's temple. His eyes flicked back and forth, watching the hatchway, but no one followed.

"Close it!" he barked, spittle flecking the corners of his mouth. "Close it!" he shrieked as the other scientists hesitated. He pushed the muzzle of the revolver harder into his hostage's forehead. The man whimpered. A seaman rushed up the ladder and pulled the hatch shut with a clang.

"Now – take us out," Toussaint hissed.

The scientists and the crewmen exchanged looks.

"Take us out!" the Captain screamed.

* * * * *

The battered car rolled through the broken Naval station gates. A pair of crumpled bodies slumped against the metal fence. The Doctor looked through the stormy darkness, horrified. The lights in the huts flickered. One of them smouldered, rain-dampened flames guttering in the wooden shell. From somewhere across the Naval station came distant shouts and the stutter of gunfire. The Doctor pulled on the handbrake.

"What – what's happened?" whispered Sir Henry.

"The mob – they must have come here," the Doctor answered quietly.

Soloman limped from the car, through the rain, to one crumpled body. The glazed eyes of Joachim Mendoza stared up, unseeing at him. Soloman twisted his lips, rain merging with faint tears.

"What are we doing here, Doctor?" he asked harshly, turning away from the body.

"The reactor – the submarine's reactor," the Doctor replied, climbing out of the car. "We've got to stop it being initialised."

Soloman frowned. "The reactor? But I thought –"

"Things have moved on, Soloman," the Doctor called as he headed for the hanger. "Things have moved on!"

Sir Henry leaned heavily against the front of the car, his heart racing. "Reactor? But Doctor, I don't –"

"Henry!"

The old diplomat turned to the voice. A figure stumbled out of the darkness, drenched and frightened.

“Carol!” Sir Henry ran towards the terrified woman, clasping her hands. “My God!” He put a hand to her cheek, pushing one rain-dampened curl out of her tear-stung eyes. “What’s been going on? It looks like all Hell has –”

“Sir Henry!” shouted Lieutenant Tyrell. He raced from the open door of Hut One. “Get inside, Sir – under cover! You too, Miss Merriweather!” He looked up and saw the Doctor and Soloman standing in the pouring rain. “Inside – get inside!” he shouted.

Light flared from the door to Hut One. Commodore Nelson stood on two canes in the doorway, Collins behind him. “Sir Henry!” he cried. “Where in God’s name have you been?”

“Commodore!” called the diplomat. He swished his damp hair from his brow. “Commodore – this is the Doctor. Something about a reactor – Doctor!” he called across the tarmac.

The Doctor loped up to the hut. “Are you in charge, here?”

“I’m Commodore Nelson, Director of this facility – who are you?”

“There’s no time for that, Commodore,” the Doctor insisted. “We’ve got to get to the reactor – it’s not safe. There’s a flaw – you mustn’t initialise the reactor!”

“Not safe?” The Commodore shook his head. “Dammit, that reactor’s passed every test in the –”

“Commodore!” shouted Sir Henry. “Listen to the Doctor, old man – there’s something else going on here! If he says there’s something wrong with it, you’d better listen. He’s –” Sir Henry’s shout ended on a gurgling shriek. Blood spouted from his shoulder. Carol Merriweather screamed as the old diplomat’s body shuddered and lurched forward.

The darkness behind Sir Henry hissed. “Dead at last!”

It was a shimmering, quivering shadow – part silhouette, part human. Tamara’s face flickered in the shadow, alternating with something feline and something dark and mirrored. The thing crooned as Sir Henry’s blood pooled.

“We will not be denied, Doctor – we have planned long and laid those plans with infinite care.” The Shayde raised talons dripping red into the rain.

“The reactor will be initialised, Doctor,” the shadow hissed. A thing that might have been a hand or a set of mirrored claws dripped blood as it stalked, long-legged, forward, stepping over Sir Henry’s fallen body. “The Null-Event will take place, and you will be returned to Gallifrey – my mission accomplished!” Fangs clashed somewhere inside the creature’s mirrored head. The face of Tamara Scott flickered for a few seconds over the mirror.

“Returned to -?” the Doctor stared, incredulous.

The shadow hissed and laughed. “With the Null-Event comes the Timescoop, Doctor. We shall guide it in. Hidden in the space-time turmoil, the Timescoop will take you home, Doctor – a secret way to take you back to face your future.” The shadow’s talons clicked. “All the rest here is meaningless – the fate of men and things are as dust to what lies in future balance. Gallifrey itself is the prize, Doctor, and whether you will be Champion or Nemesis, I do not know, but my –”

The shadow shrieked as something bolted out of the darkness, hurling itself at the Shayde like a spear. A blot of shadow leapt at the Shayde, spitting and snarling. The indistinct silhouette smeared and slipped, its outline quivering, its shape folding and melting. It screamed, shimmering from mirror to humanoid in seconds, shifting back and forth from one to another, phasing from solid to shadow as it crumpled. The attacker, too, began to shift and alter, morphing from a dark, furred bundle of claws and teeth, joining with the Shayde, merging with it – consuming it. A horrible light wavered on the blood-spattered tarmac, freezing the rain around it into immobile drops. The light and the merging, slipping shapes wavered, trembled, and coalesced, the light vanishing, the two

forms suddenly resolving into one. It knelt there, on the wet tarmac, rain soaking into its naked back, hands spread out on the cold ground. It raised its head – a young head, dark-haired, eyes flashing a touch of ginger.

“Gotcha!” it purred.

* * * * *

Silver stood before the TARDIS doors. Somehow, she knew. She turned to the thing that wore the appearance of her Doctor.

“You’re not him, are you?” she asked. The Doctor’s eyes darkened, and he shook his head sadly. The warm smile vanished, and the face began to shimmer and melt. His features collapsed, resolving themselves into a darkly-mirrored sphere. The thing with the Doctor’s body and the blank sphere for a face spoke in a soft, honeyed voice from nowhere.

“I am a Shayde – one of many. A creature of the Timelord Matrix, an Agent of the Keeper, sent to ensure that... plans do not unravel.”

Silver gazed at the mirrored sphere with a great knot of sadness tying itself in the pit of her stomach. “Plans?” she whispered.

The Shayde turned its blank face towards the TARDIS door. “It is a defence mechanism. When faced with crisis, a TARDIS may splinter itself apart, imbedding itself into the local reality matrix. Hide, until the crisis is resolved. Bits and pieces of the ship were scattered across Petit Cerique and this alien time vessel. Your boots, the Guide, the library steps,” the Shayde indicated the timepiece in Silver’s hands. “Your watch. The lamp the Doctor saw in the market square.”

Silver couldn’t help but smile. “Is that what he saw?”

The mirrored sphere nodded. “A beacon. A light shining in darkness. Yes – that is what he saw.”

Silver unlooped the TARDIS key from around her neck. “And if I unlock these doors?” She stared at them as if seeing them for the first time: the narrow double doors, uneven handles, peeling paint, the curious signs, the irregularly frosted windows.

“You release the TARDIS – cancel the pause control, allow it to reform.”

“I release the TARDIS?” But there was more. The Shayde’s mirrored face swirled, morphed back into the hollow features of the Doctor once more. “What else?” Silver asked, staring into the counterfeit eyes.

The Shayde-Doctor sighed. “You release the Doctor. The TARDIS is the key. Bound as she is, she becomes part of the Null-Event. Patterns are complete. The reactor is detonated, the Bhargav vessel destabilises, the vortex is breached, and the Timescoop takes the Doctor. But unbound...” The Shayde trailed off.

“What?” Silver asked. “What?” she shouted, her voice echoing down the silent wooden corridors. Tears pricked her eyes. Some momentous decision trembled on the horizon.

The Shayde-Doctor looked at her with a gaze full of sorrow and regret.

“With the TARDIS unbound, events are in flux. The Doctor is released. You allow him to chose...”

* * * * *

“Please, Sir,” whispered the scientist. “You must believe me – we cannot move the submarine until the reactor has been initialised. All motive systems are now linked for the

final test. We cannot start the engines now without unhooking the nuclear drive, which will take hours. Please..." he pleaded.

Toussaint's trigger-finger twitched. "So stop the reactor. Start the engines on ordinary power – launch this vessel!"

The scientist glanced at the clock: 19:51:32.

"I... I can't – the initialisation sequence is on an automatic timer, and I don't have the code to stop it."

Toussaint's finger squeezed the trigger. The hull echoed to the sound of the gunshot. Smoke drifted up from the body slumping down against the bloodstained chair. The Police Captain trained his pistol on a second scientist.

"Find me the code."

* * * * *

Channing pounded the hatch. "It's no good!" he shouted. "It's locked!"

"What will happen now?" Hitomi asked.

Channing wiped the sweat from his forehead. "The initialisation is on a timer. The reactor will begin to warm up over the next three minutes as the start-up sequence is automatic. To stop it now you'd need the command codes – and only myself, the Commodore and Doctor Strang have them."

* * * * *

"Choose?" Silver spread her hands. "Choose what?"

The Shayde's face shimmered once more. Once more the mirrored sphere regarded the young girl blankly. It seemed to sigh, unhappily.

"Something is coming, Silver – something terrible. There is a darkness which gathers in the forgotten corners of space and time, a darkness which threatens all of creation. The Universe is held in the balance. This is a time of beginnings and a time of endings, a time of flux and change – a time of the greatest terrors and the mightiest glories. The Doctor is the key to all this – a key which will unlock the final destinies of all space-time."

"What, some kind of Time War or something?"

The Shayde shook its mirrored skull. "Nothing which those of us who live in this present universe can conceive."

"And what am I supposed to do?" Silver insisted. "Let the Doctor choose? Choose what?"

"Choose whether or not to embrace his destiny," the Shayde replied. "Choose whether or not to return to Gallifrey. Whether or not to return home."

Silver turned the key over in her fingers. "And if I unlock the TARDIS?" she asked.

"You free him to make that choice," the Shayde confirmed. "But it is a choice that he must make... alone."

* * * * *

The man stood up, rain sliding down his naked torso. He turned to the Doctor, ignoring the stupefied stares from the humans surrounding them.

"Better late than never?"

The Doctor blinked. The body was unfamiliar, the voice new – but the essence... “Mortimer?” the Doctor asked. The dark-haired young man smiled.

“What do you think?” he said, giving a slight catwalk turn. His dark eyes flashed amber. “I’ve been tracking them since we landed. Never did like Shaydes,” he growled. He cricked his neck. “Scrapped with them a couple of times in the town, but I don’t think they quite realised what I was.”

“How?” The Doctor cocked his head. “You absorbed their block-transfer matrix?” he surmised.

“That hit from the car must have destabilised them just enough,” Mortimer said quickly. His naked skin shifted, and he suddenly wore a naval uniform to match the Commodore’s. “It’s still unstable,” he noted.

Tyrell knelt down with Merriweather and the crumpled body of the Commissioner. “My God!” he shouted. “Sir Henry’s still alive!”

Nelson snapped to. “Collins – find Doctor Harper!” The Lieutenant ran off towards the medical hut.

“Soloman, Mortimer,” the Doctor said, turning from the stunned station Director. “We need to stop the reactor!”

The Commodore watched the Doctor, the man in the black armour and the man now dressed like him vanish into the rain and the darkness, not understanding anything.

* * * * *

“Alone?” Silver asked the Shayde, her voice quiet and small.

“You cannot return with him, Silver,” the Shayde insisted. “You must free him to make his destiny without you.”

“But... but he... he needs me...,” Silver protested.

“Yes,” the Shayde nodded. “He does. He needs you. He relies on you. In unbinding the TARDIS, you must also unbind the Doctor. He cannot face the coming terror still entwined with your humanity. He must return to the darkness of his own people and face them alone – as an equal to them: as a Gallifreyan, as a Timelord, not as a traveller and his companion.”

Silver stood silent and still. Somehow, she felt a deep and distant truth, a drum-beat calling through her experiences. She closed her eyes. She felt the weight of the Doctor’s dead body in her arms once more, the heat and stink of the swamp mud around her ankles, the darkness and despair that had closed in around her. And then she felt that spark – the flare of new life, the blossoming of regeneration, the strange, sacred bond that held her and Doctor together and made them one. Human and Timelord, alien to alien, wrapped together by circumstance and synchronicity, by accident and design, by change and device. She had known it then – she knew it now: those bonds that threaded them together held him to her as much as it held her to him.

“Release him, Silver,” the Shayde pleaded.

That stupid old cliché fluttered through Silver’s head: If you love something, set it free. If it doesn’t come back, it was never yours in the first place... It was no choice, no choice at all. It was a double-bind: if she didn’t release the Doctor, he would be taken from her anyway; if she released him, she knew he would choose to go, to return to his people, to fight their war or whatever it was. She knew him – she knew he would go. Soft tears ran down her cheeks, dragging makeup and salt. The future. This was the future: a future in the past, a future without the Doctor, without the TARDIS. The future. This was the

future: only an echo of the past, an echo of a choice that was no choice. This was the future: silent, empty, solitary. A future alone.

Through fire and water... In sickness and in health...

The TARDIS key felt as heavy as loneliness, as cold and inevitable as sorrow as her tiny fingers closed around it...

* * * * *

The Doctor and Mortimer raced into the hanger. The dark bulk of the Spearhead rose up over them. Soloman limped behind.

Zhao looked down from the gantry at the top of the submarine..

“Doctor!”

Galloway leapt up. “Doctor! It’s no use – the door to the vessel is sealed!” He waved his wrist scanner. “The reactor’s initialisation sequence been started!”

The Doctor looked around, desperate for options.

“I can get inside,” Mortimer insisted, his skin quivering with mirrored light. He raced for the submarine’s hull. “My Matrix form is still unstable! I can get through the hull and –“

There was a snarl and a hiss. The second Shayde, shifting and shimmering from silhouette to a tailed, taloned something with the partial face of Grae, splintered into existence. A flailing talon slammed into the Doctor, winding him, throwing him to the concrete. Mortimer spun, and the snarling, Grae-thing attacked. The Shayde forms crackled. The Grae-Shayde sourced pain from deep within the Matrix, conjured blades, relived terror, and struck at Mortimer. He flew across the concrete hanger floor, then spun and kicked back, his human shape shifting to cat, to mirrored shimmer, to something half-way between. The two shapes clashed, light sparking, dark mirrored forms shrieking and twisting. Then there was only Mortimer, lying on the concrete, his limbs battered and hanging, his face smeared with blood.

“Go!” he croaked.

The Doctor scrambled to his feet, the seconds ticking away. The shadow of the Spearhead loomed like a curse. He ran for the ladder, up, up to the gantry, fingers fumbling with his sonic screwdriver.

* * * * *

The Shayde-Doctor’s face rippled as the metal rotor in the cramped space rose and fell. Warning lights flared and flickered as space-time split and shifted around it. In the darkness, Silver crouched on the tiny floor, eyes dull and empty.

* * * * *

The sonic screwdriver whined. Bolts shot back, the hatch opened up. The Doctor grabbed and hauled it up. A fist slammed across from nowhere into his jaw, sending him flying. He grabbed at the edge of the railing. Garvyn Turner shook his head and his bunched fist. He swung his cutlass-machete, catching Zhao across her back. She toppled forward, banging against the railing, skidding down the hull of the submarine, crumpling on the concrete floor of the hanger.

Hitomi sprang up, fists spinning. Garvyn’s pistol snapped, the shot exploding against Hitomi’s shield. She shook, arms spread wide, flying backwards into Galloway. The

pair collapsed. Channing rammed the butt of his rifle upwards. Garvyn ducked, and the wooden shoulder clanged against the conning tower. Garvyn kicked out, striking Channing on the back of the legs, leaping over him and skidding down the ladder, cutlass-machete scraping sparks against the rungs. The Doctor blinked the stars from his eyes, his fingers clawing at the metal gridding. Below him, the Shaydes grappled, mirrored energy rippling and pulsing.

The Doctor stumbled, falling down the ladder, boots and knees scraping against the metal. The command centre. The scientists. Toussaint. Garvyn.

The Police Captain roared. He threw the scientist in his throttling grasp at the overseer and fired. Bullets sprayed the control panels. The Doctor half-ducked, half-tumbled, behind a control panel. One of the scientists screamed. Wiring burst into showers of sparks. Something erupted into flame. Smoke oozed from the damaged console. Garvyn swung his machete, splinters of metal flying. Toussaint lunged, his hands wrapping around Garvyn's throat. There was a terrible cracking, splintering, choking sound. Toussaint's mouth gaped, blood slowly rising over his tongue and gurgling out of the corners of his mouth. His dying hands tightened on Garvyn's throat. He stared at the machete buried in his chest with darkening eyes, Garvyn's hands locked on its hilt. There was a crunch as Toussaint squeezed, and Garvyn's neck snapped. They toppled to one side, bathed in blood, dead.

The science crew screamed and shouted, pushing up the ladder, dragging their wounded with them. Alarms sounded – bells, hooting klaxons, warning sirens. The Doctor coughed as the smoke began to fill the chamber. His eyes found the clock.

20:00:26

One minute to save the world.

The cancel codes. He needed the cancel codes. Channing. He needed Channing.

20:00:31

The Doctor turned, scrabbling for his handkerchief, eyes streaming, mouth burning with smoke. His hands fumbled for the ladder.

20:00:39

He stumbled on the rungs. He dropped his handkerchief. "Channing!" he cried, his voice hoarse. The smoke clawed at his throat. "Channing!!" he roared.

20:00:48

A sound. A rumbling, whooshing, vworping, trumpeting sound – a sound like none other. It filled the tiny command centre as a red box began to slowly fade into view.

20:01:00

Two figures in front of the red box.

"Silver," the Doctor whispered, his lean cheeks and his eyes hollow with understanding. He stepped forward, but the dark child stepped back, an involuntary recoil, her face haunted. The Doctor flicked a glance at the other – like staring into a mirror. The Shayde with his old face turned and looked at the clock, then he looked back at the Doctor.

"Twenty-six seconds to save the world," the Shayde said quietly. "An eternity to choose."

And the Doctor finally understood. The end had come at last.

Interlude

The floor shook. A warning klaxon blinked out across the Timescoop controls. Phractus looked around frantically. Lights flashed at him from the ancient console.

“What is it?” the Chancellor snapped. “Phractus – what is it? What’s happened?”

The Cardinal stammered, his fingers searching vainly over the controls. The arcane readouts meant nothing to him. He stared uselessly at the pulsing warning light.

“Phractus?” shouted the Chancellor, as the chamber rippled and the robed Council members flailed. “What’s gone wrong?”

Keeper Peldin shoved his corpulent bulk through the gaggle of Councillors. “Nothing is wrong, Chancellor,” he wheezed fiercely. “Everything is right.”

Phractus and Nemus stared at the Keeper.

“The Doctor is returning,” the Keeper coughed. “But perhaps not as your secret Champion.”

“Peldin!” shrieked Phractus. “What have you done?”

“What you should have done from the beginning, Cardinal,” the Keeper replied. Energy flared behind the control panels. The floor tilted. Cracks spread like a cancer through the chamber’s dark stone walls. “Acknowledged the future, accepted its uncertainties!” A terrible, monstrous light began to sear through the chamber. The panicked Councillors began to shout and cry out, scrabbling for an exit. Phractus backed away from the controls, fumbling for the Zero Effect controls at his belt.

“The Timescoop!” the Cardinal stuttered. “It’s returning!”

“Yes!” Peldin spat at him. “Bringing you what you asked for – the Doctor and all that that means! Did you think you could claim him as your own? Shape him in your image? Bend him to your wills? No - the Doctor returns, and all Gallifrey will know it. The Doctor returns, but so does his sense of justice, his passion for truth, all that he holds dear, all that he is prepared to fight for! You asked for the Doctor, and the Doctor you will get – uncontrollable, unpredictable, uncontainable!”

The darkness split and screamed. Something splintered into existence with a shriek of pain and terror. Living, terrible shadows filled the Timescoop chamber, and the air shimmered with the unpleasant suggestions of arms, claws, tentacles, pincers, spikes, eyes, antennae, flailing from shrouded, robed shapes, cuboid flickers of dim, amber fire, clicking on and off, shifting position and alignment within the cowl. Fronds of darkness shifted and twittered underneath the cowled lights. The shapes howled and scraped, their screams merging with the cries of the Timelords.

Phractus’ black-gloved hands punched the controls of his Zero generator, and a bubble of no-time blossomed. And then the Timescoop returned, and the Zero-bubble exploded with energy.

vii. Dawn

The sun rose over the horizon in a tremble of blood and amber. They sat on the veranda of the C.O.'s hut, drinking tea in the warm morning breeze. In the stark dawn light, the remains of the previous night's terror seemed small and accountable. Hut Seven had been burned down, and the toolsheds ransacked. The gates still listed, swinging slightly in the uneven wind. Debris from the storm dotted the compound, too – palm fronds and broken branches. The sea was still choppy, bringing shoals of jacks to the surface and tempting the clouds of gulls that screamed on the bouncing thermals.

Carol Merriweather shifted her coat around Sir Henry's shoulders. He winced and managed a faint smile. He was still weak. Doctor Harper said that he would need to be transferred on the HMS Holmes back to Jamaica. The Marines were still busy restoring order to the shattered island.

Commodore Nelson shivered under his greatcoat. His gaze roved back to the smoking ruin of the hanger. The Spearhead was damaged virtually beyond repair. The reactor was secure – somehow – but the remainder of the vessel was a twisted, burned-out hulk. His eyes were dark and hollow. Something was gone from him, a fire that had burned for so many years – now extinguished. He coughed. There was nothing but a darkness inside him, like clinker.

The Doctor pushed open the door with another tray of mugs, handing one to Hitomi and another to the Commander. Everyone had a battered, shell-shocked expression on their face. Channing stole glances at Hitomi, his eyes wandering over her combat suit, her field helmet, the stunner clipped to her belt – not entirely sure what he was seeing. Beyond the hut, Soloman and Zhao helped the Marines load five shroud-covered stretchers into the back of the station's Landrover.

There was only one mug of tea left on the tray. The Doctor took it and stared. Mortimer came and stood behind him, butterfly-stitches on his cheeks, one arm in a sling, a splint on the other wrist, bandages wrapping around his chest. Together they looked out towards the edge of the compound, to where Silver stood, silhouetted by the rising sun.

“Go easy on her,” Mortimer said softly.

“I will,” the Doctor said. “I never wanted to hurt her – but I had no choice. This was all too big for her. Too much, too fast... too big.”

Mortimer cocked his head. “You knew it had to be done.”

“I know,” the Doctor said. “That's what makes it hardest.”

He took the tea and walked slowly across the windswept flags of the quay to where Silver stood. He handed her the mug. She nodded quickly, briefly, not wanting to look at his face.

“Thanks.”

The Doctor nodded. They stood while the gulls dipped and swooped. The waves chopped at the quay, bright turquoise and deep blue. On the far side of the bay, the island curved away in tree-covered green out of sight. Underneath the lowering shadow of the cliff-top fortress, the battered town began to awaken.

“I'll have to go soon,” the Doctor said quietly.

Silver nodded. “I know – I mean, I realise that.” She tucked a loose, windswept strand of hair back behind her ear. “And what will happen to me?”

The Doctor took a deep breath. He shrugged. “I'm not really sure. That depends on you, I suppose. It's your life – it's your future.” He looked back behind him, to where Mortimer stood, watching. “You have friends,” he said. Silver said nothing, but the Doctor

could see the dampness at the corners of her eyes. He stared at the horizon, then turned his back and stepped away from the quay.

“Will he come back?” the young girl asked, a catch in her voice. The warm morning wind twitched at her dark hair and its fading blue streak, spinning it around her neck and the top of her dress, across an empty place where the TARDIS key had hung.

The Doctor turned around, sunlight catching on the shifting patterns of stars on his waistcoat, the mirror-flickering in his eyes. His bearded face creased into a frown. “Even I don’t know that, Silver. The future is unreadable, even to the Matrix – now more so than ever. The Doctor’s destiny is twinned with Gallifrey now. Who knows where that will lead him?” The Shayde-Doctor looked out across the sea, towards the burning solar globe on the horizon. It felt its final, tenuous links with the Matrix beginning to unravel. The Shayde turned to Silver, wondering what would become of this human child, lost decades in her own past, trapped out of her own time.

“Perhaps,” the Shayde suggested. “One day, perhaps...” It waited for a moment, then left her, staring at the sea.

Mortimer limped alongside the Shayde-Doctor back towards the science hut, the breeze pulling at the hem of his naval greatcoat. He hugged the lapels closed over his bruised and bandaged chest. They paused at the front of the hut. The telephone box was back in its original place outside the front door. Mortimer nodded towards it.

“Nothing more than a telephone box now, I suppose.”

The Shayde-Doctor pushed open the peeling red door to the dusty, paper-windowed interior. “No, nothing more than an ordinary telephone box now,” he said quietly. “The link to Gallifrey is gone. I won’t last much longer myself.” He looked back at Mortimer. “You’re staying?”

Mortimer shrugged, then winced. “I don’t really feel like going home – not now. The absorption of the block-transfer forms seems to have stabilised. Besides,” he glanced back at the quay, to the silent figure standing there. “She might need me.”

The Shayde nodded, its form slipping and sliding into a dark-mirror sphere, hovering in the warm tropical air. “You’ll be safe,” its voice said, coming from nowhere and everywhere. “Without the Shaydes to guide it, and with the TARDIS in the way, the Timescoop focused not on the Doctor, but on the most immediately obvious temporal phenomenon: the Null-Event.” The mirrored surface crackled with an almost amused burst of energy. “Sent it all back to Gallifrey, where it’s arrival would certainly be something of a surprise. And now, without the hole in the vortex, this particular nexus remains safe. No one will trouble you here.”

“Not everything went back, though, did it?” Mortimer said.

“No.” The mirrored sphere shimmered. “The Doctor chose to go, and the TARDIS followed, of course – but I am allowed a little leeway when it comes to patching up various cracks and anomalies.”

Mortimer looked back to the veranda, where Sir Henry rested against Carol Merriweather’s shoulder. The old man had a nasty wound in his shoulder, and his heart was about as robust as a wilting balloon – but maybe, just maybe, Mortimer thought, he might manage to find a few years of peace yet.

“There should be some happy endings, don’t you think?” the sphere said quietly. It flickered, and suddenly faded to nothing and vanished, a final glitter of dispersed energy swirling away on the wind.

Mortimer walked slowly to the quay and stood with Silver. She turned to him, the red light from the horizon burning in her unbearably sad eyes.

This would have to be her time now; she would have to make her life in this alien age. There would be so much lost to her – the internet, the Scissor Sisters, chai lattes, Buffy the Vampire Slayer reruns. She would be middle-aged by the time she was being born, retired by the time she would meet the Doctor. Her past would become her future.

She'd watched him make his choice. The lean face had smiled, the grey-blue eyes searching. There, amidst the wreckage of the Spearhead's command centre, she'd heard him cast his die.

“I have to go, Silver... you know that...”

Yes, she knew that, just as she knew he would not ask her to go with him. She watched him watching her. His gaze was clear. There would be no regrets. His choice was made, his future determined.

“You'll be safe here, and perhaps... one day....”

The words remained unspoken, the promise un-made. Perhaps. Perhaps not. Who knew what the future might hold – for him, for her, for the both of them. And yet, where there was life...

Silver turned to Mortimer, her face circled by the light of the rising sun.

“One day,” she whispered, “One day, he will come back.” She smiled, looking back at the endless sky and the boundless ocean. “Yes,” Her voice was stronger. “One day, he will come back. Until that time...” And her voice echoed out across the sea, lost in the rising brilliance of a new sun and the uncertain dawning of a new future.

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