

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

The Wax Museum

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PROLOGUE

Laws and law-makers have no jurisdiction over the actions of the artist. Insofar as artistic expression is concerned, there can be no limits.

(Nanos Mortich, *Principia Aesthetica*)

Tightly bound tubes curled their way about the chamber like some vast metallic Hydra. Steel merged with copper as though a metallurgist had dreamt an impossible dream, and had woken to find his imaginings given material expression. In the centre of the serpentine mass which dominated the walls there stood an imposing glass column. It was at least two metres high and wide enough to contain a large man. The column was attached at its base to a spaghetti-like tangle of cables which, in its turn, was fed to a nearby control unit mounted on a plain metal stand. Manipulating the unit with feverish intensity stood a masculine figure as tall as the column. His hands were heavy and broad, and his thick fingers played upon the keys of the unit as though he were composing a symphony. The finesse of his playing belied an intense physical power, and the final key of his composition was struck with a rare flourish, as though a masterpiece had been accomplished after years of endeavour.

Inside the column a humanoid shape writhed and contorted in mortal agony. The glass of the column was soundproof, which was fortunate since the screams of its occupant would have been almost deafening. At last, a thunderous crack of energetic sound tore across the chamber and the shape inside the column became deathly still. The anonymous figure in front of the control unit stepped back to survey his work, and as he did so he released a long, slow breath of unqualified contentment.

“Perfect,” he mouthed to himself, “quite, quite perfect.”

PART I: THE CELESTIAL EXHIBITION

It is imperative that the artist's work remains free of the torpid values of the pen-pushing bureaucrat and the pulpit-preaching moralist. These effete figures of the establishment are, in artistic terms, irrelevancies.

(Nanos Mortich, *Principia Aesthetica*)

Suspended motionless in the Space-Time Vortex, the TARDIS remained impassive to the temporal flux which flowed ceaselessly about its box-shaped exterior. Inside its near endless interior the console room was draped in shadow, its eccentric pilot – fully equipped with a head-mounted torchlight – buried beneath a chaotic puzzle of circuit boards and contraptions of unknown origin. How long had he been searching for it now? An hour? Two hours? Sometimes it was impossible to tell the passage of time whilst inside the TARDIS. Delving into yet another box, the Doctor's hand finally lighted upon the treasure he had been so fervently seeking: a light bulb. Pulling a duster out of his jacket pocket he gave the errant bulb a good polishing, before gingerly placing it into an empty slot beneath one of the console's panels. Stepping up to the opposing panel he threw a switch, and the console and its surrounding roundel-mounted walls lit up, banishing the shadow and returning the console room to its former glory.

The Doctor surveyed his handiwork and let out a sigh of quiet satisfaction. Taking a seat in the armchair that was somewhat carelessly positioned in one corner of the room; he was suddenly struck by the emptiness around him. He was alone, and no amount of light-bulb-searching therapy was going to change that fact. Silver and Mortimer were gone. Once more he was travelling solo. It had been a while since he had last been a lone traveller. In fact, he had been a different man altogether back then.

"I wonder what Silver would make of me moping around and looking for light bulbs?" mused the Doctor, "I mean it's hardly the most demanding pastime. She'd probably rate it alongside cleaning dirty laundry or giving Mortimer a bath – now that really was a chore."

Without warning the TARDIS violently listed to one side, breaking the Doctor's reverie and sending him careering across the console room. Grabbing at the central column he quickly balanced himself and surveyed the controls: drift compensators set, temporal chronometer readings normal, dimensional stabilisers fully functional. Everything was as it should be; even

the egg-timer was in place. No, thought the Doctor, it must have just been a freak temporal cross-current, or perhaps the edge of one of those time storms they used to wax lyrical about in the Academy back on Gallifrey. Stuff to frighten the kids, nothing more. With that last comforting thought in mind he returned to his armchair, intent on resuming his quiet reflections.

The unexpected listing of the TARDIS had brought with it more than just a displaced Doctor, however. Spread open on its centre pages, a tourist guidebook had somehow found its way on to the seat of his armchair. Looking up at him invitingly, resplendent in its gold and black livery was an advert for the Twenty-First Celestial Exhibition. The Doctor perused the double-page spread with a growing curiosity. It had been a while since he'd last visited what was, at least for its time, the single biggest collection of art in the Milky Way Galaxy. The selection process for the Exhibition took decades, and, as such, the event itself seldom occurred more than twice in a century.

"As far as I can remember," the Doctor said aloud to no-one but himself, "empty plastic bags were all the rage at the early ones. I wonder what cutting edge examples of artistic endeavour are in vogue these days?"

Setting the TARDIS' pathfinder unit in motion the Doctor quickly located the Exhibition's coming-of-age showcase: the Sirius System; Earth date 2780. With the delicacy of a rock pianist, the Doctor hammered a harmony of notes across the console until, with one last signal of intent; he set the Time Rotor in motion. Barely had he given his latest navigational outing full marks when the rotor came to a stop, indicating that the TARDIS had landed. Pulling out a hand-held mirror he'd borrowed from a certain Victorian escapologist, the Doctor surveyed his appearance: plain grey morning suit with a wing collar shirt about which was fixed a purple tie.

"Suit fits, tie doesn't," observed the Doctor, as he loosened his neck-ware and considered the chaos of boxes and circuitry at his feet. Something caught his eye; what looked liked the end of a tie was peeking out of one of the unopened boxes. Bending down he painstakingly unfastened the lid of the box and found that it was jam-packed with ties of every style and description.

"Phew," muttered the Doctor, "for a moment there I thought I was going to find a pile of cheap sunglasses."

Choosing a subtle mauve example of no particular fashion, he fastened the tie about his neck and held aloft the mirror once more. "Yes, I think that'll do nicely. Not too ostentatious, yet with just enough elegance to pass me off as an art critic – or perhaps even a dabbling artist. Oh yes, I think I'm going to enjoy this."

Placing the mirror on the console, the Doctor checked his inside jacket pocket for a certain sonic device. Noting its presence he briefly toyed with the chain of the TARDIS key which hung about his neck, before flicking the switch which activated the scanner screen. A moment later and the screen was filled with a vast hallway thronging with visitors, each intently gazing at the countless artworks on display. A broad smile lit up the Doctor's face when he noticed that one visitor after another was turning towards the TARDIS. In just a few seconds a sizable crowd had formed around the time machine, accompanied by much curious peering and pointing at the newly arrived object. Shutting off the scanner, the Doctor pulled

down on a large green handle and the exit doors swung smoothly open. Eyes sparkling with not a little mischief, the Doctor exited the TARDIS.

Geoffrey Greatorex was not a man accustomed to being kept waiting. He had arrived at the reception of the renowned Wax Museum expecting to find its enigmatic proprietor and resident artist, Nanos Mortich, eagerly awaiting him. After all, was not Greatorex the richest living being in the whole of the Taurus System? And did not Greatorex's plastics company own the sparsely populated, dwarf planet of Cirrus Minor, the very world upon which Mortich had built his vast museum?

Taking a cotton handkerchief from his trouser pocket, Greatorex dabbed at the sweat which was running down his face. He had been told that Mortich's museum was notoriously hot, but this was beyond his expectations. It had to be at least forty-degrees Celcius – almost unbearable for someone like Greatorex, who had been raised upon the unforgiving Tundra Plateau of Taurus Prime. Without warning the inner door of the oval-shaped reception room slid open and a stooping figure crept into view. This was Onus Grieg, Mortich's personal assistant. Grieg wore a simple grey tunic, fastened about his waist by a strip of dull brown leather which once might have passed for a belt. His visage was a perfect example of the ageing process: sagging, wrinkled and pale; his dull and whispering voice, which issued from his fallow mouth, was little different.

"Welcome to the Wax Museum, Mister Greatorex. Please be assured that you are standing on the threshold of the single greatest concentration of artistic waxworks in recorded history. Sadly, our illustrious proprietor, Mortich the Magnificent, is unable to begin your wax facsimile at this time. He has, quite unexpectedly, been called upon to attend the Celestial Exhibition. As you may know, the Exhibition is a once in a lifetime event and hardly something an artist as illustrious as Mortich the..."

"Magnificent?" snapped Greatorex, with a sharpness of tone which implied that his patience had long been spent. "I know full well that your 'magnificent' director is hell-bent on winning yet another artistic accolade. In fact, he's well known for his stadium-sized trophy cabinet. But that's not the point. What is very much the point is that he – or rather you – informed me that he would be here today, and you've kept me waiting in this dull little room of yours for over two hours." His voice rose as he reached the end of his complaint. "Furthermore, are you aware that my company owns this planet? Do you appreciate the significance of that fact? Or, are you as ignorant and inept as rumour would have it?"

Grieg visibly flinched at the final insult. Taking several long, deliberate breaths he quietly replied. "Your 'significance' is well known, Mister Greatorex, even within the rarefied confines of the Wax Museum. Unfortunately, Mortich the Magnificent's absence is quite unavoidable. Please accept my sincerest apologies on his behalf and rest assured that you will not be kept waiting any longer. I can initiate the preliminary wax-modelling procedure, and when our artist-in-residence returns shortly he will complete the facsimile. Please be so kind as to come this way."

With the subtlest of gestures Grieg pointed towards the inner door of the reception. Made of pure arancium, a metal only found on Cirrus Minor, the door was bright orange and stood out against the rest of the gun-metal grey interior like a beacon. Stepping through the doorway, Greatorex could feel the temperature rising even further and feverishly mopped his brow. *At least he'd only have to put up with this palaver once*, he thought. Mortich had offered to make a waxwork of him as part of the deal to base the Wax Museum on Cirrus Minor. Greatorex was thoroughly uninterested in the bribe in itself, but Mortich's iconic status in the Rim Systems made the offer irresistible. To have a waxwork of oneself made by Mortich was to have a passport into the economies of a dozen star systems. That kind of passport could make Greatorex one of the most powerful industrialists in the whole of the Milky Way Galaxy. Hot museum or not, he wasn't going to turn down that kind of industry door-opener. Keeping contracts and business deals firmly in mind, Greatorex followed his obsequious host into the museum's interior.

However angry he might have felt towards its egocentric founder, Greatorex couldn't help but be impressed by the Wax Museum. Built on top of the highest mountain ridge on Cirrus Minor, the museum struck into the sky in Babel-like fashion. At over five hundred metres high, its monolithic shape towered over the surrounding landscape, exerting a spectacle which was simply hypnotic. Its interior was equally intimidating. Beyond the reception area the museum was composed of a single, open-plan stairwell which soared ever upwards; its stark white outer wall lit by a soft, blue-red light which appeared to emanate from no particular source. The staircase was composed of some two thousand steps, making the business of ascending from the bottom to the top no less demanding than a morning's worth of serious hiking. There was an alternative for less athletic visitors, however. At the foot of the gigantic structure were parked a dozen or so two-person levitators, each one shaped much like an Old Earth twentieth-century stair-lift. Built out of a marble-esque material, their stone-like appearance was at odds with their gravity-defying property. Selecting the nearest stair-lift Grieg indicated for Greatorex to join him. Soon enough the guide and his guest were effortlessly gliding up the imposing staircase. At regular intervals the stair-lift would pause, allowing its passengers to study in closer detail the numerous alcoves which had been cut into the outer wall, each one housing one of Mortich's waxworks. To give the visitor a more personal experience there was no barrier or transparent screen to seal off the art from the art lover. Each piece was there to be scrutinised, right down to the last drop of wax.

The first hundred or so were abstract studies: geometric shapes and complex three-dimensional patterns. These were followed by a veritable cornucopia of plant and animal models; such was their intricacy and detail that their author must have spent an age perfecting each and every one of them. Finally, the collection was concluded with a lengthy series of humanoid and near-humanoid subjects. Each model represented a public figure, and there was even the occasional tableau. After so many weird and wonderful shapes Greatorex would have found it almost refreshing to focus on Mortich's medley of celebrity figures, if it were not for one crucial detail. For, as he returned the unwavering gaze of one wax figure after another, Greatorex couldn't help but think that their extraordinarily lifelike appearance sent shivers down his spine. More, he had the uncomfortable sensation that each figure was desperately trying to tell him something. Putting what he thought was an overactive imagination firmly to

one side, Greatorex pushed on, ever mindful of the industrial superstardom that this little excursion would earn him.

Reaching the end of Mortich's collection, Greatorex was perplexed to find that the final lit alcove was vacant. Anticipating his guest's question, Grieg exercised his hoarse vocal chords once more.

"This alcove is temporarily empty, due to Mortich the Magnificent's decision to enter his latest work in the Celestial Exhibition. It's called..."

"... 'The Scream'. I forged it in homage to the great Old Earth expressionist, Edvard Munch. His work has haunted my dreams since childhood, and because of this I believe it is only right and proper that I repay that debt to him in some small way."

An almost deafening round of applause followed Mortich's closing words, echoing about the Exhibition's cavernous interior with an energy which proved quite exhilarating to the acclaimed sculptor. Mortich's exhibit was the showcase of the Celestial Exhibition – a guaranteed audience puller and all but certain to win him the Grand Primo Award for a third consecutive time. No-one else in the Exhibition's history had won its highest accolade more than once; to win three times in a row would make him the most successful living artist in the galaxy. His already considerable artistic stature was matched by his physical frame: standing at over two metres high and with a heavy, muscular build, Mortich presented a daunting figure. His choice of apparel only went to further emphasise this point: a black two-piece suit and turquoise shirt, topped off with a bright orange tie.

As Mortich surveyed the multitude of faces in the crowd he reflected on the moment. This was why he did what he did. The money, the contracts – none of it mattered. It was the adulation for his work that made him go on – far further than any of his admirers realised. Raising his hands in modest recognition of the applause, Mortich took a step forward and bowed. The applause grew even greater, sending out a blast of sound which shook the central hall from one end to the other. As the applause finally began to abate, a gamut of questions and queries were launched by the Exhibition's media contingent. This was the part that Mortich especially enjoyed: baiting the art critics and sending their egos crashing to the ground. More than one headline writer and galactically-recognised critic had lost their vaunted position after being publicly humbled in a verbal sparring match with Mortich; only the very best could hope to keep up with him. And that was why so many would-be interrogators were utterly toothless.

Stepping away from his work Mortich fielded his first question. "Mister Mortich, I am Heinz Knepp of the Schanten Conglomerate. Can you tell us, is 'The Scream' as physically accurate as your previous works, and who's the lucky model you based it on?"

"I love awkward questions, Mister Knepp," replied Mortich with a baritone voice which hinted at a far greater reserve of power left untapped. "So it's a shame yours isn't. In answer to the first part of your so-called question, yes, this work is perfect – down to the very last atom. As to the model I used, let's just say that he prefers to keep his identity anonymous."

Question after question followed: What inspired Mortich? How long did his latest masterpiece take to sculpt? What was his next project? Predictable, dull and flat, thought

Mortich. Was there no-one prepared to challenge him? At last, a question arrived which had some bite to it.

“I’m Rill Cridman, representing the Combined Star-Media Group of the Gnuem System. Rumour has it that your work is little more than a conjuring trick, a simple case of smoke and mirrors to feed an artistically ignorant public. What do you say to that, Mister Mortich?”

Mortich’s face broke into a wide, gleaming smile which revealed a mouth of large, shining teeth. It was a smile that would not have looked out of place on a shark before it took its first bite out of its prey. “My fellow artists are entitled to their opinions – however wrong they may be. Anyone who has visited my museum or studied my portfolio will know that my work involves using a molecular modelling chamber, a device which I myself developed. Of course, some degree of technical ‘fixing’ is used in my work, but the manner in which I achieve my perfect copies is entirely the result of artistic endeavour – my artistic endeavour. Does that answer your question, Mister Cridman?”

“More or less, but I do have one more query. Rovinj Tar was the leading presidential candidate on Subix Dora. Tar’s campaign included the introduction of a Bill of Rights for AI androids. Shortly before the election Tar visited the Wax Museum in order to have a waxwork of himself made. Incredibly, no-one has seen or heard of him since he entered your museum, and unsurprisingly his campaign was suspended. Still more unsurprisingly, the end of his presidential hopes pleased the industrial giants in the android-manufacturing sector. Can you account for Tar’s disappearance?”

“My museum is, well, rather large,” Mortich replied, his smile unwavering, “perhaps he got lost on his way out?”

A chorus of laughter rang out amongst the crowd. Cridman pressed his question further. “Tar is not the first public figure to disappear after taking up your offer of having a waxwork made. I have a list of over a hundred politicians, entrepreneurs and captains of industry, as well as a smattering of A- and B-list celebrities, all of whom have not been heard of since their waxwork was first displayed in your museum. Don’t you find it just a little odd that they would all choose to disappear after having their waxwork put on public display?”

Mortich’s fixed smile visibly widened. “I think you’ve answered your own question, Mister Cridman. Surely it’s obvious that each of these so-called missing persons retired from public view after their wax figures were made public. There’s a certain delicious irony about it, don’t you think?”

As Cridman was about to respond a sudden bleeping sound issued from Mortich’s wrist-com. Motioning his apologies, Mortich moved back from the crowd and raised his wrist-com to his mouth.

“This had better be good,” he whispered, barely able to conceal his frustration at having had his verbal battle interrupted.

“Your scheduled guest has arrived, and is undergoing the first stage of treatment,” came Grieg’s deathly reply.

Mortich gave a sly grin. “That’s likely to be the second-best news I’ll get today. Keep him suitably entertained, I’ll be returning in an hour.” Deactivating his wrist-com Mortich returned to the fray. “Now Mister Cridman, where were we?”

“No, no, no, no, NO! This really won’t do at all.” The shrill, glass-breaking tones of the Celestial Exhibition’s director, Millian Brač, cut through the wall of onlookers like the eardrum-piercing whine of a hydro-spanner. Before him his attendants scattered in all directions, frenziedly cordoning off the strange blue box which had appeared in the Exhibition’s vast atrium just a few minutes earlier. Breaching the crowd which had quickly encircled the newly arrived object, Brač found himself facing a distinguished looking gentleman with a just hint of Old Earth about him, who was deftly holding the crowd around him in a state of abject rapture.

“And so you can see,” continued the stranger with the tasteful mauve tie, “that its artistic merit lies in its refusal to yield to the narrow, socio-temporal limits of its exterior environment. In short, it is an object out of time and out of space. I call it ‘Hidden In Plain Sight’. I hope you’ll enjoy it.” At that, the crowd erupted in a spontaneous round of applause and the stranger took a bow. In the meantime, and with a sense of poise crafted from years of practice, a decidedly perturbed Brač marched smartly up to the stranger whilst his attendants secured the cordon and dispersed the crowd.

“Who, precisely, are you?!” Brač screeched with the same penetrating power as a dentist’s drill.

“I’m generally known as the Doctor,” replied the stranger, taking his fingers from his ears, “and I’m honoured to make the acquaintance of such a well-known artist. You are Brač, Brač of the bestseller *A Preponderance of Plastic Bags*, are you not? Your study of the power and scope of the humble plastic bag was unutterably spellbinding. And as for your exhibit at the XIX Celestial Exhibition, well, all I can say is that I have neither before, nor since, witnessed such a concentration of plastic bags. Why you didn’t win the Exhibition’s Grand Primo Award I shall never understand. In short Sir, you were robbed.”

Brač’s mouth dropped open. “You... you actually remember my ‘Bags En Masse’ exhibit?” he gasped, barely able to conceal his amazement.

“Oh yes, I wrote a review or two on it,” the Doctor continued, his enthusiasm becoming almost theatrical. “Marvellous idea, years ahead of its time. Now, if you’d entered it in the previous Celestial Exhibition you’d have won hands down. Do you remember? It was the one with all the shoes with their laces tied together, very dull. Something about social conformity or some such nonsense. But of course you entered against that waxworks artist and he won. A darn shame if you ask me.”

Brač’s mouth was still hanging open. “And, well, I suppose...”

“Yes indeed, I’m here to exhibit,” replied the Doctor. “I take it you’re here to offer me the first official review of my previously unseen ‘Hidden in Plain Sight’?”

With eyes flickering in confusion and arms uselessly flapping at his side Brač slowly concocted a reply. “Did I, err, hear you say that it was ‘previously unseen’?”

“Yes, you did, and it most certainly is. The Celestial Exhibition marks its début, and of course that means you’ll have exclusive rights to its first-time review. I look forward to learning what you think. Oh, and by the way, the light on the top actually works, it’s not a gimmick. And in case you’re wondering what’s inside it, it’s actually dimensionally transcendental, which basically means the inside is bigger than the outside. I suppose some might say that

applying transcendental engineering to a work of art is a touch ostentatious, but I find it's very useful if you like playing hide-and-peek a lot."

Brač rubbed his eyes as if to clear his vision of a bewitchment and slowly moved his gaze from the unexpected visitor to the blue box and back again. "Um, I think, I mean it would be an honour to review your work, Doctor...?"

"Just plain 'Doctor' will do," replied the Doctor, leaning in closer to Brač and changing his tone to a conspiratorial whisper. "I'm actually here in a professional capacity, as a critic for the art journal *Iconoclast*." The Doctor stepped back and continued in normal tones. "So Director, if you'd be able to recommend any of the exhibits to me it would be greatly appreciated. I'm so very keen to see what my fellow artists have been doing."

As though the bewitchment had suddenly lifted, Brač clicked his fingers and one of his attendants came dashing forward. She was strikingly tall and kept her thick, jet black hair in a simple but elegant plait. Like all the attendants at the Exhibition, she wore the regulation uniform of a bright orange three-piece suit, capped by an even brighter orange tie. "This is my head attendant and trainee curator, Istria Hum. Miss Hum will guide you around the Exhibition. Should you need anything else, anything at all, please don't hesitate to ask." With that Brač abruptly hurried away, intent on finding a quiet corner in which to collect his scattered thoughts.

Trying to avoid being blinded by his newly recruited guide's eye-catching attire, the Doctor turned and smiled. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Hum. Now, let's start with the favourites. Who's odds on to win the Grand Primo Award this time?"

Istria gave him an uncertain smile and pointed towards the part of the Exhibition from where all the noise was coming. "The same artist who's won it on the previous two occasions, Mortich the Magnificent, wax-maker extraordinaire. And please call me Istria, 'Miss Hum' sounds very formal."

"Istria it is," confirmed the Doctor, "well Istria, just who is this *Mortich the Magnificent*?"

"You are fraud, Sir," Cridman yelled out as the Exhibition's security staff escorted him away, "and no amount of connections and contacts is going to protect you forever. Sooner or..." Cridman's voice slowly faded out of earshot, leaving Mortich to enjoy another rapturous round of applause. Giving one final bow to his audience he stepped away from his exhibit and began to work the crowd. Senators and statesmen, prime ministers and presidents each took it in turn to greet Mortich and congratulate him on his latest masterpiece. Within a few minutes the superstar artist and his admirers had drifted away from his latest work of art, leaving behind just two onlookers to wonder what all the fuss was about.

"I know I shouldn't comment, but Mortich's work really gives me the chills," Istria said, pulling her bright orange, Exhibition-issue jacket closer to her.

"I do take your point," agreed the Doctor, "but there's something else about his work that doesn't quite ring true, if only I could put my finger on it."

Gazing intently at the figure in the glass cabinet, the Doctor couldn't help but think that the art he was looking at felt somehow wrong. There in front of him stood the body of

humanoid male, roughly a metre and a half tall. Everything about the waxwork was lifelike, right down to the very last detail, but it was the look of sheer agony on its face, the gaping mouth caught in a silent scream of terror, which really caught the Doctor's eye. He'd seen fear and horror on enough faces in his time to know if it was genuine or a clever mock-up. This one looked frighteningly realistic. Taking out his sonic screwdriver he began to scan the waxwork.

"I'm sorry," said Istria quickly, "but you can't tamper with the exhibits, and it's against the Exhibition's rules."

"Oh, not to worry," the Doctor said, continuing to scan the contorted shape regardless, "I won't do any harm. In fact, I do this sort of thing all the time – tampering, that is. You could say I'm something of an expert in the field. Now, let's see what we've got here." As he focused the sonic screwdriver on the head of the waxwork its signature buzz became a high-pitched whine, then suddenly and without warning it went dead. "That's very, very strange," remarked the Doctor, tapping the pen-like device against the palm of his hand, "it usually only gets indigestion when it hits a deadlock."

"Oh, I think you'll find it's hit more than a deadlock," said a deep, booming voice from behind them. Turning around quickly they were confronted with the intimidating figure of Mortich, his towering frame looming over them. Flanking Mortich were two of the Exhibition's security guards, each of whom was pointing a stubby, metallic laser tube at the Doctor. "What precisely are you doing to my exhibit?" said Mortich with deliberate menace.

The Doctor gave a genial smile and quickly pocketed the sonic screwdriver. "I'm one of your biggest fans, Mister Mortich, and I've persuaded the young and very impressionable Istria here, to let me take a closer look at your latest waxwork. The young are so easy to impress, aren't they? But I'm somewhat longer in the tooth and a touch cynical as well. Which means that I'm all the more delighted to see that you've updated your modelling technique since you first won the Exhibition's Grand Primo Award? This time you've used a binary induction method, keyed to the molecular energy signature of the subject. Last time it was plain old atomic copying which, if my memory serves me right, employed a fairly blunt type of mathematical modelling, not unlike an extremely crude version of block-transfer."

"Whoever you are, you seem to know a great deal about my work," observed Mortich, who motioned to the guards to lower their weapons. "It seems that this incident is less serious than I first thought. Return to your duties, I'll handle things from here." The guards nodded in acknowledgement and moved away. Mortich turned to the Doctor. "You are aware that what you've just said must mean that either you're a corporate spy or a genius?"

The Doctor smiled, "I think I prefer the latter, and since you've dismissed the guards I can only assume that you think likewise."

"Indeed. But I also think you're a great deal more than just a genius. You talked of age and experience. My first success at the Exhibition was over a hundred years ago. On my home planet of Cirrus Major the atmosphere encourages a slower rate of cellular breakdown. The result is that the average lifespan of my people is well over four hundred years. But our condition is rare amongst organic, non-upgraded life-forms. So, what precisely are you?"

The Doctor felt an intensity in the interrogative which smelt of someone who already knew the answer they were seeking. "I'm a Time Lord, from the planet Gallifrey."

Mortich visibly stopped dead, as though some great wheel had turned in his head and given him the solution to an ageless riddle. "It is an honour, Sir," Mortich said, his voice lowered in the tone of a supplicant. "Your race is legendary on my planet. Almost ten thousand years ago, when the Brutix Contagion threatened to destroy all life on Cirrus Major, it is said that the Time Lords intervened with a cure for our malady. Without their help my world would have been left barren and lifeless. If you or any other Time Lord were to visit my planet, you would be regarded as a god."

"That's a dangerously tempting offer, Mister Mortich, but I'm afraid the legend of which you speak may be just that. My people are renowned for their policy of non-interference – believe me when I say that I have firsthand experience of their dislike for those who interfere."

"You are no doubt right," replied Mortich with a voice which was desperately trying to conceal a growing sense of excitement. "But, if I might be so bold, I would like to invite you to see my personal collection of works, which are housed in my museum. To host a Time Lord would be the undoubted pinnacle of my career. What is more, I would be more than happy to present you with your very own waxwork."

The Doctor paused for a moment and rubbed his right temple as though in deep thought. "That's an almost irresistible offer, Mister Mortich. Yes, I would like to visit your museum at some point. Although I'm not sure about a waxwork, wouldn't it make me appear rather, well, vain?"

"Not at all! Your waxwork would be the height of modesty; a model of understatement. I am due to return to the Wax Museum shortly. I could offer you return passage to Cirrus Minor, after the Grand Primo Award has been announced, of course. What do you say?"

Watching how Mortich's gaze was fixed upon the Doctor, Istria found herself comparing the artist's offer to the proverbial spider inviting the fly into its parlour. There was something deeply uncomfortable about Mortich, which Istria almost found suffocating. But then again, he was a highly-strung artist and a galaxy-wide celebrity to boot, so perhaps that was what these people were like in the flesh.

"I'll consider your offer, Mister Mortich. In the meantime, my guide and I shall continue to enjoy the Exhibition. Thank you again." With that the Doctor hurriedly whisked Istria away. Once they were out of sight of Mortich, the Doctor motioned for them to stop. They'd found themselves in the cavernous central hall of the Exhibition, in front of an artwork entitled 'The End Of Time'. Pointing at the exhibit – a broken clock – the Doctor began to gesticulate as if he were commenting on the sorry litter of broken parts which had once been a perfectly serviceable timepiece. "I may be a Time Lord but that particular quality doesn't open every door, my dear. Even if Mortich's offer is genuine he must be after something else – something far grander. He's too big a fish to be interested in handing out museum tours and waxwork freebies to complete strangers. No, there's something more sinister to his offer, and I'm very curious to know what it might be."

"Doctor, I didn't understand half of what you and Mortich were talking about, but I do know that you're clearly not just an unscheduled artist. So, what exactly are you doing here?"

The Doctor gave her a broad smile which saw his eyes light up like star fire. "Travelling, watching and, most of all, interfering. This is why I will most definitely be accepting Mortich's offer, although not quite on the terms he was offering."

The sudden ringing of a claxon brought their conversation to an end. Around them the throng of Exhibition visitors was reduced to silence. It was time for the Grand Primo Award to be announced. In the centre of the vast hall, suspended equidistant between floor and ceiling, there materialised a gigantic, holographic face: it was Director Brač.

"Please may I have your attention," the Brač hologram began. "As you may be aware the Celestial Exhibition has been running for over one thousand years, and in all that time only one artist has won the Grand Primo Award more than once in their own lifetime. Today, ladies, gentleman and beings of no fixed gender, history is being made. Today, the Grand Primo Award is given to a man who has broken through the limits of conventional art and married high technology to unfettered imagination. Today, the winner of the Grand Primo Award is Mortich the Magnificent."

The silence in the hall was broken by a wild, almost riotous cheering and applauding. Hands and other appendages were clapped together in a frenzy which threatened the very fabric of the building's infrastructure. As the cacophony of noise began to subside just a little, Brač's visage was replaced with that of Mortich's. A look of undisguised triumph was written across it.

"My fellow artists and lovers of art, my thanks. This accolade is more than any single sculptor or painter could wish for. Rest assured this will not be the end. My work will go on."

Another wave of cheering tore across the Exhibition complex. The Doctor and Istria turned to each other for a moment and exchanged the same cynical look. Nodding towards his own, now abandoned exhibit the Doctor began to slowly move away from the garish hologram and its hypnotised audience. With everyone else's attention fixed on Mortich's lengthy acceptance speech, the pair was able to reach the TARDIS unnoticed. Pulling out his TARDIS key the Doctor inserted it into the lock. As he opened the door and stepped inside Istria gave him a puzzled look. "I don't think hiding in this box of yours is going to block out Mortich's self-congratulations." Suddenly Istria realised that there was no sign of the Doctor. "Where on earth have you got to..." Her voice trailed off as she too entered the strange box.

At the summit of the towering Wax Museum a single figure stood, rigid and unmoving inside a column of sealed glass. Greatorex's eyelids would have blinked, but the nerve signals between his brain and the rest of his body had been jammed by a neural inhibitor which had laced the tea that Grieg had given to him. With his eyes fixed wide open, Greatorex could see the strange knot of piping which completely covered the walls of the room in which the glass chamber was housed. Strangely enough, despite the terror coursing through his mind he still had enough wherewithal to compare the piping to some vast, silver snake. Directly in front of him stood Grieg, who was busy manipulating the free-standing control unit, positioned just a metre or so from the column.

Grieg looked at Greatorex with an expression which almost hinted at pity. "I wish I could say that this process was quick and painless, but I'm afraid it's quite the reverse. At least the inhibitor you drank means you won't feel too much. You should count yourself lucky, the last model was fully conscious when he was processed."

With these final empty words of comfort left hanging in the air, Grieg pulled at the single large lever set into the side of the control unit. If Greatorex had been able to move his eyes, he would have been able to see that the skin on his hands and face was slowly changing its colour and texture. But it was probably better that his eye muscles remained paralysed. If he had been able to see what was happening to him, he might just have thought that his skin was beginning to look very much like wax.

PART II: THE MISSING MODEL

The value of an artwork is not determined by transient social norms or capricious public opinion; art is absolute in its compass and absolute in its quality.

(Nanos Mortich, *Principia Aesthetica*)

The Doctor was too occupied with the TARDIS' databank to notice Istria's look of incredulity as she stepped into the console room. "Well," she slowly began, putting each word of the sentence together as though she were trying out a foreign language for the first time, "I've, um, heard of magic tricks but this... this is something else. I mean, did you get permission to set all this up from the Exhibition's committee? Of course, that must be it. No wonder the chief architect quit last week – I suppose you had to drill a hole in his precious wall insulator?"

The Doctor raised his head from the stream of data passing across the larger of the console's two computer screens and gave Istria a comforting smile. "Some people wouldn't approve of this being called magic, but it is certainly beyond the conceptual frame you're used to."

Istria frowned. "I'm sorry, if I hadn't understood what you just said, I'd have thought you were patronising me."

"Sorry," the Doctor said, shaking his head to clear it of the data download he'd just browsed through. "This isn't an artistic sideshow, it's a TARDIS, a product of temporal..."

"Okay, okay, if you're going to patronise me at least use vocabulary which we can both understand. Now, if you've had enough of being guided around I've got a job to do and Director Brač will be looking for me."

Stepping out of the TARDIS Istria was immediately struck by the gushing tones of Mortich as he continued his acceptance speech. Looking around her to see if anyone was watching, she began to inch her way around the TARDIS' exterior, checking for hairline cracks or optical devices. In fact, anything that might have proven that what she'd just seen was just a plain and simple illusion. Twice she circumnavigated the TARDIS and twice she drew a blank: no cracks, no devices. Closing her eyes she gingerly stepped back through its doorway. When she opened her eyes again, there before her was the same scene. Raising her hand to speak, Istria managed to summon up one more question. "I... I still don't get it. What is this place?"

"I did try and tell you before," said the Doctor, still studying the computer screen, "this is a time-ship, or more precisely a TARDIS. Oh, and the inside happens to be bigger than the outside. Does that make it any clearer?"

Istria nodded in slow motion. "Well yes, I mean, almost. I guess it takes a little bit of getting used to, like some of the art around here."

The Doctor smiled again and pointed to the computer screen. "I'm becoming more and more worried about what Mortich's doing. I don't think he's an ordinary artist, and the technique he's using to create his wax models raises more questions than it answers."

"How so?" asked Istria, happy to at last get to grips with a topic with which she was more familiar.

"Well, his original modelling technique could be applied to any object, living or otherwise. The latest one he's using needs a living subject on which to model the waxwork; it simply won't work on inanimate objects. That means that he's isolated himself to copying only living matter, in other words, no more abstract studies. That's a little strange since most artists like to dabble in abstract works from time to time, and for Mortich to bar himself from that field just seems wrong. The second problem is far more serious. When I scanned his latest award winner, 'The Scream', it was giving off some very unusual readings, the sort of readings which you'd expect to find if there'd been a teleportation accident."

"You mean atoms getting mixed up which don't belong together?"

"Precisely. However, my sonic screwdriver cut out before I could tell what the original atomic structure of the waxwork may have been."

Istria gave the Doctor a curious look. "You have a screwdriver that's *sonic*?"

"Yes, and?" replied the Doctor in a slightly miffed tone.

"Nothing, that's fine. Just wanted to make sure. So, is that it in terms of the 'Mortich problems list'?"

"No," the Doctor said with a grave look on his face. "There's one more thing. I've seen fear and I've felt fear. I know the difference between fake fear and real fear. The look on that waxwork's face was very, very real. And that means that whoever it was based upon was absolutely terrified when their waxwork was made."

"Mortich's models are usually anonymous," pointed out Istria, "although he's done quite a few celebrities and politicians in his time. Which reminds me, I've just realised there's another piece to this puzzle: the Wax Museum has a reputation for jinxing public figures. A bit like Old Earth science-fiction television shows."

"You've lost me," said the Doctor.

"Well, that makes us even," grinned Istria. Happy to share in her knowledge of cult media programmes she drew herself up to her full height – almost one metre and eighty centimetres – and began to explain. "Years ago, when certain actors appeared in a TV programme for too long, especially sci-fi shows, they'd get typecast. Basically, when they left the show they'd been in they usually found it really hard to get others types of acting jobs. For most people, who only ever watched TV and film, these typecast actors seemed to vanish without a trace. It was as though the TV show they'd appeared in had jinxed their careers. Mortich's museum is similar. Pretty much every single time a public figure has a waxwork of themselves displayed, they're never heard of again. Zilch. Niente. It's all very bizarre. Now, all

these disappearances have given Mortich and the Wax Museum a sinister reputation. Ironically enough though, all this missing persons business has seen his popularity skyrocket. These days you can't get a ticket to visit the Wax Museum for love nor money. The waiting time for a standard day ticket is three years; and if you want a season pass you'll be queuing up for at least a decade. I suppose it's just a good job that Cirrus Majorians live longer than most of us!"

The Doctor didn't catch Istria's last little quip; his mind was pondering why public figures were vanishing from public life after being immortalised in Mortich's museum. Thrusting his hands into his jacket pockets he began to pace around the console room, unpacking all the leads they'd found so far. "A curious choice of modelling technology, mixed up atoms, a face of fear and missing persons who really shouldn't go missing at all. I think it's about time I paid the Wax Museum a visit. Which means, Istria that you've got to make a choice."

Istria looked puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

"I tend to travel with others, but for various reasons I'm alone right now. Travelling in this ship, this 'TARDIS', can be amazing and incredible all at once. But there are risks attached to the lifestyle I lead. I tend to interfere in things, and that can mean getting into all sorts of trouble. Consider what's just happened. We've learnt that Mortich the Magnificent is surrounded by an extraordinary amount of coincidence and mystery. In fact, I'm intrigued enough to want to get to the bottom of it, and that could mean facing any number of dangers. Now, I've also learnt that you clearly know a great deal about Mortich's reputation, certainly enough to be able to help me unravel this puzzle. Yet this venture is not without some degree of hazard. You have to choose: either you come with me and help, or you stay here and I'll be eternally grateful for what you've already done. It's your choice."

Istria was nonplussed. She gazed around the strange, alien ship she had only recently discovered, and then at the elegantly dressed figure who claimed to be a 'Time Lord', the same person she'd witnessed using a 'sonic screwdriver', and who talked about mysterious, unknown dangers. Oh, and he also claimed be able to travel through time and space in his 'TARDIS'. Pausing to take in one last breath, Istria fixed the Doctor with a look of studied decisiveness. "Yes. I'd like to help you, for now at least. If we find out that Mortich is up to his neck in darkness, we'll have exposed the biggest artistic fraud in the history of the Celestial Exhibition. Plus, Brač can't stand Mortich, so I might even get into the Director's good books, which believe you me, would be very good news indeed."

"That's settled then," replied the Doctor with a broad smile on his face. Flicking switches and turning a dozen dials, he set the TARDIS' engines in motion. Outside in the Exhibition's atrium the wheezing, groaning sound of the time machine dematerialising was drowned out by the final words of Mortich's speech. As the incongruous blue police box faded from existence, Mortich's hologram followed suit. Not so very far from where the TARDIS had once stood a tall, imposing figure stepped out from the shadows. Raising his wrist-com to his mouth, Mortich activated the transmit faculty.

"Grieg, prepare the chamber for another subject. I'll be there directly."

The Wax Museum reception was accustomed to the clamour and noise of admiring visitors, packed together in their thousands. The two women who had just arrived were anything but admiring, however. The first was diminutive and middle aged, with an aura about her of one who was used to getting her way in things. Her stark, ash-grey trouser suit only reinforced this sense of authority still further. The second was at least a head taller than her companion and looked to be a decade or so younger. Her build was athletic and she was dressed in a light blue matching trouser suit. Around her she exuded the atmosphere of one who was fixed upon order and routine, and the precision of the number over the vagaries of the word.

The smaller woman, Lillian March-Reynolds, held up a red handkerchief to dab at the perspiration on her face. She'd been told of the stifling heat of the museum, and felt doubly angry at being both desperately uncomfortable and forced to visit a place that she utterly detested; although she detested its creepy custodian, Onus Grieg, even more so. As the withered figure of Grieg entered the reception, Lillian marched forward and dealt him a piercing glare.

"We've been here for over an hour..." began Lillian.

"One hour, three minutes, thirteen seconds and counting," interjected Lillian's factotum, Eva Girvan.

"Yes, exactly, well over an hour, Mister Grieg. Can you account for this obvious lack of manners on your part?"

Grieg made his reply with his usual, deadpan delivery. "Please accept my sincerest apologies, Miss March-Reynolds. With the climax of the Celestial Exhibition unfolding as we speak, both Mortich the Magnificent and myself are greatly occupied at this time, and our time is precious, as you can imagine."

Lillian's glare became even more intense. "Your time is precious, you say? My assistant and I have travelled across a dozen star..."

"Thirteen," interrupted Eva.

"...thirteen star systems to see your *remarkable* artist-in-residence. And do you know why we're visiting your moribund collection of wax dummies?"

Grieg raised his left eyebrow in apparent ignorance and remained silent.

"Then let me enlighten you, Mister Grieg. Three weeks ago my modelling agency hired out our top model, I say again *our top model*, for Nanos Mortich's 'The Scream'. We know with complete certainty that our model entered the Wax Museum. However, he's not been seen or heard of since. What do you have to say on the matter?"

"I'm utterly perplexed, Miss March-Reynolds. It is quite impossible that the Wax Museum or Mortich the Magnificent could have any connection with your missing model. Incidentally, I've just been informed that 'The Scream' – the piece for which you claim your model posed – has only this day scooped the Grand Primo Award at the Celestial Exhibition. Across the galaxy artists and thinkers are heralding Mortich the Magnificent as the greatest sculptor of all time. Perhaps your model is celebrating this news at the Exhibition himself?"

Lillian let out a derisive peel of laughter. "Celebrate Mortich's latest piece of tomfoolery? You must take me for an idiot, Sir. Only the dumb animals that make up today's artistic herd would sink so low as to hail what Mortich churns out as art. He's a technician for sure, but he's no artist. As for the so-called Celestial Exhibition, the only thing that's good about that

collection of nonsense is its closing date, which quite frankly can't come soon enough. Oh, and in case you were wondering, we did search the Exhibition complex in the first place, along with several dozen other locations in which we thought our model might have ended up. Rest assured that we chose to come to the Wax Museum as a last resort, Mister Grieg. You would do well to remember that fact."

Grieg slowly nodded and pointed towards the orange-coloured inner door. "If you would be so kind as to follow me, I will arrange for you to search the premises. But first, may I get you some refreshments? After all, it is exceedingly warm in the Wax Museum. Some tea, perhaps?"

In a vacant alcove near the base of the Wax Museum's soaring spiral staircase there arose an elephant-like trumpeting, followed by a series of notes which, was all but impossible to unravel. As the sound grew in intensity it was succeeded by a visual phenomenon: a box-like structure which began to solidify out of thin air. A moment or two later the TARDIS had fully materialised.

Proudly watching as the Time Rotor came to a halt, the Doctor couldn't help commenting on his navigational handiwork. "We're improving at these short hops, the old girl and I. In fact, you might almost say we're becoming reliable."

"You mean to say your ship's alive!" gasped Istria.

"In a manner of speaking, yes. What's more, judging relatively short spatio-temporal distances takes a certain knack. Getting from A to B isn't what it used to be."

Istria's amazement was quickly replaced with bafflement. "I'm afraid you've lost me again."

"Well, at this point in time the Universe is still expanding, and that expansion tends to affect travel coordinates. It's a bit like planning a journey based on an out-of-date map. The expansion effect changes the relative spatio-temporal location of a place, and if you want to travel in time the problem can get even worse. Of course, the TARDIS has built-in compensators for that kind of problem, but they can be a little, shall we say, erratic at times."

"So, does all that mean we're in the Wax Museum or not?"

"We are, and we're right on time. We should have arrived at roughly the same moment that we left the Exhibition. Which means that given the distance between here and there we ought to have at least three or four hours before Mortich gets back. That should be enough time to do some detective work before he turns up. Now, stop wasting time and let's go."

As the Doctor bolted out of the TARDIS ahead of her, Istria couldn't help giving him a wry smile. Half expecting to find herself still at the Celestial Exhibition, she had to pinch herself when she took her first step out of the TARDIS and found herself on a vast, open-plan spiral staircase. Looking up at its dizzying height almost took her breath away. Suddenly realising it was incredibly hot, Istria loosened her tie.

"Why is the temperature through the roof, shouldn't it be kept cool to preserve the waxworks?"

The Doctor rubbed his nose in thought. ‘That’s a good point. I can only imagine that Mortich’s using some form of wax substitute, probably Glyconium 90. G-90 needs to be kept at a constant temperature of about forty degrees Celcius, otherwise it becomes volatile and breaks down. The curious thing about G-90 is that it’s a particularly rare substance. In fact, it only occurs in large quantities in one very special circumstance.’

“And that would be?”

The Doctor gave Istria a dark look. “During a teleportation accident.”

Lillian and Eva had seen enough of Mortich’s collection to last a lifetime. After hours of checking and rechecking his public collection – the one housed in the vertigo-inducing central stairwell – they had been led by an increasingly weary Grieg to the storerooms and workshops at the base of the museum. Endless, dimly lit corridors snaked their way around the base of the vast tower complex, connecting various cluttered cubicles and darkened rooms in a complicated, meandering pattern which would have given most architects a migraine. There, in the gloom and decay of utter neglect Mortich kept his rejects and draft models, artistic experiments better left unseen. As Grieg stood patiently at the entrance of each room they entered, Lillian and Eva studied and scrutinised every nook and cranny, making use of the various scanning tools they had brought with them.

Of all the rooms they searched, the former model-making chamber was the most eerie. Whilst Eva kept her mind occupied by searching for dimensional anomalies, which might reveal a hidden room or corridor, Lillian found herself beset by the dread atmosphere which seemed to seep out of the walls and permeate the very air they were breathing. Such was the sense of foreboding which burrowed itself into the core of her being, that she was forced to momentarily retire from the room and seek out the grisly figure of Grieg for distraction. Taking a deep breath to steady her nerves, she posed him a question.

“This basement complex of yours, it’s clearly been abandoned for years. So, if this particular part of it was once Mortich’s workshop, whereabouts is his new facility?”

Grieg gave her a smile which would not have looked out of place on a lizard. “Mortich the Magnificent’s current wax-making chamber is positioned on the highest floor of the museum. Entry to it is forbidden to all but Mortich the Magnificent and myself, and those who come here for modelling purposes, of course.”

“I think you’ll find we have access,” snapped Lillian, producing a warrant document issued to her by the State Governor of Cirrus Minor.

“I rather think it is you who is mistaken, Miss March-Reynolds. The contract which my benefactor signed with the owner of Cirrus Minor, Mister Geoffrey Greatorex, contains an explicit clause rendering the Wax Museum immune to state authority. In short, this complex exists outside of the legislature and judiciary of this planet, not to mention its security and intelligence services.”

Before Lillian could react to Grieg’s expression of smugness Eva returned from searching the derelict workshop. “No hidden spaces, no traces of biological material matching our model. It’s clean.”

Lillian looked back at the room with an increasing sense of unease, and not a little despair. "There's nothing clean about that place. Let's move on. Mister Grieg, I'll be taking up my complaint with your employer when he returns, and be aware that I will gain entry to all parts of this museum, one way or another."

"I'm sure you will," observed Grieg with the same lizard-like smile painted across his wizened features.

Istria had had quite enough of waxworks for one day, which she realised was ironic since before meeting the Doctor and travelling in his bizarre ship – what was the name of it again? – she'd have given her right arm to have visited the renowned Wax Museum of Nanos Mortich. Of course, she'd heard all about its extraordinary interior temperature, its vast mountain-like stairwell and its decidedly creepy custodian. She'd also seen holograms of some of its exhibits, and as part of her Art degree she'd written a dissertation on sculpting which had included a brief study of Mortich. But, and it was a pretty big but, after hours of going round and round the vertiginous five-hundred metre staircase, poring over every last detail of every last waxwork, she'd had her fill of it. Oh, and she'd had her fill of the Doctor's buzzing screwdriver as well.

"Why did your screwdriver thingy go dead on the waxwork in the Exhibition, but it's working in here?" she asked.

The Doctor stood up from scrutinising a waxwork of a small, crab-like being and looked affectionately at his sonic screwdriver. "It's sensitive towards certain energy wavelengths, and whatever Mortich carved 'The Scream' out of was soaked in at least one of them, probably quite recently too. I can only assume that over time the energy dissipates itself, leaving me free to scan the waxwork unchallenged. As I said before, there's something very peculiar about these models of Mortich's. If only I could fit together all the pieces we've uncovered, perhaps then I could see the shape of the missing part. It feels like it's on the edge of my mind, I just can't quite reach it yet."

"Well, I think we've poked and prodded enough of these exhibits to know there's nothing more to..."

Istria's voice trailed off as she came face-to-face with the first of Mortich's humanoid models. And this one was new. The clothes were fashioned in the latest style of men's suit found on Taurus Prime, and the shoes had to be straight out of the Drada Collection, which had only been released to a handful of exclusive outlets a few weeks earlier.

"This is weird," said Istria, "this waxwork looks like it just walked off of a catwalk. I can't explain it but somehow it doesn't look right. It's, well, too 'now'."

The Doctor studied the figure carefully. It was of a man, probably in his early forties with short-cropped hair and a wide, well-fed face. His eyes were the most brilliant emerald green and he had the look of a person who was accustomed to getting their own way. Activating the sonic screwdriver once more the Doctor began to scan the model. As he reached the head there came the same high-pitched whine as before and the sonic screwdriver cut out. Pocketing the temporarily paralysed probe, the Doctor returned to using good old-fashioned

twenty-twenty vision, aided and abetted by a large magnifying glass which he took from his jacket pocket. Deciding to study the mouth and ears first he abruptly took a step backwards, the final sickening piece of the puzzle falling into place.

Leaving behind the disused section of the Wax Museum, Lillian and Eva were no nearer finding their missing model. Packing away their scanning equipment they both turned towards Grieg, who was looking distinctly tired.

"We'll search the main complex again, if you don't mind. Mortich refers to it simply as the 'Staircase', is that not right?" asked Eva in her usual clipped, business-like tone.

Grieg nodded. "Indeed, the 'Staircase' is the nomenclature which Mortich the Magnificent has given to the gallery area. Please be so good as to follow me again."

Left with little choice in the matter Lillian and Eva trailed after Grieg, ever watchful in case a sign or a clue which might help their cause was revealed. A series of plain, stone-built corridors led up from the lower section of the museum into the stairwell complex which dominated its structure. As with so many visitors before them, it was hard for Lillian and Eva not to be impressed by its breathtaking vista of endless stairs and exhibit-housing alcoves – even if, only a few hours before, they had been painstakingly treading its soaring height. Why Mortich had chosen that particular design was difficult to tell. It was certainly true, however, that the architecture of the Wax Museum left a lasting impression on its visitors.

Suddenly struck by the magnitude of their search, Lillian paused for a moment and drew Eva to one side. "I don't believe that Mortich, or Grieg for that matter have guessed why we're really here, but I don't want to take any risks – we have to be certain of our evidence, otherwise our whole case is worthless. I want you to scan the stairwell area again, for as long as it takes, but this time without Grieg. I don't trust him, he's under our feet the whole time. I think it's about time we sent him on a fool's errand." Moving towards the outer wall of the stairwell, close to where the staircase began its inexorable climb, Lillian turned to face Grieg.

"Mister Grieg, we'd like to press your patience a little further. We'd like a copy of Mortich's inventory, detailing his complete collection of works to date; is that possible?"

Grieg gave a sigh of growing fatigue and indicated a nearby computer terminal. "I can give you a full inventory, as well as critical reviews of each and every work. All I need from you is a download destination."

Lillian withdrew a transparent cube from her utility bag. The faces of the cube were no bigger than her thumbnail, and its shiny surface gleamed and dazzled even in the faint, purplish light of the Wax Museum. Passing the storage device to Grieg, she accompanied him to the terminal. Inserting the cube, Grieg began to download the vast inventory. Strangely, after just a few seconds the terminal screen went blank and the cube was hurriedly rejected. Studying the terminal with an expert eye Grieg seemed baffled.

"This is most uncommon; it appears that the terminal has crashed. I will have to access the mainframe via another workstation. Please, come with me."

With a knowing look on her face, Lillian accompanied Grieg to a door on the other side of the stairwell, marked 'Staff Only'. With her boss keeping Grieg occupied Eva immediately set

to work on the first exhibit. If she and Lillian were lucky, the Sandman Virus contained in the storage cube would send Grieg in circles for some little time to come. That was the wonderful thing about that particular virus, it was traceless and temporary – a gimmick in both name and nature. By disrupting a computer network or software program for just a few moments it could cause quite a round of havoc, yet it was nigh on impossible to blame anyone for its malcontent, since its effects were fleeting and its viral trail faded almost instantly, much like the way footprints on a sandy beach are washed away by the incoming tide. For most hackers the Sandman Virus was little more than a nuisance trick, but occasionally it came in handy for distracting clients and confusing business rivals; or keeping creepy museum custodians occupied.

Approaching the first of the abstract objects in Mortich's collection, Eva's attention was caught by a shape which looked quite out of place alongside the other exhibits. It was a tall, blue box and it was positioned about a quarter of the way up the staircase, close to the flora and fauna section. Fighting against her instinct for an orderly search, Eva ignored the intervening exhibits and hiked her way up the staircase towards the strange box. Taking out her dimensional Map-Quick scanner she pointed the snub-nosed instrument at the incongruity in front of her and depressed the 'scan' button. Flicking her eyes over the readings Eva decided that her findings were mistaken and tried again. Getting the same readout as before, she decided that the object before her was impossible and tried for a third time. With the same result yet again, Eva switched off the Map-Quick device and gave the blue box a long, unbelieving stare.

"I'd believe your readings if I were you, that's no ordinary object."

Eva almost jumped at the sound of the unexpected and unfamiliar voice. Spinning around to face the owner of the voice she found herself looking up at a face she had only ever seen in magazines or holograms. It was Mortich.

Taking Istria by the hand the Doctor drew her away from the waxwork. Confused by his sudden action Istria gave him a puzzled look.

"What's wrong? What have you found?"

The Doctor visibly winced as he returned his magnifying glass to his jacket pocket and remained silent. Then, searching his trouser pockets he took out a pair of chrome-plated tweezers, which he proceeded to insert into the model's half-open mouth. In a moment the tweezers had gripped something soft and malleable. With the most delicate movement he could muster, the Doctor gently pulled on the object caught in the tweezers' grasp until the merest piece of the model's tongue was protruding. Realising what she was looking at Istria found herself leaning against the wall of the alcove for support. The tongue was flesh and blood.

Grieg had tried six different terminals in all with exactly the same result: a blank screen and a dead CPU. Yet the curious thing was that as he returned to the first crashed terminal he

discovered that it was fully functional again. As he checked it over for signs of power failure or sabotage he noticed that the second, and then the third terminal had returned to life. Within another ten minutes or so all the affected workstations were alive and awaiting instruction once more.

“That is... so very odd,” observed Lillian in a somewhat slurred tone of voice, suddenly aware that she was battling against a growing feeling of extreme weariness.

“Yes,” replied Grieg dryly, “odd indeed. Although, I must say I was expecting the Sandman Virus to last a little longer. The original version could incapacitate a network or terminal for hours at a time. I have to conclude that either the museum’s network is a good deal more robust than I thought it was or, more likely, this strain of virtual contagion has been adjusted to act like more of a jape, a simple parlour trick a child might play on an unsuspecting parent.”

Lillian tried to frown in mock ignorance, her sense of fatigue almost unbearable. “I... I must say I... I don’t know what you’re... you’re talking about.”

“I know full well that you would prefer to search the museum without my presence, Miss March-Reynolds. I am also aware that your investigation here is more than a simple case of locating a missing person. I must, therefore, inform you that it is only on the most generous terms of Mortich the Magnificent that you have been allowed to enter here at all. I think you’re feeling a little tired. I suggest that you rest here for a time. Later I will see to it that you are given full access to the wax-making chamber. In fact, you will experience its workings at firsthand.”

Lillian at last became aware the truth: she had been drugged. It had to be tea – the blasted tea! She’d only taken a sip of it, but whatever was in it was clearly potent. Thank goodness Eva had declined Grieg’s offer altogether. As Lillian’s mind lost contact with her body she could just make out Grieg guiding her to a nearby chair, where he seated her. In the last seconds before she finally lost consciousness, she noticed with abject horror that same sinister smile creeping across Grieg’s face. This time she knew of what it reminded her: it was the same sort of smile you might expect to find on a snake – if snakes could smile – before devouring its prey.

Still leaning against the alcove for support, Istria could feel the blood draining from her face. Close to fainting she began taking long, deep breaths in a desperate attempt to get more oxygen to her brain. Realising that his companion was in distress, the Doctor quickly took a small phial from his inner-jacket pocket, uncorked the nozzle and held it up to Istria’s nose. The smelling salts took quick effect and she soon found her vision clearing and her hearing returning to normal. Nodding her thanks, she took another deep breath. As though hypnotised by the horror of it, she couldn’t help gazing once more at the waxwork model.

“I don’t understand. It’s a sick joke, right? Just Mortich playing games with people who sneak into his museum without paying?”

“I’m afraid not. The tongue is quite genuine. What is more, there are skin traces inside the mouth, ears and nose. I imagine that if we were to open up the model – or rather body – we

would find that the innards are also quite real. This poor chap has been exposed to a matter-transmission device, but not the conventional sort in which the subject's atomic structure is broken down, transmitted and then re-assembled at the receiving end. No, indeed not. It seems that the process has been adjusted, so that the molecular structure of the subject is re-arranged to form a new, atomic signature. Put another way, someone's realised that, under certain conditions, a teleportation accident will leave behind a perfectly intact body at the transmission point, but one which is reduced to a wax-like substance, no doubt G-90."

"Are you saying what I think you're saying?" Istria whispered, as though the louder she spoke the more definite their discovery would become.

"I think we've found out why Mortich's waxworks are so ingeniously perfect. Which also means we've stumbled across a mass murderer: either Mortich or whomever is working for him."

Hearing a soft humming sound coming up the stairs behind them, the Doctor and Istria ducked further into the alcove, pressing themselves against its walls in the hope that they wouldn't be noticed. Out of the corner of her eye Istria couldn't help sneaking a look at whatever it was that was passing by. It was a stair-lift device, that levitated passed them in an eerily dignified fashion. It contained two occupants. On the far side was an elderly man with a sour, dry face which told of years of servitude and study. *That had to be Mortich's near-legendary assistant, Onus Grieg*, thought Istria. Next to him was seated a woman, but her posture was very odd. Sitting bolt upright and with her face fixed straight ahead of her, she looked as though she were completely paralysed. As the stair-lift glided away Istria let out a sigh of relief and cautiously stepped out of the alcove. As she did so an imposing figure came up behind her and tapped her on the shoulder. Swinging round Istria came face-to-face with Mortich. Standing next to him was a tall woman with her head slightly bowed. Mortich was holding a bright green stun-gun in his left hand, covering both the woman and Istria.

"Do please come out Doctor, I'm looking forward to sculpting two birds with one stone."

The Doctor stepped out of the alcove and gave Mortich a withering stare. "If there's one sort of villainy I really can't bear, Mister Mortich, it's the sort that thinks it's performing a service of one kind or another."

"I'm doing a good deal more than that, Doctor. And with you and your companion, as well as your TARDIS, to add to my collection, along with a couple of amateur sleuths out of the way, I'll be well on my way to sealing my reputation as the greatest living artist of all time."

"What on Old Earth are talking you about?!" blurted out Istria, a sense of growing panic forming in the pit of her stomach.

"For a scholar of art you really are quite simple-minded, my dear." Mortich's tone was dripping with contempt. "I will shortly be adding you to my collection, as my long awaited 'Prime Exhibit' – my crowning glory, as it were. You, your Time Lord mentor and his ship will become the star attractions in my museum: processed, posed and permanent. Welcome to the Wax Museum."

PART III: SMOKE AND MIRRORS

To be successful as an artist is to be given immortality. What more could one hope to achieve in a single lifetime?

(Nanos Mortich, *Principia Aesthetica*)

Still holding the stun-gun squarely at his three prisoners, Mortich motioned for them to begin climbing the dizzying staircase. After a dozen or so steps the Doctor paused and lent on the handrail, gulping in air as though he'd just competed in a marathon.

"Look, I don't think he's up to this," pleaded Istria.

Mortich remained impassive and motioned with the stun-gun to keep moving. After another minute or so the Doctor swayed and collapsed, his body crumpling to the ground like an old tree finally succumbing to a winter's storm. Istria dropped to the ground next to him and grasped at his wrist. He had a double pulse! That couldn't be possible, could it? Well, thought Istria, double pulse or not it certainly was slow, dangerously so.

"His pulses – I mean pulse – is very weak. He needs rest, you simply can't push him like this!" Astonished by her own newly-discovered confidence, Istria found herself glaring at Mortich, indifferent to the weapon that he was now pointing directly at her.

Lowering the gun for a moment and stepping back from his prisoners, Mortich unclipped a small, barrel-shaped instrument from his belt and pointed it at the prone figure of the Doctor. A moment later he put away device and nodded.

"It would seem that the stories of Time Lord impotence are true. If this person really is a product of that vaunted race, perhaps the rest of us may sleep a little easier in our beds. Temporal guardians? Preservers of civilisation? If climbing a staircase is enough to stop one of them in their tracks, I think Gallifrey's reputation is ill-founded."

Moving towards the outer wall Mortich located a small, hexagonal button which was set flush into the stonework. Pressing the button twice he stood back from the wall and waited. Moments later two of the levitating stair-lifts arrived, very much like a pair of obedient dogs answering the call of their master. Mortich pointed to Eva to board the second, whilst directing Istria to get the Doctor and herself into the first. With his prisoners seated – or, in the case of the Doctor leaning to one side – Mortich positioned himself next to Eva and flicked a switch on his

armrest. In unison the stair-lifts gave off a soft humming sound and began to rapidly ascend the staircase.

Gazing up at the very top of the museum, Istria found that her heartbeat was beginning to race. What was happening to her? The Celestial Exhibition and her chores as Brač's assistant seemed like a lifetime ago – or perhaps someone else's life altogether? Now where had she got to? A magical mystery tour with a time-travelling alien? An artistic fraud which risked upending the apple cart of established aesthetics for the next dozen centuries? And public murder on such a scale that it surely begged the two-part question: Who was protecting Mortich and why? As questions and images whirred around in Istria's mind, she suddenly realised that she was facing what sounded very much like a death threat. Incredibly, after all that thinking she couldn't answer her original question: What was happening to her?

Istria was jolted back to the present by the stair-lifts coming to an abrupt stop. They had arrived at the summit of the Wax Museum. From the balcony which led off from the staircase it was possible to look down at the five hundred metre drop and its spiralling collection of waxworks. Before she could begin to ponder the spectacular view below her, Istria was marched towards a single large portal directly behind the balcony. With the help of the other female prisoner, Istria carried the Doctor through the portal and along the corridor beyond. Here the walls were made of an unusual red metal, the name of which Istria couldn't quite put her finger on. At the end of the corridor there was a set of doors. Mortich pointed to the first. As Istria approached the door it automatically opened, revealing a bare rectangular room, about five metres square and with a high, vaulted ceiling. It had the dank smell of a storeroom about it, and the traces of wax-like material on the floor only added to her suspicions. Once they were through the doorway the portal closed noiselessly behind them. Looking around her Istria could see that the room was lit from within by a single mauve light, built into the ceiling. Carefully laying the Doctor on the ground, Istria and the other woman turned to face each other properly for the first time.

"My name's Istria and this is the Doctor," she said, kneeling next to the Time Lord's still slumbering frame and checking his pulse – or was that pulses? – once again.

"I'm Eva, Eva Girvan. It seems we might be in the same business."

"I don't follow you?"

"Investigating Mortich. There's not a lot of point pretending otherwise now. We're both trapped and whether he thinks you're an innocent bystander or not, he's still going to get rid of you all the same. And, bearing in the mind the waxwork he caught you looking at, I'd say you know quite enough about what's happening here to be a major threat to him."

Istria nodded. "You're right, but I still don't really understand what's going on. The Doctor mentioned something about a teleportation accident but I'm not sure what he was getting at."

"Your friend has learnt a great deal. Mortich has been in the business of wax-making for over two centuries. In that time he's developed a number of techniques, but it's his apparent ability to sculpt wax copies, which have been demonstrated to be atomically flawless, that has begun to create suspicion around him. In plain language, to do what he's doing requires a shift in the atomic structure of a subject which can only be perfect if, and only if, it's the subject itself which becomes the wax copy."

“You mean to say he really is turning people into wax, just like the Doctor said?”

“It’s far worse than that, I’m afraid. To create the wax version of the original subject, the subject must be alive and conscious to some degree. Lillian – the lady you may have seen pass by you earlier in one of the museum’s stair-lifts – and I are private investigators. But there were originally three of us. Vojak Untermann was our ‘gofer’, the person we sent in to check out the ground before we began our investigation proper. He was experienced and streetwise, although he tended to take risks a little too easily. Lillian wasn’t sure if sending him to check out Mortich was a good idea, but he wanted the challenge of snaring a really big fish, and they don’t come much bigger than ‘Mortich the Magnificent’. We set up a genuine modelling company for almost a year before we started looking into Mortich’s business dealings, and we arranged various model shoots in this part of the galaxy before we tackled the Wax Museum. Vojak volunteered to enter the museum undercover as a model. His last message said that he’d made contact with Onus Grieg and that he was going to meet Mortich to discuss a really important upcoming project. That was the last we heard of him, but it wasn’t the last we saw of him.”

Istria frowned. “How so?”

“We visited the Celestial Exhibition a short time ago, and we saw Mortich’s latest work, the one that’s earned him his third Grand Primo Award. ‘The Scream’ waxwork is a perfect physical copy of Vojak...” Eva’s voice faltered for a moment before she regained her composure. “It’s too perfect to be a copy – it is Vojak. Of course, we performed some rudimentary scans to see what we could find out, and we just so happened to pick up a huge amount of Idris 20, a type of radiation which is commonly released during matter-transmission breakdowns. However, barring Idris 20 the main by-product of teleportation malfunctions is Glyconium 90, which by sheer coincidence is almost identical to wax.”

“Eureka!” shouted the Doctor, who managed to synchronise his exclamation with the act of sitting bolt upright. Istria and Eva both jumped backwards in shock at the Doctor’s sudden revival. Before either of them could react any further the Doctor gave Istria a quick wink and stuck his hand out to Eva, grasping her nearest hand in turn and vigorously shaking it.

“It’s good to meet you, Eva isn’t, Eva Girvan? I think we’re going to get along famously. We’ll certainly need your inside knowledge on Mortich if we’re going to foil his schemes, and your conclusions regarding that particularly nasty piece of work could well be spot-on. As for Idris 20, no wonder my poor old sonic screwdriver got indigestion, low-spectrum energy wavelengths like I-20 can play havoc with sound-based probes.”

Pausing momentarily the Doctor suddenly noticed the colour of the ceiling light. “Oh, that’s a coincidence, the light in here is mauve; that’s good, it matches my tie, or does it clash with it? What do you think?”

“I... you... but...” Istria broke off, not quite sure which question to pitch at the Doctor first.

“Self-induced deep-sleep mechanism, a bit like a coma; any Time Lord worth their salt can pull it off. And if it fooled Mortich it proves at least one thing: he doesn’t do his research very well. ‘Impotent’ indeed! I’ll show him what ‘temporal guardians’ and ‘preservers of civilisation’ are made of.”

“But you were asleep, or in some kind of coma, weren’t you?” queried Istria, her head once again spinning with questions. “How did you hear what we were saying?”

The Doctor scratched his head in thought for a moment before replying. "I suppose it's a little bit like fainting, when you can still hear sounds but everything else has gone dead. Believe you me, it can be a great party trick."

"Right," said Istria, unsure of how much of what the Doctor was saying was meant to be taken seriously. "Perhaps what's just a touch more important than you playing party games is our finding a way out of here, at least before Mortich gives us a lethal demonstration of his I-something and G-whatever."

The Doctor's face lit up. "You're absolutely right. Now, would either of you two ladies happen to have a mirror on your person?"

Mortich was not impressed. The remains of Geoffrey Greatorex had been returned to the wax-making chamber, where the master sculptor was scrutinising his assistant's efforts. Turning aside from the part-waxwork part-corpse, Mortich addressed Grieg in no uncertain terms.

"Ham-fisted, amateurish and shoddy. It is remarkable, indeed incredible, that you have been assisting me ever since my original wax-making chamber was constructed, and yet your work on Greatorex is without a doubt an unmitigated disaster. Moreover, given that you have witnessed countless wax-making procedures, how could you have made such a monumental mess of it?"

Since Grieg's hearing had dulled with age, he could not quite appreciate the level of scorn in Mortich's tirade.

"I had little choice, Sir," replied Grieg in the tone of a fawning supplicant. "The arrival of the two investigators forced me to suspend the operation before completion. Our museum sensors indicated that our visitors were carrying scanning tools, which could have picked up the wax-making process. I humbly decided that it was too great a risk to continue at that time. I will of course complete the..."

"That's quite enough," interrupted Mortich, with a tone of voice that could have punched a hole in armour-plated steel. "Your buffoonish work wouldn't have been quite so awful if you hadn't then proceeded to position your very own freak show in the public gallery."

This time Grieg was fully aware of Mortich's rage. Raising his hands in confession, he tried to present his reasoning. "The outer layers of Greatorex's body were fully processed. Only a small portion of his inner parts remained..."

"Only a *small* part!" yelled Mortich. "I think you'll find it was his protruding tongue that gave the game away. What is more, if I have to hear any more out of you regarding your complete lack of sense I shall not be held responsible for my actions. I'll deal with your mistakes presently. Right now we have a fresh assortment of waxworks to fashion."

Mortich strode over to the control unit near the centre of the chamber and began programming it with a new set of instructions. With an exaggerated air of purpose he completed the sequence and turned towards the figure of Lillian, seated at the far side of the chamber and still utterly immobile. Observing his latest subject with the practised indifference of one who has long since abandoned their conscience, Mortich looked at Grieg with a glaring countenance. "Let us begin."

Watching the Doctor at work was a bit like being in the audience of a magic show and a circus act all at once, thought Istria. Somehow he'd rigged up her make-up mirror on the end of a telescopic metal rod, which he'd produced from one of his voluminous jacket pockets. He'd also attached his magnifying glass to the strange contraption, so that the mirror reflected light directly onto its lens. In the meantime, Istria and Eva had been instructed to stand against the wall at the far end of the room, opposite the door, with their legs slightly bent and leaning forward with their hands pressing down on their knees. This would allow the Doctor to climb onto their shoulders, whereupon they'd been told to stand as straight as they possibly could, using the wall for support.

"Now ladies, it's been a long time since I was at the top of a human pyramid, but I don't think I've lost my touch. Don't forget, it's essential that you both stand very, very still. Now, on the count of three: one, two, three!"

Springing up as though he weighed no more than a child, the Doctor expertly positioned himself on their shoulders. Then, and with painstaking care he slowly stood up. Taking a breath to steady himself, the Doctor flicked a button at the base of the telescopic rod. Noiselessly the rod extended to its maximum length. Okay, he thought, that's the easy part. Now comes the tricky bit. Swivelling the rod with the delicacy of a sword swallower inserting a sword into their throat, the Doctor began to angle the mirror-lens end-piece so that it reflected and magnified the soft radiance of the mauve ceiling light onto the door sensor above the portal.

"Doctor, what exactly do you... hope to gain by doing this?" Eva's question was punctuated by her efforts to keep still.

Istria's voice was equally strained. "Yes, you could... tell us what you're... up to."

"The sensor-speaker combination over the doorway must contain a temperature gauge – at least I'm pretty sure it does," explained the Doctor. "So, all I need to do is get just the right angle with this here mirror and magnifying lens so that I can direct a strong enough beam of light at it."

"And... that's going to get us... out of here?" gasped Eva.

The Doctor kept his gaze fixed on the door sensor and the patch of magnified light which danced and flitted around it. "Light means heat, and it's imperative that the whole museum has a fixed temperature in order to keep the G-90, the stuff from which the wax models are 'made', stable. If the temperature changes in the slightest an alarm ought to be triggered, which will hopefully distract Mortich from whatever he's doing to your friend, Eva. And, if we're really lucky, it might disrupt the door lock on this room as well. We'll just have to keep our fingers crossed on that one. But I can't imagine Mortich counted on imprisoning an amateur circus act. Which means that if this diversion works, he shouldn't be looking for answers in here."

At last the light beam was positioned on the door sensor. To Istria and Eva the next minute or so felt like an eternity. Then, all of a sudden the small speaker fixed above the sensor gave off a series of sharp bleeps, and the portal opened. With a smile on his face that could have

lit up a black hole, the Doctor jumped down from his companions' tired shoulders, put his finger to his lips and headed for the door. Nodding in silent acknowledgement, Istria and Eva followed him out of the room.

The alarm had already cut out by the time Mortich reached the wall-mounted terminal positioned outside the wax-making chamber. Scanning the museum complex he found that there was a distinct temperature rise in the section in which his guests were being held. How on Old Earth could someone have raised the temperature? Unless of course there was a fault in the central heating mechanism? And if that were the case he'd have more than a trio of prisoners to process.

"Grieg, go down to the temperature regulator unit and see if there's a fault. Should you meet any of our guests along the way, feel free to stun them on sight. But remember, I need them alive – no disintegrations."

Brandishing his stun-gun, Grieg hurried out of the chamber as fast as his ageing legs would carry him. Reaching one of the waiting stair-lifts he quickly seated himself and began the long return journey to the base of the museum.

Back in the wax-making chamber, Mortich turned to Lillian, who was now positioned inside the glass column at the centre of the room. Although some degree of sensation was slowly returning to her body, she still couldn't move. Mortich mouthed his words to her with deliberate exaggeration, allowing Lillian's now open eyes to lip-read his gloating remarks through the soundproof glass.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to delay your processing, my dear. There could be temperature problems in the museum, which would put at risk my entire collection, including your soon to be finished waxwork, and that would be such a pity after all my efforts and all your agony."

Lillian didn't respond, but the pupils in her eyes appeared to dilate a little. Whether this was the effect of the neural inhibitor wearing off, or a sign of abject fear, was impossible to say. Either way, Mortich didn't care.

Having guessed at the direction of the wax-making chamber, the Doctor and his companions cautiously made their way down the strange, glaringly red corridor. In an attempt to distract herself from the horror of the last few hours, not to mention what terror might still be to come, Istria asked the Doctor if he knew the name of the bright, red metal which covered the walls of the corridor.

"It's delvix, a compound metal used in the focusing mechanism of teleport systems. It also acts a shield against Idris 20 radiation. In fact, you could almost say it's the ideal material for matter-transmission devices, or even teleportation experiments. Mortich probably lined the area around his maladjusted machine with delvix in order to protect his so-called waxworks collection. Also, if he's using a jerry-rigged teleport facility on a regular basis, there's sure to be

some level of radiation leakage; the delvix makes sure it doesn't get as far as his precious 'Staircase'."

Eva suddenly raised her hand and pointed ahead of them. "I can hear something," she whispered. Sure enough, the distinctive humming of a museum stair-lift was growing louder.

"Run!" mouthed the Doctor, pushing Istria and Eva in the opposite direction to the approaching sound. With hearts pounding and lungs burning the trio hurtled down the single, scarlet-coloured corridor that connected the wax-chamber and its auxiliary rooms to the spiral staircase. Reaching the balcony overlooking the staircase they came to an abrupt halt. Rummaging in his trouser pocket the Doctor pulled out a single key on a silver chain. He thrust it into Istria's right hand, closing her fingers around it.

"Get to the TARDIS, take Eva with you and don't stop until you're inside. Whatever happens, you'll be safe in the TARDIS. Now go – and don't look back!"

Before Istria could argue, the Doctor ducked into the nearest alcove. Realising what he was planning she beckoned to Eva to follow her and made a mad dash for the single stair-lift parked at the top of the stairs. As the stair-lift transporting Grieg finally came into view, Istria hit what she thought was the 'go' button and they began to move down the staircase and away from its deathly custodian.

Giving the two runaways a smirking grin, Grieg paused to adjust the setting on his stun-gun to maximum. Mortich wouldn't care if he was 'forced' to kill either of these two intruders by chance. After all, it was the Doctor who was the real target, along with his precious time machine. Increasing the speed of his stair-lift, Grieg took off in pursuit.

In his beloved wax-making chamber Mortich was busily checking and re-checking his equipment. The circuitous piping which covered the walls was gleaming and unblemished, and the control unit near the centre was giving off all the right readings. Perhaps the temperature alarm was a diversion? Perhaps the museum's thermostatic system was functioning normally? Still pondering these questions, Mortich's attention was suddenly drawn to a sound which was coming from just outside the chamber, very much like the soft patter of stealthy footsteps. Moving with feline grace towards the doorway, Mortich drew his stun-gun and stepped outside, covering both ends of the corridor. There was nothing, not a thing. Jogging military-style down the passageway, Mortich swept his gaze over every possible angle. Still nothing. Content that he had been mistaken, he returned to the chamber.

Making one or two further adjustments to the control unit, Mortich's eye caught sight of a sudden movement inside the glass column: Lillian had finally woken up.

Pounding on the glass, Lillian's face was a mixture of pure anger and utter panic. Mortich savoured the moment. Maybe it was time to process her after all? The temperature risk couldn't have got any worse, otherwise the alarm would have sounded again. Yes, he thought, it's time to go to work. As his hands were about to begin the final programming sequence, Mortich heard someone politely cough behind him. It was the Doctor.

"Ah, my dear Doctor, it's so good you of you to drop in. I knew you wouldn't be able to resist a damsel in distress." Mortich drew his stun-gun and levelled it at his prey once more.

"If you think you know me, Nanos Mortich, then you're very much mistaken. I've come here with one ambition, and one ambition only, and that's to stop you in your tracks."

"A pity you'll be disappointed then," replied Mortich, and fired the stun-gun. The Doctor crumpled to the floor like a broken puppet.

Grieg's stair-lift was rapidly gaining on them. As he came to within a dozen or so metres he was finally able to get a clear shot without the ever-spiralling staircase obscuring his line of fire. The first blast seared the air just above their heads; the second caught the back of the nearside armrest, leaving behind it a fizzing energy signature.

"This isn't going to work," muttered Istria, desperately searching what was left of the armrest control for some sign of an accelerator.

"When in doubt, opt for the least expected," said Eva. "Hold tight."

Eva reached out with her left foot and kicked down hard on the emergency break set into the foot-well. With a sickening lurch the stair-lift almost tilted forward a full ninety degrees, its harmonious humming changing key to a bass-line throb. Clinging on for dear life, Istria and Eva just had time to notice Grieg whizzing past them before their stair-lift righted itself and promptly grounded both itself and its passengers. Leaping off of their now redundant transport the pair dived for the nearest alcove, simultaneously avoiding another blast from the trigger-happy Grieg.

Bringing his stair-lift to a halt outside of the alcove, Grieg carefully dismounted and proceeded to cover the entrance with his stun-gun.

Istria gave Eva an ironic smile. "And what do you propose that we do next?" she whispered.

A look of concentration passed across Eva's face as she turned to observe the waxwork that was occupying their bolthole. It was the remains of Geoffrey Greatorex.

"I may just have an idea," said Eva.

"I hope it's better than the last one," observed Istria.

The floor upon which the Doctor was lying felt cold and unforgiving. He was on his side in a foetal position. Stretching out his legs he found that there was a smooth, concave wall stopping his lower limbs from unbending. With his movements clearly impeded, the Doctor warily opened his eyes and looked up. In front of him knelt a small woman, and the look on her face didn't instil confidence. Gingerly standing up he looked around him, quickly recognising his surroundings. He was inside the notorious glass column in the centre of Mortich's wax-making chamber.

Just outside the column, Mortich was standing and smiling. This time, however, he was wearing a headset device, with a built-in microphone. Waving at his two prisoners, Mortich pressed a button on the headset.

“This apparatus has a directional sound amplifier and transmitter. Basically, I can hear you and you should be able to hear me,” explained Mortich. “Perhaps you could raise a hand to confirm this?”

The Doctor and Lillian remained unmoved. Mortich gave an exaggerated sigh. “Oh, you would have to play it the hard way. Really, I was hoping for some conversation before I start. Surely you must be dying to say something?”

The Doctor shot Mortich a dark look. “I can’t imagine what you’d expect to hear from a person you’re about to murder – I take it you do realise what you’re doing? I hope you’re not one of those poor devils who denies their actions?”

Mortich raised himself up to his full, intimidating height. “I know full well the price my subjects pay, and it is a price worth paying.” His voice grew low and ominous as he continued. “Art, such as mine, goes beyond the paltry value of the individual. Do you think that when military artists record the horrors of the battlefield, they are cold-hearted criminals? Beings without conscience?”

The Doctor smiled coldly. “You gagged your conscience a long time ago, Mortich. You know well enough that torturing the living for the sake of a cheap piece of fairground entertainment is abhorrent. Wartime artists paint a picture of suffering, that’s true. But the suffering is not caused by their hands. They are bystanders, and their work has helped to dispel the dangerous notion that war is an exciting affair in which death is seldom met. On the other hand, you are a killer, pure and simple. What’s more, you’re not even an artist; you’re a third-rate teleport engineer who flicks a switch and calls it art. If the art world knew how you created your perfect models, you’d be a laughing stock from one end of the galaxy to the other.”

“You would do well to keep a civil tongue, Time Lord. I have it in my means to make your processing brief or interminable. The pain is the same in either case, but I’m sure you’d prefer it to be over without too much fuss.”

“You’re a fiend!” shouted Lillian. “You took an innocent man and tortured him to death. I hope the Dark One seeks you out when the Dead Day comes.”

“Oh, I do love a bit of harmless superstition,” smirked Mortich, adjusting his headset so that Lillian’s screeching tone was more bearable. “I assume you’re referring to ‘The Scream’. Yes, I did enjoy that one. Now, what was the model’s name? Underman? Or was it Underling? Either way he gave a good show before he went, lots of pleading and panicking. He really was the perfect model for my homage to Edvard Munch.”

The Doctor shook his head. “Edvard Munch was an artist, an expressionist who inspired others. He was an innovator. In fact, he was everything you’re not, Mortich. As that journalist Cridman observed, you’re a fraud. But, first and foremost, you’re a killer.”

Mortich’s expression suddenly became serious. “I take your second point, Doctor. To the title of killer I must concede. A great many of my sponsors and benefactors have rid themselves of rivals and blackmailers, agitators and lobbyists by sending them to me. My art is my life, Doctor. But nothing is without cost, and this museum requires a substantial degree of funding.”

The Doctor shook his head in disgust. “And to think that your ‘hits’ have been put on public display. Surely you were expecting to be found out eventually?”

“Not at all. The more sensitive models are aesthetically adjusted so that they are unrecognisable – Grieg, my assistant, has a certain skill in that field. For the rest, you’d be

surprised how easy it is to set up a working death chamber next to a public place. I've even processed the occasional subject whilst the Wax Museum's doors were open, and the Staircase was lined with admiring visitors."

"You won't get away with this!" Lillian spat.

"I will, as I have with all the others. Oh, and Doctor, if you don't mind I'll be labelling Lillian here as your 'companion'. The Doctor without his companion would look... incomplete."

Suddenly a query entered the Doctor's mind. "One last question, if I may?" His tone had turned as dead as stone.

"Go ahead," replied Mortich, punching the opening sequence into the control unit with a feverish impatience.

"Did someone put you up to getting me, or are you doing this purely for art's sake?"

Mortich glanced up from his work with a look of disappointment on his face. "I'm afraid I must deny your last request, Doctor. In any case, I operate a strict principle of anonymity where my clients are concerned."

Returning his attention to the controls, Mortich hit the 'execute' command.

Without warning another stun-beam tore across the narrow entrance of the alcove and struck the rear wall, leaving in its wake the telltale firework display of leftover energy; a sure sign that Grieg had raised his stun-gun's setting to its highest level.

"Whenever he fires, he always avoids the waxwork," noted Eva.

"So?" said Istria, slightly envious of Eva's ability to remain coolly logical despite the obvious danger.

"Listen. Stay in the alcove, and when you see me cross my fingers call out loudly to Grieg that we're coming out."

Istria nodded, and backed as far as she could manage into one side of the alcove. Moving around with painstaking care, Eva positioned herself behind Greatorex's unfinished waxwork and gradually began to push.

Outside, Grieg had decided enough was enough. "Time to come out ladies, I'm losing my patience." With that, he double-checked the energy gauge of his stun-gun and began to edge closer to the entrance. As he drew nearer, he was sure that the waxwork of Greatorex had begun to move. Grieg was amazed; one of the women must be behind it! Taking careful aim at the waxwork he took a step closer.

Eva crossed her fingers. "Okay, okay, we're coming out, don't shoot," pleaded Istria.

For a fraction of a second Grieg turned his attention to the left side of the alcove. That was all the time Eva needed. Dropping into a squat position, she shouldered the waxwork forwards with all her might, sending it crashing to the ground. Exactly as she had hoped Grieg half-jumped, half-stepped backwards, momentarily taking his aim off of the alcove and its fugitives. As the waxwork tumbled over Eva leapt diagonally forwards and rolled, anticipating Grieg's inevitable shot. The stun-beam missed its target by less than an inch. In that moment Istria charged out of the alcove like a top-class sprinter and threw herself at Grieg. Caught

between two targets at once Grieg made the one move guaranteed to cost him the fight: he hesitated. As he depressed his stun-gun's trigger pad, Eva knocked him off his balance, sending him careering towards the edge of the staircase and the echoing space of the stairwell beyond. Keeping a desperate grip on his weapon, Grieg allowed himself to reach the handrail and took firm hold of it with his free hand. However, before he could regain the advantage, Istria, who was still charging ahead, knocked into him at full tilt, sending the stun-gun flying and Grieg tumbling over the handrail.

Pausing for moment to catch her breath, Istria looked over the handrail and braved the sight of the giddy drop. Below her was Grieg, his gnarled hands gripping at the edge of the staircase for dear life. His face looked up at her with an expression of pure shock.

Eva joined Istria at the handrail. As she spied the desperate figure below them she began to sense a change in the air; it was the temperature, it had suddenly dropped. Instead of a stifling forty-odd degrees Celcius, the air in the Wax Museum must have gone down as much as four or five degrees. Putting the cooler conditions to the back of her mind, Eva began to consider how they might rescue the dangling figure of Grieg. As she knelt down to see if she could reach his hands through the bars of the handrail, a bizarre orange fume began to issue from the sleeves of Grieg's tunic. A look of horror swept across the face of the doomed custodian. As the smoke grew thicker Grieg's right hand was suddenly wracked with spasms, forcing him to break his grip on the staircase. A moment later and his left hand followed suit. Finally losing his purchase, Grieg plummeted downwards, his silent scream caught in the empty, insensible pit of the stairwell.

Taking a step back from the horror she had only just witnessed, Istria found the feeling in her legs ebbing away. Sitting down before she fell down, she propped herself up against the nearest balustrade. Eva dropped down beside her and measured her pulse.

"The Doctor said a temperature shift would upset the G-90 stuff," croaked Istria, her mouth suddenly as dry as sandpaper. "Am I wrong, or does what just happened to Grieg mean what I think it means?"

Still possessed of a cold, logical mindset Eva weighed up what had just occurred and then answered. "If you're thinking that part of Grieg's arms was composed of G-90, then I think you're probably right. He must have been exposed to Mortich's teleport device at some point. Clearly, the sudden change in temperature came at precisely the wrong time for him."

Looking around her, Istria could see more of the strange orange smoke drifting out of the alcoves lining the staircase. Obviously the change in temperature had begun to work its effect on Mortich's exhibits. She gave Eva a tired smile. "Do you do this sort of thing a lot?"

"Not quite on this scale, but Mortich is a big fish. And as Vojak always used to say, you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs."

"True, but you can also break a lot of eggs without making an omelette."

This time it was Eva's turn to produce a tired smile. "If you've got the energy to be smart, you've the energy to walk. Now, where's this TARDIS thing the Doctor mentioned?"

Mortich was mesmerised. Although he always found the first stages of processing strangely hypnotic, on this occasion he was particularly pleased with himself for two very important reasons. In the first case, the bounty on the Doctor would keep his Wax Museum running for decades; in the second case he could now lay claim to having exhibited the first ever atomically accurate waxwork of a Time Lord. Of course, the Doctor's TARDIS was another issue, and his sponsor had not been clear regarding what was to happen to the time-ship. However, Mortich was sure he would be able strike a deal on it. After all, the final tableau of the Doctor and his companion would look so much better with the TARDIS in the background.

Breaking from his reverie Mortich was suddenly aware that his subjects were not showing the slightest sign of change. That was odd, he thought. Normally the atomic excitation was fairly swift. Examining the control unit's readout, Mortich suddenly felt a sharp, stabbing pain in his arms and legs. Bending forwards at the waist as though easing a cramp, he took a long deep breath and tried to stand. As he did so the pain which tore through his body became excruciating. Letting out a sudden, explosive shout he lent against the nearby control unit, desperate to relieve whatever was happening to him.

Looking at the glass column, Mortich had just enough focus left to register his astonishment at seeing that the Doctor and Lillian remained quite unharmed. In fact, Lillian almost appeared relaxed. A horrible thought suddenly crossed Mortich's mind. Frantically looking around the chamber for signs of sabotage, his eyes locked upon a truly awful sight – at least as far as he was concerned. There, near the entrance to the chamber, there was fixed a safety valve. It should have been pointing north; instead it was pointing south. It was the emergency vent. And it had opened.

Mortich screamed out in utter agony and tried to reach the valve to shut it off, but his legs were paralysed, or rather waxified to the spot. Unable to help himself, and with every cell in his body rapidly abandoning its DNA coding and transforming into G-90, Mortich began to weep. Barely had his first tear run down to his jaw line, then the process was complete. On the control unit a single green light flashed twice and the system went dead.

Safe within the glass chamber the Doctor and Lillian gazed out at the motionless figure of their tormentor. As a waxwork Mortich cut a rather sorry sight. His final expression of unmixed self-pity was rather at odds with all the bluster and arrogance that had fuelled his career. Brought to heel in convincing, if not to say permanent fashion, Mortich's fate was as public as that of all those individuals unfortunate enough to be duped into posing for him.

As the Doctor surveyed his sabotage with the cold sense of a job which had to be done, Lillian gave him a quizzical look. Taking his cue the Doctor began to explain.

"Some teleport systems operate by delivering a massively pressurised dose of radioactive energy. This beam of energetic particles smashes into the molecular structure of the subject and instantaneously scatters it. Of course, with a normal teleport facility this scattering effect is controlled and focused in order to transmit the subject's atoms to a predetermined reception point. Mortich's cannibalised teleport is a touch different, however. First, it keeps the subject fixed in one place; and second it only blasts them with enough energy to change their physical structure to G-90, otherwise known as Mortich's 'wax'.

"Now, all this piping lining the walls is part of the huge pressure-cooker set-up which Mortich has been using to direct the teleport energy at just the right level. But here's the snag:

the slightest upset in its delicately balanced pressure set-up and the whole system could blow apart. So, I nipped in here a little earlier – I think you were still out for the count back then – and did a little plumbing job of my own which, apart from affecting the teleport system, may have given the museum’s thermostat controls a headache as well. Anyhow, when Mortich activated the system it registered an immediate pressure imbalance and automatically shunted its molecule-smashing energy into the only place which could safely contain it: the wax-making chamber.”

Lillian wasn’t convinced. “Why didn’t Mortich notice the pressure readings were out of synch before he started?”

The Doctor pointed at the brightly lit control panel. The lower section contained a readout display which indicated pressure-related problems and other emergencies. Looking more closely, Lillian could just make out the small space where the bulb which lit the display was housed – only there was no bulb. With no light to illuminate the emergency display, Mortich’s attention was not drawn to the readout’s warning of imminent meltdown. As a result, the master sculptor had remained blissfully ignorant that his finely tuned teleport was rapidly haemorrhaging.

“If there’s one thing you mustn’t forget when you’re tampering with teleports,” commented the Doctor, “it’s to make sure you change the light bulbs.”

Lillian reached out and hugged the Doctor, her relief plain to see. “I can’t thank you enough. Both Eva and I...” Suddenly remembering her assistant Lillian pointed to the irradiated chamber. “I have a friend in the museum, at least somewhere in it, I think. Would the radiation have affected her?”

“She’s perfectly safe,” replied the Doctor. “As well as the chamber itself, the walls beyond it are insulated against leaks. And in any case, it’s a fast-decaying energy so it shouldn’t be hazardous for more than a few minutes.”

Glad that Eva was safe, Lillian turned to the glass chamber which still held her and the Doctor. “What about us, then? There can’t be all that much air left in here. How are we going to get out?”

Taking a large glass cutter from his pocket, the Doctor smiled. “As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s scouts would say, always be prepared.”

With a noise unlike anything heard at the Celestial Exhibition since its departure, the TARDIS materialised in roughly the same spot it had occupied on its previous visit. A moment later its doors opened and Lillian, Eva and Istria stepped out. After everything that had happened to them, it was stunning to confront a scene which had hardly changed at all. Thronging visitors milled about, their comments punctuated here and there by the distinctive screeching of Director Brač. Istria suddenly felt safe again – it was a feeling she’d almost forgotten since stepping foot in the Doctor’s incredible travel machine.

As the Doctor joined them, Istria couldn’t quite shake the sense of danger and hazard she’d just left behind her. Sensing her predicament, the Doctor took her hands in his and looked steadily into her eyes.

“Thank you, Istria. You’ve been amazing. Now you have to tell the art world about Mortich’s crimes. I’m sure Lillian and Eva here will be more than happy to help you. Do take care.”

Releasing her from his mesmerising gaze, the Doctor strode purposefully into the TARDIS and, without looking back, firmly closed the doors behind him. The sound which followed was the strangest thing that Istria, Eva or Lillian had ever heard. And, when the TARDIS finally evaporated in front of their very eyes, not one of them was in the least bit surprised. Turning around to face the future, the three women silently walked away.

Aboard the TARDIS the Doctor set the coordinates and seated himself once more in his favourite armchair. The tourist guide extolling the wonders of the Celestial Exhibition was still open on its centre pages, and the nearby egg-timer was still in need of being reset. Nothing really changes, thought the Doctor.

All of sudden his mind was struck by a recent memory. He found himself recalling the newly met and the even more newly departed Istria Hum. He’d been right to let her go, hadn’t he? Yes, of course he had been right, there was no other thing for it. He needed some time to himself, at least for the present. And she’d been relieved to get back to the Celestial Exhibition, he’d sensed that emotion most strongly of all. No, it wasn’t the time to find a companion just yet. When the moment did come, however, he’d know it.

Discarding the tourist guidebook the Doctor returned to his memories, content for a while to ponder the past.

EPILOGUE

Living is a fragile affair, littered with obstacle and grief. Through art we may raise ourselves above the crude, physical stuff of life and attain a pure, unsullied existence. Those who fail to recognise this truth, or who deny its message are indeed fallen beings. Better that their frames be consumed by fire, than their hollow words be permitted to poison the living still further.

(Nanos Mortich, *Principia Aesthetica*)

Tightly bound tubes curled their way about the desolate, decaying chamber like some long-dead serpent. Rusted piping had given in to the irresistible demands of entropy, and here and there a cable had formed itself into a series of surreal contortions. Uprturned floor panels were strewn about as though a great storm had been at work, scattering everything in its path. In the centre there stood a dusty glass column, with a roughly hewn hole cut into its base, just large enough to allow a person to enter or exit.

In front of the column, leaning against a derelict control unit stood the figure of a man, fixed and unmoving. Towering over its surroundings, Mortich's petrified corpse was truly macabre. Strikingly, in spite of his frame's agonised shape, it was his face that was utterly shocking. Caught in a soundless cry, Mortich's expression was one of woeful self-pity, hardly the final look expected of the once lauded *Über*-sculptor.

Emptied of meaning and abandoned to its fate, the Wax Museum had become a tomb to its awful architect. Intriguingly, the last person to gaze upon Mortich's final resting place was not a member of the investigation commission, or the subsequent clear-up team. Neither were they a relative of one of his many victims.

Observing Mortich's twisted corpse, an equally twisted smile crossed the visitor's face. With a look of utter contempt, they left the artist's ultimate pose to the unbroken stillness of the museum. There would be others, the visitor thought. Indeed, there would be others.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jez Strickley lives in Trieste, Italy, where he has been teaching a mishmash of history and geography for the last five years. Born on the Isle of Wight, Jez flies back to the UK whenever time permits, and knows his way around Britain's economy-airline hub, otherwise known as Stansted Airport, far too well. Fandom came late for this Whovian. In spite of growing up with the series in the 1980s, and turning his teenage bedroom into a shrine to all things Who, it wasn't until finding *Whotopia* and later *The Doctor Who Project* in 2006 that he began committing his thoughts on the maverick Time Lord to paper. Fan fiction and fatherhood nearly collided last autumn, but fortunately for all concerned the former was done and dusted just a few short weeks before his first child, Thomas, was born.



A visit to the Celestial Exhibition sets the Doctor on the trail of master-sculptor Nanos Mortich, a man for whom art is everything.

However, when the Doctor takes an unguided tour of Mortich's Wax Museum he soon discovers that his arrival is exactly what Mortich has been waiting for...

Why are Mortich's waxwork models so lifelike?
And just what sort of trap has the Doctor walked into this time?

This is another in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the ninth Doctor as played by Anton Robbins

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