

THE
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PROJECT

LEXICON



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Lexicon

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Sand.

Sand, sand, sand.

Everywhere was sand.

Absolutely nothing but sand as far as the eye could see.

Val was heartily sick of it.

Val, Tom and the Doctor had been slogging through the endless dunes for over two hours and Val had seen nothing but sand. No animals, no trees, no people, no buildings. A barren wasteland comprised solely of sand.

"I hate sand. It gets everywhere. If only there was some water, at least then we'd be on a beach," she muttered to herself as she looked wistfully around. But from what the Doctor had told her earlier, Magog IV was nothing but a ball of sand orbiting a perfectly ordinary M Class star.

Her two travelling companions were a few feet ahead of her and Val hurried to catch up with them.

"So where exactly are we headed?" Val asked Tom.

Tom rubbed the back of his neck and looked ruefully at her.

"Some camp or other."

"Holiday or prison?"

Tom looked over at her and laughed.

"Take a guess."

Sighing, Val looked and waved a hand at the Doctor's back. "What mad scheme has he got us involved in now?"

"You know the Doctor. Whenever there's some kind of mystery to solve, he wants to investigate. He just can't help himself."

Val laughed. "Typical."

The Doctor strolled several feet ahead, his sharp inquisitive face darting from side to side. Hearing the conversation, he looked over his shoulder.

"Mr. Brooker. Ms. Rossi. Do come along. I've met turtles less dilatory than you two. Better conversation as well, to be frank. Oh, don't look like that, Mr Brooker. You at least have the virtue of lacking the qualities that make excellent turtle soup. Try to look a little less scandalised, Ms Rossi. Enough of this chit chat. I want to find out about those prisoners escaping that work camp. Now come along. Time is of the essence."

"All right, Doctor. Keep your hair on." Tom called at the Doctor's back. He leaned closer to Val.

"It has to do with that bloke he met at the bar. Chet Tarrant. If that's even a name."

"He was a strange one," Val said, eyes narrowed.

"I reckon. One minute we're having a relaxing drink, then the Doctor strikes up a conversation with this Tarrant guy. Next thing you know, the Doctor's running around as if his hair's on fire. And as usual, he keeps it all to himself. Sometimes I feel like a wallflower when he gets going."

Val chuckled. "It's been like that since day one. Still, something Tarrant said must've spooked him. It's not like the Doctor to get..."

"Scared?" Tom shook his head.

"Exactly."

"It has to be serious for him to act like that."

"And that's got me worried." Val stared at the Doctor, who marched resolutely on.

Tom nodded. "Whatever's up, he'll tell us eventually. Hopefully before the nick of time. C'mon, we better catch up. A beach without a shore isn't a fun place to be left behind on."

With that, Tom and Val ran to catch up with the Doctor.

* * * * *

The ground had risen steadily for several miles when the Doctor and his companions reached the summit. For a moment, out of breath, the trio stared down into the declivity.

"Well, that's different," Val commented.

"I'll say," Tom said. "They look like people." He turned to the Doctor. "Is this your prison camp?" The Doctor nodded gravely. Tom felt a prickling sensation across his scalp.

What appeared to be an open cut mine laid spread out beneath them. Workers, grimy and clad in little more than rags, laboured together in filthy conditions.

"I can see at least a dozen different races. Draconians, Terileptils, Humans. There's even a Drahvin.

Surrounding the mine were several squat, menacing towers, connected by a pulsing electrical energy field.

"Get down," the Doctor hissed, dropping to the ground. Startled, Val and Tom followed suit.

"There," Val said, shading her eyes with one hand and pointing with the other to a pair of figures who had marched out of a tunnel.

Helmeted, clad in black, the figures wore dark goggles that rendered their faces blank and inhuman. Why wear them, Tom wondered, when they had emerged from underground.

"Are they drunk?" Val asked. Their stiff, disjointed movements marked them out from the workers, who scuttled away as they passed.

"Sadly, no, Ms Rossi."

"Then who are they?"

"Puppets," the Doctor said, shaking his head. "Even more brutalised than the poor wretches they oversee. In another time, another place, they were called Robomen."

"Robomen?" asked Tom.

"Yes, Mr. Brooker."

"What exactly is a Roboman?" asked Val, suddenly very uneasy about having her question answered.

Crouched between them, lips pressed white in fury, the Doctor maintained his silence for an excruciatingly long moment.

"Doctor?" Tom asked the question in the same way he might handle gelignite. A sizzle fried the air as a bolt of blue energy flew over their heads. Workers scattered, some screaming, others stumbling and falling into the dust in their haste to flee.

"Where's that firing coming from?" Val looked around, trying to pinpoint the source. A rising hum filled the air, an electric chorus that swelled and swelled until it made the sky vibrate.

"What the hell is that?" screamed Tom.

The Doctor turned, as precise as a machine and pointed into the sky with one unwavering hand.

"A Hoverbout." said the Doctor, "I haven't seen one of them in a long time."

From out of the haze swooped a shape that quickly grew.

"Oh my God. Doctor, what have you done...?" said Tom.

"Dalek," spat the Doctor. Fear swept through Val.

Black and truncated, the Dalek soared towards them on its hovering disk, gun stick aimed at them, raw power coruscating around its aperture.

"We have to run. Doctor? We have to go." Fruitlessly, Tom pulled at the Doctor's arm. To his horror, instead of running, the Doctor stood and watched the Dalek's rapid approach.

Numb, Val stood as well, and Tom pulled her close, unsure what to do except somehow protect her.

The disc's shadow fell over them. Val blinked in the sudden gloom, spots dancing in front of her eyes. A thick metallic stink filled the air, and the disc's hum made her bones ache.

"YOU ARE THE PRISONERS OF THE DALEKS. DO NOT MOVE OR YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED."

Slowly, the Doctor raised his hands above his head. When Val followed suit, she was stunned to see a broad grin on his face.

"Naturally," the Doctor said, raising his voice. "We wouldn't dream of running, now would we?"

Raising his arms, Tom scowled at the Doctor, who ignored him. Movement behind them, and suddenly they were surrounded by more of the helmeted men.

Up close, Val recoiled from them. Their faces were slack, and it seemed that invisible wires kept them upright. Their heads were cocked to one side, as if they were listening to voices only they could hear. Looking at the Dalek, she could well imagine that was true.

"SQUAD LEADER. YOU WILL TAKE THE PRISONERS FOR PROCESSING. ENSURE THEY ARE READY FOR THE NEXT WORK SHIFT. THE WORKFORCE HAS FALLEN BELOW OPTIMAL EFFICIENCY LEVELS."

"I obey," replied the Roboman, its voice devoid of emotion.

The Robomen pressed close, forcing the Doctor and his companions down off the summit.

They followed a crumbling narrow track down into the mine. As they approached the energy field it faded long enough for them to pass through.

"What the bloody hell have you got us into, Doctor?" Tom hissed into his ear. A little of the numbness had drained from Val. She placed a hand on Tom's arm.

"Easy, Tom. I'm sure....."

Shrugging her hand free, Tom shook his head.

"I'm sure he's going to get us killed this time. Is that right, Doctor? Are we going to die today just to satisfy your curiosity?"

Val saw the Doctor's shoulders hunch, just a little. When he turned his head to look at them, his face was utterly impassive, a mask of complete control from which burned a fierce, alien intelligence that shook her to her core.

"Why didn't we try to escape?" Tom hissed, aware of the Robomen surrounding them.

"The last time we met the Daleks, what did I say they were?"

Casting his mind back to their encounter with the Eldak'e, Tom remembered exactly how the Doctor had described them.

"You called them a cancer."

The Doctor nodded.

"That's right. That's precisely how I described them. Daleks are a universal cancer and you don't negotiate with a cancer. It can't be persuaded not to kill its host. Killing a cancer involves tearing out every living cell."

"What happens if the cure kills the patient?" Val asked.

"Then so be it," the Doctor whispered, before he turned and walked on.

* * * * *

Livid, Tom watched the line of exhausted workers shuffle forward, and stifled the fury he felt toward the Doctor.

Outwardly, the enigmatic time traveller looked no different to before. Always sunny side up, Tom thought bitterly to himself. He wanted to say it through his gritted teeth, but he knew doing so would only invite investigation, torture and death.

Val stood ahead of the Doctor in the line. An intense white light burned in the near darkness of the service tunnel. A light that Val knew very well. The eye of a Dalek.

"MOVE," said the electronically synthesized voice, grating and unmistakably alien.

Despite himself, Tom shuddered. He had heard it all through the night, the unrelenting metallic voices echoing constantly. The person at the front of the line stepped forward into the darkened tunnel.

The line shuffled slowly forward and Tom saw two Robomen listlessly dole out picks and shovels.

"My boy is too young to carry that," a man at the head of the line objected. He gestured to a child standing beside him. "Be reasonable."

The electronic voice grated. **"DO NOT CHALLENGE THE ORDERS OF THE DALEKS!"**

The man was exasperated. "If you give him a smaller tool, like a hand drill, he will last longer, and thus work longer in your cause."

The Dalek paused and deep inside its core, the mutant calculated its response.

"WHAT YOU SAY IS LOGICAL." THE DALEK, ITS DOME SWIVELLING UNTIL THE SINGLE EYE FIXED ON THE MAN. "HOWEVER, INFERIOR LIFE FORMS WILL NOT CHALLENGE THE SUPREMACY OF THE DALEKS."

The gun stick rose inexorably and a hum filled the air. The man stumbled back, trying to shield his son.

"ALL WHO DEFEY THE DALEKS WILL BE EXTERMINATED."

The Dalek's voice rose to a shriek. An intense light filled the air, bathing the man and child in neutronic radiation and, for a few moments, their skeletons were visible as they flew back and landed in the dirt, smoke curling from their bodies into the air.

The dead child's contorted body made Tom sick. He looked and saw that the Doctor had turned his head away.

"**MOVE!**" screamed the Dalek.

Everybody in the line shuffled forward, each looking at anything but the bodies.

"State your identity," said a Roboman in a flat, lifeless voice.

"Valentina Rossi," Tom heard her say.

The Roboman checked his tablet. "Number forty-eight in ... in work party two. Healthy female – pick and shovel."

The second Roboman took the tools from a locker and handed them to Val, who staggered a little under their weight. Tom almost broke from the line to help her, but the Doctor held him back. Shrugging free from the Doctor's grip, Tom looked down at his feet and scowled.

"Whatever you may think of me, young man, know that I have all our interests at heart."

"Shove it, Doctor. The way I see it, you and me, we're the same now. Slaves. What do you think about that?"

Ignoring the Doctor's hot gaze, Tom peered down the line. A second Dalek had emerged into the light, its arm extended and shoved Val forward.

"**MOVE,**" said the Dalek, its monotone voice echoing down the tunnel.

She staggered down the rough-hewn tunnel.

A tall thin man was next. He had silver wiry hair and a narrow nose. Cracked, half moon spectacles rested on the ridge. "Guillaume Beck," he said, his voice betraying his age. "Professor."

The first Roboman checked the log. "Prof ... prof ... professor of ph ... of physics."

"That's right."

"You are number fifty in the second work party." The Roboman's emotionless voice rang out. Its eyes rolled like marbles, blind and indifferent to its surroundings. His conditioned mind struggled to find the right words. "You will scan the cave for ... You will scan ...for the largest con ... con-centrate of ore ... and report to the onsite Roboman."

"Yes."

"You will monitor structural weaknesses in order to ... to protect the workers from rock fall."

The Professor waited patiently, though the lines carved into his face indicated barely repressed tension. "To protect the workers," he repeated.

The second Roboman gave the Professor a narrow handheld device.

Beck started towards the tunnel, only to be stopped by the Dalek's sucker arm pressed against his ribs.

"**HALT!**" the Dalek commanded. "**STATE YOUR AREA OF EXPERTISE IN PHYSICS.**"

Trembling, Beck did his best to look straight into the lens of the Dalek's eyestalk.

"Astrophysics."

The Dalek considered this for a moment, before dismissing Beck with a shove.

"**MOVE!**"

The Doctor was next.

"Identify," the Roboman said.

"John Smith," the Doctor replied.

The Roboman scanned down the list. "You are number f-fifty-one in work party two. Physical assessment indicates agility and strength. You will operate the pneumatic drill ... and relieve number thirty-five from the previous slave intake."

Tom wondered what being relieved of duty *really* meant. He forced aside the disturbing thought.

The Doctor prepared himself to receive the heavy weight of a pneumatic drill, but the second Roboman did not move. He stood beside his counterpart, staring blankly through his visor.

The Dalek spoke. **"THE DRILL IS ONSITE. YOU WILL RELIEVE SLAVE UNIT€ THIRTY FIVE AND INSTRUCT HIM TO REPORT TO THE SUPERVISING ROBOMAN."**

Tom expected a flippant retort from the Doctor, but none came. His face as blank as that of the Robomen, the Time Lord nodded his compliance and stepped into the tunnel.

Tom led the line in moving up one. "Thomas Brooker," he announced, loud and clear.

"Thomas Brrrooker," the Roboman said. "You have demonstrated above average IQ in your assessment. You are being considered for Robo-conversion."

Tom gaped at the mindless figure standing before him; a Dalek puppet. He wondered, for a horrible moment, what it would be like to look out at the world from behind the visor.

The Roboman touched the little aerial on the side of his helmet, apparently receiving further instruction. "Until your suitability has been confirmed by the system, you are slave unit number fifty-two in work party one."

Tom's relief was tempered with concern at being separated from Val. The Doctor could go hang, but what about Val?

The Roboman finished. "You will push ... push the train carts for now."

An electric hum made the hairs on Tom's arms rise. He turned, and tried to keep the fear from his face at the nearness of the Dalek. Its sucker arm shoved him forward.

"MOVE!"

* * * * *

The tunnel was not as long as Tom expected. A hundred yards of hunched, crabwise movement then it opened out into a spacious cavern. The two work parties, made up of unskilled, frightened, hungry workers, did their best under the constant supervision of the Robomen. Some drilled into the rock face, while others inexpertly swung picks. The shattered stone was lifted by hand into metal carts, which were pushed along haphazardly laid rails down a wide side tunnel. The roar of powered vehicles echoed around the cavern as Robomen took the loaded materials to the refinery.

Tom stopped and scanned the sea of workers, trying to locate Val and the Doctor. He staggered a couple of steps as the supervising Roboman hit him with the butt of his rifle.

"Go to your work party!" the Roboman shouted. Tom thought he sounded more emotional than the Robomen allocating the labour at the mind entrance.

As his eyes adjusted, Tom noticed a structure on the far side of the cavern. It took the form of a single oblong wall of some unknown smooth material, with narrow windows spaced out at intervals along the top.

He wondered what it might contain.

A rattling sound announced the approach of a cart. An elderly woman struggled to push a cart towards him. Beneath a mask of sweat-streaked dust, her skin was waxen, hair matted and

her sunken eyes glittered dully. The loaded cart hit a stone on the track juddered to a stop. Off balance, the woman staggered and fell. Heart in his mouth, Tom stooped and cradled her in his arms.

“Why did they put you on this job?” The woman’s chest hitched as she struggled to focus on him.

“I was...I was...” a hacking cough wracked her thin body. When the shivering subsided, her head fell back. “I was an athlete when the Daleks killed my world.” Her last breath sighed out, high and thin, and then she was dead. Tom let the body slide free and he stood and stumbled back, unable to understand what had just happened.

A Roboman walked over to where the woman’s body lay. Jerkily, it looked between the corpse and Tom. “Take over her work duty.”

A siren wailed.

"THE FOLLOWING SLAVE UNITS WILL ENTER THE CLEARANCE CHAMBER!" shouted a Dalek voice.

As their numbers were called, workers dropped their tools and made for the chamber. Some sobbed and clutched each other, while others, too exhausted, simply walked towards their fate without a flicker of emotion.

A door slid open. Under the vigilance of the Robomen, a twin line of almost two hundred trudged into the chamber. Squinting, Tom tried to make out what might be inside, but all he saw were rows of nozzles.

He froze. He recognised the design – long thin tubes, each lined with strands of silver piping, whisk like prongs ready to thrust from barrel at the end. The last of the condemned workers entered the chamber, and the door slid shut with a hiss of compressed air.

Silence fell over the cavern as everyone waited for the inevitable. Then it came. One word from the speaker in the roof – metallic, loud, rasping, grating –

"EXTERMINATE!"

Immediately, light poured from the slit windows in a blinding burst that sent shadows skittering up the cavern walls. A high-pitched screaming accompanied it, a sound Tom all too readily understood.

It, like the light, gradually faded away.

Without hesitation, everyone resumed work. Drills whined and picks struck at the walls.

“Work!” The Roboman loomed over Tom.

Taking the place of the dead woman, he summoned his strength and heaved the cart of ore forward.

* * * * *

Val was glad to have found herself working alongside a family. Instinctively joining the mother, Rachel, she swung her pickaxe with all her might. A puff of dust, and rock chips flew.

“Here, let me help,” the boy, Toby said. He expertly applied his hand drill and the remaining jagged edge came away with ease.

The older boy, Marcus, helped his father, Peter, lift the slab into a metal cart.

“What is this stuff, anyway?” Val asked.

Rachel stared in amazement at her. “You’re on Magog IV and you don’t know what you’re mining?”

“The Daleks forgot to mention that when we had high tea with them,” Val said, a smile taking the sting out of her weary sarcasm.

Rachel’s lips quirked but then she returned to work, raising her pick with a grunt. Val followed suit, but already her energy was ebbing.

“How are you guys doing this?” she asked. “I’m shattered already.”

“We want to live,” Peter said grimly, attacking the wall with his pick.

Toby applied his hand drill to loosen a slab. Instinctively, everyone jumped back as part of the wall dropped. They coughed, the dust sending them into a fit. Peter spit muddy saliva onto the floor.

“It’s Dalekanium,” Rachel said.

“The alloy their casings are made from?” asked Val, remembering her last encounter with the Daleks.

Rachel nodded, “We mine the stuff so they can grow their empire.”

The little girl, who, up to this point had remained silent, said, “The dust is poison.”

“Poison. What do you mean, poison?”

“Radioactive. You might want to consider making a mask,” said Rachel, who wiped her mouth with a dirty handkerchief. Appalled, Val stared at her for a moment.

“Keep working,” Peter advised, looking warily around. “Work, and you avoid punishment. Work, and you avoid extermination.” He hefted his pick.

“I heard a rumour that someone managed to escape,” Val said from the corner of her mouth.

Peter laughed tiredly. “Escape? There is no escape from this place.”

“A friend met a man who said he had escaped from here. Someone called Chet Tarrant.”

Rachel’s head whipped around and Peter’s eyes bulged in their sockets.

“Chet Tarrant?” he whispered.

“Yes.”

“We knew a Chet Tarrant, yes.”

“What happened to him?”

Peter swallowed, glanced quickly at his daughter. “He saved Jemima from being punished by the Robomen. The brutes. She’s barely a child. He took Jemima’s shift and worked his own as well.”

“Then what?”

Rachel spoke. “The radiation wore him down.”

“And then he was put into the chamber with seventy others,” Peter concluded. “So, you see, it can’t be the same man. Chet Tarrant is dead.”

Val did not have the energy to argue.

A Dalek appeared at the tunnel’s mouth. The supervising Roboman stepped aside. Lights on its domed head flashed with each grating word.

“SLAVE UNIT NUMBER THIRTEEN OF WORK PARTY TWO.” Its voice reverberating around the cavern.

Jemima clutched at her mother. The whole family looked terrified.

“YOU WILL STEP FORWARD.” the Dalek commanded.

“NOW!” continued the Dalek, its eye focused on the child.

Rachel kissed her daughter’s forehead and fiercely hugged her. “Go on. You’ll be all right.”

Speechless, Val watched the little blonde girl climb across the boulders and tracks until she reached the Dalek. Herded along, Jemima stumbled away down the tunnel.

Peter stood at Val's side. "We don't know where they take her or what she does," he said. Despair made his eyes dark. "She tells us nothing about it when she returns."

Rachel added, "She sleeps. That's all she says."

"They let us live so she isn't distressed," Marcus said.

Everyone in the family seemed to believe him. Val saw it made some sense, if calling what the Daleks ever did was sensible. Why else would the Daleks keep them alive when they had grown weak?

They all got back to work. It was hard, gritty and exhausting. Val felt a surge of nausea come over her and she fought the urge to vomit. It had to be the dust, she thought, watching the glittering motes dance around her.

The sound of metal on metal distracted her. A cart rattled into view. Another slave replacing their full truck of ore with an empty one. She was about to turn back to the rock face when she realised who laboured behind it.

"Tom!"

Startled, Tom looked around. When he saw Val, an idiot grin of disbelief creased his grimy face. Looking quickly around, he hurried over to her. They shared a quick hug, ignoring the stares of the family around them.

"Have you seen the Doctor?" Val asked, studying his tired face. She flicked away a lock of his hair, and he smiled.

"No, but I'm sure he's around somewhere, ferreting away at a solution. I'm furious at him, but he's gotten us out of tighter scrapes than this." He looked around the cavern, and the exhaustion written in the faces of everyone, and laughed. The sound of it lifted Val's spirits, despite her growing nausea.

"Have you heard anything about Tarrant?" Val asked.

"Nothing," he said. "You?"

Val indicated the family, who had returned to work, doing their best to ignore the discussion.

"They say he did work here."

"Did?"

"Yeah. But the Daleks killed him in their extermination chamber."

"So he's either lying or he really did escape. But how?"

"We'll just have to keep looking. And what about the Doctor?"

"Who knows what he's discovered," Tom said, "if anything." He narrowed his eyes. "It had better be worth it, all this."

"If what Tarrant said is true, he escaped. If he managed it, then we can free all these people from the Daleks," Val said. "That's why we're here. Remember that."

Without replying, Tom got behind the full cart of ore, and heaved with all his might.

* * * * *

The Doctor heard the wall in front of him groan. He jumped back as it collapsed, sending jagged sections of rock sliding in a clattering roar. A chunk of rock struck an elderly man in the head. He slumped dazed to the ground.

The Doctor saw the silhouette of a Dalek emerge through the dust. He turned his face away, knowing what came next.

"**YOU ARE WEAK.**" screamed the Dalek, its voice grating. The man tried to stand. "**YOU HAVE NO FURTHER USE TO THE DALEKS.**" Its voice rose an octave. "**EXTERMINATE!**"

The man screamed as energy tore through his body and he convulsed. The intensity of the blast revealed the skeleton beneath his flesh.

The Dalek lingered for a moment, its dome turning left and right, surveying the workers. Then, without a word, it turned and glided away. Staring at it with loathing, the Doctor watched it depart.

"Vile things," Beck said as he walked up to the Doctor. The scanner in his hand beeped quietly to itself.

"That's not the half of it," the Doctor said, glancing at Beck.

"I'm Professor Beck." He held out his hand and the Doctor shook it.

"Smith. John Smith." The Doctor indicated the scanner. "Given the concentrations of ore in this mine, you must be getting readings above ten thousand microamps?"

Beck lifted the scanner. "Frequently. These mines aren't safe at all." He looked at the Doctor curiously. "You have a background in science? Which branch?"

"All of them," the Doctor answered, ignoring Beck's raised eyebrow.

"And yourself? A professor, yes. But, of what?"

"Physics."

"Ah yes," the Doctor said. "I recall you saying that to the Roboman. But not the whole truth, I hazard?"

Beck's mouth creased in a smile. "What makes you say that?"

"We both know the Daleks would drain every scintilla of your knowledge if it was in a field they lacked speciality in. And not be gentle about it in the bargain. That's what Daleks do. So, you tell them the truth, but not the whole truth."

Beck peered over the ridge of his dusty half-moon glasses. "You seem to know more about the Daleks than you're letting on."

"I confess to having encountered them before. Their...methods and mine are mutually exclusive. I do my best with my modest resources to frustrate their plans."

"I see," said Beck. "And how are things going this time round?"

"Not as well as I'd hoped," the Doctor said, rubbing ruefully at the back of his neck. At the approach of a Roboman, he hurriedly dug at a pile of loose rubble with his pick, while Beck waved the scanner around. When the Roboman had moved off into the shadows, they continued their whispered conversation.

"So you've come here to help. Why?"

"I met someone off world who claimed to have escaped from here."

Beck frowned. "And you believed him?"

"I did," the Doctor said. "He was the second person to tell me."

Beck's frown deepened. "So, how did you end up here?"

"My friends and I walked a while until we came across a patrol." Beck looked at the Doctor as if he'd sprouted another head.

"Deliberately? Are you mad?"

The Doctor fixed his eyes on those of Beck. "Deliberately. And no."

Beck shook his head in amazement. "How many martyrs have there been in your crusade?"

“Too many,” the Doctor replied, his face blank.

“And the friends you came with. Where are they?”

“Hopefully alive, at the very least. They’re quarrelsome, but very resourceful. I have high hopes for them. Now, what about you?” the Doctor pushed. “What form of physics are you proficient in?”

Beck keenly watched the Doctor’s face.

“How do I know you aren’t a Dalek spy? They do have them, you know. Offer food to a particular wretch who’ll grab at the chance for an extra day of life, then seed them into the workforce to report back any plans for rebellion.”

“All true. But if I was wretched enough to spy for them, why wait for genuine information? Given their natural paranoia, I could denounce anyone and they’d be glad for the chance to exterminate someone. Trust, Professor Beck. That’s all we have left.”

Beck considered this for a while. The work went on around them. Picks clanged, rocks clattered, people grunted with effort and, every now and then came the sound of a Dalek’s weapon discharging followed by an agonised scream. He glanced carefully around to make sure they were alone. Strung along the rock face on either side were the other workers. None of them were close enough to hear any conversation, and even if they were, none of them seemed interested in anything but the wall in front of them.

“Quantum physics. The structure of the universe, or even the multiverse, if you will.” He leaned close, his lips almost touching the Doctor’s ear. “Before the Daleks destroyed my world, I had advanced my theories on time travel to the practical plane.”

“Time travel?” the Doctor said, looking at Beck in amazement.

“Indeed. But the Daleks ruined all that. A mixed blessing, perhaps. Can you imagine what they would do with my research if they knew?”

“Oh yes,” the Doctor said. “First hand.” Despite Beck’s questioning look, the Doctor remained silent, gnawing at a thumbnail.

* * * * *

Utterly exhausted, Tom staggered when his cart hit a stone and ground to a halt. He wiped at the sweat dripping down his face, leaving a muddy track. Chest heaving, he slid to the ground, leaning against the cart for support. Rocks clattered.

“Get up and work.” Tom opened his eyes and looked at a Roboman looming over him. It held a heavy looking black baton in one hand.

Wincing, Tom slowly got to his feet. He was weary and hungry. “You should take better care of me,” he said, “if I am to join your ranks.”

“You have a higher thannn ... average IQ,” the Roboman said.

Tom frowned at him. For a moment, he thought it was going to ask him a question.

Tom decided it best not to reply. He didn’t want to encourage the idea of his conversion if he could help it.

The Roboman put a hand to the receiver on his helmet. After a pause, he said, “I obey.” Without another word to Tom, the Roboman turned on his heel and marched off.

Bemused by its singular behaviour, Tom dragged himself upright. Looking around, he saw that he was alone. Carefully, Tom followed the Roboman.

Following down a side tunnel, he saw the Roboman turn down a narrow cleft in the wall. Keeping his distance, Tom warily followed, on the lookout for other guards. The air was cool,

and water dripped down the walls, a change from the oppressive humidity in the main tunnels. Easing into the cleft, Tom continued his pursuit.

After a short walk, the gap opened into a wider space. Looking carefully around the corner, Tom saw something he would never have believed.

The Roboman sat on a bench, his helmet by his side. His rifle stood propped beside him. He had removed his leather gloves and ran his fingers through sweat-soaked hair. Confused, Tom edged closer and dislodged a pebble with his foot. It clattered across the ground and came to rest at the Roboman's feet. Startled, the man looked up. Seeing Tom, he grabbed his baton and rose swiftly to his feet. He glared at Tom, and Tom glared back.

"You're not a Roboman?" Tom said, breaking the silence.

The Roboman's shoulders slumped. "No."

"If you've not been converted, then what the bloody hell are you playing at? Unless..."

Tom laughed then shook his head. Had he stumbled across the solution to the mystery by complete chance?

The man frowned. "What?"

"Someone is helping particular prisoners escape," Tom said, grinning. "And what better way to do it than to pretend to be in league with the Daleks?"

The man licked his dry lips once. "Well, quite."

"So. How did you do it?" Tom pressed.

"Well.....?"

"No, don't tell me," Tom said, grinning even more now. "They attempted to convert you, it failed, and then you pretended that the process had been a success."

The man nodded. "The perfect ruse," he said. "Who would ever suspect a Roboman of being a spy?"

Tom laughed at the audacity of it. "All I have to do now is get this information back to the Doctor."

The man's eyebrows arched. "The Doctor?"

"Yes. A friend I came here with. He met someone named Chet Tarrant, who claimed he had escaped from these mines."

The man got to his feet, and picked up his helmet. "Chet Tarrant was exterminated with forty-nine others," he said. "I supervised the clearing of the dead myself."

"Oh, I'm sure you did!" Tom said, winking at the man. "And then somehow teleported him to the Desilu colony."

The man shoved the helmet back onto his head and adjusted the visor. "The Desilu colony, eh?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, then the man raised his laser rifle. Tom's grin fell into a frown. What was this guy's game?

"You are right, Number Forty-Three," he said. "I was never converted into a Roboman."

"Okay," Tom said, still uncertain.

"But, I do serve the Daleks." He levelled his weapon at Tom's head. "It's my turn to ask questions now. How exactly did Chet Tarrant escape extermination, and who is this Doctor?"

* * * * *

A klaxon sounded.

A Dalek screeched, "**WORKERS WILL REST AND CONSUME NOURISHMENT.**"

The slave gangs put down their tools. Some collapsed onto the ground, utterly exhausted. Others formed a ragged line in front of two Robomen who supervised a large kettle of steaming gruel, which they doled out in a haphazard fashion.

Val sat on a rock and wiped her brow. "I'm not sure how much longer I can go on. I need sleep."

"You've got to pace yourself," Peter said.

Toby nodded. "The food will help."

Marcus pulled a face. "It tastes awful."

Joining the line, they waited patiently for their food. Val saw up close the exhaustion of her fellow prisoners. Their skin was deeply creased and hollow eyes were devoid of any hope. Hands, blistered and bloody, trembling with tiredness. Backs bent, exposed skin covered in scratches and welts and bruises. Men and women, old before their time; children shorn of a childhood lost in the darkness of the mines. A wave of impotent rage washed through Val, followed quickly by hopelessness. Where was Tom? Where was the Doctor?

The line moved forward and suddenly Val found herself at the front. A battered tin cup full of steaming gruel was shoved into her hands. She moved aside looking at it with distaste.

"What is this slop?" said Val, her face screwed up in disgust.

"Basic food rations," said Rachel, "Just enough nourishment to keep you going but not enough to actually fill your stomach."

Val listlessly swirled the cup. A sudden, overwhelming hunger gripped her and she scooped at the slop with her grimy fingers. It tasted vile, but she ate until the cup was empty, then she scraped at the residue with her fingers until that was all gone. And even then, she was still hungry.

"I see what you mean." said Val.

With the rest of the family, she stumbled over to a quiet corner, and waited for the klaxon to begin work again.

Rachel's excited voice woke Val out of her doze.

"Jemima!"

Blery eyed, Val watched Jemima swim into view. The child looked rested and her smile was bright as she sat next to her mother.

"You look better than I feel," Val told her.

"I've been sleeping," the girl said.

"Now that is very interesting," a warm, reassuring voice said.

Startled, Val sat up. "Doctor!" Rising unsteadily, she enveloped him in a hug. "Where have you been?" she asked, whispering to him.

"Oh, here and there. The Dalek's surveillance is never as tight as they might want you to think. As delicately as he could, he disentangled himself from Val's arms.

"And who do we have here?" Introductions were dispensed with quickly. When Val mentioned that Jemima had just returned from some sort of Dalek experiment, the Doctor looked intrigued and concerned. Squatting down, he faced the girl.

Jemima seemed unsure of him. Val smiled and touched her hand. "It's okay," she said. "He's my friend."

At that, Jemima smiled at the Doctor.

The Doctor's green eyes were hard. "You visit often with the Daleks?"

Jemima shrugged. "Sometimes."

Suddenly, Jemima's face lit up as her parents approached.

"We don't know what she does for them," said Peter.

"Is there something like a glass ball in the room with you?"

Jemima nodded.

"And connected to the ball are wires which go to a helmet they make you wear?"

Jemima nodded again.

"There are lots of pretty colours inside the ball," she volunteered. "I like watching them. They make me go to sleep."

The Doctor stared at her and sighed.

"I already know what they make you do. I've seen it before. They make you sit in a special chair? It looks like the base of a Dalek. And they put the helmet on you."

Jemima could not take her eyes from his. She slowly nodded.

"Usually, the subject becomes possessed by the Daleks, their mind wholly theirs. Somehow, remarkably, your personality has remained intact."

"What are you talking about?" said Rachel, "Who are you?"

"I'm the Doctor and your daughter is the organic core of a Dalek Battle Computer." replied the Doctor matter of factly.

"What?" said Peter angrily.

Instinctively, Rachel hugged her daughter.

Peter swallowed his rage. "Why would they do that? Why would they plug my daughter into their systems?"

"They need the purity of a child's mind," the Doctor told him. "Uncomplicated and uncluttered, yet abundant in creativity and imagination – qualities they no longer possess." He chuckled at the irony. "I did once point out to them that they can't be the superior race if they have to harness traits and abilities from so-called inferior species."

"What did they say to that?" Marcus asked, engrossed in the conversation.

"Oh, the usual. Exterminate etc etc etc." He grinned at the memory.

Peter was not grinning. "So, you've been their prisoner before?"

"Oh, on more occasions than I care to remember."

"And what is this Battle Computer they are connecting her to? What is its purpose?"

Jemima suddenly piped up. "The Movellans!"

The Doctor's eyes narrowed. He stroked his narrow nose with his forefinger. "Ah," he said. "That places where we are in their history."

"I see everything," Jemima said. Oddly, her voice had deepened, taking on an adult's cadence. "I see their new home world. In his chamber at the heart of their capital city broods the Emperor Dalek, sitting in the centre of a web that spans the galaxy. I see them looking towards Skaro for a possible solution to the impasse that has seen their battle fleets incapable of firing a single shot."

The Doctor smiled.

"I see the pattern," continued Jemima.

Rachael frowned. "The pattern?"

"Of how everything works."

"Fascinating." The Doctor almost purred with delight.

"I help people," Jemima blurted. She stared intently at the Doctor. "I help them get out."

The Doctor's grin faded. "How?"

“Teleport,” the girl said. “When the Daleks put people in the chamber, I use the computer to teleport one person out of the chamber at the moment of extermination.” She looked around, eyes wide.

“I keep a list, you know?” She looked around, as if ready to reveal a great secret.

“What sort of list, Jemima?” her mother asked.

“A list of people who have been nice to us. I keep it here.” She tapped the side of her head.

“And what do you do with it?” The Doctor eagerly leaned forward.

“When I’m connected to the computer, I see lots and lots of letters and numbers. All mixed together.”

“A code?” Val asked. The Doctor nodded.

“Symbolic logic. The language of the Daleks.”

“I was able to put my own code inside theirs. I call the list Lexicon.”

“Lexicon?”

“All those people who’ve been nice to us are on it.”

Val nodded. “Like Chet Tarrant?”

Jemima nodded.

“What an interesting admission,” a measured, elderly voice said.

A figure stepped forward and the Doctor rose to greet him.

“Professor Beck.”

“I couldn’t help but overhear. If the girl is able to convert one energy emitter in that chamber into a teleport beam for one person of her choosing, theoretically she should be able to convert them all.”

The Doctor nodded. “Precisely what I was thinking.”

“It is just a matter of working out the right code for her to embed in their computer.”

Peter got to his feet. “I don’t like the sound of this.”

The Doctor shook his head. “It is the only way. She can get us *all* out!”

“The Doctor knows what he’s talking about,” Val said. “You can trust him.”

“We would need to time it right. Get everyone into that chamber.”

Rachel picked up the thought. “But how would we get Jemima back in time?”

“Leave that to me,” the Doctor said. “I have a card up my sleeve for just the right moment. If we do this correctly, we’ll be able to use the Dalek’s vile death machine as a means of our escape. An irony to be savoured, don’t you think?”

The klaxon sounded and a Dalek approached.

"REST PERIOD IS OVER. ALL SLAVE UNITS WILL RETURN TO THEIR DESIGNATED WORK PLACES." the metallic voice shrieked. **"WORK. WORK. WORK!"**

The Robomen emerged from the shadows and began herding the prisoners back to work. Val did a quick head count and found that a guard was missing. She wouldn’t have thought much of it until she realised Tom had gone missing also.

Marcus placed his hands on his hips. “So, how do we get everyone into the chamber?”

The Doctor surveyed the work camp. “We need to instigate a riot!” he said, emphatically.

* * * * *

The dais throbbed with energy. Tom could barely make out the pepper pot shaped silhouettes before him. Intense light poured from an unseen source. Sound pulsed around him, making him feel nauseous.

Through the disorientation, he heard a voice, rising in volume as it grew more and more hysterical.

"IDENTIFY!" screamed a Dalek

Tom couldn't think. "I..." he spluttered. "I can't."

A second Dalek voice, in a lower register, grated, "INSTRUMENTS INDICATE TRUTHFUL RESPONSE."

An image formed in front of Tom. Squinting against the light, he tried to focus. An elderly man, white hair swept imperiously back, stood before him. He wore clothes Tom's great great grandfather would have, and a cloak rested on his shoulders.

"IDENTIFY!" the Dalek shrieked.

"I don't know him!" Tom cried.

The second Dalek confirmed, "INSTRUMENTS INDICATE TRUTHFUL RESPONSE."

The image of the man blurred and morphed into a smaller figure, dishevelled and with a mischievous glint in his eyes, which beamed out from beneath a mop of black hair.

"IDENTIFY!"

Tom gasped, "I – I do not know him."

"INSTRUMENTS INDICATE TRUTHFUL RESPONSE."

A third man, tall, intelligent, arrogant, with white bouffant hair and a long nose appeared; he wore a red velvet jacket and a frilly shirt.

"I've never met him," Tom gasped before the Dalek could shriek at him.

A younger man appeared. He had a tangle of brown curly hair and mad staring blue eyes. An impossibly long, multi-coloured scarf draped over his burgundy coat.

Tom weakly shook his head.

"THE PRISONER DOES NOT KNOW THE DOCTOR IN THE MANIFESTATIONS THAT WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED." the first Dalek rasped.

The second one countered, "HE MAY HAVE REGENERATED AGAIN."

Tom forced out the words, "I – do – not – know – this – Doctor."

"INSTRUMENTS INDICATE UNTRUTHFUL RESPONSE."

The lights, the noise, the confusion suddenly evaporated. For a moment, Tom saw he was under the scrutiny of interrogators behind a large glass window. The world went black, and his legs gave out.

* * * * *

Toby received the slate from Jemima and passed it onto Val. Val coughed, the radioactive dust playing on her lungs. If the Doctor got her out of there, would he be able to cure her of the sickness, or was all this in vain – for her at least? She passed the slate to Peter, who, after checking on the Daleks and Robomen, sidled up to the Doctor and slipped it into his hand. Quickly examining it, the Doctor glanced at Peter, nodded once, and then turned away.

* * * * *

Professor Beck airily waved his scanner about, and pretended to take note of the readout. What he was really doing was glancing frequently down at the equation scrawled on the slate the Doctor held.

“This is the subroutine that needs to be altered,” the Doctor said, scratching out two of the symbols. Using a sharp stone, he carved replacements.

“Yes! Yes!” Beck hissed in excitement. “But, don’t forget the last sequence.”

“What?”

“If you don’t change it, the rest won’t work.”

The Doctor frowned at the slate in his hands and then he broke into a grin. “Yes, you’re right.” Rubbing out the symbols with his thumb, he hurriedly scratched in a revised sequence. He looked at Beck, who nodded in satisfaction.

A whistle blew. A man dressed in dirty rags gave a single nod of the head. Beck nodded in return.

“They’re all in agreement, by the look of it,” he said.

“Of course they are,” the Doctor replied, suddenly cold. “If they don’t risk their lives trying to escape, they’ll die here – worked to death, if they’re lucky or a nasty lingering death from radiation poisoning. Some will die in the riot; they knew that. But the majority will escape.”

The Dalek tannoy sounded once again. **"SLAVE UNIT THIRTEEN WORK PARTY TWO WILL REPORT FOR DUTY."**

The Doctor shot a look in the direction of the family. Rachel hugged Jemima then kissed her on the forehead. Reluctantly, Rachel let go of her and Jemima walked over to the Doctor.

As she passed, he surreptitiously handed the slate to her.

While the others moved around so that she was shielded from view, Jemima hurriedly memorised the string of symbols. After a few minutes, she dropped the slate to the ground and kicked loose rocks and pebbles over it. Then calm and resolute, Jemima stepped over the rubble towards the Dalek waiting for her at the entrance.

Peter scrambled towards the Doctor. A Dalek shouted him down. **"HALT. DO NOT MOVE!"**

Hands up, Peter stepped backwards.

"RETURN TO YOUR DESIGNATED WORK AREA. OBEY. OBEY."

"I obey." said Peter through gritted teeth.

The Doctor caught Peter's eye.

“Don’t worry”, he called. “You have my word she will be fine.”

Both men watched Jemima walk off with a Dalek close behind. Neither truly knew if they would see the girl again.

* * * * *

Tom regained consciousness. He couldn’t move. A harness constrained him. He focused on the blur of images before him. A wall of instrumentation. He watched for Daleks. None. A sole Roboman guarded the doorway, armed with a laser rifle.

Tom glanced down at himself. Terror struck him at the sight of their leather uniform he wore.

The uniform of a Roboman.

He struggled futilely to get free. A loud click from above panicked him.

A large lamp above the entrance lit up red. A deep throbbing pulse resonated through the room.

Something above Tom's head began to descend until it touched his head. A hum, then the helmet slid into place.

He knew once the process was complete he would no longer be himself. A single tear rolled down his left cheek. An image of Val filled his mind, and a sense of immense regret coursed through him.

"Why couldn't I just say it? I had plenty of chances." he whispered, feeling a pulse at each temple.

The visor slid into place over his eyes. His fingernails pierced his palms as he anticipated the Daleks' invasion of his mind, of his very consciousness.

"Val, I love you," he said.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang and Tom jumped. His breathing hitched and he tasted salt as adrenalin poured into his veins.

Then silence.

He opened one eye, then the other. The machinery had stopped. He looked at the computer bank – it was dead. The red light had gone out.

The door behind the Roboman slid open with a hiss of pressurised air. The noise of shouting and gunfire flooded into the previously silent room. Before the Roboman could bring his rifle to bear, he was shot in the back. He fell forward and a young man armed with a rifle stepped into the room.

The man scrambled over the dead body. "Tom Brooker!" he shouted. "Which one of you is Tom Brooker?"

A number of voices stirred and moaned. It hadn't occurred to Tom that there might be others in the alcoves either side of him.

Tom summoned the energy to call, "Me!" His throat was dry, the words barely audible. He swallowed and tried again. "Over here, I'm Tom Brooker!"

The man grappled with Tom's restraints until they hung loose. He stepped back as Tom sat up. With trembling hands, he pulled the helmet free and cast it aside with a clang.

"I'm Jonas. Can you walk?"

Tom moved his right leg. It felt like a concrete slab. He tried standing, and then fell forward into the man's arms.

"Come on," Jonas said, urgency in his voice.

"I've got pins and needles," Tom said, stamping his feet.

"We've got to get out of here before the Daleks come."

A Dalek gun fired. Someone screamed. Anxious, Tom rubbed his legs. "Come on!" he urged them.

Gripped in an agony of returning circulation, he straightened. Leaning on Jonas for support, Tom staggered towards the door.

"We've got to get to the Clearance Chamber," Jonas said.

"Why?"

They stepped over the lifeless body of the Roboman. "The Doctor has a plan," he said.

"The Doctor?"

"Yeah, the Doctor. It's a long shot, and we might all end up dead," Jonas said. "But it's worth it if we can get out."

"How did you find me?"

“The Doctor said you’d be right in the middle of any trouble. He was right.”

Tom chuckled, then winced as the tingling in his legs grew worse. “Are you the one who has been helping people escape? Did you get Tarrant out?”

The man raised his rifle and then slowly peered around the door. “No,” he whispered, glancing back. “It was Jemima.”

“Jemima?”

“A little girl. Imagine that; our lives are in the hands of a little girl.”

“Here, take this.” continued Jonas as he threw Tom a rifle.

Tom fell quiet as he examined the controls of the rifle.

“You know how to use that thing?” said Jonas.

“Err...”

“It’s easy. Point it at a Dalek and pull the trigger.”

* * * * *

They fought their way through the galleries. When they could, they hid from Robomen patrols. When they had to fight, Jonas proved his value. Tom quickly gained the impression that Jonas had been in the security forces at one time. Certainly, he dealt with any threat speedily and without fuss.

Others though, people weakened by abuse and hunger, people without the fighting skills Jonas exhibited, did not fare as well. Time and again, as the riot raged around them, Tom came across the broken bodies of the dead, victims of the Robomen counter attack.

The scarcity of Daleks surprised Tom, until they reached the main mining area. Then he saw them in their concentrated fury.

A great many bodies lay strewn about the cavern. Pockets of resistance still existed, ready and eager to take down a Dalek if they could. Crouched in the mouth of a tunnel, Tom saw four men sneak up on a Dalek and grab hold of the killing machine.

"UNDER ATTACK. ASSIST ME!" it shrieked.

A nearby Roboman aimed its rifle and fired, killing two of the men.

Wresting itself free, the Dalek swivelled and brought its gun stick to bear. It fired again and again at the fleeing men, bringing them down in a blaze of actinic light.

The Dalek tannoy crackled into life.

"DOCTOR! WE KNOW YOU ARE HERE. WE KNOW YOUR TARDIS IS NOT PRESENT. THERE CAN BE NO ESCAPE FOR YOU. YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED. THE DALEKS WILL BE VICTORIOUS!"

Tom felt the butt of a rifle pressed into his back. He winced as he and Jonas turned around slowly.

A voice spoke, the monotone words chilling for their lack of emotion.

“Drop ... your ... weapons.”

Reluctantly, Tom and Jonas discarded their weapons.

“Join ... the line ... Join the line ... to the ... chamber.”

Stepping over the rocks, Tom and Jonas joined one of the many lines leading to the huge bulkhead door to the Clearance Chamber. Tom scanned the rows of people, frantically searching for the Doctor and Val. He saw them! They were milling forwards with a family – a man, wife, a teenage son and a younger boy.

Tom wanted to call out to Val, to let her know he was all right, but he knew to do so would be foolish and would invite death.

Thankfully, Tom's line began to mingle with the Doctor's as it neared the door. Val had a look of desperate hope, which Tom shared. Their hopes rested with a child he had never met, a child who hoped to defeat the malign wile of the Dalek's battle computer. If they were wrong, and she failed, everything; his hopes, his dreams, his life, would be snuffed out within minutes.

Tom felt Val's eyes on him, and they rekindled his resolve. Val's grey face broke into a beautiful smile. His heart warmed at the sight of it. She gave a discreet wave, which Tom acknowledged with a nod. She touched the Doctor's shoulder and whispered something to him. Turning his head as if to look down the length of the line, he briefly locked eyes with Tom. Tom, who had borne anger at the Doctor during their captivity, felt a surge of gratitude at seeing his old, maddening, infuriating, complex friend acknowledge him.

"**HALT!**" a Dalek screeched as it left its position at the chamber entrance and glided down the length of the line. It stopped about halfway down, the shell quivering with a hidden impatience.

"YOUR IMAGE HAS A SEVENTY SIX PERCENT PROBABILITY OF MATCHING OUR RECORDS."

The Dalek extended its limb and prodded a tall, thin featured man. He had wiry grey hair and fragile spectacles perching on the end of his nose.

"YOU ARE THE DOCTOR."

The man gulped. "Me?"

A Roboman stepped beside the Dalek. "This is ... number ... thirty-nine ... Professor ... Guillaume Beck."

"PROFESSOR" the Dalek screamed, "HUMAN ACADEMIC HONORIFIK. LINGUISTICALLY SIMILAR TO DOCTOR."

Beck looked terrified. He stared wildly about but people shrunk away from him. Alone, he straightened, glaring defiance at the Dalek.

"Professor is higher than Doctor in the qualification spectrum, you ridiculous tin can."

The Dalek shoved him with its limb. He staggered backwards a couple of steps.

"YOU ARE THE DOCTOR." the Dalek repeated again and again.

"I am not."

The metallic voice rose in volume and intensity and the gun stick moved, pointing directly at the Professor.

"YOU ARE THE DOCTOR."

Beck shook his head. "I'm not. I'm Professor Guillaume Beck, professor of physics. Check your records."

"YOU ARE THE SUPREME ENEMY OF THE DALEKS."

"No!" yelled Beck defiantly, he straightened, glaring imperiously at the Dalek.

"YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED!"

"You may kill me, but humanity will go on. We will rise up, overcome you and wipe your foul stain from the galaxy. The Dalek Empire will fall!"

The Dalek's gun twitched. **"EXTERMINATE!"**

Professor Beck screamed in agony as the energy bolt discharged, tearing his central nervous system to shreds.

Tom watched Val bury her head in her hands. The Doctor shook his head sorrowfully.

The Dalek swivelled round, its eyestalk lifting, as if the machine addressed unseen superiors. "THE DOCTOR HAS BEEN EXTERMINATED!" said the Dalek with something akin to pride.

The Roboman at its side gestured with his rifle to the people in the line. "Enter ... the chamber."

The line moved quickly now. Tom followed the others through the vault doors, and found himself within a large, terrified milling crowd. The air grew warm, then hot, then oppressive.

A hum of power signalled the closing of the chamber, and sure enough the giant door swung in and sealed itself.

As soon as it thumped shut, Val pushed through the crowd of prisoners and flung her arms around Tom.

"Oh, Tom!" she cried, "I thought I'd never see you again!"

He clutched her tightly, feeling her heartbeat in synch with his. After a moment, he looked over her shoulder and directly into expressionless face of the Doctor.

"A lot of people have died today," Tom said.

The Doctor said nothing in reply.

"I know," Val responded.

"And all to satisfy a whim."

Val released her grip, and, still cradling him, looked up into Tom's eyes. He smiled down at her.

For a second they shared a moment, as if in isolation. Then an oh-so familiar grating shattered the peace.

"YOUR REBELLION IS OVER. DEFIANCE WILL BE MET WITH OVER-WHELMING RETRIBUTION."

The voice became more and more hysterical. "EXTERMINATE. EXTERMINATE. EXTERMINATE!"

Tom and Val clutched one another in expectation. The Doctor's stared impassively as the stumpy Dalek guns in the ceiling began to glow.

Peter Stones stood before him. "If this works, what about Jemima? They'll kill her."

The Doctor and Peter stood silhouetted against the blinding light. "I have a ship," Tom heard the Doctor say. "It has unique properties. I will materialise it around the Battle Computer and save your daughter."

In that instant, the light flared up, and then Tom felt a breeze of cool air brush his sweaty brow. He opened his eyes.

It dawned on Tom where they were. "Look at the trees, Doctor, the shape of them."

"I know, my dear fellow."

"This is the Desilu colony, where we met Chet Tarrant."

"Safe, Tom. That's what we are. Safe."

Other work party members celebrated in stunned amazement. They laughed and cheered and wept and hugged each other. Tom saw a woman was sitting on a grass clearing, wiping tears from her eyes. Had she lost a loved one, or was she just relieved to be free and alive?

Peter and Rachel Stones pushed forwards.

"What about Jemima?" Peter said, the tone of his voice accusatory.

Before the Doctor could even think of a reply, a protective white field of power had frozen him in silhouette. Tom realised that he and Val were also caught in the strange bubble.

Everything flashed white, and suddenly the three of them stood in the dark. The musty air and creaking metal told Tom they were in some sort of hold. There was none of the familiar rocking of a ship at sea. Were they in space?

“The TARDIS!” Val cried with delight. She patted it with her hand, as if confirming it really stood in front of her.

The Time Lord’s eyes narrowed. “The girl teleported us here.” His eyes softened, filled with a tender sorrow rarely witnessed by his companions. “So brave, so clever.”

* * * * *

Epilogue

Without a workforce, the Dalek's plans had been thrown into disarray. At least that was Tom thought as he looked around the empty control room. The Daleks had evidently left in great haste, abandoning their massive, complex machines. The clatter of metal came from behind. He turned, unwillingly. The Doctor stood in front of the Battle Computer, which had been stripped down to its component parts. But it wasn't enough.

Jemima remained harnessed into the machine. Wires trailed from the helmet she still wore. Her body lolled in the chair. Tom was glad the helmet obscured her features. He didn't think he could be in the room if he could see her face.

With an assortment of tools scattered across the floor, the Doctor had tried every means possible to prise Jemima free from the machine.

"It's no good" he said, shaking his head. "The process the Daleks began was irreversible. Despite what she said, she was never really free from this...this thing, even when she was awake. She's part of it now. At least, the instinctual part of her is. The finer things about her, her personality, her hopes, her dreams, gone. She's free."

Val bowed her head and sobbed, remembering the little girl and her happy, carefree smile. Tom put his arm around her shoulders and drew her close. She turned her face into his chest and wept.

"Was it worth it, Doctor?" Tom asked, without malice.

"Yes." A pause, then the Doctor's shoulders slumped.

"No."

* * * * *

Later

Val studied the Doctor, dressed now in his usual sweater and long coat. It had been hard, very hard, for them to deliver Jemima's body to the family. Rachel had cried and shouted accusations, while Peter sat in stunned silence.

And now they watched the burial from afar, not daring to show their faces.

Val felt Tom take her hand. It was rough, from the work in the mines, but warm. She looked into his eyes and smiled.

"Val, I've made a decision."

"A decision?"

"Yes, but I can't tell you. Not here, not now. Not with –." He broke off and nodded to the Doctor, who stared at the family as they left the marble statue of their daughter. "Not with him in earshot."

When the family had gone, and the sun had begun to gutter into the sunset, the Doctor turned and headed for the TARDIS, which stood beneath the widespread boughs of an oak.

"Miss Rossi, Mister Brooker, I...." The Doctor broke off, and turned his face away. He left them there, in the fading light, and entered the TARDIS by himself.



When the Doctor discovers that a slave labour mine is being operated on Magog IV, his outrage drives him to extreme lengths. His anger leads to capture by the slavers, ensuring Tom, Val and himself are placed at the heart of the vile operation.

Deep underground, far from the light of the sun and freedom, they, alongside the people of Magog IV – farmers, teachers, scientists, families – are put to work mining a radioactive isotope that is slowly killing everyone.

But somehow, prisoners are escaping. Who is the inside man? Is it the professor of quantum physics? The father protecting his family? Or the dehumanised guard slowly regaining his humanity? The Doctor is driven to find out. He will not rest until he knows.

But for Tom and Val, the Time Lord's recklessness is pushing them in a different direction.

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