

THE  
**DOCTOR WHO**  
PROJECT

**REVERENCE OF THE DALEKS**



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Published by Jigsaw Publications for The Doctor Who Project  
Vancouver, BC, Canada

First Published October 2013

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Typeset in Times New Roman

Logo © 2005 The Doctor Who Project  
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For Verity Lambert (1935-2007)  
&  
Raymond Cusick (1928-2013)

*Thanks for the nightmares*

**reverence** [rev-er-uh ns, rev-ruh ns]

*noun*

1. a feeling or attitude of profound respect, usually reserved for the sacred or divine; devoted veneration
2. an outward manifestation of this feeling, esp. a bow or act of obeisance
3. the state of being revered or commanding profound respect

## ONE

The ship moved silently, slowly and completely undetected through the inky void between stars. With its engine trail masked by internal bafflers, its hull, coated in a dull black sensor absorbing material and with its stealth fins extended, the vessel would appear on any scanner as a small rogue asteroid or comet. No chances could be taken. This close to the Frontier, any stray ion particle or heat bloom would be detected by the proximity detection network that ensured the protection of the Draconian Star Empire.

Within the ship, metal corridors radiated out from a central command deck like spokes in a vast wheel. Dull red lights barely illuminated the oddly angled passageways and all around could be heard a faint throbbing sound.

On the command deck, a shape glided silently from one terminal to another. Squat and vaguely conical, it had multiple limbs that twitched with an unnerving movement that betrayed its completely alien way of thinking. The shape continued its work, even as another of its kind emerged from the turbo lift.

"REPORT," spoke a harsh, mechanical and totally synthesised voice from the shape as it glided towards the holographic display that dominated the bridge. A small red dot of light indicated the ship's current heading. It moved slowly towards a much larger blue globe.

"MINOR COURSE CORRECTION IS REQUIRED TO CIRCUMNAVIGATE PARTICLE CLOUD DETECTED ON LONG RANGE SCANNER. RANGE TO TARGET NOW THREE POINT ZERO NINE FIVE. ORBITAL INSERTION IN ONE HUNDRED RELS. DELIVERY OF PRIMARY WEAPON IN ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY RELS." replied the Red Dalek Pilot.

"ALL LIFE ON BETA DRACONIS SEVEN WILL BE INFECTED WITHIN TWO HUNDRED AND TEN RELS OF EXPOSURE." said the Blue Dalek scientist, the lights on the side of its semi-spherical head flashing in unison with its faltering speech.

For a moment, there was silence as it watched the holographic display through its single, fibre optic eye.

"EXCELLENT," it finally replied as the data was processed through its positronic linkage. "REPORT ON CONDITION OF SHIP STATUS."

The pilot glided towards another terminal and plugged its sucker arm into a round slot. Instantly, a connection was made to the ship's command network and information streamed through the pilot's data core.

"WEAPONS AND DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS AT 100 PERCENT EFFICIENCY. STATUS OF STEALTH SHIELDING AT 100 PERCENT EFFICIENCY. ENGINES AT..."

The pilot stopped as new data was downloaded.

"EMERGENCY. EMERGENCY. MAGNETIC CONTAINMENT FIELD FAILING. NINETY EIGHT PERCENT....NINETY ONE PERCENT....EIGHTY THREE PERCENT."

"SHOW ME." screamed the Dalek scientist.

The holographic display flickered as the pilot Dalek bought up a schematic of the ship.

"PROXIMITY TO PARTICLE STORM HAS COMPROMISED ALL SYSTEMS. POWER WILL FAIL IN SIXTY FOUR RELS."

Suddenly, an explosion rocked the ship as tendrils of raw ion energy arced throughout the vessel and for a few seconds the command deck was in total darkness as system after system failed before emergency lights slowly blinked into existence.

The noise of the turbo lift arriving on the bridge broke the silence.

"DALEK COMMANDER ON THE BRIDGE," announced the pilot as an ebony black Dalek glided silently onto the command deck.

"WHAT IS HAPPENING? EXPLAIN." said the Black Dalek Commander, its voice deep and booming.

"THIS SHIP HAS SUSTAINED DAMAGE DUE TO EXPOSURE TO ELEVATED LEVELS OF NEUTRINOS IN PARTICLE STORM. ESTIMATE TOTAL FAILURE OF CENTRAL POWER CORE IN SIXTY TWO RELS. STEALTH CAPABILITIES OF THIS VESSEL HAVE BEEN COMPROMISED." replied the scientist.

Suddenly a high pitch alarm sounded.

"ALERT, ALERT," shouted the pilot. "SENSORS HAVE DETECTED DRACONIAN S'RATHKA CLASS ATTACK SHIPS AT EXTREME RANGE."

"OVERLAY ATTACK SHIPS ON HOLOGRAPHIC DISPLAY." ordered the Black Dalek, its voice reverberating around the bridge.

The Dalek Commander observed the holographic display as six orange points of light suddenly appeared and for a moment, its limbs twitched in something approaching rage.

"DRACONIAN VESSELS ARE ON AN INTERCEPT COURSE. ESTIMATE TIME TO INTERCEPT IN FIFTY SEVEN RELS."

"REPORT STATUS OF PRIMARY WEAPON SYSTEM." said the Dalek Commander.

The Dalek scientist glided over to a console and interfaced with the ship's BAT-NET.

"BATTLE NETWORK REPORTS PRIMARY WEAPON IS UNAFFECTED BY SYSTEM FAILURE. HOWEVER, PROBABILITY OF MISSION SUCCESS IS NOW ESTIMATED AT EIGHT PERCENT."

"UNDERSTOOD," replied the Dalek Commander as it formulated a course of action.

"PREPARE TO JETTISON HYPERDRIVE ENGINES."

Both scientist and pilot rotated their domed heads towards the Black Dalek as if misunderstanding the command.

"WE WILL DETONATE THE ANTIMATTER CONTAINMENT PODS. THIS WILL MASK OUR ESCAPE VECTOR. THE PRIMARY WEAPON MUST SURVIVE AT ALL COST."

"I OBEY" said the pilot, turning its attention to the console in front of it. It depressed a small button and an alarm sounded as the engine was uncoupled from the ship.

On the main viewscreen, the engine could be seen tumbling away into space.

"DETONATION OF CONTAINMENT PODS IN FIVE RELS, FOUR, THREE, TWO, ONE, ZERO."

A light, brighter than any sun suddenly flared into existence as the magnetic fields surrounding the anti-matter pods destabilised and collapsed.

The ship bucked violently as the shockwave slammed into it. On the command deck an alarm sounded as power failed in every critical system.

"AS PREDICTED, RADIATION IS MASKING OUR COURSE. DRACONIAN ATTACK SHIPS WILL BE UNABLE TO DETERMINE OUR HEADING. WE ARE DRIFTING. POWER TO THRUSTERS AT ZERO, SENSORS AT ZERO. NAVIGATION SYSTEMS FAILING. LINK TO COM-NET SEVERED." screamed the pilot.

"CAN WE DETERMINE OUR TRAJECTORY?" said the Black Dalek, turning its eyestalk towards the holographic display.

"NAVIGATION SYSTEMS CANNOT ACCURATELY PREDICT OUR COURSE DUE TO PRIMARY CORE CORRUPTION. HOWEVER, BASED ON OUR CURRENT RATE OF DRIFT, IT ESTIMATES THAT THIS VESSEL WILL MAKE PLANET FALL AT GALACTIC CO-ORDINATES NINE FIVE ZERO ZERO GAMMA SIX TWO ALPHA FIVE IN...."

The Black Dalek turned to face the pilot.

"CONTINUE." ordered the Black Dalek.

The pilot paused for a moment, rechecking and verifying the results. They were the same.

"SIX MILLION EIGHT HUNDRED AND FIFTY FIVE THOUSAND, SEVEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY TWO RELS."

For a moment, all that could be heard on the command deck was the throbbing of Dalek technology.

"UNDERSTOOD," said the Black Dalek Commander, "WE WILL MAKE THIS VESSEL SECURE. WHEN WE ARE AT A SAFE DISTANCE FROM DRACONIAN SPACE WE WILL SEND A DISTRESS SIGNAL TO THE MAIN FLEET. WE WILL ENTER HIBERNATION PODS AND PREPARE FOR OUR RESCUE. THIS MISSION HAS FAILED BUT THE DALEKS ARE NEVER DEFEATED. WE ARE THE SUPREME LIFE FORMS IN THE UNIVERSE. WE WILL SURVIVE. WE WILL BE VICTORIOUS. WE WILL DOMINATE."

\* \* \* \* \*

## TWO

The vortex pulsed with impossibly changing geometric patterns of light, shifting from blue to green to yellow and red. The raw power of time, space, matter and energy converged, twisted and separated around the outer plasmic shell of an ancient Gallifreyan Type Forty Time Capsule that, for reasons best left to its owner, was stuck in the shape of a small, antiquated, wooden communications device known as a Police Public Call Box.

Inside, in an impossibly infinite space that betrayed the fact that this wooden box was merely a facade, was a vaulted chamber. Huge, majestic and dimly illuminated by candles that cast long shadows that moved in the flickering light, this was a place of quiet contemplation and calm.

"Wow," shouted a man's voice, deep and with a feint twang of a North East English accent, "What is this place? Have you ever seen anything like it?"

From behind a pillar stepped a woman. Tall, thin, elegant and beautiful, Valentina Rossi, (Val to her friends or Miss Rossi to the owner of this vessel), just shook her head in amazement.

"It reminds me a little of Durham Cathedral," answered Val.

"Yeah, that's what I thought. What's with the statues?" said the man from within the gloom.

Val looked around, her eye sight becoming more accustomed to the dim light. She saw, in a huge circle, located at the exact centre of the vast chamber, thirteen plinths. On ten of the plinths stood a statue, ten figures, all different and yet somehow all the same. Their carved faces gazed blindly at each other in silent communion and for the briefest of moments; perhaps as short as a single heartbeat, she was convinced that they were somehow talking to each other.

"Tom," she suddenly called out as a shiver ran down her spine, "I really don't think we should be here."

From out of the gloom, wearing a pair of battered Converse shoes, faded jeans and a t-shirt that was creased and washed out, Tom Brooker appeared.

"Don't tell me you're afraid," he said. "After all we've been through."

Val shook her head slightly, biting her bottom lip.

"No," she started. "It's not that."

Tom smiled.

"Then what's wrong."

Val walked slowly towards one of the statues and pointed.

"Don't you recognise who this is?"

"Nope," replied Tom.

Val shot Tom a look that almost made him wince.

"Look harder." insisted Val.

Tom shrugged his shoulders and walked towards the statue. He gazed at it for a few moments before he suddenly realised what Val was talking about.

"Oh my God." he said. "It's, it's..."

"Me," called out an angry voice from the far side of the chamber.

"Doctor!" proclaimed Val. "What are you doing here?"

"Miss Rossi, I was about to ask you that very same question."

The Doctor strode towards Val and Tom, his face almost as impassive as the statues.

"How dare you enter this room. How many times have I told you that most of the TARDIS, apart from your living quarters and console room, are strictly off limits."

Tom's face blushed red with anger.

"Look here Doctor..." he started before the Doctor cut him off mid-sentence.

"No! Mister Brooker!" yelled the Doctor angrily. "YOU look here! There are some places so sacred to me that they must never be disturbed and this is one of them."

"We were bored. We just wanted a walk around the place. It's been ages since we last stretched our legs properly," shouted Tom defensively. "You've been too busy tinkering with the TARDIS to even notice."

"Oh and that makes it all right for you to trespass in the Vault of Memories?" shouted the Doctor before realising what he'd said.

"The Vault of Memories?" asked Val.

Realising his mistake, the Doctor sighed.

"As a Time Lord, when my body is near death, I change, regenerate. I become a different person, yet the same person."

Val nodded, remembering the Doctor's previous incarnation.

The Doctor pointed at the first statue, an old man with a hawk like nose who, even as a statue, had an air of indignation.

"My first incarnation," he said slowly. "So pompous, so righteous. Running from his own people. An exile and a wanderer."

"And him," said the Doctor as he moved towards the second statue which depicted a smaller, less dignified man who held a recorder in his hand. "A clown. He used that against his enemies. They never knew what hit them."

"This," said the Doctor grandly. "Was my third incarnation. In love with danger and excitement and frilly shirts. That would be his undoing." he continued, before adding. "The adventure and excitement, not the frilly shirts."

The next statue showed a tall man who appeared to be dressed like a bohemian artist, a wide brimmed hat sat on his head and around his neck was an impossibly long scarf.

The Doctor stared intently at this statue for a few moments.

"I didn't have a worry in the universe back then. A bohemian traveller with a passion for exploration. From Paris in the spring to Zeta Minor. A life of adventure and fun. Well, until Logopolis."

"Logopolis?" said Tom

"A long story and a bad day." whispered the Doctor sadly.

"Doctor number five." said the Doctor as he pointed at the next statue. This figure showed a man with a young face, younger than the Doctor as he now appeared. The face was smiling. In one hand it held a ball, in the other a cricket bat.

"He looked nice," said Val.

"He was. Impulsive, carefree, willing to throw himself into danger without thinking about the consequence. He gave his life away for a girl he hardly knew." The Doctor's voice held a faint trace of bitterness.

Tom stepped towards the statue.

"Is that..." he started before the Doctor nodded.

"Celery? Yes."

Moving along they reached the sixth statue which depicted a tall man in a long patchwork coat. His face was somewhat cruel and contemptuous.

"Ah, my sixth incarnation. So brash, so determined to fight injustice, so arrogant and so, so full of his own self-importance. Fell off an exercise bike of all things and then he was gone," said the Doctor as he walked towards the next statue. "Replaced by my seventh incarnation."

The Doctor smiled grimly

"Now," said the Doctor. "This was when things started getting interesting."

The statue showed a small, unassuming figure, wearing a panama hat and holding what Val thought was an umbrella. An umbrella with a question mark handle.

"A grand player of games," started the Doctor. "And a master manipulator of both enemies as well as friends. He would break the heart of his most faithful companion if it suited his needs. In the end he fell from the top of a waterfall, locked in mortal combat with his greatest of enemies. Or was it the oldest of friends? I can't remember now."

Moving quickly towards the eighth statue, the Doctor gave out a large, hearty laugh as memories came flooding back to him.

"Tamara, Grae, Silver. I had some good times back then. Some really good times." The Doctor's voice trailed off and suddenly a single tear appeared in the corner of his eye. Hoping neither of his crew mates had noticed he quickly wiped it away.

Approaching the final plinth, the Doctor pointed. "Now, of course you knew him, this Doctor. So proud, so brave, so very...him."

Val stared at the statue of the ninth Doctor and remembered all the mad, wonderful adventures they'd shared together. Sparana Prime; Vancouver; France under the rule of the Clocktower, Singapore, the so called City of the Dragon and, finally, the Doctor's confrontation with the Great Intelligence.

A lifetime ago.

Literally.

The Doctor now stepped up onto the empty plinth next to the statue of his previous incarnation and, with a sweep of his arms announced grandly. "And this is where I'll stand...when the time comes, a mere statue. And the body after this one will stand there," he continued as he pointed at the empty plinth next to him. "And the body after that one will stand there and finally, my last incarnation will stand on the final plinth."

Val looked at the Doctor sadly. For all his bravery, for all the good he was capable of, for all of the millions of beings he had saved from cruelty and tyranny, ultimately his destiny was mapped out, even if the details remained uncertain.

Tom scratched the back of his head.

"I still don't understand." he said.

"The telepathic link that I share with the TARDIS is a strong one. When my body dies, the TARDIS knows. It misses me, mourns me even. This is the TARDIS' way of remembering who I was."

The Doctor jumped of the plinth.

"Come on, time to go," he said. "Places to be, things to do."

The Doctor turned and strode across the vast chamber, his form swallowed by the gloom.

\* \* \* \* \*

A short time later, Val and Tom found the Doctor, lying on the floor of the console room, his head underneath the hexagonal central console. For the last few days, the TARDIS had been acting strangely (well, as strange as a dimensionally transcendental time machine with its exterior mapped to resemble an old fashioned wooden Police Box can be).

"Ahhh, there...we...go!" said the Doctor triumphantly.

Suddenly the TARDIS gave a slight lurch and the Doctor sprang to his feet, a look of satisfied victory on his face.

"All fixed," he continued as he pressed button after button on the console.

"What's fixed?" asked Tom.

"Subspace transceiver," said the Doctor matter-of-factly. "A few days ago, the TARDIS detected an unusual transmission. I've been trying to pinpoint its origin for a while now." The Doctor checked measurements on one of the console's panels.

"What kind of transmission?" asked Tom.

"A cyclic, rhythmic alpha wave signal, repeating at regular intervals," replied the Doctor

"A distress signal?" said Tom.

"Possibly," said the Doctor. "I'm trying to lock down the co-ordinates."

The Doctor looked at a small computer screen on the TARDIS console.

"Nine five zero, zero gamma six two alpha," he continued. "The Eaffoje system."

"Eaffoje? Have you been there before?" said Val

The Doctor shook his head.

"Eaffoje, Eaffoje." murmured the Doctor, "Where have I heard that name before?"

"Maybe you've been there?" said Tom.

"No. I'd remember if I'd visited. Eaffoje is a long, long way out." he replied. "Even at the height of the Earth Empire, only a few of the mega corporations had dared venture that deep into space."

"So who's sending the signal?" said Val.

"That, Miss Rossi, is very good question indeed," replied the Doctor.

He keyed in the co-ordinates and smiled at his two travelling companions.

"Let's go and find out."

### THREE

The air was thick and warm and steam rose from the leaves of the giant Engar'la trees.

Sunlight streamed through gaps in the dense foliage and all around could be heard the cries of mighty beasts, locked into the perpetual struggle between life and death.

A'Nerali moved slowly through the jungle, his sensations heightened, his breathing and heart beat slowing. He had been hunting his prey for two days now and he knew that soon the hunt would be over.

One way or another, there would be death this day.

A'Nerali had come of age this year and, as was the law of the Venirex, he was required to hunt the great Pankara beasts that roamed the jungle. Yesterday he had received his first tribal tattoo on his face, a pattern of four circles that marked him as a protector of the Eldak'e, and as a Venirex warrior and son of the village elder, it was his duty to provide for his people now that he was an adult. He would fulfil that duty or die in the process.

The hunt had been long and difficult; his prey swift and cunning yet now he sensed that it would be over soon. He would take no satisfaction in the Pankara's death save for the survival of his people.

There!

At last he saw his prey and he slowed his breathing even more. He reached for the sacrificial arrow and, in one smooth action placed it against his bow.

For a brief moment, A'Nerali could smell the Pankara's fear, could hear its blood coursing through its veins.

He pulled back the string and took aim.

The end would come quickly and painlessly for the beast and prayers and offerings would be given to the gods ensuring the soul of the Pankara reached Far'nat'hara, the plains of everlasting grazing.

Suddenly a strange noise filled the air and a terrible wind scattered dirt and fallen leaves.

Trembling, he let go and the arrow shot forward with a whooshing sound. However, the arrow veered away from the Pankara's eye and instead hit it on its hind leg causing the beast to scream in agony. Now the creature looked at A'Nerali, its eyes burning with a dull red glow and the hunter froze. He knew what would happen next.

With a roar, the Pankara bolted forward, its crested head pointed down to the ground.

Fear gripped A'Nerali and he turned to run but the creature was too fast, too strong and he felt an intense pain as the Pankara's nose horn tore through his skin, his muscle, his flesh. For a brief moment he felt his thigh bone shatter and then, mercifully, darkness took him.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Time Rotor at the centre of the console had come to a stop, indicating that the TARDIS had landed. Val and Tom looked at the Doctor expectantly.

"Well?" said Tom, his face full of excitement.

"Just checking the readouts now," he said as he flipped switches and pressed buttons.

"Atmosphere normal, pressure normal, slightly elevated levels of kinoplasmic radiation."

"Dangerous?" asked Val.

The Doctor shook his head.

"I shouldn't think so. The thing about kinoplasmic radiation is it's not naturally occurring," he said, looking up from the console.

"Still, it's best to be safe than sorry," continued the Doctor as he reached into his pocket and produced a bottle. Unscrewing the lid he tipped into his hand three small pills. He swallowed one and gave his companions one each.

He pulled down on a lever and, with a low hum, the main doors opened.

"Well," said the Doctor. "Who fancies a stroll?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Tall trees, ancient and twisted surrounded the three time travellers as they stepped out of the TARDIS.

Here and there, shafts of pale sunlight penetrated the canopy casting strange, unnatural shadows onto the jungle floor.

All was silent save for the chirping of insects as they scurried over the ground.

The Doctor, Val and Tom stumbled over the thick, snake like roots of massive trees that had stood there seemingly since the world was still young.

Suddenly, in the distance, a terrible howl shattered the silence; the primal scream of a wild beast in terrible pain.

The Doctor reached into the inner pocket of his jacket and pulled out his sonic screwdriver.

He raised the sonic screwdriver into the air and, with a sweep of the hand brought it down, pointing in the direction of a small glade.

The sonic screwdriver buzzed and the Doctor looked at the small screen in the handle of the device.

"I think...this way," said the Doctor

"Where do you think he's taking us?" asked Val in a murmur.

Tom took a sideways glance at Val and shrugged.

"Now that's interesting," said the Doctor suddenly.

Looking over the Doctor's shoulder, Tom tried to get a look at the readout but as he gazed at the sonic screwdriver, the Doctor turned it off and placed it back into his pocket.

"What's interesting?" asked Val.

"Mmmm," replied the Doctor

Val rolled her eyes to the sky

"I said 'What's...'"

The Doctor turned to face his companions.

"I heard you," he said matter-of-factly.

"Well?" said Tom.

"Well", he said grandly. "The signal is coming from this direction and..."

Tom shook his head, exasperated.

"...There is a humanoid about twenty meters away. Oh, with rapidly falling life signs."

The Doctor ran towards the glade with Val and Tom close behind.

He approached the battered figure carefully and knelt down.

"That looks nasty," he said as he pulled out a large handkerchief from his pocket.

"Mister Brooker," he said urgently. "I need a sturdy branch."

Tom looked around and found a thick branch which he snapped in two. He gave one half to the Doctor who proceeded to make a tourniquet.

The Doctor applied the tourniquet around the hunter's shattered leg and twisted the branch tighter and tighter to stop the flow of blood that pumped out of the wound in sickening bursts of crimson. His face was grave.

"Can you hear me? What's your name?" asked the Doctor.

The warrior's eyes opened slowly but the Doctor could tell that he wasn't focusing.

"A... A'Nerali"

"A'Nerali," said the Doctor quietly. "Try not to move. You've been badly hurt."

A'Nerali closed his eyes as unconsciousness once again took him.

"If we don't get him to safety and soon, our friend here will die," said the Doctor sternly.

"The TARDIS?" asked Val, worried for the fallen warrior.

"No, not really the best idea," replied the Doctor. "Imagine what the natives would think if we just materialised in the middle of their village."

"I suppose you're right," said Tom

"There's no 'suppose' about it Mr Brooker. Judging by our friend's appearance, the natives of this planet haven't yet attained a Bronze Age level of technology. Having the TARDIS suddenly appear out of nowhere could have profound implications for their future development. Come on, you take his legs, I'll take his shoulders."

A'Nerali screamed in pain as the Doctor and Tom carefully lifted him.

"We must get him to safety and quickly," said the Doctor. "He's lost a great deal of blood and I don't think he's got much time."

\* \* \* \* \*

The sun had now set and overhead, myriad points of light blazed in the inky black sky. A shooting star, its fiery tail burning with a fierce red flame flashed, and bathed the jungle in an unearthly glow.

The Doctor and Tom carried the limp figure of A'Nerali between them, but their progress had slowed considerably. In the distance, they saw the pale glow of a camp fire.

"Not far now." said the Doctor, unsure if A'Nerali could even hear him. He looked terribly pale.

As if answering him, A'Nerali slowly opened his eyes and tried to focus on his surroundings

"Eldak'e." he murmured several times before falling unconsciousness again.

"What's he talking about?" said Val, "What does that mean 'Eldak'e'?"

The Doctor frowned, "It's not a word I've heard of before, and it's not a word that the TARDIS can translate either. Strange."

Suddenly a shrill noise filled the night air and they stopped. At a sign from the Doctor, Tom gently lowered A'Nerali onto the ground. The Doctor reached into his jacket and pulled out a small torch. Flicking a switch, the torch bathed their surroundings in a brilliant glow.

Eyes that burned with a dim red glow reflected back at them. The shrill noise sounded again as a dozen lizard like creatures called to one another. As if on an unseen signal, their mouths opened and thin tongues licked the air. They had scented new blood.

The creatures moved as one, slowly circling the group. Hoping to distract them, the Doctor waved his torch around, but the lizards kept coming closer.

One of the creatures took a step towards Val, who closed her eyes. This close she could smell the carrion stench on the creature's breath, the unmistakable aroma of putrefying flesh.

Val screamed.

The lizard screamed.

For what seemed like an eternity, she stood, her eyes screwed up tightly. Then she heard a voice, soothing and calm.

"It's okay, Miss Rossi," said the Doctor. "You can open your eyes now."

Slowly, she forced her eyes open and stared as the creature dropped to the floor, an arrow protruding from its head. Thick green-black blood oozed from the wound.

The remaining creatures looked frantically around before scattering into the undergrowth, howling in protest at being denied their prey.

"Hello," said the Doctor as a group of hunters suddenly emerged from the shadows. "I'm The Doctor and these are my friends, Tom and Val."

The hunters stared at the strangers, their bows nocked and arrow tips aimed directly at them.

"Please, we need your help." said the Doctor, pointing at A'Nerali, lying bathed in sweat on the ground.

"A'Nerali?" said one of the hunters. "Quickly, take him to the Eldak'e."

Three of the hunters ran to A'Nerali and carefully picked him up and hurried away with him into the jungle.

"Eldak'e?" questioned the Doctor, "What is the Eldak'e?"

"You do not know?" said the hunter, surprised at the Doctor's question.

"Forgive my ignorance. We are from another tribe, a long way from here."

"It has been said that there are other tribes. I do not believe those stories," said the hunter.

"Believe me," said The Doctor.

"There is something about you that tells me that I can trust you," said the hunter. "I am Tanari'al, first hunter of the Venirex." He puffed his chest out. "As to your question, the Eldak'e are our gods made manifest on this world. They protect us, heal us and sustain us." Abruptly, he raised his hand, motioning them forward.

"Come, follow me. We will return to our camp," said Tanari'al.

\* \* \* \* \*

A huge fire burnt brightly in the middle of the Venirex's village. Glowing embers floated high overhead before being carried away on a cool breeze.

Several Venirex, mainly women and children, stood away from the main group, playing crude musical instruments fashioned from wood and bone. Their music was soft and peaceful, the intricate melodies blended with the choir like singing of a lone Venirex female.

A huge totem stood to one side of the village, its surface covered in ornate carvings. The Doctor stood looking at it for a few minutes, alone in his thoughts, before several Venirex women dragged him away, eager to sit next to him.

An old Venirex, his face deeply lined but with pale blue eyes that seemed to shine with wisdom that made them look almost youthful, sat between the Doctor and Tom. His body was covered in tribal markings and around his head sat a crown of carved wood.

"You say you are from the stars?" said Turan'ik'tha, his voice hushed.

The Doctor nodded, his eyes meeting the village elders'.

"Why have you come here?" continued Turan'ik'tha.

"We we're following a signal that led us here," said the Doctor.

"I understand."

The Doctor blinked.

"You understand?" said the Doctor, "How is that possible?"

"There is much the Venirex know. The Eldak'e have taught us much," replied Turan'ik'tha.

"It is our way," said Tanari'al, leaning forward, "to exchange gifts at a gathering such as this."

"Gifts," said Val, embarrassed. "I..err, I mean, we don't have anything to give to you."

Sensing her shame, Turan'ik'tha smiled softly.

"Do not worry," he said gently, "The gift does not have to be of great value or importance. Sometimes, the simplest of offerings are more prized."

Val reached into the pocket of her jacket, hoping to find something to give.

Her fingers brushed against something and she pulled out a small rectangular object covered in silver foil.

Tanari'al reached out and took the offering, turning it over and over in his long fingers before raising it to his nose. He sniffed cautiously and the Doctor laughed.

"Don't worry," said Val, "It's perfectly safe to eat."

Tanari'al's eyes lit up.

"A gift of food," he roared with approval and several of the Venirex cheered with delight.

"Well, I wouldn't go as far as saying chewing gum was food but it's certainly tasty," said Tom.

Tanari'al laughed.

"Of all the gifts you could honour us with, food is the most desired. It is often given as a formal declaration of marriage, a life bond that cannot be broken."

Val spluttered.

"I...I beg your pardon? Tom, say something."

Tom smiled nervously and looked away. His feelings, buried deep inside him rose to the surface for a brief moment. Why couldn't he just come out and say what he wanted to say? Was he that afraid?

Before he could speak, Tanari'al stood up, raising the strip of gum high in the air.

"Tonight's feast will indeed be a great one."

\* \* \* \* \*

As promised, the feast was sumptuous. Large green leaves were piled high with food. Everyone drank from the hollowed out roots of some massive plant.

The Doctor wiped his lips with the back of his hand while Tom, having rediscovered his courage, teased Val mercilessly about her upcoming nuptials.

Suddenly the ringing tone of a gong filled the camp. In response, all the Venirex stopped what they were doing and stood with bowed heads.

For a moment, all that could be heard was the crackling of the fire and the shrill cries of nocturnal animals deep in the jungle. Then they heard it.

An almost imperceptible pulse sounded, like some obscene parody of a human heart beat. Slowly the pulsing sound became a throbbing, rising and falling in tone.

The Doctor suddenly jumped to his feet and ran towards the totem, his eyes frantically scanning the symbols carved into the wood.

"How could I have been so stupid?" he shouted, staring up at the totem as the light from the fire cast flickering shadows over it.

"What is it Doctor?" asked Val.

The Doctor pointed at the symbol on the totem.

"This glyph," said the Doctor.

The symbol was conical with three lines, one at the top and two in the middle. From one of the lines, what appeared to be a lightning bolt could be seen and below the lines was a series of four dots.

Suddenly a Venirex warrior ran from the foliage.

"A'Nerali?" exclaimed Val.

"But that's not possible," said Tom, staring in disbelief at the smiling face of the warrior who, only a few hours earlier, had been so close to death.

"Where are his wounds?" said Val. "He was bleeding to death."

"The Eldak'e have restored me," shouted A'Nerali, his face flushed and full of vitality.

"Eldak'e," said the Doctor. "Oh, they do like their anagrams."

"Doctor? What's wrong? What are you talking about?" asked Val, her voice tinged with dread. She'd never seen the Doctor act this way before.

He was actually scared.

The pulsing throb grew louder, filling the camp with its awful sound.

"What's that noise?" said Tom.

"That noise," said the Doctor, "is the heart beat..." He stopped as three squat, conical shapes emerged from the darkness, "...of a Dalek."

"**ALL HAIL THE €LDAK'€!**" screamed one of the Daleks, dome lights flashing in unison with its harsh, electronic voice. "**ALL HAIL YOUR GODS!**"

## FOUR

"What's a Dalek?" asked Tom as one of the metallic objects glided towards Tanari'al.

The Doctor shook his head, his face a mask of anger and hate.

"What's a Dalek? A Dalek," began the Doctor, his voice choked with rage. "A Dalek is a cancer, a disease. They are the fruit of an evil genius who twisted life into his own warped image. Born of hate, born of war, they have spread across the galaxy like a pestilence, striking down world after world to sate their appetite for destruction and conquest. Evil, Mr Brooker. They are concentrated evil. Born without compassion, without pity. Their one emotion is hatred of everything that isn't a Dalek."

As if reacting to his last word, the Black Dalek rotated its head, its eyestalk pointing in the Doctor's direction.

"**WHO ARE YOU?**" said the Black Dalek.

The Doctor looked at the three Daleks with dawning curiosity. Something about them was wrong. Layers of dirt covered each of them, and there were clear signs of damage.

The Black Dalek's dome was heavily dented, with both lights missing. The Red Dalek's eyestalk had been bent at an alarming angle sometime in the past. The Blue Dalek was the worst; its gun and arm had been ripped away, leaving gaping holes. Several of the black sensor globes were also missing, and the Doctor saw that a section of the skirting at the rear was gone, exposing the creature's inner mechanism.

"**IDENTIFY YOURSELF! WHO ARE YOU?**" repeated the Dalek.

Anger welled up inside the Doctor.

"Who am I?" he roared. Val flinched, her eyes wide with fright. She had never seen the Doctor act like this before.

"I am the Doctor. The Ka Faraq Gatri. I was there at your birth and I was there at your death. Skaro burned at my command and I brought darkness to your blighted species. I am your mortal enemy. I am the Doctor."

For a moment, the Black Dalek looked unwaveringly at him, the harsh, cold white glow of its eye seeming to burn into his very soul. Its gun stick twitched.

"**DOCTOR?**" screamed the Daleks in unison.

"**DOCTOR. YOU ARE OUR...**"

"Oh, get on with it," said the Doctor defiantly.

"**... HONOURED GUESTS.**"

The Doctor blinked in amazement.

"What?"

**"THE ELDAK'€ WELCOME YOU,"** said the Black Dalek.

"No, no, no." said the Doctor angrily. "You've played this trick before. On Vulcan you pretended to be humanity's servants but secretly you were planning the colony's total extermination."

The Black Dalek's gun stick rose at the same time the Doctor said his final word, pointing it directly at the Time Lord.

"There we are. Finally," said the Doctor, almost triumphantly.

"Ex-ter-min-ate," continued the Doctor, pronouncing every syllable. "Ex-ter-min-ate, Ex-ter-min-ate. Isn't that how it goes?"

**"THAT WORD HAS NO MEANING FOR US,"** said the Black Dalek.

**"ENJOY THE FEAST. BUT BE WARNED. THE VENIREX ARE OUR CHILDREN AND WE WILL ENSURE THEIR SAFETY. THE ELDAK'€ SEEK ONLY TO PROTECT THE VENIREX."**

With that, the three battered Daleks turned slowly in unison and moved away into the jungle.

"What the hell was that all about Doctor?" asked Tom.

The Doctor continued to stare at the Daleks until they vanished into the darkness beyond the camp.

He shook his head, then looked at Tom. "I have no idea, Mr Brooker," he said. "But whatever they're planning, I intend to stop them."

\* \* \* \* \*

The chamber was lit by the weak, pulsing red glow from an emergency light set into the ceiling, and by moonlight filtering through the gaping hole that was all that remained of the ship's view screen.

With a harsh grinding noise, a doorway slid open and the three Daleks entered, their appendages twitching, betraying the fact that these were far from mere machines.

The Black Dalek moved toward the centre of the chamber and plugged its manipulator arm into a control unit.

**"ACCESSING HISTORICAL DATABASE,"** said the Dalek as the control unit flickered into life.

**"SUBJECT NAME; THE DOCTOR."**

A faint humming noise slowly filled the room as the ship's damaged data core came to life after centuries of inactivity.

Data streamed through the control unit directly into the Dalek and a holographic display flickered into life.

Swirling photons coalesced into a shape. A humanoid face. The Doctor's. The image cycled through the known incarnations of the Doctor before stopping on the face of the humanoid in the Venirex village. The image changed, revealing the complex biology of a Time Lord; the binary vascular system, an internal body temperature of 15 degrees Celsius. And deep within the hippocampus, the area of the brain responsible for regeneration.

**"THE DOCTOR MUST BE BROUGHT HERE. HE IS VITAL TO OUR PLANS."** said the Blue Dalek scientist.

"NO. RECORDS INDICATE THAT HE WILL COME HERE. HIS CURIOSITY WILL BE TOO GREAT FOR HIM." said the Dalek Commander, its eye scanning the hologram.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So tell me," said the Doctor, "How did all this happen?"

Turan'ik'tha placed his hand on the Doctor's shoulder.

"Follow me," he said as he pulled open the entrance of a large tepee.

Inside, a fire burned brightly. The air smelt of incense and all around, hung from wooden rails were vast quantities of animal skin that the Doctor saw had pictographs painted on them.

"Here," said Turan'ik'tha, beckoning the Doctor to sit.

The Doctor sat cross-legged on the ground as the Venirex leader took an animal skin down from a rail.

Turan'ik'tha kissed the skin reverently and carefully handed it to the Doctor.

"Fascinating," said the Doctor as his eyes scanned the pictographs, "A complete history of your people?"

Turan'ik'tha nodded as the Doctor began to read.

"And this?" said the Doctor, pointing at a representation of a Dalek, a crude dome with three lines emerging, the lower half covered in dots.

"The Eldak'e," replied Turan'ik'tha.

"Tell me about the Eldak'e." said the Doctor, his voice tinged with urgency.

Turan'ik'tha leant towards the Doctor and carefully took the animal skin from him and began to read.

"The Eldak'e came in a blaze of fire that turned night into day. At first, they were angry at us"

"Oh, I bet they were," said the Doctor.

"They forced many of us to work underground, digging into the very soul of our world. And then the land and our animals started dying. Crops failed," said Turan'ik'tha. "A sickness came upon the Venirex, the unborn withering and dying in their mother's belly."

The Doctor cursed under his breath at the thought of what the Daleks had done to this planet.

"And then the Eldak'e healed us," continued Turan'ik'tha

"What?"

"After many years of suffering, the Eldak'e changed. They had grown weary of death and wanted now to cure the Venirex. We have lived in harmony with the Eldak'e now for centuries."

The Doctor shook his head.

"No, no, no. That's not how Daleks work. They just don't change. A Dalek can't change its bumps."

For a few minutes, the Doctor sat perfectly still, with only the movement of his eyes betraying the fact that he was scanning the symbols on the animal skin.

There was movement behind them and Tom and Val entered the tepee. The Doctor could tell instantly that something was wrong.

"Doctor," said Val. "I think we've got a problem."

"What do you mean?" said the Doctor.

Tom stepped forward into the light and the Doctor gasped in shock at what he saw.

Pus filled blisters covered his entire face and blood trickled slowly from the corner of one eye.

The Doctor rushed over to his companion and pulled his sonic screwdriver from his pocket.

"No, no, no." he said.

"What are they? What's happening to me?" said Tom, wincing in pain.

"We call it the Wasting," said Turan'ik'tha.

"How apt," said the Doctor.

"All Venirex warriors are affected by the Wasting." said Turan'ik'tha.

The Doctor turned to Turan'ik'tha.

"The Wasting only affects the men?" said the Doctor.

Turan'ik'tha nodded.

"Interesting," said the Doctor

"It is the first test a Venirex warrior must face."

Once again, the Doctor swept his sonic screwdriver over Tom then looked at the readout.

"This is impossible. Your DNA is being rewritten," replied the Doctor, his face ashen.

"What does that mean?" said Tom.

"It means Tom, that your body is a battleground."

"The TARDIS..." said Val

"Is too far away," interrupted the Doctor, "It will take too long to get there."

"When the Wasting comes or we are injured we go to the Sky Temple. We pray and the Eldak'e heal us." said Turan'ik'tha.

"No," said the Doctor. "I can't put his life in the hands of the Daleks."

"We don't have any choice Doctor," said Val.

The Doctor turned to face Turan'ik'tha.

"Where is this Sky Temple? Can you take us there?"

Turan'ik'tha nodded.

"Excellent. Miss Brooker, with me but I think it would be best if Mr Brooker stayed here."

"No." said Val defiantly.

Tom reached forward and placed his hand on Val's arm.

"I'll be all right Doctor." said Tom quietly.

Suddenly Tom's legs gave way and he crashed to the ground.

Val reached forward and helped Tom to his feet and she looked into his eyes as tears rolled down her face.

"I, I don't want to lose you." said Val.

Through cracked lips, Tom managed a smile.

"I don't want to lose me either." said Tom.

For a moment, they simply looked at each other, both afraid to say what they wanted to.

"Are you ready?" said the Doctor

Val nodded her head.

"Come along then."

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time they had reached their destination, the sun had started to set, casting long shadows across the jungle canopy. All around, the sounds of nocturnal wildlife filled the air.

"And here we are." said the Doctor. "It's exactly what I thought. A Dalek ship."

Half buried in the ground, dense foliage covered the hulls smooth curved lines. The ship's weapon pods had sheared off during the crash and various rusted remnants of machinery lay scattered on the periphery of the ship.

"How can anything so beautiful, so elegant, be so symbolic of the pure evil of the Daleks?"

"You are mistaken Doctor. There is no evil here. This is the Sky Temple," said Turan'ik'tha.

The Doctor shook his head.

"You've mythologized them. Dalek has become Eldak'e and their warship has become the central focal point of your religion, the Sky Temple."

The Doctor stood before the Dalek ship, pulled the sonic screwdriver from out of his inside pocket and waved it slowly in front of him.

"It's as I suspected," said the Doctor. "This is the source of the signal the TARDIS picked up."

With a screeching sound, the entrance to the ship slowly opened. A ramp lowered falteringly to the ground. Darkness beckoned.

"Come on." said the Doctor. He climbed the ramp into the ship's gloomy interior.

"After you," said Val, indicating to Turan'ik'tha.

Turan'ik'tha shook his head.

"It is forbidden for me to enter the Sky Temple."

"Great," said Val, frowning. "Well, wait for us here then. We'll be back soon. I hope."

"Doctor, wait for me." Val peered into the darkness beyond the entrance, then stepped tentatively inside.

\* \* \* \* \*

Deep within the ship, an alarm sounded, activated by the presence of the two intruders. The Black Dalek swung towards the Dalek scientist, appendages twitching.

**"AS PREDICTED, THE DOCTOR HAS COME,"** screamed the Black Dalek Commander.

The Dalek Commander turned and moved towards a row of monitors. An internal schematic of the ship showed two red dots moving slowly down a corridor.

**"INTERNAL SENSORS HAVE LOCATED THE DOCTOR AND HIS FEMALE COMPANION. HE IS PROCEEDING ALONG CORRIDOR ALPHA SEVENTEEN TOWARDS CONTAINMENT CHAMBER. I WILL TAKE CONTROL OF THE SITUATION,"** said the Black Dalek.

\* \* \* \* \*

The light from the Doctor's torch penetrated the darkness, casting strange shadows down the corridor. At the end, a large doorway stood. The Doctor walked towards it. He looked down and saw a standard Dalek control pad, designed to interface with the manipulator arm.

The Doctor waved the sonic screwdriver across the control pad. He flicked his wrist, the screwdriver buzzed, and the door opened with a hiss of escaping air.

"That was fast." said Val.

The Doctor smiled, obviously pleased with himself.

The Doctor pointed the torch below his face, the light picking out his features in stark relief.

"I want you to go back to the village," he said before handing the torch to Val.

"But..." protested Val.

"No buts," interrupted the Doctor. "It's safer this way. I should never have agreed to bring you here. Please, go back to Tom. You'll do more good for him there than you will here."

Slowly, Val nodded. Of course, the Doctor was right.

He walked through the doorway, which silently closed behind him, leaving Val alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

A single harsh blue light lit the room. At its centre stood a plinth upon which sat a metallic sphere. On the opposite side of the room stood another door. Approaching the sphere, the Doctor pointed the sonic screwdriver at it. He glanced at the readout.

"Now," he said to himself. "What exactly are you containing?"

An itch developed between his shoulder blades. The Doctor stood and slipped the sonic screwdriver into his pocket, then turned. "There you are," said the Doctor, facing the Black Dalek.

**"WE HAVE ANTICIPATED YOUR ARRIVAL, DOCTOR. DO NOT MOVE."**

"Just do it!" screamed the Doctor, almost spitting the words.

He saw the gun twitch, and he closed his eyes, not in fear but in acceptance. Maybe this was where it was meant to end. The air crackled with energy and then exploded in a brilliant light. Excruciating pain surged through his body. Arms flung back, the Doctor fell into merciful darkness.

**FIVE**

Where was he? Lying down. Check. Strapped to a table. Check. Splitting headache. Check. The Doctor opened his eyes. In the dimness of the room, he could make out various pieces of medical equipment positioned around him. Realisation that he was not alone slowly dawned on him.

"Come out, come out wherever you are," said the Doctor, almost mockingly.

Slowly, the three Daleks glided out of the gloom and surrounded him.

"**TRY NOT TO MOVE,**" said the Dalek Commander. "**THE EFFECTS OF THE PARALYSIS BEAM WILL SOON DISSIPATE. HOWEVER YOU WILL EXPERIENCE SOME LOCALISED PAIN DUE TO THE EXTRACTION.**"

"Extraction, what extraction? What have you done?"

The Red Dalek scientist with the bent eyestalk moved towards a console and plunged its sucker arm into the control activator interface. A screen slowly illuminated and the Doctor could see his body, spinning in three dimensions. The display zoomed into his brain.

"**WE HAVE EXTRACTED CELLS FROM YOUR BRAIN.**"

"Why? What do I possess that you couldn't get elsewhere?"

"**OBSERVE, DOCTOR.**"

The image on the screen zoomed into an area deep within his hippocampus.

"NO!" screamed the Doctor as he realized what the Daleks had done.

"The Rassilon Synapse. Why? What do you hope to achieve?"

"**OUR CHILDREN ARE DYING. THE GENETIC MATERIAL THAT SUSTAINS THEM HAS BECOME CORRUPTED. EVERY NEW GENERATION OF VENIREX IS LESS THAN THE PREVIOUS. THEY GROW WEAKER. WITHIN FIFTY YEARS, THEY WILL BECOME STERILE AND WITHIN ONE HUNDRED, THEY WILL BECOME EXTINCT. WE INTEND TO INTRODUCE TIME LORD DNA INTO THEIR GENETIC MATRIX.**"

"You can't," protested the Doctor, straining at his bonds. "You can't give them the ability to regenerate."

"**NOT REGENERATION, DOCTOR. RENEWAL. WHEN THEIR BODIES DIE, THEY WILL BE RENEWED INTO THE SAME PHYSICAL FORM.**"

"Why are you doing this?" said the Doctor.

The Dalek scientist lowered its eyestalk.

"GUILT," replied the Black Dalek Commander. "OBSERVE THE SCREEN." Its manipulator arm engaged with the control activation interface.

The screen changed to show the Dalek ship in deep space. The ship's status ran along the bottom of the image.

"INTERNAL BAFFLERS ENGAGED. ION ENGINE OUTPUT MASKED. STEALTH FINS EXTENDED. HEAT BLOOM AT ZERO POINT ZERO."

"So," said the Doctor, turning to the Dalek Commander. "You were rigged for silent running. Whatever your mission, you clearly didn't want anyone to see you coming."

The Doctor turned to the screen as the image changed once more to an external view of the ship.

The Dalek vessel had entered an ion cloud and the Doctor could see tendrils of highly ionised energy course over the hull.

"You compromised this vessel's safety for stealth. Normally a Dalek ship could easily survive an ion storm but without shields it wreaked havoc with your systems."

"CORRECT," replied the Dalek Scientist.

"So you were forced to eject your primary engine core and you drifted here. How long did it take you to make planet fall? Beta Draconis is a long way from here."

"SIX MILLION EIGHT HUNDRED AND FIFTY FIVE THOUSAND, SEVEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY TWO RELS."

The Doctor let out a loud laugh.

"Now, that is an awfully long time. Almost three thousand and twenty seven years, eight months, five days and..."

The Doctor twisted his wrist and looked down at his watch.

"...Thirteen hours, give or take a rel or two."

"So tell me, what happened to you? I've faced the Daleks before and you're something different. You've done something no other Daleks I've ever seen have done. Changed."

"THE DAMAGE TO THIS VESSEL WAS CONSIDERABLE. ALL POWER WAS DIVERTED TO THE CONTAINMENT FIELD PROTECTING THE DEVICE."

"Device," said the Doctor. "What device?"

"OUR MISSION WAS TO INTRODUCE A GENOME SPECIFIC, SELF REPLICATING NANO VIRUS INTO THE ATMOSPHERE OF BETA DRACONIS SEVEN. UPON DELIVERY, A SIGNAL WOULD ACTIVATE THE NANO VIRUS. WITHIN ONE SOLAR HOUR, THE NANO VIRUS WOULD ATTACH ITSELF TO PROTEIN STRANDS IN THE MALES OF THE POPULATION, REWRITING THE DNA OF THE HOST BODY WITH NEW GENETIC INFORMATION THAT WOULD REMAIN DORMANT UNTIL NEEDED."

"Needed?" interrupted the Doctor.

"THE WAR AGAINST THE HUMAN AND DRACONIAN EMPIRES WAS BEING LOST. OUR HOME WORLD HAD BEEN DESTROYED BY YOU USING THE HAND OF OMEGA THE EMPEROR PREDICTED OUR TOTAL DEFEAT. A STRATEGY WAS DEVISED THAT WOULD ALTER THE BALANCE OF POWER BY BOTH DEFEATING ONE ENEMY WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY GROWING OUR FORCES."

The Doctor's face was a mask of disgust.

"You planned to mutate the Draconians? Turn them into Daleks and use them as cannon fodder against mankind."

"CORRECT."

"And that's what's happening to my companion? Is there a cure?" said the Doctor.

"YES," replied the Dalek scientist.

The Doctor sighed with relief.

"Good. But that still doesn't explain what happened to you. Just how did you go from being the most destructive force in creation to benefactor of the Venirex?" said the Doctor angrily.

The Black Dalek lowered its eyestalk as if unable to look at the Doctor.

"WE DRIFTED HELPLESSLY THROUGH INTERSTELLAR SPACE IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION, SEPARATED FROM THE COM-NET. AS THIS VESSEL PREPARED FOR PLANET FALL, PROTOCOLS AWOKÉ US FROM HIBERNATION. HOWEVER, THE DAMAGE TO OUR SYSTEMS WAS EXTENSIVE AND WE CRASH LANDED."

The Dalek Commander paused.

"Go on." urged the Doctor.

"UPON US LEAVING THIS VESSEL, WE WERE GREETED BY THE VENIREX. THEIR ELDERS WERE EXTERMINATED IN ACCORDANCE TO GENERAL ORDER ALPHA ONE."

The Doctor shook his head.

"Shock and awe. Typical Dalek behaviour. Exterminate the leaders and enslave the survivors."

"CORRECT," replied the Black Dalek. "THE VENIREX WERE PUT TO WORK MINING THIS AREA FOR THE MINERALS NEEDED TO REBUILD THIS VESSEL. HOWEVER, THEY WERE INCAPABLE OF COMPLETING THE TASK."

The Doctor leaned forward.

"So why did they survive? Normally, once a population is determined to be of no use to the Daleks they are exterminated."

"THE NANO VIRUS," replied the Dalek Scientist.

"What?"

"DURING THE CRASH, THE DEVICE WAS DAMAGED AND THE ACTIVATION SIGNAL SENT. THE VIRUS WAS RELEASED INTO THE ATMOSPHERE. THE NANO VIRUS WAS CODED TO ATTACK DRACONIAN DNA. HOWEVER, WITH OUR PROTECTIVE SHELLS BREACHED, IT ENTERED OUR SYSTEMS AND COMBINED DALEK DNA. WITHOUT UPDATES TO OUR SOFTWARE VIA THE COM-NET AND WITH OUR BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS COMPROMISED BY OUR OWN WEAPON, WE MUTATED FURTHER UNTIL WE BECAME DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER DALEKS THAT HAD EVER EXISTED."

The Dalek scientist glided towards the Doctor.

"WE REALISED THE DEPTHS OF OUR SINS AND MADE A PROMISE TO PROTECT THE VENIREX AT ALL COSTS. THE EFFECTS OF THE NANO VIRUS ON OUR CHILDREN WERE REVERSED. WE IN RETURN BECAME REVERED BY THEM."

The Doctor laughed.

"Hoisted by your own petard."

The Doctor looked down at his restraints.

"Release me," said the Doctor.

The Dalek scientist turned and depressed a control stud. With a hiss, the metallic bands that held him down slid away and the Doctor sat up, rubbing his wrists.

For a moment, he regarded the Daleks. Ever since his first encounter with them so long ago on Skaro, he had known nothing but anger and rage towards them. They were his most hated enemy, bred purely to destroy. But here, on a planet light years from civilisation, his greatest foe had done something he had predicted at their genesis.

"I always knew that out of the Dalek's evil must come to something good."

**"SO YOU WILL HELP US DOCTOR?"**

"Yes," said the Doctor. "I'll help you. If we can reprogram the nano virus, then I'm sure it will work. Yes, I'm positive it will. But first you must help my companion."

The Dalek scientist turned and interfaced its manipulator arm into a console.

**"YOUR COMPANION WILL BE CURED,"** said the Dalek scientist.

The Doctor breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank you," he said, barely believing what he was saying.

"Come on then," he continued. "There's work to be done."

\* \* \* \* \*

Incense filled the tepee that Tom lay in, filling his nostrils with a sweet, soothing aroma. For three days, he had passed in and out of consciousness as the pain increased. Val had stayed at his side, hoping for the return of the Doctor and the cure to whatever it was that was killing Tom. Turan'ik'tha entered the tent followed by a strange little man dressed in a ceremonial dress and mask that crudely represented a Dalek. He knelt beside Tom and pressed his hands onto Tom's head. Tom screamed in agony.

"Who are you?" shouted Val, distressed at Tom's pain.

"This is E'lhanien, the medicine man. He has been sent by the Eldak'e to cure your man of the Wasting."

Val watched with growing doubts as E'lhanien began to speak in what sounded like gibberish.

There was much bowing and raising of hands to the sky. E'lhanien even lit a candle that he explained would set free the evil spirits that had taken over Tom's body.

Tom's eyes opened wide as he writhed in agony and Val tenderly dabbed his forehead with a wet cloth.

From a small pouch that was hanging from a belt around his waist, E'lhanian pulled a small phial that contained a greenish liquid inside. The medicine man took a cup from a nearby table and poured the green liquid into it. Adding a small amount of fresh water to the coloured fluid, E'lhanian stirred the cup's contents.

E'lhanien approached Tom and told him to drink. Tom sat up and took the cup from E'lhanien. It smelt bitter, like vinegar and Tom balked.

E'lhanien gestured for Tom to drink.

"Drink."

Not sure what else to do, Tom swallowed the mixture, grimacing at the taste.

Almost immediately he began to convulse. He shot up in his bed and doubled over in pain, then leaned over the side and vomited.

"What have you done to him?" screamed Val.

"This will take away the sickness," replied E'lhanien calmly, watching Tom.

Tom fell back and passed out. Val dipped the cloth into a cool bowl of water and lay it across Tom's forehead. She had no idea what was going on, what this liquid had done to Tom, and whether she should run to find the Doctor for assistance.

E'lhanien looked directly into Val's eyes and pointed towards Tom. "The sickness is fading."

And indeed it was. The pustules and scabs on Tom's face had begun to fade. Within five minutes Tom was awake and asking for something to drink.

Val was totally dumbfounded. Not ten minutes ago, Tom had been at death's door, but now he was almost back to his normal self.

E'lhanien packed up his things and made his way to leave Tom's tent. As he raised the flap to leave, he turned to Val and said. "Your man is now healthy. The Eldak'e take care of their children. They allow us no harm."

"Thank you." said Val.

E'lhanien nodded, turned and then he was gone.

Val took Tom's hand in hers. "How are you feeling?"

"Feels like the worst hangover ever. Apart from that, I'm okay."

"I don't know what was in that green liquid, but whatever it was, it cured you." said Val.

"I don't believe it either myself, Val. I thought I was a goner."

Val gently squeezed Tom's hand and smiled.

At that very moment, the flap to the tepee lifted up, revealing the Doctor.

"Ah, Mr. Brooker. I see you're up and around and back to your usual healthy self."

"Doctor, you're never going to believe what happened." said Tom.

Val interjected. "Tom was practically dying Doctor, but this man, he... he... he cured him."

"Though it's hard to credit, I can see that." replied the Doctor. "There are a lot of things that, until a few days ago I wouldn't have believed. Trusting a Dalek was one of them." said the Doctor quietly.

"Are you all right?" said Val, sensing something was troubling the Doctor.

"Me?" replied the Doctor. "Fine, perfectly fine."

Val gazed at the Doctor. She knew something was bothering him.

"Sure about that?" pressed Val.

The Doctor sighed.

"A lot's happened in the last three days." said the Doctor.

"Want to talk about it?" said Tom.

The Doctor nodded and began to tell his companions what had happened.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later that evening the Verinex arranged a special feast to celebrate Tom's renewed health. Turan'ik'tha had explained that it was custom for the Verinex to celebrate on such an occasion. It was their way to give thanks to the Eldak'e for protecting them, for taking care of them, and most of all, for healing one who had been cured of the Wasting.

The Verinex celebrated with dancing and feasting. There was food of all sorts and Tom, Val and the Doctor were encouraged to try the many exotic delights on offer.

As the night wore on, there was more dancing, more feasting, and offers of thanks and prayer. The Doctor was occupied in discussion with E'lhanien, while the other Verinex enjoyed this special occasion.

Tired from his recent ordeal, Tom felt in need of some fresh air and a chance to think. While the celebration whirled around him, he stood and made his way to the edge of the light. There, he saw Val, cornered by some of the women of the village. Val beckoned him over, mouthing a plea to be saved. Smiling, he came over. Val broke from the group and went over to meet him.

"I'm just a damsel in need of saving," she said, casting a glance over her shoulder and waving at the women, he whispered and laughed to one another. Val looked back.

"Where were you off to?"

"All that noise. I'm still exhausted after today. Just a bit of fresh air.

"Mind if I come along?" she asked, smiling.

Tom smiled back. "Sure, that'd be nice."

Tom took Val's hand and the two quickly and quietly snuck away.

A short time later Val and Tom found themselves on the ground, stirring up at the stars shining brightly in the night sky

"We are so blessed." said Val, almost in a whisper.

Tom turned his head and smiled. He reached out his hand and almost subconsciously, brushed it against Val's. For a brief moment, their eyes locked, before he turned his head away.

Overhead, a bright red point of light moved across the sky.

"Did you see that?" said Val.

"See what?" said Tom.

Val pointed at the light and sat up.

"That!" said Val.

"Shooting star?" said Tom.

Val shook her head.

"No, I don't think so. It's changed course."

Tom sat up to join Val.

"Are you sure?"

Val nodded her head.

"I'm positive," said Val. "Look, it's getting brighter."

"It's not getting brighter," said Tom. "It's getting closer."

"I think we should tell the Doctor." said Val as she stood up.

They ran and emerged from the jungle into the village. They saw the Doctor looking up at the sky. His face was ashen.

"Doctor," said Tom.

"I see it Mr Brooker," said the Doctor.

The air was filled with a high pitch droning noise and a sickly red glow bathed the village. Out of the light they saw a ship emerge, jets of flame bursting from the six thrusters encircling it. With a heavy crunch, the vessel landed, its repulser drive powering down. Everyone watching had to cover their faces against the dust billowing into the air.

"Keep back," shouted the Doctor over the engines' roar.

"Who are they?" said Val nervously.

"We weren't the only ones to have picked up the Eldak'e's distress signal," answered the Doctor.

Slowly, the airlock opened with a hiss of air. The Doctor warily approached, staring into the darkness within. He saw a bright point of light approaching slowly and heard the throbbing mechanical heartbeat that he knew only too well.

"Now," said the Doctor grimly. "We're in trouble."

## SIX

"Stay back," warned the Doctor as Turan'ik'tha approached the ship, a bright smile on his face.

From out of the pitch darkness of the airlock, three Daleks emerged, their armour, a shiny silver and black, contrasted sharply with the damaged shells of the Eldak'e. The Daleks fanned out, taking up defensive positions around their ship. A fourth Dalek appeared. Much larger than a standard Dalek, this was an altogether different creature. Its gold and silver armoured shell reflected the fires burning in the village. Twin energy blasters, much larger than a standard Dalek's weaponry, were located at the front and, at the rear, six arms, each with a different function, radiated out from a hub located on its back. Each arm twitched, like the legs of a spider. This was one of the Dalek Primes, answerable only to the Dalek Emperor.

Arranged around the Dalek Prime's bloated spherical head, as well as the normal eyestalk, were three additional optical sensors that glowed brightly, giving the Dalek mutant located within three hundred and sixty degree vision.

Turan'ik'tha stepped forward and raised his arms in greeting.

"Get back, Turan'ik'tha." said the Doctor urgently. "All of you, get back."

The Dalek Prime stood motionless, its eye burning with an intense white glare.

Deep inside, the Dalek mutant pulsed in revulsion as the humanoid approached. TAC-COM protocols suggested this creature was the primary figure in this primitive society and as such, posed a threat to Dalek operations. Pre industrial civilisations were dependent on a hierarchal structure and could be easily cowered into submission through a show of force.

"~~EXTERMINATE~~." screamed the Dalek Prime, its voice much deeper and less modulated than a normal Dalek.

"Take cover, take cover," screamed the Doctor.

A light flared.

A light that the Doctor had seen a thousand times before on a thousand worlds.

The twin blasts struck Turan'ik'tha in the chest, bathing his body in a sickly green-blue glow. First to go was his hair as it caught fire. Next, his eyes melted like dripping candles and his internal organs exploded in a red mist as water molecules rapidly expanded.

His clothes became his skin and his skin became his clothes, and then both slid off his charred bones. Almost as if proving a point, the Dalek Prime fired again and a concussion wave lifted Turan'ik'tha's carbonised skeleton into the air.

Val screamed as what remained of Turan'ik'tha's body landed on the ground in a smouldering heap before her.

"There was no need to kill him. He was no threat to you," screamed Val, her face a mask of fury and rage.

"**SILENCE,**" roared the Dalek Prime and Val felt a palpable hatred in its voice for what it considered to be inferior life forms. "**SILENCE OR YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED.**"

Val forced herself to remain silent by biting the inside of her mouth. She could taste the harsh iron tang of blood.

The Dalek Prime moved towards the Doctor, Val and Tom. Its eyestalk moved up and down until it finally settled on the Doctor. The Dalek Prime ran a scan of the humanoid. When the data came back, the creature inside the shell felt a long suppressed emotion.

Fear.

In spite of this, the Dalek Prime followed protocol and broadcast the information to its drones on a microwave relay.

"**KA FARAQ GATRI IDENTIFIED.**"

The Doctor saw the Dalek drones twitch and he smiled.

"**GENETIC SCAN CONFIRMED. YOUR GENOME MATCHES THAT OF OUR SUPREME ENEMY. YOU ARE THE DOCTOR.**"

Looking the Doctor eye to eye, the Dalek Prime considered a course of action. In spite of standing orders regarding the immediate extermination of the Dalek's most hated enemy, and its own fear, the Dalek Prime knew the Doctor could be of use to them.

"**DOCTOR. YOU WILL BE TAKEN BACK TO NEW SKARO WHERE THE EMPEROR WILL EXTRACT EVERY SCINTILLA OF INFORMATION FROM YOU. THE SECRETS OF THE TIME LORDS WILL BE OURS. GALLIFREY WILL FALL TO THE MIGHT OF THE DALEK EMPIRE. VICTORY OVER ALL INFERIOR LIFE FORMS WILL BE ASSURED. THE DALEKS WILL BE INVINCIBLE.**"

The Doctor shook his head and smiled.

"I've heard it all before," he said, mockingly.

"**YOU WILL NOT DEFEAT THE DALEKS. WE ARE THE SUPREME BEINGS.**"

"Of course you are," continued the Doctor, his voice filled with contempt.

"**SILENCE,**" screamed the Dalek Prime, its arm twitching.

"Or what? You've got no power over me," laughed the Doctor.

The Dalek Prime sent an order to the drones. Immediately, weapons raised, they surrounded Val and Tom.

"Doctor," said Tom nervously as he reached for Val's trembling hand.

"**YOUR COMPANIONS ARE OF NO CONSEQUENCE. THEY WILL BE EXTERMINATED. EXTERMINATE, EXTERMIN....**"

The energy blast caught one of the Dalek drones squarely between the gun and manipulator arm. The white-hot plasma bolt ripped through two inches of Dalekanium reinforced bonded polycarbide armour. The mutant creature inside screamed in agony as its flesh seared and internal organs boiled away.

The remaining Daleks turned their optical sensors towards the smoking shell. Immediately, their systems re-prioritised their target and the Dalek BAT-NET came online, calculating the trajectory of their attacker. Two micro-seconds later, the BAT-NET sent tactical information to the Daleks who instantly downloaded the topography of the area, the image glowing brightly on the holograph displays deep within their cores. Humanoids appeared in

lurid shades of red and their primary target appeared as three blue points of light approximately two hundred meters ahead. The BAT-NET analysed the energy signature and determined the level of threat.

The Dalek Prime requested confirmation of the information it had received but the BAT-NET returned the same data.

The energy signature of their enemy was Dalek.

The Dalek Prime moved forward, its sensors showing the enemy had spread out. The creature inside ordered the COM-NET to send a friend or foe data package to their enemy. When the COM-NET reported failure, the Dalek Prime halted. It was obvious that these Daleks had no link to the COM-NET and were therefore unable to be re-integrated.

"WE ARE HERE TO RETRIEVE THE NANO VIRUS WEAPON," said the Dalek Prime, all the while scanning the area.

From the jungle, the Black Eldak'e slowly moved forward.

"NO!" it said. "ALL LIFE MUST BE PRESERVED. THE NANO VIRUS WILL NOT BE USED AGAINST YOUR ENEMIES. YOU WILL LEAVE THIS PLANET. YOU WILL NOT HARM OUR CHILDREN."

Their enemy had given away a tactical advantage and the Dalek Prime turned and moved towards the village. It glided towards a small group of young Venirex warriors and, with a claw arm, lifted A'Nerali into the air by his neck.

"YOU DARE TO QUESTION MY ORDERS? WE WERE SENT TO RETRIEVE THE NANO VIRUS WEAPON. YOU ARE A DALEK. YOU WILL OBEY ALL INSTRUCTIONS. OBEY. OBEY."

The Black Eldak'e powered up its weapon system.

"WE ARE NOT DALEKS. WE HAVE EVOLVED. WE HAVE BECOME SOMETHING GREATER," said the Black Eldak'e.

The Dalek Prime scanned its enemy and felt a wave of revulsion.

"YOU ARE CORRUPT. IMPURE. WE ARE THE SUPERIOR RACE. YOU WILL BRING THE NANO VIRUS WEAPON TO OUR VESSEL OR WE WILL EXTERMINATE ALL OF YOUR....CHILDREN." said the Dalek Prime.

The Eldak'e emerged from the jungle, their targeting systems locked onto the Dalek Prime.

"EXTERMINATE." The Black Eldak'e as it opened fire.

At that moment, the Dalek Prime rotated and with horror the Doctor realised what would happen.

A'Nerali screamed in agony in the blistering heat of the Eldak'e's energy blast, his skeleton visible for a few agonising seconds.

"NOOOO!" screamed the Black Eldak'e as the Dalek Prime dropped the smoking corpse of the young warrior to the ground.

The Dalek Prime knew it could exploit the compassion of their enemy and interfaced with its drones via the BAT-NET.

It gave the order.

The only order a Dalek lives for.

The drones fixed their targeting computers onto the Venirex and with something akin to joy screamed the order in unison.

**"EXTERMINATE."**

As one, the Daleks opened fire, filling the air with blasts of pure neutronic radiation.

The warriors screamed in the withering energy of the Dalek's weapons. Their skin peeled away, and their internal organs exploded.

The Black and Red Eldak'e returned fire, hitting a drone just below its eyestalk, sending raw energy flooding into the shell's interior. The mutant inside died screaming.

In response, the Dalek Prime had scanned the Blue Eldak'e and calculated that it was the weakest of its enemies. It moved towards the weapon-less Eldak'e and activated a rapidly rotating cutting arm. With almost surgical precision, it ripped into the weakened battle armour and, in a blur of motion, tore the mutated creature from its shell.

For a moment, the Dalek Prime looked intently at the true face of its enemy. The creature, covered in a thick layer of black-green mucous, thrashed in its grip. The abomination had indeed mutated. Instead of simple vestigial appendages, it had fully formed arms that ended in claws and a recognisable, though twisted face, which screamed in agony.

**"YOU ARE IMPURE. YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED,"** said the Dalek Prime as it shredded the Blue Eldak'e's flesh, pieces of it falling to the ground.

The Dalek Prime now moved towards a small group of Venirex women, firing its twin cannons as it approached.

They were dead before they hit the ground.

Through the smoke, Tanari'al slowly crept forward, his bow raised. Ahead of him was his prey, the false Eldak'e.

He paused, offering a silent prayer to the gods. With this kill, he would avenge his people. He drew the bowstring, took aim and loosed.

The arrow flew true and straight, hitting the Dalek Prime on its spherical head. Tanari'al's gave a shout, then watched open-mouthed as the arrow bounced harmlessly away.

The Dalek Prime retreated, shifted its vision to infrared and targeted Tanari'al with its rear mounted optical sensor. With lightning speed, its claw arm reached and gripped the warrior by his neck. Raising Tanari'al high in the air, the Dalek Prime rotated its spherical head so its eyestalk was level with his face.

**"EXTERMINATE."** screamed the Dalek Prime as a second arm plunged forward into Tanari'al's chest.

Tanari'al screamed as his sternum shattered and blood sprayed into the air, covering the Dalek Prime in a torrent of deep crimson. Tanari'al's eyes widened in agony as the Dalek Prime removed its arm from his body. The last thing he saw was his still beating heart held in front of his eyes before everything dissolved into darkness.

The Black and Red Eldak'e turned and concentrated their firepower on the Dalek Prime, however, their blasts were simply deflected off of its reflective battle armour.

The Dalek Prime ordered its drones to cease firing. It moved towards a group of women and children who were huddled together in fear.

**"YOU WILL SURRENDER THE NANO VIRUS WEAPON OR WE WILL EXTERMINATE THE DESCENDANTS,"** said the Dalek Prime. **"COMPLY WITH MY ORDER."**

For a few moments, the Black Eldak'e stood almost motionless, only its dome moving from side to side, surveying the village, evaluating the situation.

**"COMPLY. COMPLY,"** repeated the Dalek Prime, its voice rising in pitch.

The Black Eldek'e calculated the probabilities of survival for the children.

They were not good.

"I...I WILL OBEY," said the Black Eldak'e. "ONLY IF THE EXTERMINATIONS STOP."

"AGREED," said the Dalek Prime.

The Black Eldak'e turned and glided out of the burning village in the direction of the Sky Temple.

\* \* \* \* \*

The village was eerily quiet. About a hundred twisted and mangled bodies lay scattered on the ground. Thick smoke belched into the night sky and the air smelt of charred wood and burnt flesh. The Dalek Prime and its drones circled the village, their optical sensors penetrating the smoke while the Red Eldak'e remained motionless.

The Doctor approached Val, who sat on the ground next to Tom. Her face was covered in soot and tears streamed down her face.

"Are you all right?" said the Doctor.

"I don't think I'll ever be all right again Doctor," replied Val.

The Doctor sat down on the ground next to her and placed his arm around her shoulder.

"Look at me Val," said the Doctor quietly.

Val turned her head and looked into the Doctor's face.

His eyes, often cold, glowed with a warmth that almost took her breath away.

"When this is over, I wouldn't blame you if you wanted to go home. I really wouldn't. But remember this. You two have experienced things that only a few others have. You and Tom really are my friends, even if I don't always show it. The universe would be a much less interesting place, a much less happier place, if Valentina Rossi and Tom Brooker weren't with me to see it."

"Doctor, I, I don't know what..." said Val.

Before she could finish the Black Eldak'e emerged from the jungle, carrying the nano virus sphere at the end of its manipulator arm. The Eldak'e's eyestalk surveyed the dead. Its final mission for the Venirex had been completed. It approached the Dalek Prime, who extended its claw arm and pulled the sphere away. For the briefest of moments, the two adversaries looked at each other through fibre optic relays and holographically enhanced vision sensors.

"PREPARE TO BE EXTERMINATED," said the Dalek Prime. Almost as if in expectation, the Black Eldak'e lowered its eyestalk.

The Dalek Prime fired, its two cannons set at maximum.

The Eldak'e's shell exploded, sending white-hot fragments of Dalekanium and pieces of organic matter flying through the air.

The force of the blast rocked the Dalek Prime. It ran a self-diagnostic to ascertain any damage. Despite the proximity to the explosion, the Dalek Prime had received only superficial damage to its casing.

"BRING THE DOCTOR BEFORE ME" said the Dalek Prime, its voice booming, "ALL OTHER LIFE FORMS ARE TO BE EXTERMINATED. EXTERMINATE. EXTERMINATE."

"I OBEY," replied the final Dalek drone as it powered up, its battle computer targeting the Venirex children. It fired a single, fan shaped blast, which enveloped the women and children. Their screams of agony filled the air. Under the scorching heat of the Dalek's firepower, their bodies twisted and withered like burning sticks.

"NO!" screamed the Red Eldak'e as the last of the Venirex died.

The Dalek drone moved towards the Doctor, Val and Tom.

"YOU WILL STAND," said the Dalek.

The Doctor, Val and Tom rose from the ground.

"DOCTOR, YOU WILL MOVE AWAY FROM YOUR COMPANIONS. MOVE," said the Dalek as it thrust its manipulator arm into the Doctor's side.

"EXTERMINATE," said the Dalek as it aimed its weapon stick at Tom and Val.

"EXTERMINATE," came another monotone voice, followed by a flash of light.

The Dalek drone exploded in a fireball of rapidly expanding, super-hot gases. The Doctor smiled with satisfaction as the manipulator arm landed with a heavy thud a few metres away from where he stood. He swiftly moved forward and picked up the arm.

A plan began to formulate in his mind.

"Miss Rossi, find cover. Mr Brooker, with me," shouted the Doctor.

Tom shot a glance towards Val. He wanted to say something but the words failed him. Instead he simply nodded and smiled.

"When you're ready," said Tom, turning back to face the Doctor.

"One, two, three," said the Doctor, "Run."

They bolted towards the Dalek attack ship, dodging energy blasts from the Dalek Prime. All around, Engar'la trees exploded, sending shards of splintered wood flying through the air.

The Red Eldak'e fired again and the Dalek Prime turned as the energy blast caught it just below its rear mounted optical sensor. Disoriented, the Dalek Prime had to shunt power from its motivator units to compensate for the damage.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Just pray they've been careless and not activated the ship's defence grid," shouted the Doctor over the noise of the battle.

"Oh, great. Now you tell me," said Tom.

Through the smoke and flame they finally made it on board the Dalek attack ship. Dodging down the corridors, they worked inward until they entered a small antechamber located next to the engine room.

"So, what are we doing here?" said Tom, drawing in deep breathes.

"See that command station?" said the Doctor, pointing at a console at the far end of the room. "That is this ship's secondary network hub."

"And..." said Tom.

"And, Mr Brooker, I need you to hack it while I'm busy sabotaging the magnetic containment field. I need you to find a way to bypass the safety protocols.

Smiling, Tom cracked his fingers and strode towards the console. He placed his hand over the holographic interface and stared at the display.

Nothing happened.

"You'll need this," said the Doctor, tossing the manipulator arm across the room.

"Thanks," said Tom as he caught the arm. Holding it up, he placed the sucker end into a circular depression and twisted.

The holographic display changed as he found himself bypassing layer upon layer of encryption.

Although different from any computer system he'd ever seen, Tom found himself navigating the Dalek network root directory.

It needs to be something simple, he thought as various interfaces rotated before him. Something that he could enter without detection.

Suddenly the display flashed red.

"No, no, no," said Tom in frustration

"What's wrong?" said the Doctor.

"The system's blocking me. It's fighting back."

The Doctor frowned, hurried over and looked up at the display.

"Let me see," said the Doctor as he twisted the manipulator arm. The display changed once more.

"Oh, very clever. Triple level encryption ciphers with a modulating data stream," said the Doctor.

Tom whistled as the Doctor effortlessly bypassed the Dalek equivalent of a firewall and began navigating through the data core.

"What were you planning?" said the Doctor.

"An Ouroboros."

The Doctor turned to Tom and smiled.

"Very elegant," said the Doctor. "There are times, Mr Brooker, when you really impress me."

"Thanks," beamed Tom.

"Only some times," said the Doctor sternly. "And where do you plan placing the infinite loop?"

Tom looked at the display and scratched his head in bewilderment.

"Oh, come on Mr Brooker, it's really quite easy when you think about it," said the Doctor, almost as if he were testing his companion.

"We need the system to believe it's already checked the safety protocols. The logical place to place the Ouroboros is here, in the tertiary server. That way, the system will bypass the safety protocols all together."

"Clever," said Tom as he began compiling the code.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Dalek Prime scanned the area. Only two points of light were now displayed on its holographic overlay, one red, and one blue. Immediately it pinpointed the nearest target; the human companion of the Doctor.

The Dalek Prime moved forward, its repulsor drive lifting it off the ground on an antigravity cushion. It bore down on the female who stumbled backwards in the typical human reaction of fear.

**"YOU WILL BE EXTERMINATED."**

Val screamed as the Dalek Prime's twin cannons twitched in anticipation.

The Red Eldak's power levels were falling. It had received critical damage in the fight and system after system began to power down. The creature inside knew it was dying; its data core was fragmented and life support failing. It glided forward and raised its gun stick, redirecting all available energy reserves for one final shot. The eyestalk turned dark and the

creature found itself cut off from all external sensor readings. For the first time since its birth in the vast war factories on Skaro it was utterly isolated from the outside world.

"~~EXTERMINATE~~."

With a final effort, the Eldak'e fired before it sank into oblivion.

The blast sliced through the air like a lightning bolt. It flew over the head of the Dalek Prime and slammed into an Engar'la tree sending pieces of wood flying through the air. Too late, the Dalek Prime realised that the Red Eldak'e had deliberately missed.

Val saw the piece of timber heading straight for her but her reflexes were too slow and she crumpled to the ground as it hit her on the hard on her forehead.

With her ears ringing and her vision turning dark, the last thing Val saw was the Engar'la as it came crashing down on top of the Dalek Prime.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It's in," said Tom, turning towards the Doctor.

The Doctor smiled.

"Excellent work Mr Brooker. Time to go."

They ran through the Dalek ship and emerged into a scene straight from hell.

The bodies of the Venirex lay scattered on the ground and the burnt out shells of both Eldak'e and Dalek stood motionless, burning like torches.

"Oh my God," said Tom, unable to comprehend the devastation around him.

Realisation suddenly hit him and he began to look around frantically.

Val. Where was Val?

"Val!" he shouted as he searched frantically, his eyes streaming.

"Tom."

The voice came from a crumpled heap on the floor and Tom ran over to where Val lay.

He slowly lifted her to her feet and gazed into her soot blackened face.

Tears streamed from reddened eyes and blood seeped from a large cut on her forehead.

"I...I thought I would never see you again." said Val, her voice faltering as she looked into the face of her friend.

"Oh, Tom," she sobbed as she threw her arms around him. "Are they all dead?"

All Tom could do was nod.

Val stared at Tom through tear-filled eyes and slowly kissed him on the lips. For a moment, Tom was taken aback by Val's sudden show of affection.

"What's that for?" spluttered Tom, his voice rising in pitch.

"Don't ever almost die on me again Tom Brooker." replied Val.

"I'll try my best Valentina Rossi."

Nervously Tom returned Val's kiss before his nerves got the best of him.

"Tom, are you..." began Val.

"I'm, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that." interrupted Tom before he turned away.

A short distance away, the Doctor smiled grimly.

"That's how it always begins." he muttered under his breath.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Dalek Prime ran a system wide diagnostic scan on itself, directing power from non-essential systems.

**"DAMAGE TO BATTLE ARMOUR AT SIXTY FIVE PERCENT. ENERGY LEVELS AT TWENTY THREE PERCENT."**

Slowly, it turned its dome, tracking the movements of the Doctor.

The Doctor. The Ka Faraq Gatri. The Destroyer of Worlds. The Dalek Prime's hatred for the supreme enemy of its race knew no limits. It moved forward, its graviton motivator protesting under the strain.

**"DOC...DOC...DOCTOR,"** said the Dalek Prime, its voice faltering.

**"YOU WILL...WILL BE...EX...EXTERMINATED."** screamed the Dalek Prime as the Doctor dived for cover.

With something akin to satisfaction, The Dalek Prime knew it would be the one responsible for the destruction of the Dalek's greatest foe and it sent the fire command to its weapon.

Nothing happened.

**"WEAPON SYSTEM DISABLED."**

"Look at the state of you." said the Doctor mockingly as he took a step closer and he saw, through a split in the Dalek Prime's casing, the mutant creature within. It thrashed about in its life support cradle, a hideous, bloated shape, covered in a thick jelly like substance.

**"WE..WE ARE THE..THE...THE SUP...SUPERIOR BEINGS,"** said the Dalek Prime.

The Doctor laughed.

**"SILE...SILENCE. KNOW THIS....DOCT....DOCTOR, THE DALEKS WILL...WILL SOON BE THE....THE NEW LORDS OF TI...TIME. GALLIFREY WILL FALL....TO THE...MIGHT OF THE DALEK EMPIRE."**

For a moment, the Doctor's face seemed to crumple. Surely they wouldn't dare attack.

Slowly the Dalek Prime turned and glided slowly towards its vessel. With a whine of overloading power regulators it entered the ship and seconds later the airlock closed with a hiss.

"Get back!" yelled the Doctor as the engines of Dalek attack ship roared into life and the vessel began to rise slowly. The air screamed as the repulsor drive engaged and an invisible anti-gravity ram pressed down into the ground, forcing the ship upwards into the sky. Within two minutes, the vessel had reached the upper reaches of the ionosphere, the curve of the planet reflecting on the ship's hull.

On the command deck, the Dalek Prime glided from station to station, preparing the ship for the journey home. With a manipulator arm, it interfaced directly with the COM-NET and prepared to send its report. The Dalek Prime watched as a display showed the progress of the download. Carried through a network of stealth relay stations that spanned the galaxy, the data would take three hundred Rels to download and a further five hundred to arrive at New Skaro. The nano virus would be replicated. Victory would be assured.

The Dalek Prime accessed the navigation systems and a holographic projection of the galaxy appeared. Red points of light indicated the reaches of the Dalek Empire whilst blue and green points represented Human and Draconian space respectively.

If the Dalek Prime felt any emotion other than hate, it would have been pride at the number of red points of light.

Amongst the vast swirl of lights lay a single point of white light.

Target Zero.

Gallifrey.

Soon the Daleks would burn across the stars and the home planet of the Ka Faraq Gatri will fall.

"PREPARE TO ENGAGE STAR DRIVE. TRANSIT TO HYPERSPACE IN - "

Dalek Prime paused as an alarm sounded.

Data streamed through the COM-NET and the Dalek Prime tried accessing the tertiary server in an attempt to locate the stray code.

"TIME TO ANTIMATTER CONTAINMENT FAILURE - SIX POINT FIVE MICRO RELS.  
TIME TO DISABLE INFINITE LOOP - SEVEN POINT THREE MICRO RELS."

Point eight micro rels.

The difference between success and failure.

The Dalek Prime screamed in impotent fury as the magnetic containment field collapsed. Matter collided with antimatter and annihilated each other in a release of energy.

\* \* \* \* \*

For several seconds, the night sky turned to day as the Dalek ship exploded in an expanding sphere of light and heat.

The Doctor lowered his head and looked around him, his face a mask of despair.

"We did it Doctor," said Val.

"I suppose we did, Ms. Rossi." He looked around sadly at the carnage. "Though, if this is victory..."

"You know, I never thought I would feel pity for a Dalek," said the Doctor as he examined the burnt out shell of what used to be the Eldak'e scientist.

"There was nothing you could have done, Doctor." said Tom, trying to reassure the Time Lord.

"Wasn't there Mr Brooker?" said the Doctor. "I let my prejudice get in the way and a lot of people died."

"I once said that good must one day come from the Daleks but at what cost? Genocide," he continued, looking around him at the smoking bodies of the Venirex that littered the village.

"Time to leave, I think."

Gathering his friends with him, the Doctor led them from the village towards the TARDIS.

## EPILOGUE

The smouldering ruins of the Venirex village lay in silence. Even the birds passing overhead did so in complete silence, almost as if in reverence for the dead.

A hundred or so bodies, their forms twisted by neutronic radiation, lay scattered on the ground, their expressions locked in agony.

Then, amidst all that death, something strange, miraculous, began to happen. An almost imperceptible humming noise filled the air and a blue glow started to spread across the corpses of the Venirex, which began slowly to blur, to shift and then to change.

Not regeneration. Renewal.

Suddenly, it was over and where there was once nothing but death, life had returned.

## CODA

The Doctor stood alone in the Vault of Memories.

Alone but for the statues.

How long had he been here?

Hours certainly; days possibly.

He had been vaguely aware of the presence of his two travelling companions but he had simply ignored their pleas for him to...what was the phrase they'd used?

"Snap out of it."

A typical human saying.

All around the vast, cathedral like chamber, were the whispers of the past, memories that he thought were long buried deep inside.

"Do I have the right? Simply touch one wire against the other and that's it. The Daleks cease to exist. Hundreds of millions of people, thousands of generations can live without fear, in peace, and never even know the word Dalek."

The words penetrated him to his very core, stabbing him like a knife and he opened his eyes.

"There was nothing I could do." pleaded the Doctor as he took a step towards the statue depicting his fourth body.

"Time will tell, it always does," came a second, much quieter voice but one that still tore through the Doctor.

For a few moments he gazed into the many faces he had worn before turning away, unable to maintain eye contact.

Shamed, the Doctor strode from the Vault of Memories, leaving the statues and the past behind him.









Investigating a transmission from a unexplored star system at the very edge of known space, the Doctor, Val and Tom discover the Venirex, a primitive warrior tribe who worship their living gods, the peaceful and benevolent Eldak'e. When Tom is struck down by a mysterious and life threatening virus, the Doctor is forced into an uneasy alliance to save him and begins to question his prejudice and hatred of his oldest enemies. However, the Doctor wasn't the only one to discover the transmission and soon new visitors arrive whose plans threaten not only the Venirex but the entire galaxy.

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This is another in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Tenth Doctor as played by Laurent Meyer

ISBN 0-918894-28-X

