

THE

DOCTOR WHO

PROJECT

Rites and Responsibilities

Richard Hoover

Published by Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, BC, Canada

www.thedoctorwhoproject.com

First Published October 2017

Rights and Responsibilities
© 2017 The Doctor Who Project/Richard Hoover

Doctor Who & TARDIS © 1963, 2017 British Broadcasting Corporation

Cover designed by Robert Pollock
Layout & Design by Bob Furnell

The moral right of the authors has been asserted. All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to any persons living or dead is purely coincidental. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any forms by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any other information retrieval system, without prior permission, in writing, from the publisher. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Hannah screamed as the TARDIS console room lurched hard to one side. One of the circular panels lining the walls clattered free, trailing wires behind it. The wires sparked as they tore loose from the wall. A puff of smoke wafted through the air, stinging Hannah's nostrils.

"Press the red one," the Doctor said as he worked frantically at the control console.

Hannah clung tight to her own section of the console as she scanned its controls. She jabbed a finger at a red, square button. Airplane oxygen masks dropped from the ceiling.

"The other red one," the Doctor demanded.

Hannah found another button to try. The Canadian national anthem started playing over hidden speakers. The console room lurched again. It felt like the TARDIS was rattling apart at the seams.

"The *other* –"

"I'm running out of red ones."

The glittering column – the TARDIS's time rotor – situated at the center of the control panel, slowed.

"Hold tight," the Doctor said. "We're about to land."

Before the time rotor fully stopped, a final jolt hit the TARDIS. The floor dropped from beneath Hannah's feet. She slipped and let loose another scream that was cut off as she hit her head on the edge of the control console.

The time rotor came to rest. The console room was still and silent save for the occasional spark from the fallen panel.

"All things considered, we weathered that with grace and aplomb," the Doctor said as he scooped the panel from the floor. He studied the mess of wires protruding from the wall a moment before shoving them inside and pressing the panel back into place. "Mind you, to encounter ripples of such magnitude in the time vortex... Something must be projecting a great deal of temporal disturbance. Most intriguing."

"Yeah, fascinating," Hannah grunted as she pulled herself from the floor. Her head throbbed painfully. "I'm fine by the way."

The Doctor looked over to Hannah. His sharp features rearranged themselves into a look of concern. "Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no. Miss Redfoot –"

Hannah waved his concern away. "It's all right, Doctor. Just a bit of a head –"

"– you're getting blood all over my spotless console room." The Doctor pulled a silk handkerchief from the pocket of his pin striped shirt, thought better of it, and produced a filthy, greasy mechanic's rag from beneath the TARDIS console. He shoved it into Hannah's hands as he bounded past her. "Here. Deal with that blood or we'll be forever cleaning up this place and I, for one, don't appreciate the smell of bleach in the console room."

Hannah scrunched her nose at the rag but pressed it to the side of her head anyway. She winced as she applied pressure to where her skull had met the console. “Doctor. Doctor?”

The Doctor was nowhere in sight. The door leading deeper into the TARDIS swung on its hinges. Hannah was about to start into the labyrinthine corridors of the time machine, when the door banged open and the Doctor bustled back in. He carried an odd loop of white cloth with red patches on its side. He stopped directly before Hannah.

“Why are you holding that rag to your head?” the Doctor demanded.

“You gave it to me to stop the bleeding.”

“I gave it to you to wipe up the blood on the floor before it stains.” The Doctor pointed to several small blood spatters on the floor. “Now, move that rag aside.” He lifted the cloth loop towards Hannah’s temples. “And we settle this into place. There.”

The Doctor pulled the loop of cloth over Hannah’s head like a hair band, covering the cut in Hannah’s temple. Hannah sighed lightly as she felt a cool, soothing sensation spread from her wound. The throbbing in her skull receded.

“Mm, that feels better,” Hannah said.

“Medical bandage,” the Doctor replied brushing off his hands. “It will treat and medicate the area of injury. Best to leave it on until those red patches turn white. That’s the medication, you know.”

Hannah didn’t know, but she nodded. As the Doctor busied himself at the TARDIS control console, Hannah hunted among the wild assortment of souvenirs the Doctor had arrayed about the console room. He didn’t have a mirror, but he did have an old brass telescope that had slipped from its tripod and clattered to the floor. Hannah heaved the telescope onto its mount. She checked her wavy reflection in the shiny surface of the brass tube. She studied the thick medical bandage encircling her head and made a face.

“Not very attractive,” Hannah said.

“Mm? Well, what can you expect?” the Doctor said without taking his eyes from whatever he was absorbed by at the console. “You are only human.”

“Hey – ”

“No time for that,” the Doctor cut the young woman off. He hurried to a chalkboard in a wooden frame that was mounted on wheels. The chalkboard had fallen against one of the TARDIS walls from the time machine’s wild flight. The Doctor straightened the chalkboard and pulled his long, warm, dark coat from where it was folded across the top. “Come along now. There’s a temporal ripple to investigate.”

“Oh, goody,” Hannah rolled her eyes. The Doctor didn’t see. He was already through the TARDIS doors.

Hannah stepped from the TARDIS to find the Doctor staring at the area surrounding them, the faintest hint of a smile on his face. Hannah followed the Doctor’s gaze and gasped.

Overhead, nebula gasses of reds and greens and purples roiled together in beautiful patterns. Clusters of stars twinkled through the gasses, casting shifting shadows that resembled a graceful herd of horses running across some interstellar meadow. Cool light from the nearby sun reflected off silver asteroids that floated and spun in the great void.

The view was awesome. It was experiences like this that Hannah had hoped for when she’d insisted on traveling with the Doctor.

After the initial thrill from the celestial display above, Hannah took a moment to study her more immediate environs. Hannah, the Doctor, and the TARDIS were poised on a metal platform perhaps thirty meters across. There was an odd crystalline pattern to the deep blue metal as if it had been spun by some mechanical arachnid rather than welded into place. The platform was connected by a long, uncovered walkway to a central hub in the distance.

Hannah moved to the railing lining the walkway and looked down. The celestial tableau continued right underneath the platform. The young woman turned to the Doctor.

“Some sort of space station, Doctor?”

The Doctor tucked his hands into his coat pockets and joined Hannah at the railing. “Yes, indeed. Very good, Miss Redfoot.”

“There aren’t any walls or windows.” Hannah frowned. “How are we breathing?”

That faint smile was on the Doctor’s face again. He arched his eyebrows at the young woman.

Hannah turned her gaze aloft. She watched the small asteroids floating near the station. One of them tumbled towards the central hub. At a certain point – Hannah didn’t trust herself to accurately judge distances from here – the asteroid changed course, as if it had encountered a wall of rubber and had been gently bounced aside.

“A force field?”

“Bound atmosphere, actually,” the Doctor said starting along the walkway. “Electrical excitation of the atmospheric particles ensures their co-adhesion against the surrounding vacuum.”

Hannah halted in her tracks and stared at the Doctor.

The Doctor sighed and called over his shoulder as he wandered away, “Yes. A force field, to you lay people.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” Hannah asked as she hurried to catch up with the Doctor. “What if it fails?”

“Then the atmosphere boils away into space and we all suffocate,” the Doctor shrugged.

“That isn’t reassuring.”

“Do you fret about what keeps an airplane up when you go flying?” the Doctor asked.

“Well, no, but –”

“Then don’t worry about the atmosphere,” the Doctor admonished. “You’re much too young to be so stressed. Now, what have we here?”

As the Doctor and Hannah had progressed along the walkway, slivers of floating light had formed in the air around them. They were like sparkling shards of glass but incorporeal, unreal. Hannah extended her fingers towards one and it floated away on an eddy of air.

Hannah followed the glittering fragment. She peered into its depths. It was like looking through a tiny window. She could just discern a dark room, a cavern perhaps. A figure was standing in the room. It turned and Hannah was surprised to see it was herself, holding a small flashlight.

“Doctor, have a look at –” Hannah broke off with a scream. An almost human sized insect dropped from the roof of the dark room towards the flashlight-carrying Hannah below. Hannah – the real Hannah – staggered back from the floating shard before she could see what happened next. She put a hand to her racing heart.

The Doctor joined Hannah, his eyes squeezed in a wince and his finger digging in his ear as if to clear it. “I have a simple technique you can use whenever you feel like screaming: Don’t.”

Hannah crossed her arms over her chest and glared at the Doctor. “I don’t scream.”

The Doctor only shrugged.

“Doctor, I saw myself. In one of these, these shards.”

“Well, of course,” the Doctor said as he eyed the shards suspiciously. “Time splinters. Something very near here is mismanaging time. Badly. Very badly.”

“Or someone?” Hannah said sweetly as she eyed the Doctor.

“I know what I’m doing, Miss Redfoot,” the Doctor said, drawing himself upright. “Whoever is doing this is an imbecile.”

“All right,” Hannah conceded, as she and the Doctor resumed their stroll along the walkway. “So what *are* time splinters?”

“Splinters in time,” The Doctor replied. “I rather thought that was self-evident from the name.” The Doctor gestured about him, sending more of the splinters wafting away. “Think of them as glimpses into events happening elsewhere, elsewhen.”

“I saw myself.”

“Of course,” the Doctor replied. “The splinters are affected by the local temporal field of whoever’s near them. Just as every individual exerts a small but measurable – with the right tools – influence over the local gravitational force, so too do they exert a similar pressure on the time stream. These splinters are highly susceptible to such pressures, stretching both forwards and backwards through time.”

Hannah nodded, not really listening to the Doctor drone on about temporal this and spatial that. She studied the little splinters that she and the Doctor passed. Within one, she saw herself playing as a small child. Another showed her and the Doctor running towards the TARDIS – well, that could happen any time really. A third showed an aged, heavysset woman with a wrinkled face, smiling as if she understood some great cosmic joke. Hannah pressed a hand to the smooth skin of her own cheek as she realized the old, shriveled-apple faced woman must be, or *would* be, her.

Hannah turned to the Doctor to comment on what she’d seen, but her eyes were distracted by the shards orbiting the Time Lord. Hannah wondered if they were broken somehow. Only a few of them showed the Doctor. Most of them showed strangers. Here a man with a neatly trimmed moustache and goatee, wearing a blue waistcoat detailed in pinpricks of starlight. There a curly haired, grinning face, surrounded by an impossibly long scarf. Another showed a small, leather faced, older gentleman that somehow put her in mind of the old Charlie Chaplin movies Hannah’s dad had made her watch as a kid.

A splinter floated before Hannah’s face. The picture within it morphed to show Hannah, wearing her medical bandage and an unflattering pair of grey coveralls, standing within a large room made from the same dark crystalline metal as the walkway beneath her feet. The Doctor was there too. At least, she thought it was the Doctor. His clothes were different too. He was clad in flowing orange-brown robes instead of the dark coat he presently wore. From one side of the image a purple energy beam appeared, stabbing towards the Doctor. Hannah saw her other self leap between the beam and the Doctor and –

“Stop it,” the Doctor said, pulling Hannah away from the splinter.

“But Doctor –”

“It doesn’t do to know too much about one’s future.” The Doctor paused to consider his words. “Or potential future.”

“Potential future?”

“These splinters show possible futures. Possible presents. Possible pasts. Well, after all, we have all of time and space to deal with here. Even so, it’s not wise to see the alternatives. Self-

fulfilling prophecies and all that rubbish. Ah, here we are. The command nexus. Let's see if we can't get some answers to all of this, shall we?"

Chronographer Atticus released a fluting sigh. He rubbed tired eyes and turned his gaze to the picture of his family nearby. There was no way to know if he would be successful. And even if he was, it was doubtful that the other him would know.

Atticus was surrounded by banks of instruments and machinery wrought from the same spun metal as the rest of the *Continuity Station*. Here, at the central nexus, a latticework roof extended above Atticus's head. Polarized windows were set in place. Atticus had them dimmed. He tried to tell himself it was to reduce eyestrain from the blazing sun outside. The truth was, he couldn't bear to look upon the gasses and asteroids that surrounded the station.

The computer before Atticus chirruped, bringing his attention back to his work. The analysis of his latest series of tests was complete. The fatigue of long hours of work left him as he studied the results.

Atticus tapped a digital button on his display and spoke to the air, "Chronographer's log. Test results forty-two. Success. At last, success. The *Continuity Station*, positioned it is for prime temporal conductance. Ready are the shards for alignment. Proximity of the sepulcher lends field weight sufficient for all purposes. Family of mine will soon be restored."

Atticus stroked the picture of his family. He hoped that at least some version of him would see his wife and hatchlings again. Even so, his stomach felt empty as he considered his next words for the official log. He wondered if it was more confession than science report.

"Ready is the Chronoerasure. Final alignment approaches and then..." Atticus trailed off.

"And then?" an unfamiliar voice demanded.

Atticus whirled on his perch.

Two primates stepped into the control nexus from one of the collector walkways. The lead primate wore a dark coat and carried an air of authority. The smaller primate wore close fitting trousers and a short sleeved shirt that exposed her hairless arms.

Atticus squawked in surprise but did his best to regain his composure. His hand edged towards a drawer in his desk. "You will be telling me who you are. How you are here."

The larger primate – Atticus guessed it to be the male of the species – bustled over to the displays and instrument panels that surrounded Atticus. He answered Atticus's question with, "I'm the Doctor and this is my associate, Miss Hannah Redfoot."

"Lo." the smaller primate – possibly female – waved her hand.

"Han-ar-edfoot?" Atticus tried the sound of the odd name.

"Well, now. This *is* interesting," the primate called the Doctor interrupted. "Isn't this interesting, Miss Redfoot? Some sort of primitive time vortex scanner. And with enough gravimetric distortion to expand the focus to the history of an entire planet. That would be moderately clever, if *I* wasn't in the room. I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name."

Atticus rocked back on his perch at the stream of words from this primate. "Er, Chronographer Atticus." Some of what the Doctor had said finally registered. "Primitive? This is the most advanced vortex invigilation device ever created."

"Doctor," the female primate whispered to her companion as she stared at Atticus, "it's like an oversized talking parakeet."

“Mm, yes?” the Doctor replied to Hannah’s parakeet remark with a shrug. “And to him you’re a talking, hairless ape. Am I right, Chronographer Atticus?”

The alien before the Doctor and Hannah had an odd beak, not rigid like a normal bird’s, but flexible almost like lips. Fine green and blue feathers gave its narrow face a mottled appearance. They trailed behind its head into an indigo crest. The alien wore a white jumpsuit and heavy, wide boots. No wings were in evidence anywhere. It half sat, half stood on a padded T-shaped post. The word *perch* came to Hannah’s mind. The alien nodded in response to the Doctor.

“Yes, I rather thought so,” the Doctor continued. “And he’s a ‘he,’ not an ‘it.’ Leave your limited human prejudices behind, Ms. Redfoot.”

Ms. Redfoot. The Doctor only called her *Ms. Redfoot* when he wanted to annoy her. And the most annoying thing was that it always worked.

“Now, then,” the Doctor clapped his hands together causing both Hannah and Atticus to jump and focus entirely on him. “Chronographer Atticus, why don’t you tell me why you’re focusing so intently on this particular planet? And why you’re sending disturbances into the time vortex?”

Hannah watched Atticus purse his beak. It was an odd expression to see on the face of a bird. The Chronographer replied with, “Critical is this planet to my past. To the past of all Dackars. And to their present. To their future.”

“Dackars, of course,” the Doctor spun briefly to face Hannah. “Our good Chronographer Atticus is of the Dackars. One of the most creative races in the eastern galaxies. Although, I had no idea your people dabbled in the study of time, Chronographer.”

“My people, my family, they study nothing anymore,” Atticus said. His eyes drooped and were glassy. Hannah wondered if birds could cry.

“What does that mean?” Hannah asked.

The Doctor didn’t answer. He seemed content to let Hannah deal with Atticus while he, the Doctor, took a closer look at the computer displays arranged about them.

“Chronographer Atticus?” Hannah couldn’t believe she was talking to a bird – bird-man – nearly her own size. Just a typical day traveling in the TARDIS, she considered. “Why don’t your family study anymore?”

“They cannot,” Atticus looked at her mournfully. Hannah saw him swallow hard. He tapped a couple of controls on the monitor next to him.

A muffled hum came from above. Hannah looked up to see the blackened windows turn transparent. Beyond was the breathtaking view of coloured gasses and glittering asteroids.

“It’s beautiful,” Hannah said of the display. She couldn’t interpret the look that Atticus gave her.

“The sepulcher,” Atticus whispered, sending a chill down Hannah’s spine. There was something so very final in the way he said it. “The resting place of all my people.”

“Resting place?” Hannah shook her head. “I don’t understand.”

Atticus nodded. “These gasses. These rocks in space. Poor monument to the passing of what your mate calls one of the most creative races.”

“Oh, he’s not my mate,” Hannah hastened to say, pointing at the Doctor. “But are you saying... that is, are your people dead?”

Chronographer Atticus nodded as he reclined on his perch. “That which you see beyond the station, that is all that remains of Dackar. My planet. Destroyed. They have all passed.” After

a moment the avian seemed to brighten. “Today that changes.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Hannah could see the Doctor was listening quite intently now, even if he wasn’t facing Atticus.

“What do you mean?” Hannah asked.

“Studied a long time I have. Now, today, you will witness history. Or more, the restoration of history. The return of Dackar as a planet. As a race.”

“Oh, yes?” the Doctor interjected into the conversation. “Your time scope’s focused on the past is it? And how exactly are you planning to reform your planet there? Tweezers?”

If a bird could look smug, Atticus was that bird. “Always harder than destruction is creation, even for the Dackars. A closer look is needed, Doctor.”

Atticus pointed to the computer display the Doctor was standing next to. Hannah moved to the Doctor’s side. The display showed a grey planet orbiting dual suns. Various numerical counters overlaid the image. Hannah couldn’t make anything from the numbers but there was one word on the screen that she could read.

“Banas?” Hannah looked questioningly at the Doctor. “What’s a Banas?”

The Doctor stood trembling. His hands tightened into fists, his knuckles turning white. Fury coloured every feature of his face. Hannah took an involuntary step back as the Doctor pivoted to face Atticus. If the Doctor’s gaze could burn, Atticus would be nothing but a smoking pile of ash. The Doctor whispered a whisper that carried the length and breadth of the command nexus, “It’s genocide.”

“The only way,” Atticus replied. The bird-man puffed out his chest. It was a pale sign of dominance compared to the waves of anger radiating from the Doctor.

“Your people are done. Face that truth.”

“I will make my own truth,” Atticus replied. It was hard to read expressions in those avian features, but Hannah sensed a resolve come over the alien scientist as iron hard as the Doctor’s own.

“Doctor,” Hannah interrupted the two scientists, “what’s going on?”

The Doctor pointed to the center of the control nexus. The large room was octagonal in shape. Walkways, like the one the TARDIS had landed on, extended from each wall into the space surrounding the station. Within the nexus was a floor of sorts, lowered a few steps from the main walkways to the array of computer equipment Chronographer Atticus had assembled. Ringed by the machinery was an open space some fifteen meters across. The time splinters that floated about the station were concentrated there, more of them and larger than elsewhere. They glittered enticingly before Hannah’s gaze.

Hannah was so absorbed in the sparkly spectacle it took her a moment to realize what the Doctor was truly pointing at. Suspended from the ceiling high above the splinters was a large metal sphere with spines protruding from it. It reminded Hannah of pictures she’d seen of old naval mines from World War II.

“Is that a bomb?” Hannah asked.

Atticus nodded. “Clever, yes? One bomb in the present can cause outrage and anger. One bomb in the past,” Atticus clacked his beak together, “can destroy an enemy before it evolves. Not genocide, Doctor. Denotes does genocide the systematic slaughter of a race, as happened to mine. But preventing an enemy from at all coming into being? No, not genocide. How can someone die if they were never born?”

The Doctor pressed a finger to his lips and nodded. Hannah couldn’t believe it. It looked like the Doctor was agreeing with Atticus.

“You’re right,” the Doctor said. “Not genocide.” He considered the control panels standing near him. With a sharp kick he toppled one of them to the ground. “Madness!”

Atticus wasn’t the fool the Doctor clearly took him for. He, Atticus, had his own qualms about what he was doing, but eliminating the Banasi was the only way to restore his family. He knew. He’d considered all other ideas.

It came as no surprise that the primate would try to stop Atticus. As the Doctor lunged for the control panels, Atticus threw the other primate to one side. He winced as she screamed shrilly, but kept his focus on his goal.

Atticus had fought in the wars against the Banasi until everything he’d cared for had been destroyed in that final conflict. When his planet exploded, it was only by sheer chance that Atticus had survived, manning his assault fighter. He’d been a pilot in the space corps. Even so, he’d had basic soldier training and had been issued with the tools of that trade. He’d kept his blaster as a reminder of what he’d learned that day: might makes right.

Atticus pulled the drawer of his desk open. The blaster glittered inside, silent but deadly. The chronographer grabbed the weapon as the Doctor smashed another console.

Han-ar-edfoot rose to her feet before Atticus and lunged at him.

Atticus batted the female primate away. He spun his blaster on the Doctor and let loose a volley of purple energy beams. The Doctor leapt aside, the blaster beams burning smoking holes into more valuable equipment. Atticus squawked in rage. Light from the floating time splinters made it hard to focus on his enemy.

Atticus retargeted the Doctor. He squeezed the trigger of his blaster just as Han-ar-edfoot grabbed his leg and pulled. The blast arced towards the Doctor, who impossibly ducked at the last moment. The purple energy beam sailed squarely into one of the time splinters right behind the Doctor.

Atticus had just a moment to see an elderly primate with a walking stick through the splinter before light poured forth, blinding everyone in the nexus.

“Oh, do hurry up, Grandfather,” said the elfin-faced girl with the unruly dark hair as she hurried along the dimly lit corridor.

“Hush, child,” the Doctor scolded. He followed in the girl’s wake, his frock coat flapping around him as his walking stick *click-clicked* on the marble floor. “Do you want to alert security, mm?”

“Oh, Grandfather,” the girl smiled impishly.

“Now, none of that.” The Doctor wagged a finger. “How, I allowed you to talk me into this I really can’t imagine, Susan.” *Susan*. Of course the Doctor had harrumphed and postured when the girl had chosen the human name for herself, but secretly he was pleased. She was so much like him, the only one of his relatives who seemed to truly understand him. Quick minded and quick witted. Inquisitive and impatient. Not that he would overindulge her ego by telling her that. Yes, ego. The Doctor was quite heartened to know that *he* didn’t suffer from a surfeit of that condition.

Grandfather and granddaughter crept along the darkened corridor, lined with etched green

stone and detailed by a checkerboard pattern of marble slabs in the floor. The two were sneaking through the bowels of the great Academy of their home planet, Gallifrey. The layer of dust covering the floor bore mute testimony to the scant number of people who ventured down this far. Most Time Lords felt it better to watch than to do. The Doctor snorted at the notion. In his mind's eye, he pictured them sitting redolent in plush loungers, trays of nibblies – a human word that Susan had introduced to him – sitting at hand. Fat and lazy, the Doctor thought. Well, that certainly wasn't going to be him or Susan.

Susan was several steps ahead. She stopped short at a junction of three halls.

"Which way, Grandfather?" Susan asked in her high voice as she looked along the two paths offered to them.

"This way, child," the Doctor led the way along the right corridor without missing a step. "You really must cultivate a better sense of direction, Su..." The Doctor trailed off as the pair came to the end of the corridor. A single door opened onto an empty storage closet.

"The other way, Grandfather?" Susan asked, trying to hide a smile.

"Let this be a lesson to you, young lady," the Doctor said as he turned with all the dignity he could muster. "Never allow yourself to be distracted from your goals."

"Yes, Grandfather," Susan replied, the teasing smile in full bloom on her face. The Doctor chose to ignore it.

The two retraced their steps to the junction, taking the other path this time. Their way was lit by wrought iron wall sconces that emitted a faint, sourceless light. It was night in the Academy and most everyone had retired to their chambers for the evening. The Doctor hoped that would allow him and Susan to reach their destination unhindered.

"What are they like?" Susan asked as she helped the Doctor along the hall. "The time machines, I mean. I've never seen one before."

"Mm? Like?" the Doctor grunted. "Rather like the rest of Time Lord society. Dull and boring to look at. Plain grey, capsules."

"But they're supposed to change, aren't they?"

"Yes, yes," the Doctor patted Susan's hand where she was supporting his elbow. "When we arrive somewhere. When we arrive. Then they change to blend into the environment."

"Oh, I can't wait to see that."

The two continued along the corridor until it opened onto a large, darkened warehouse space. The Doctor and Susan were high up on a gantry of sorts that had simple metal stairs descending to the warehouse floor. Within the cavernous room sat row upon row of neatly arranged grey cylinders. Gallifreyan time machines – TT Capsules – in their natural form.

Susan turned and grinned. "Oh, they're wonderful, Grandfather."

The Doctor waved a dismissive hand. "Settle down child. Let's see. Yes, I think we'd rather do well with something in the type 50 range."

The Doctor and Susan froze at the sound of a thump echoing through the cavernous space. Another thump followed.

Susan raised her eyebrows. She turned and wandered down one of the rows of parked time machines.

"Susan," the Doctor hissed, "come back here." But the girl had already disappeared among the time machines.

The Doctor followed after his errant granddaughter. With each step, he tapped his walking stick irritably on the ground. He made a mental note to curb her tendency of wandering off.

"There you are, child," the Doctor said as he circled around one of the gathered time

machines. He found Susan studying another one, her head canted to one side.

The vehicle rocked almost imperceptibly and thumped on the floor again.

“It’s alive,” Susan said with wide-eyed excitement.

“Rubbish,” the Doctor replied. “Come away from there. It’s clearly faulty, rocking about like that.”

Susan pressed her hand to the grey surface of the time capsule. Faint streaks of vermilion spread outwards along the sides of the time machine from the tips of Susan’s fingers. The young woman laughed, a not unpleasant sound to the Doctor’s ears.

“Oh, Grandfather, let’s take this one,” Susan said, her eyes large and pleading. “I think it likes me.”

“Likes you? Likes you?” The Doctor sighed. “Well, these machines *are* mildly telepathic. And the type 40s were rather, hmm, eccentric.”

“Like us,” Susan whispered.

The Doctor saw there was no dissuading her. And it did seem as if the time machine before them truly approved of his granddaughter.

“Oh, very well,” the Doctor said. “Let me go find the key.”

The Doctor had taken some steps from Susan when a new sound filled the air. The Doctor turned and saw Susan staring at the source of the sound. In the space above her, small flickers of white lightning sparked into existence. They sizzled and popped and rolled about as if tracing the edges of some unseen window.

“What is it, Grandfa –”

Susan’s words were cut off as the flickering lightning intensified and exploded outwards, opening a rip in the fabric of space and time. The Doctor saw a blue, metallic room through the rent, back-lit by the gasses of a broad nebula. He saw a man in a dark coat and a young woman grappling with an alien bird. A purple energy beam shot towards the opening. It infused itself into the lightning defining the edge of the time splinter. The energy beam circled and circled and circled the edges, widening and brightening with each revolution. The edges wobbled, holding back the ever increasing energy.

The Doctor started to call a warning to Susan. He didn’t get a word out. The searingly bright purple beam tore from the splinter, bearing down on Susan. There was a massive explosion. The Doctor was lifted into the air. He was flung bodily aside and smashed into the unyielding stone walls of the warehouse. Bones cracked and splintered. He felt a flutter in one of his hearts.

The Doctor slumped to the ground. His body tingled all over like an army of ants marching across his skin. So this was what regeneration felt like. Just before surrendering to unconsciousness, the Doctor’s last thought was, *Susan*.

Hannah had instinctively rolled away from Atticus and shielded her eyes when the bright explosion filled the nexus. As her vision cleared, she looked around for the Doctor.

“Doctor?” Hannah called. No answer.

Hannah looked towards the time splinter that Atticus had shot. It had lost the ephemeral quality of the other splinters, looking more like a door floating in the air. Glowing purple energy coursed around the edges of the time splinter. Small trails of lightning crackled from the energy, charging the surrounding air with static electricity. Hannah felt the hairs on her arm and the back

of her neck raise. The splinter itself fluctuated in size. Expanding. Contracting. Expanding. Contracting.

“*Doctor?*” Hannah screamed for the Time Lord.

“No more is your Doctor, Han-ar-edfoot,” Atticus announced. The shock wave from the explosion had knocked him against his computer desk. Some of his feathers were bent, others were slightly singed. He picked himself from the floor and scabbled after his dropped blaster. “And so the same shall be said of you. I *will* have my family restored.”

Hannah leapt to her feet. She raced past Atticus, kicking his blaster away as she ran. She stopped short of the flickering time splinter, covering her eyes against its glare. The image it showed seemed to be on fast forward. She saw a stranger lying in a bed in what seemed to be a hospital room. Through a window in the room she saw a sun rising and setting with frightening speed.

Hannah turned her gaze from the time splinter. She hunted around for the Doctor, but he wasn't there. Maybe he'd ducked behind one of the instrument panels. Hannah was sure he'd been clear of the beam Atticus had shot at him. Well, mostly sure.

“It ends,” Atticus announced.

Hannah whirled to find the bird-man training his blaster on her. She took a step back. Her foot landed on a metal cylinder that had fallen from one of the instrument panels the Doctor had wrecked. The cylinder rolled from beneath her foot. With a short cry, Hannah toppled over backwards.

She steeled herself for the impact on the hard metal deck of the space station. The deck seemed to be a long way in coming.

Finally, she landed flat on her back. A cloud of dry dirt rose around her, getting into her nose, her mouth, her eyes. She coughed against the choking dirt and rubbed her face to clear her vision. She wondered how quickly Atticus would be able to fire at her again.

As her vision cleared, Hannah found herself sitting very still. An irrational fear took her that if she moved the world might very well disappear. Again.

Gone were the woven metal confines of the *Continuity Station*. Gone was the slightly antiseptic smell of recycled oxygen. Gone too was the panorama of stars and gasses and asteroids. In their place lay a dusty plain of orange dirt, the occasional sprout of red grass seen here and there. Above, a faintly green sky sported a few puffy, white clouds. A warm, dry breeze swept across the landscape. The chirrup of alien insects buzzed in Hannah's ears.

Hannah had no idea where she was. A quick scan of the surrounding countryside showed that wherever she was she was alone.

“Rebellion on Gallifrey.” President Quella shook her head as she gazed through the circular window of her office atop the tallest of the Citadel's great spires. The rest of the city was spread below her. Sunlight glittered from the surrounding spires. The ethereal perfection of the buildings disguised the upheaval that was pervading ever more into Gallifreyan society. “It's scarcely conceivable.”

“It's here,” Quella's guest spoke around the biscuit he'd popped in his mouth. “So I can conceive it really well. Time Lords under your administration have become far too reckless.”

Quella pressed her lips together in irritation as she turned towards her guest. He was seated on a plush, pastel lounge. The sand colour of the fabric was echoed upon the walls of Quella's

office. A large glass dome above admitted diffused light, casting a warm glow over everything in the room.

“As I recall,” Quella replied, arching an eyebrow, “you were rather reckless in your Academy days as well, Admin.”

The Admin sniffed and helped himself to another biscuit. Quella didn’t care much for the man, but propriety and her position meant that she had to at least pretend to be a good host.

“The operative word there being *were*,” the Admin replied. Jowls were just beginning to form beneath his chin. They jiggled ever so slightly as he spoke. “I dealt with my recklessness centuries ago. What are you doing to deal with the recklessness now?”

Quella smoothed her platinum presidential robes and took a steadying breath. “I am waiting for the report from my Administrator. The man responsible for the maintenance and smooth running of the entire computer network connecting Gallifreyan society.”

Quella seated herself in the lounge across from the Admin and tried to make herself comfortable. Her back ached more and more these days and her right hip was noticeably less flexible than it had once been. The Admin had regenerated only recently and it had Quella thinking about how *she* was feeling rather thin lately. She adjusted her once raven black hair – now a striking silver – and regarded the Admin.

The Admin had finished his second biscuit. He reached for a third with one hand, while scooping up his teacup from the table with another. He took a genteel sip of the tea before answering, “The entirety of time and space are quite extensive, Madam President. A plethora of places to conceal oneself. And she *did* graduate from the Academy with a triple first. She knows better than most how we operate and how best to hide her presence from our scrutiny.”

Quella looked to the window again, not wanting to watch her visitor fill his mouth with biscuits. “Can you at least answer the question of whether she still lives?”

Quella could hear the shrug in the Admin’s reply. “Wouldn’t it solve many of your problems if she didn’t?”

Quella couldn’t help but laugh. “Admin, you may be a genius when it comes to computers and technology –”

“Madam President flatters me,” the Admin said, puffing himself up.

“– but you *are* hopeless where people and politics are concerned.”

“Politics,” the Admin snorted. “A myriad of protocols meant to shroud the meaning of what people really want to say. And as for people, don’t even get me started.”

Before Quella could respond, her door chime trilled. She adjusted the collar of her robes before calling towards the door, “Enter.”

The door opened and a commander of the chancellery guard marched in. Dull brown hair was combed back smooth over his scalp. His eyes were an indeterminate colour that went with the soft features of his face. He stopped short at the sight of the Admin, who gave no notice of the newcomer.

“Yes,” Quella prompted. She fished through her memory for the man’s name. “Commander Jenric?”

“Madam President,” Commander Jenric saluted, “urgent news.”

“Why do people never barge in with trivial news?” the Admin said before biting into another biscuit.

The commander glared daggers at the Admin before regaining his composure. He reported, “A time splinter has been detected, Madam President. In the wilds beyond the Citadel walls.”

“A time splinter? Caused by the rebels?” Quella questioned as she straightened in her seat.

She tried to keep her composure as a short twinge of pain lanced along her back.

The commander shifted where he stood. "We are, as yet... uncertain."

"Then I'd suggest you investigate, commander," Quella said with a decisive nod. "Investigate."

Hannah checked the time on her phone. She'd been walking for close to an hour. Well, limping really. She'd landed hard when she fell from the time splinter. She didn't think anything was broken, but she wasn't going to be running any marathons any time soon.

The landscape she found herself in was sparse, an expanse of dirt with a few scraggly plants struggling to survive. At least the vegetation suggested water was nearby.

Hannah had waited for some twenty minutes with the hope the Doctor would arrive. He hadn't. She'd decided she'd best look for shelter until she could figure out a better plan.

Returning to the space station wasn't a possibility. The time splinter she'd tumbled from was still in evidence, but it had wafted several meters into the air, well beyond Hannah's reach. Its size had been in a state of flux on the *Continuity Station*. Since Hannah had arrived that had changed. The splinter had slowly contracted to the size of a garbage can lid with no sign of stopping. Not that it really mattered. Even if Hannah could get back, Chronographer Atticus would still be waiting with his ray gun.

The plain Hannah found herself in was almost featureless, although it did rise to a crest in one direction. With no better criteria to judge her location on, she'd decided to head for the crest. Hopefully, when she reached the top, she'd have a better view of her surroundings. Maybe even a sign of civilization or at least shelter somewhere. The plain was pleasant enough to be in now, but who knew what it would be like when night fell. And no telling when the weather would turn sour.

Hannah sighed and counted her blessings. At least she'd landed on a planet with air, atmosphere, and gravity.

It was warmer on the plain than Hannah was used to and the greater than average gravity weighed upon her. She was sweating and a little winded by the time she reached the top of the crest. The sight beyond made her forget her discomfort.

There in the distance rose a great city. Tall spires sparkled in the sunlight. Faint specks could be made out flitting through the air like insects. Some sort of hovercrafts, Hannah supposed. The empty plain surrounding the young woman made it difficult to tell how far away the city was. The down slope of the crest was much steeper than the up and littered with sharp, loose shale. It ended in a shallow ravine that Hannah would have to climb out of if she wanted to reach the city. And she *did* want to reach the city.

Hannah perched herself on the edge of a low boulder at the top of the crest. She'd give herself ten minutes before trying to find a way down.

It took a few moments for the growing buzz to register. A tiny cloud of insects had followed Hannah as she'd walked from the time splinter. She'd tried swatting them away, but they fluttered beyond her reach. They hadn't seemed dangerous so she'd rather put them from her mind.

This new buzzing was different. More grating and somehow artificial.

Hannah turned her gaze towards the city again. One of the floating dots she'd noticed before was drawing closer. Her heart beat faster as she realized it was heading straight for her.

Hannah pushed herself to her feet. She was about to wave to the hovercraft when a voice boomed from a speaker it sported.

“Halt,” the voice commanded. “Prepare yourself for detention.”

That didn’t sound good. The plain behind Hannah was wide open. No shelter. Nowhere to hide. Her only chance was in the rocky ravine below.

Hannah staggered down the sharp slope towards the bottom of the ravine. Rocks skittered away as her sneakers slapped them. It was treacherous footing, to say the least. Above, the voice from the hovercraft was commanding her to stop.

The bottom of the ravine showed signs of once having been a riverbed. An overhanging escarpment had been carved into the rock by the passage of water at one time. Hannah spotted a crack, possibly a cave, in the side of the eroded wall. No telling how far in it went, but it looked to be the only cover at hand.

She had almost reached the dry riverbed when her foot landed on a loose chunk of shale. The rock twisted from under her foot, tripping her to the ground. She screamed and rolled painfully to the bottom of the ravine, her arms scratched by the gravel, her body poked by sharp rocks.

Hannah spat dirt from her mouth. As the dust cleared, her first vision was of red leather boots standing before her face. She raised her head and her eyes focused on the blaster pistol pointed square at her.

“You were ordered to halt,” the commanding voice from the hovercraft said, “rebel.”

People and politics, President Quella had said. The Admin wasn’t good with people or politics.

The Admin couldn’t argue. People were messy, unruly, and undisciplined. And stupid. Don’t forget stupid. Politics were even worse, but only because they were created by people to manage people.

The Admin much preferred the cold, solid logic of computers. Computers made sense. Computers did exactly what you told them to do – requiring that you, of course, told them *exactly* what you intended they do.

No, the Admin was quite happy leaving the messy world of people to the likes of Quella to deal with. Even so, a stubborn kernel of curiosity within the Admin wanted to know more about this time splinter and the person who had been detected coming through it.

The Admin had taken his leave from President Quella shortly after the commander of the guard had departed. With the intruder detected, Quella had better things to do than feed the Admin tea and biscuits.

The Admin hurried through the winding corridors of the Academy, his orange-brown robes flapping about him. Students hastened from his path. He smiled at that. They learned quickly, those students, not to impede the man who had absolute access to the computer system and who could assign failing grades to them on all their transcripts. Not that he ever had yet, but a few well-placed rumours in the early days of his posting had been sufficient to stop any Academy pranks against him for centuries.

He entered his office, a windowless room in the bowels of the Academy. The Admin liked his privacy. And his clutter. Boxes of old computer equipment, design documents, and assorted other detritus from his many lifetimes here were strewn about the floor. He kept meaning to organize the mess but somehow never did.

The only clear spot in the office was around the pedestal next to the door. He stopped, as he

always did, to regard the bust set atop the pedestal. The corner of the room in which it was set was lined with the same green-black stone as the rest of the room. Here, though, the Admin had seen to it that lights were embedded in the walls to bathe the marble bust in brightness. It had been so long since the Admin had seen that face in the flesh. These days, he sometimes wondered if he'd only dreamt her.

That kernel of curiosity nagged at the Admin. He turned his gaze from the bust and crossed to his desk, a large slab of dark stone matching the walls of the office. Assorted computer displays and control panels were scattered haphazardly on the desk.

In theory, the network of security cameras that wound throughout the Citadel – the great city of Gallifrey that housed the Academy – was the purview of Castellan Azter, head of the security forces. In practice, Castellan Azter shared this distinction, though she didn't know it, with the Admin, who had neatly sliced himself into the system some five or six regenerations back. Although a few simple rumours and threats were enough to keep students away, the Admin's colleagues were a different matter. Someone always wanted something of him. An upgraded holoviewer. Increased access to the Matrix. Reservations to *Continuance*, the preeminent restaurant in the Citadel – it was said you needed to book a reservation no later than your third regeneration if you wanted a chance at a table before you died. The Admin had tired of the requests so he'd hacked himself access to the security cameras to keep tabs on when his colleagues were making the long trek to his office to ask for favours.

The Admin had kept his access to the security system secret, although he suspected that President Quella knew. Some of her requests – the only requests the Admin didn't mind fulfilling, or at least didn't dare *refuse* to fulfill – had the built in assumption that the Admin could see anywhere in the Citadel. Those requests had been coming more frequently as rebellious sentiments had been on the rise.

The Admin keyed in a series of search parameters on the control panels before him. Several camera views appeared on the main display on the desk. The Admin enlarged one depicting the security air car bay just as Commander Jenric was returning from his sojourn into the field. The commander stepped from the air car, leading a procession of four other, red-clad chancellery guards.

The guards were arrayed around a tall woman with olive skin and long, dark brown hair, secured behind her head with a wooden clip. The woman's hands were bound in front of her by energy cuffs. She wore a dirt stained t-shirt, exposing stone scratched arms. A choker of bone, beads, and silver was secured about her neck. A standard issue medical bandage was wrapped around her temples. She looked more than a little anxious as she was marched through the tall halls of the upper reaches of the Citadel.

The Admin snagged a clear shot of her face from the security footage. He tapped commands into his control console to initiate a facial match. After a few moments, the computer came back with the response that the woman's identity wasn't contained anywhere within the computer systems. Not a Time Lady then. Or at least, not a legitimate child of Gallifrey.

The Admin ran a quick medical scan of the young woman. Just a child, barely twenty-five years of age. Only one heart. That was interesting, though it hardly helped narrow where the girl might be from. Most of the sentient species of the galaxies were cursed with but a single heart. It was probably why they were so deficient intellectually: not enough blood pumping to the brain.

The Admin dialed up the audio reception on the security cameras as the girl was led into one of the minor council chambers where President Quella, and a couple of her colleagues, waited.

He settled in to watch and listen to the proceedings.

“I do not like this, Madam President,” Castellan Azter said as she adjusted the onyx skullcap that matched her robes. “I really do not. This woman could be one of the rebels. She should be tried before the entirety of the high council.”

“Tried?” the chubby faced Chancellor Hedner laughed. “Of what crime would you try her, Azter? Hm? We haven’t even met her yet.”

President Quella, Castellan Azter, and Chancellor Hedner were seated in one of the smaller council rooms in the Citadel. It was a circular room with a slightly raised dais set opposite the double doors leading in. It was upon this dais that the trio were seated in large stone chairs that did little good for Quella’s back. The walls of the room sported red tapestries descending from the dark recesses of the high, stone ceiling.

“Time splinters do not simply open on Gallifrey,” Castellan Azter replied in her strident voice. “With the Romanan movement gaining ever more support – and no longer just among the young, Madam President... Well, I do not like this.”

“It *is* peculiar to say the least,” President Quella agreed. “But I would hear from this woman in less severe surroundings before burying her under the weight of a trial by the full council.”

Quella watched with some amusement as Castellan Azter bit back whatever she was going to say. The head of security settled for, “You’ll at least allow the guards to remain, Madam President.”

“Yes, that does seem prudent in the situation.”

Visibly mollified, Castellan Azter settled into her high-backed chair just as the council chamber doors opened. Commander Jenric led the young woman and her escort into the room.

“The prisoner, Madam President,” Jenric said with a salute.

“Prisoner? What’d I do wrong?” the young woman demanded. “I didn’t see any signs out there saying don’t walk on the dirt.”

“You will be silent,” Commander Jenric demanded.

“Commander,” Quella’s voice cut through the room. “At ease. We shall see to the interviewing of this woman. And do remove those ridiculous handcuffs from her.”

Jenric ground his teeth, but he did wave one of his guards forward to unshackle the young woman.

“Now, my dear,” Quella said in what she hoped was an inviting manner, “please, step forward.”

“It’s about time someone wanted to talk to me. I tried to tell *him*,” the young woman glared at Jenric who stared defiantly back, “what had happened.”

“And what has happened?” Castellan Azter demanded.

Quella raised a hand to halt the Castellan. “Let’s start with the proprieties.” The president turned her gaze to the woman who’d been brought in. “First, my dear, why don’t you tell us who you are?”

The young woman rubbed her arms and looked among the three robed council members. After a moment, she directed herself squarely to Quella, “Hannah. Hannah Redfoot.”

“And from whence do you hail, Hannah, Hannah Redfoot?” Chancellor Hedner chuckled.

“Sundance, Wyoming.”

Quella turned towards Hedner. The corpulent Time Lord met her gaze and shrugged.

“And who are you lot then?” Hannah demanded.

“Mind your tongue, girl,” Commander Jenric ordered.

Quella cleared her throat and the commander fell into silence at his station near the doors of the council chamber. Quella gestured at the panel interviewing the young woman. “My colleagues, the honourable Castellan Azter, in charge of security. And the honourable Chancellor Hedner.”

“Conscience of the president,” Hedner said with a broad smile and raised finger.

“And I am President Quella.”

“Honourable, I take it?” the young woman said, crossing her arms over her chest. She gave no indication of recognizing any of the names. “President of what?”

Quella eyed the young woman. She didn’t have the retiring attitude of most Gallifreyans and she certainly didn’t dress like them.

“Do you mean you really don’t know?” Quella asked.

“That’s what I mean.” Hannah stuck her chin out.

“Quella is the President of the High Council of Gallifrey,” Hedner supplied. “The ruling body for all Time Lords.”

“Time Lords?” Hannah said. That term, at least, clearly registered with her. “Then you’re the Doctor’s people. Is he here? Where is he? I need to see him.”

“I beg your pardon?” Hedner said.

“I want to see the Doctor!”

The Doctor. Quella froze.

“I want to see the Doctor now!” Hannah demanded again. She took a deep breath to stop her voice from rising any closer to a scream.

The woman identified as Castellan Azter almost snorted at Hannah. “Your injuries aren’t severe, girl. Worry not. We’ll fetch you a medical practitioner *after* we’ve ascertained your true motives for being here.” The Castellan’s voice chilled to ice as she continued, “Admit it. You’re with the Romanans. You’re here to subvert our society. Possibly even to attempt to assassinate President Quella.”

Hannah didn’t understand any of this. The guards that had brought her to the sparkling city had told her nothing. The robed crowds that lined the corridors had watched her as if she were some carnival sideshow attraction. Now these three bureaucrats were accusing her of being an assassin. It was almost too much. Hannah dabbed furiously at her eyes, pressing back tears of anger.

Hannah saw President Quella signal to one of the guards, who hurried to the large chairs in which the three Time Lords sat. The regal looking woman leaned towards the guard and whispered something into his ear. He saluted and hurried from the council chamber.

“Miss Redfoot.” President Quella turned her piercing gaze on Hannah. It felt as if the elderly woman could see right into Hannah’s soul. “Hannah. Perhaps you would be so kind as to tell us how you came to be here. After all, you are a stranger to our home. Or so it would appear.”

“Is this how you treat all strangers?” Hannah demanded.

“Ms. Redfoot,” Castellan Azter said, emphasizing the *Ms.* in almost exactly the same disparaging way as the Doctor would, “you come to our city in a time of crisis. You’re a stranger here of a certain stubborn set of mind and making demands for a medical practitioner

without offering a single word of explanation for your appearance. Perhaps the traditions of your world are different than ours. Maybe you would like us to present you with the key to the city? Or to all of time for that matter?"

Hannah decided she didn't like Castellan Azter.

"Yes, this Wyoming," Chancellor Hedner said. "I'm not familiar with that planet. Perhaps you could furnish us with its galactic coordinates."

"Galactic coordinates?" Hannah shook her head. "Wyoming's not a planet. It's one of the States."

"States of what?" Hedner asked.

"Of... well, of the United States." Hannah realized that wasn't much of an answer. "From the planet Earth."

Castellan Azter looked triumphantly at President Quella. "You see, Madam President. Earth. She's clearly a liar." The head of security looked down her long, slim nose at Hannah, "And not a very good one at that. Earth. Ha! Earth was one of the planets lost centuries ago in the Great Schism. Or perhaps you're suggesting that your people pulled themselves from linear time to save their lives? No? I rather thought not. Madam President, I request you authorize the use of the mind probe. I'll soon have the information we need from her."

President Quella may have looked like a frail old woman, but her voice was heavy with authority as she spoke, "Castellan, you have not given this woman two moments to gather her thoughts."

"The better to —"

"We are the highest representatives of Gallifreyan society and we *will* conduct ourselves with civility. I understand your fears in our present crisis. I share them. However, I will not allow those fears to strip away the enlightenment which we have obtained. Now, I have sent for one who should be able to assist us here. I would hear his expert opinion before deciding how best to proceed. And unless I'm very much mistaken, this is him now."

Hannah turned to the door of the council chamber as it opened. It took her a moment to make out the figure standing beyond. When she did, she felt a smile broaden on her face.

"Doctor!"

As soon as the alien girl had uttered *that* name, the Admin was on his feet. He donned the orange-brown skullcap that matched his robes and hastened to the door of his office. He paused momentarily to study the bust on its pedestal. The name rang through his mind again. *The Doctor*.

Inconceivable.

The Admin set off through the corridors of the Citadel, intent on reaching the council chamber. On his way, he encountered one of the guards who had brought the girl in.

"Excuse me, Admin." The young guard waved. "President Quella requires your pres —"

"Yes, yes, I know," the Admin bit out. "Why do you think I'm already on my way? No, don't answer that. It was a rhetorical question. I'd ask if you knew what those were, but I fear you'd try to answer that too, proving your ignorance."

Students and professors alike scattered from the Admin's path as he stomped through the corridors. The chancellery guardsman followed in the Admin's wake. The two reached the door to the council chamber without interruption. The Admin took a moment to arrange his robes and

catch his breath. He wasn't accustomed to all this running around. With both hands he thrust open the double doors into the chamber.

All eyes were drawn to the Admin as he stepped inside.

The child spun on her heel to observe him. A large smile blossomed on her face.

"Doctor!" the girl cried. She rushed towards the Admin, her arms spread wide as if to embrace him.

The Admin fixed an icy gaze on the girl. Her rush towards him faltered, stopped.

"Doctor?" she said with uncertainty. "Doctor, it's me. It's Hannah."

"So you told President Quella," the Admin said, arching his eyebrow.

"Do I take it you don't recognize this young woman, Admin?" Quella called from across the room.

The Admin swept past Hannah and neared the three high councilors. "No, Madam President." He turned to appraise the pathetic creature before him. "I do not."

The girl looked as if all the air had gone from her. She took an uncertain step towards the Admin.

"Doctor, please."

"Who *is* this Doctor?" Chancellor Hedner asked. A frown creased his broad forehead.

"He was a Time Lord," the Admin supplied, ignoring the look President Quella gave him. "And a foolish one at that. He died. A long time ago."

"No," The girl croaked. "No, Doctor."

"I think it's time, Ms. Redfoot," Castellan Azter said, "that you told us the why and the how of your appearance here today. Oh, for Omega's sake, someone fetch her a chair."

The alien girl had sunk to the floor. The Admin watched in severe silence as a chair was promptly brought for her. The chancellery guard lifted her into it and she clung tight to its armrests. Her dark gaze hadn't left the Admin since he'd denounced her.

"Well?" Castellan Azter demanded. "We're waiting. How did you get here?"

The Admin watched the girl take a deep breath. She wrenched her gaze from him towards Azter and opened her mouth to speak.

An explosion rocked the council room.

Later, when she would have time to reflect on the events of the day, all Hannah would be able to recall of the aftermath of the explosion would be a series of fleeting impressions and images. Two guards racing to the sides of President Quella and Chancellor Hedner. Castellan Azter appearing at Hannah's own side and taking her arm sharply. Being rushed through endless corridors. People running, screaming. Floating over it all, the Doctor's distant look, the look of a stranger.

Now Hannah found herself in a small, grey holding cell, cut off from whatever else was going on in this strange place. A guard had been stationed outside the door of the cell. Either he was deaf or the force field that covered the door – and had zapped Hannah when she'd tried to leave earlier – canceled any sound she could produce. She'd screamed for the guard's attention until her throat was raw. With nothing else to do, she'd sat on the narrow bed, her back against the wall and one foot drawn up from the floor.

The guards had taken all her clothes and possessions, save the bandage wrapped about her head, and made her change into form fitting grey coveralls. She'd rolled the sleeves above her

elbows, her only way of asserting some sort of control over the situation.

Hannah was tempted to unroll the sleeves again. The little cell – the whole Citadel for that matter – was rather chilly, especially after the heat of the surrounding plains. Hannah supposed the Time Lords had to keep the place cool given the thick robes they all walked around in.

A movement outside the cell caught Hannah's eye. She looked over in time to see the arrival of Castellan Azter, draped in her dark robes. Great.

Azter studied Hannah through the wavering force field a moment. She extended her hand and touched some control hidden from Hannah's sight. The wavering of the force field lessened.

"I would speak with you," Castellan Azter said. It wasn't a request.

"Is that the same as having a conversation or are you just going to hurl more accusations at me?" Hannah grunted, not moving from her place on the bed.

"Your position is precarious indeed," Castellan Azter said. "Your arrival here, at the Citadel, in time with the explosion. Quite the coincidence. Wouldn't you say?"

Hannah glared at the other woman. "I get the feeling you don't care *what* I say."

"Oh, but I do," Azter replied. She signaled to the unseen guard who brought her a simple metal stool to sit on. "I truly do. The Admin has spoken on your behalf."

"The Admin?" Hannah shook her head. The title meant nothing to her.

"The man you called the Doctor."

That caught Hannah's attention. "He... he remembered me? Told you who I was?"

"Not precisely." Castellan Azter arched an imperious eyebrow. "He scanned you, you see. He confirmed that you aren't Gallifreyan."

"No. I'm human. From Earth."

"No. You're not."

Hannah wished she could punch the smug smile from the other woman's face.

Castellan Azter held up Hannah's cell phone. "Earth was lost to the galaxy well before it had produced *this* technology."

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?" Hannah asked.

Castellan Azter ignored Hannah's questions. "Oh, I grant that you *may* be human. Perhaps some cultivating society visited Earth and took your ancestors away to raise in secret elsewhere. Perhaps that cultivating society were the Romanans." This last statement almost sounded like a question.

"I don't know who those are," Hannah replied. "I don't know any of what's going on here."

Azter smiled and nodded as if the answer was perfectly satisfying to her. "Of course an agent of theirs would likely be mind-wiped. To make you ignorant of your role in things. After all, a primitive, such as yourself, would never be able to withstand a full tribunal much less some of the more... invasive methods we have of ascertaining the truth. No, it's quite obvious. You've been mentally retarded to disguise your part in this whole affair."

"Mentally retarded." Hannah grimaced and looked away. "Gee. Thanks."

"You were sent here," Castellan Azter continued, "to be an enigma to us. Someone to distract us from the movements of the Romanans. Oh, they've been quite disruptive in their overzealous drive to force President Quella to take a more active hand in the affairs of time and space. But here, today, has been their first truly militant act. And what better way to ensure the success of that act than to have us distracted by the likes of you."

Hannah didn't say anything. There didn't seem to be any point.

"One such as you could hardly have envisioned such a scheme," the other woman continued. "No, it's obvious you're a dupe. A mere tool. And one who can't even trust her own thoughts,

her own memories. I pity you, child. I truly do.”

Hannah swallowed hard. She tried to force the prickly words from her thoughts. A small voice at the back of her mind said, *what if it's true?*

“I can help you,” Azter said quietly, leaning closer to the door. “Whatever memories you have, they’re not to be trusted – faked, as they doubtless were, by the Romanans. However, within those fake thoughts may lie some seeds of truth. Why not tell me how you came to be here on Gallifrey? If you cooperate, I promise we’ll have our best doctors” – Hannah winced at the word – “examine you. They may be able to reverse the brain damage. Even if they can’t, if your, let’s call it your testimony... If your testimony helps us in stopping the rebels, well, I’m sure we could find a nice society to adopt you, to educate you. You could be happy. And free.”

Hannah licked her lips. She’d felt like she was drowning ever since falling through the time splinter. Nothing had made sense. Now this wretched woman, through her serpentine words, seemed to be throwing Hannah a lifeline. All Hannah had to do to claim it was to accept that everything that had led to the moment of her arriving on this alien world, everything – her childhood, her education, her family, her friends, the Doctor – was fake.

“I,” Hannah struggled to speak. “I need time to think about it.”

“Of course.” If the other woman was disappointed she didn’t show it. She rose to her feet and turned to leave. Over her shoulder she said, “Don’t take too long thinking, though. There is much and more to do in the wake of today’s incident, but once that is done the people will want answers.”

“You’re certain you don’t know her?” President Quella asked again for the umpteenth time.

“Of course I don’t know her,” the Admin snapped in response. “There’s enough dullards on this planet that I don’t have to go traipsing through the cosmos searching for more.”

Quella turned to the window of her office. A large scar had been burned into the spire across the way. The explosion had been more flash than fact. Reports were still coming in but it seemed as though no one had been seriously hurt. Only the building had been damaged. Assessors had already proclaimed the building structurally sound.

The explosive had been bound and shaped in such a way as to carve a symbol in the building’s exterior. It showed a Mobius strip pierced by a lightning bolt. An old Gallifreyan symbol for chaos. Ironic, Quella considered, given who the leader of the Romanans was and how she’d attained that position.

Quella rejoined the Admin where he sat in her parlour, where they’d been drinking tea and eating biscuits only hours earlier. It seemed longer. Despite everything else requiring her attention, Quella felt the appearance of Hannah on Gallifrey could not just be dismissed. Fear was running through the corridors of the city. Hannah was involved or else innocent. In either case, Quella *needed* to know.

“She knew your name,” Quella insisted. “The Doctor.”

“That name no longer applies to me. It hasn’t done in nine lives. You’re one of only a handful of people who still remember me by it.”

“Then how does this woman know it?” Quella asked.

“I don’t know.”

Quella sighed in exasperation. “She can’t be from Earth and yet temporal analysis shows that she should be. She’s human so she can’t have reached Gallifrey by herself and yet she seems to

have done. She can't have possibly met you and yet she clearly has. And you can't explain any of this."

The Admin shrugged and looked away. Anyone else would at least offer an apology. The Admin didn't.

Quella considered the man across from her. She didn't know what the Admin's connection to the young human was. She felt it went deeper than just the uprising of the Romanans.

"I need you to talk to her," Quella commanded.

"Mm? Talk with whom?" the Admin asked. He rested his hands on his growing girth. "That girl? And why should I? I already told you that I don't know who she is."

"She has a connection to you," Quella explained. "Or at least she thinks she has. You may be able to learn something useful from that. Something that Castellan Azter could not."

Quella saw the hesitation in the Admin's face.

"This is not a request," Quella added. "This is an executive order."

The Admin puckered his cheeks before blowing out a noisy breath. "Oh, very well. Though I rather think it's a waste of time."

Quella escorted the Admin from her office and secured the door behind him. She let out a long suffering sigh before checking her nearby computer terminal. In light of the explosion there were many who wanted her time. Reports to be filed. Actions to be taken. Concerns to allay. She'd done some of that already, but her own concerns continued to worry her. The situation had sharply escalated.

Quella turned her gaze from the computer terminal and let it travel to a darkened alcove recessed into one of the walls of her chambers. She didn't much care for the ornaments of office that went with being president. Pomp and circumstance, the Admin had once said in regards to them. Even so, they were functional in their own right.

Quella neared the alcove, which lit at her approach. Her presidential sash, crown, and coronet – oh, how the Time Lords of old liked their headgear – were arranged over a mannequin. The crown drew Quella's eye now. It was a simple ringlet of gold and yet so much more. It was the key to the Matrix, the collection of all Time Lord knowledge past, present, and future. Quella never liked using it, it always left her dizzy and with a dull headache. She already had one of the latter so it seemed she could scarce make things worse. She had to know. She had to know about the Admin. About the Doctor. Quella reached out with delicate fingers for the crown.

"Where are we going?" Hannah demanded as she tried to stay on her feet.

Commander Jenric had ordered Hannah pulled from her cell and assigned two guards to escort her through the echoing halls of the Citadel. Hannah wasn't short by any means, but the commander had chosen two of his tallest men. Hannah had to hurry to stay in step with their long strides or else risk being bodily dragged in their wake.

"Not exactly the conversational types, are you?" Hannah muttered at the silence she received from her escorts.

Hannah grew concerned the farther they walked. It wasn't the distance so much as how far down they were going. At first she'd been guided down sweeping ramps with elegant railings. Those had given way to cut marble steps with detailed mosaic tiling set into them. And those had given way to unadorned steps covered with a layer of dust at their ends.

Hannah tried to ignore the queasy feeling growing in her stomach. She'd read about police

states making people simply disappear.

Finally, the guards pulled Hannah to a halt before a pair of dark, stone doors. Hannah tried not to think of the word *imposing*. One of the guards rapped the back of his white gloved hand on the door.

“Enter,” a muffled voice called.

One guard held the door open while the other pushed Hannah inside. She found herself in a darkened room made darker by the green-black stone that comprised its walls. Stacks of papers and mounds of discarded electronics littered the floor. Set across from the doors was a large, cut, black stone that served as the desk for the room’s occupant: the Doctor.

He was seated behind a computer display, the light of which cast dark shadows into the lines of his face. He did not look particularly happy.

“Wait outside,” the Doctor said, waving a dismissive hand towards the guards.

Over her shoulder, Hannah watched the guards depart. The doors closed behind them with a dull thud. When she turned to face the Doctor, she found him reclining in his chair, gazing intently at her. He didn’t utter a single word.

Hannah was curious about her surroundings, but didn’t want to show it. She did her best to study the room from the corners of her eyes without turning her head. It was hard to make anything out. The room was like a cave, except for one patch of light over towards the door that—

“Well, don’t just stand there, girl,” the Doctor barked, making Hannah jump. “Have a seat.” He gestured to an uncomfortable looking wooden bench resting in front of the desk.

The Doctor’s tone cut through the uncertainty Hannah had been feeling. She stuck her chin out and folded her arms across her chest.

“I’ll stand, thanks. And my name’s Hannah. Hannah Redfoot. Or don’t you Time Lords bother with names?”

The two glared at each other. For the first time, Hannah really took in the appearance of the Doctor. His face was heavier, his cheeks puckered with fat. Even with the voluminous robes he wore, she could tell extra weight had been packed onto the rest of his frame as well.

The Doctor broke eye contact first, sending a disgusted look towards the ceiling.

“Names,” the Doctor said, returning his gaze to Hannah. “There’s one name I want to know about: Doctor. How do you know *that* name?”

“You told it to me,” Hannah jabbed a finger towards the man behind the desk.

Hannah turned from him and took a good hard look about the room. It was as cluttered as the Doctor kept the TARDIS, but there was a difference in character to this clutter. Aboard the TARDIS, the Doctor left projects unfinished due to his magpie tendencies of being attracted to anything shiny and new. Here there was a forlornness about the piles as if they’d just been abandoned. As if the Doctor had run out of steam.

Hannah turned back to the Doctor. No. It wasn’t him. Not really. It looked like him, sounded like him, but not him. Not the him she knew.

“You told it to me,” Hannah repeated. “Or, at least, the other you did.”

“The other me?” The Doctor’s voice – no, the Admin’s voice – was full of condescension.

Hannah ignored the man’s tone. She snapped her fingers as an idea formed within her. “Yeah. Yeah, that’s it, isn’t it? It’s like that one *Buffy*. Where Cordelia goes into an alternate reality and meets vampire Willow.”

“Oh, you believe you’ve entered an alternate reality now, do you?” The Admin frowned at Hannah and she realized the man would never have seen the show she was referring to.

“Yeah,” Hannah nodded. “When I fell through that time splinter. I thought you’d fallen through too. But you – I mean, *my* you – weren’t here. Only the *you* you is here. Which must mean *my* you is still on the station. You know what I mean?”

“Well, I certainly believe you’re human now,” the Admin replied. “A gibbering primate comes to mind. Try not to fling your feces about my office.”

“The real you would believe me,” Hannah said. “He doesn’t sit around growing fat while being surrounded by piles of dusty junk.” She flourished her hand to indicate the stacks of debris littering the office.

“No? What does he do then, pray?” The Admin leaned on his desk and rested his chin on interlocked fingers. He treated Hannah with such a saccharine smile that she just wanted to haul off and punch him.

“He travels,” Hannah said. “And he helps people.”

The Admin’s face froze. “Travels? Travels?” He narrowed his eyes. “Where, exactly?”

“Anywhere. Everywhere,” Hannah replied. She allowed herself a satisfied smile as she considered how cloistered the man opposite her obviously was. “And any when too. He’s got a time ma – ”

The Admin sprang to his feet and rounded the desk at speed. Hannah stepped back involuntarily.

“He travels through time?” the Admin hissed. “And *changes* it?”

“Of course,” Hannah said standing her ground and returning the Admin’s glare. “He’s a Time Lord. That’s what you people do, isn’t it?”

“It most certainly is not.” The Admin’s voice was low but it held the hint of a snarl in it. “Tampering with time is a most stupendously stupid and dangerous thing to do.”

“He calls it making sure history happens.” Hannah recalled her conversations with the Doctor through their travels and added, “And sometimes making the future happen too.”

The Admin recoiled from Hannah in evident disgust, his long robes billowing away from his body. “Now I know you’re an idiot. I would never align myself with the Romanans, child.”

Hannah had had just about enough of this man, this pale imitation of her vibrant companion. “I’m not an idiot and I’m not a child. My name’s Hannah. And I don’t know who these Romanans are.”

“Ha!” the Admin laughed but there was no humour in the sound. “The Romanans are a group of rogue Time Lords. Their leader was one of our brightest graduates with a promising future. Until she went traveling. No one know the details, but she claimed to be responsible for the Great Schism – ”

“I don’t know what that is either.”

The Admin rubbed his face and raised his hands as if asking for strength from the heavens. “The Great Schism was an explosion in time. It caused many worlds, your Earth among them, to be destroyed. It happened with no warning and no opportunity for the Time Lords to react. It would have thrown the whole universe into irrevocable chaos. And then, whoosh, it stopped. Stopped by the same person who was responsible for it. Or so she claimed.”

“This leader you spoke of?” Hannah asked.

The Admin nodded. “She returned to Gallifreyan society but was never the same. Filled with guilt and remorse, she spoke before the high council. She urged them to reconsider the policy of non-intervention. She wanted Time Lords to involve themselves in the affairs of the universe.” The Admin grinned nastily at Hannah before repeating her words, “To ensure history happened.”

“And what’s wrong with that?” Hannah planted her fists on her hips.

“What’s wrong with changing the time stream willy-nilly?” the Admin stared wide-eyed at Hannah. “Oh, nothing. That is if you consider the complete and utter rewriting of people’s lives, past, present, and future, to be nothing.”

Hannah watched the Admin seethe a moment longer as an awkward silence descended between them. She shook her head in pity and turned away, if only so she wouldn’t have to look at him. Her eyes went to the lit alcove near the room’s door. She’d noticed it earlier but hadn’t had the chance to properly examine it.

The alcove was the one part of the room free of any clutter. Set within it was a pedestal atop which was a sculpted head. Hannah moved towards the bust and saw it was the face of a young girl, pretty in an impish sort of way. There was something in the way light glinted off the girl’s eyes that made it seem as if she had not only seen the whole of the universe but had embraced it. It was a look that Hannah was used to seeing in the Doctor’s own gaze.

Hannah’s heart skipped a beat as she realized who the statue was. The Doctor had told Hannah about the young girl captured in stone. He’d even shown Hannah a picture of her. The Doctor had left the girl behind in his many travels. A regret that he’d carried with him ever since.

Hannah reached towards the smooth curve of the statue’s chin with tentative fingers, but stopped as she felt the presence of the Admin draw near.

“Your granddaughter,” Hannah whispered. “Susan.”

Hannah thought the Admin wasn’t going to answer – at least, not politely – or maybe he just hadn’t heard her. After a moment that seemed to drag out for an eternity he replied with a catch in his voice, “How do you know that?”

Hannah turned to find the Admin right next to her. His gaze bore into Hannah’s face.

“You told me about her,” Hannah said. “You told me about how she wanted to go exploring time and space. How she wanted to see the Earth. How she even chose a human name.”

Hannah could see the Admin breathing heavily. His lips trembled. Hannah braced herself for some acerbic tirade. Instead the Admin’s shoulders drooped.

“She was interested in seeing the Earth,” the Admin said. “However, we never went to your little mud ball of a planet.” The man sighed and looked years older than he had a moment before.

Hannah wasn’t used to seeing despair in the Doctor’s face. She tried to convince herself that it was a good thing this man wasn’t the Doctor. Not bearing to look at him, she returned her gaze to the bust. “Why didn’t you?” Something tugged at the corner of Hannah’s thoughts. “Wait. Was? She *was* interested in the Earth? You mean, she’s dead?”

The Admin glared at Hannah. He stomped away from her before speaking over his shoulder, “An explosion. A long time ago. It killed her.” He faced Hannah. “And made me realize how foolish traveling the time vortex was. I stayed here. I became the Admin.”

An awkward silence followed the Admin’s words.

Hannah wasn’t too good at dealing with either family or emotional issues. The two together made her uncomfortable. She pressed a hand to her stomach to try to calm the butterflies fluttering there.

“I, um,” Hannah started uncertainly. Her voice fell to a whisper. “Sorry. I didn’t know.” She cleared her throat and tried to think of something to fill the silence. “I wish I’d met her.”

That seemed to be the wrong thing to say. When the Admin spoke his eyes blazed and anger laced his words. “You wish you’d met her? You mean the other me doesn’t travel with her? But he takes your pathetic form along with him?”

Hannah felt her own anger starting to rise. “Yes. We travel together.”

“And why is that, hmm?” the Admin demanded. “What makes you so special?”

Hannah opened her mouth to speak, closed it again. She wondered why the Doctor had let her join him in his wanderings. She wasn’t extraordinary. Certainly not in the way he was.

“You see how ridiculous your story is?” the Admin continued. “You, an insignificant Earth girl, travel with an alternate me and my granddaughter isn’t even there. And – oh, yes – you change history hither and yon.”

The two locked gazes. They stood in tense silence. This time, Hannah looked away first.

“The TARDIS wanted me there,” Hannah whispered.

“The what?” the Admin demanded.

“TARDIS. TARDIS,” Hannah spat. “You know. Time and Relative Dimension in Space? You didn’t want me traveling with you, but you did offer me a ride home. Only you could never get me there. The TARDIS wouldn’t let you.” Hannah laughed but didn’t know why. Certainly she wasn’t anywhere close to being in a good humour. “You said the TARDIS approved of me.”

“I think it likes me,” the Admin whispered as if speaking to himself. His gaze went past Hannah to the sculpture of his granddaughter. Hannah looked between the two. It seemed as if the Admin was reliving a conversation he’d had a long time ago.

Hannah tried to think about something else. Her thoughts were scattered. It had been a long day. One notion niggled at the fringes of her consciousness. She blinked, trying to pull the idea into focus.

“Hold the phone,” Hannah said. “You’re dead set against changing the timeline, yeah?”

The Admin emerged from whatever past he’d been considering. “I may have been trying to impart that sentiment to you, child, yes.”

Hannah grappled with the concept entering her mind. The Doctor had often commented on how his companions had trouble thinking fourth dimensionally let alone fifth. Hannah felt a smile spread across her face as her thoughts coalesced. “But what if that already happened?”

President Quella lifted the Crown of Rassilon from her head and set it on the low table before her. She massaged her temples, her eyes shut, as she considered what she’d just learned.

Through the Matrix she’d been able to follow the trail of the Admin’s life back into the distant past. It led in a straight line from the present, showing day after monotonous day of sitting in his office dealing with the requests for assistance that he found so loathsome. Quella had delved back farther, back to a point long before the explosion of today, or even the chaos of the Great Schism. Back to another explosion. One that had gone unexplained centuries before.

The Doctor was a young man then, though you wouldn’t know to look upon the thin flesh of his face and the white hair framing it. He and his granddaughter had plotted to steal a TARDIS. They’d very nearly succeeded when an explosion had occurred in the time capsule storage warehouse. It had been assumed the explosion was the result of the Doctor and his granddaughter tampering with one of the old time machines.

The explosion had seriously injured the Doctor to the point of regeneration. His granddaughter hadn’t been that lucky. Caught square in the blast, there hadn’t been enough left to regenerate. The Doctor had blamed himself for that, lending credence to the tampering theory of the explosion’s cause. The Doctor had become a reclusive hermit for one of his lifetimes. He’d returned a new man from that, shedding his former name and ensconcing himself as the

Admin, where he had served for the rest of his lives ever since.

Quella had spread her view from that shatter point in the Doctor's past. She'd considered the other possible futures that could have come had things been different. Not all of the events were good, but then they never would be. Even so, on balance, most of those other futures were more bright than dark.

Quella went to the window and looked upon the scarred spire across the way. Things were getting worse on Gallifrey, more so than was generally known. And as much as their society tried to distance itself from the universe, where Gallifrey led, the universe followed.

Quella considered the choice before her. She didn't know which was more terrible, the choice itself or how easy it was to choose.

Though she didn't like the weight – metaphorical and literal – Quella moved to her wardrobe to don the full regalia of her presidential office. She needed to speak to the Doctor.

Castellan Azter had been busy in the hours following her meeting with the prisoner. Investigations needed to be commenced into the heinous assault on the great spire. Suspects needed to be rounded up. Interrogations needed to be conducted. The guards needed to be organized and that duty fell to Azter.

She had warned President Quella that the Romanans had been growing ever more militant since the disappearance of their leader. Based on the intelligence that Azter had gathered, she suspected there were at least three major factions within the Romanans and half a dozen minor ones. It seemed that at least one of those factions was tired of pleading their fruitless case with the high council. They had decided to take action instead. To show that “bad things” could happen even here on Gallifrey.

President Quella had tied Azter's hands, not wanting to raise escalations. Even so, Azter had an entire folder of persons of interest to monitor. She had formulated response plans for any number of actions the rebels might take. She was disheartened that any of the contingencies had come to pass. On the other hand, things could have been worse. Much worse.

Azter had finally gotten her people organized and mobilized. She'd dealt with the immediate crisis and now could only wait while the guards carried out their orders. She checked the timepiece ticking away on her onyx desk. She'd left her prisoner stewing for some time now. It would not be remiss to revisit her.

Azter scooped her skullcap from where she'd discarded it on her desk and tucked her hair under it. She crossed to the door of her office and told her secretary she'd be in the detention center if anyone needed her.

The halls of the Citadel were barren. Between the explosion earlier and the guard patrols, most people were wisely deciding to stay in their quarters. Azter's footfalls echoed off the stone walls of the corridors.

Azter didn't know if Ms. Redfoot would be able to provide anything useful or not. In the grand scheme of things, that didn't matter. All Azter had to do was to elicit sufficiently nebulous comments from the prisoner to be able to spin a tale for President Quella that would lead to an increase in security precautions. Top of the list was rounding up anyone with rebellious leanings and locking them away. That was the first step in making society, and the universe beyond, safe.

Azter arrived at the detention center to find Commander Jenric coordinating his squads. She was pleased to see the number of people who'd been brought in to be questioned about the

morning's incidents.

"Commander," Azter said, crossing to Jenric's desk, "I would speak with Ms. Redfoot again."

An uncharacteristic look of panic flicked across the plain features of Commander Jenric's face. Azter frowned.

"Is that a problem, commander?"

Jenric rose from his desk and came to parade ground attention. His gaze focused on a point just above and to one side of Azter's head. "President Quella has ordered her own interrogation of the prisoner."

Azter couldn't say she was surprised. Quella was a very hands on woman, taking unwarranted interest in events that fell outside of her presidential purview.

"Very well," Azter said sharply, "I'll sit in as an observer in my official capacity as castellan."

"Er..."

"You're er-ing, commander. You know I don't approve of indecision."

Jenric cleared his throat and shifted uncomfortably on his feet. "It's only that the prisoner was taken to the Admin's office for interrogation."

Azter narrowed her eyes. "What?"

"He was insistent, ma'am," the commander hurried to explain. "He felt his interrogation would be better served in those environs."

"And you let him have her?" Azter stepped forward so she was only a hand's-breadth from her commander. To his credit, he didn't flinch back from her.

"He did have the approval of President Quella, ma'am," Jenric said softly.

"You two," Azter whirled and pointed at two guards who had only just arrived. "Come with me. The Admin has overstepped his *and* President Quella's authority."

"You get your shorts in a twist whenever someone mentions messing with the timeline, yeah?" Hannah said to the Admin. She felt excitement growing in her belly.

"Are you possessed of some short term memory problem?" the Admin asked. "Yes. The timeline is not to be meddled with."

"So what would you do if you discovered it was already meddled with?"

"Is this where you tell me I'm a *Buffy* version of myself, again? Whatever that means."

"No. Yes. Maybe." Hannah paused to gather her thoughts. "Look. Where I came from, the Doctor and I had met this alien scientist. He was like a giant intelligent parakeet. But that doesn't matter."

"Well, as long as we're focused on the important facts," the Admin sneered – he actually *sneered*. "After all, I'd hate to think we were going into triviali –"

"Zip it." Hannah stabbed a finger towards the Admin's face. "Now this scientist, Chronographer Atticus, he had a bomb or, or some other kind of weapon. He was planning to send it back in time to destroy the race that destroyed *his* race. To stop them from, you know, doing that before they *could* do it."

A look of horror crossed the Admin's face.

Hannah steamrolled on with her story before the Admin could say anything. "You, the other you, tried to stop him. There was a fight. Atticus had some sort of ray gun."

"Ray gun."

"Ray gun," Hannah nodded, ignoring the Admin's sarcastic tone. "He shot at you, but the

beam went into the time splinter. The same time splinter I fell into. And then I was here. And you, the Doctor, um... you were different... and, um..." Hannah ran out of steam. For a moment, she'd thought she'd had hold of what exactly had happened. As she neared the end of her tale the story seemed to slip away.

Maybe that didn't matter. The Admin had turned his gaze to the sculpture on its pedestal. Hannah got the impression that he wasn't really seeing it though.

"You're suggesting," the Admin said slowly, "that *your* timeline is the correct one. And that all of this," the Admin gestured around himself, "came about because this Chronographer Atticus changed things."

"It's dumb, right?" Hannah said. "I don't know how Atticus could have caused this to happen. He was targeting some race called the, oh, what did he say? The Banasi."

"This Atticus shot at your Doctor, you said." The Admin's words didn't sound like a question.

"Yes," Hannah answered anyway.

"And the beam went into this time splinter. The same time splinter that brought you here."

Hannah nodded.

The Admin started muttering to himself about temporal shifts and chrono fluxes. It was hauntingly familiar to how the Doctor would talk to himself.

"You've figured something out," Hannah said. "What is it?"

"It's possible – *possible*, mind – that the time field surrounding your Doctor influenced the time splinter."

"Yes, that's what he said," Hannah agreed. "That the time splinters showed pasts, presents, and futures of the people standing near them."

"Mm-hm. And the beam came back into his, *our* past." The Admin turned his attention to the sculpted face of Susan. "And caused the explosion. And everything changed after that."

Hannah felt hopeful for a moment. Then a question sprang to mind that dashed those hopes, "But if that's true, then why didn't I land in your past when I came through the time splinter?"

The Admin waved the question away in a strikingly familiar gesture. "You humans think in such limited fourth dimensional concepts. Just because a few seconds elapsed between the blaster shot and your contact with the time splinter doesn't mean that years, centuries couldn't pass here."

"It doesn't?" Hannah wasn't quite sure what the Admin was saying. She was just glad to see the Admin resembling her Doctor more and more.

"If all this supposition is accurate," the Admin said, ignoring Hannah's question, "then the timeline is already damaged. This would tend to be the information President Quella was hoping for." The Admin grinned and Hannah shivered. "Although I doubt she'll like it when I tell her."

The Admin stepped away from the pedestal. He moved towards his desk and busied himself at the controls there.

Hannah started to follow but paused. A muffled buzz briefly filled the air. It sounded like it had come from the other side of the office door.

"What was that?" Hannah asked, turning to the door.

"Mm? What was what?"

More buzzes could be heard, coming faster and faster. And closer and closer.

"That."

"Oh, dear," the Admin said from his desk.

"What is it?" Hannah scurried to the Admin's side.

The Admin's computer monitor displayed footage from a security camera. Hannah recognized the two burly guards that had escorted her. One was lying crumpled on the floor just outside the Admin's office. The other was pressed into the meager shelter afforded by a marble pillar in the hall. He was exchanging blaster bolts with half a dozen assailants positioned at the far end of the corridor.

"Romanans," the Admin hissed. He met Hannah's gaze. "Coming for you."

The news caught Castellan Azter by surprise. She had just heard over the security comms of an intrusion by an armed force of rebels into the lower reaches of the Academy. Specifically, the insurgents were positioned outside the Admin's office. Doubtless on their way to rescue the human woman. As bad as the news was – and it was plenty bad – Azter allowed herself a grim smile. Ms. Redfoot must know something important if the rebels would dare to attack so blatantly to retrieve her.

Azter took the communication device from one of the guards escorting her. The hand-held disk was tuned to the frequency for Commander Jenric.

"Commander, I need a detachment of your guards dispatched to the Admin's office immediately," Azter ordered. "I prefer the rebels taken alive for questioning, if possible, but lethal force *is* authorized."

"Yes, ma'am," the commander replied. "We'll have twenty guards their momentarily."

"Sooner than that would be even better," Azter said as she closed the comm channel and handed the silver disk back to its owner. She said to her escorts, "You two, with me."

Azter hiked up her robes. She hastened her pace through the hallways of the Academy. She felt the reassuring weight of her small, concealed hip blaster. She never went anywhere without it in case of situations exactly like this.

As her little force neared the final hall to the Admin's office, she shortened her stride and slipped the blaster free. The guards with her looked at her in surprise.

"Securing the prisoner is our primary objective," Azter whispered to the guards. "Let's go."

Azter spun into the hallway, blaster raised. Her eyes tracked across the space between her and the Admin's door, searching for targets. The only people around were the two guards that Jenric had dispatched to escort the prisoner to the Admin. Both guards were slumped on the floor. Azter waved one of her own guards forward to check their bodies.

"They're alive, ma'am," the guard said after pressing his fingers to the throats of his fallen colleagues.

Azter ground her teeth. She hastened to the Admin's door already knowing what she'd find. Or not find.

Stopping alongside the door, she threw it open without exposing herself. With the two guards covering her, she cautiously poked her blaster into the room. When nothing untoward happened, she entered the office.

Piles of paper and electronic equipment were scattered about the Admin's office. She knew the Admin's housekeeping habits. It was impossible to tell if there'd been a struggle or not. It was apparent that neither Ms. Redfoot nor the Admin were still in residence.

Azter felt her cheeks twitch. "Damn."

She heard booted feet slapping stone in the hallway outside the office. She emerged to find Commander Jenric jogging towards her, followed by a cadre of chancellery guards. Before he'd

even slowed to a halt, Azter was issuing orders.

“The Admin and the human female are gone, taken by Romanans,” Azter said. “They can’t be far. Spread out. Find them. Go!”

The guards scattered with quick efficiency. As the Romanans had become more rebellious, Azter had insisted her guards practice, practice, practice at a series of drills intended to allow them to counter the rebels.

The intense search quickly yielded results. One team of guards found a circular receptacle in a disused janitorial closet. Azter recognized the device as a transmat relay. Not a full and proper transmat in itself, but a device that would augment a transmat signal allowing people to be teleported through the protective energy barriers that encircled the Citadel.

“Commander Jenric,” Azter said. “I want a tech team here now. We have to discover where they transmatted to. Have our forces standing by to depart as soon as we know. The longer we take, the more chance the rebels have of escaping. We have a closing window people. I want those rebels before that window slams shut.”

Hannah hated transmat beams. Having your matter converted to energy in one place and then back to matter in another always left her with a queasy feeling. She couldn’t help but wonder if the *her* being reconstituted was actually still *her* her or just some constructed clone.

Outside the Admin’s office, the rebels had stunned the last guard. The Admin had locked the door but that hadn’t stood up long against the blasters of the rebels. They’d surged inside and nabbed Hannah and the Admin. The two had been hustled through the corridors to a closet that smelled of cleaning supplies, where a transmat receptacle had been waiting. Hannah had overheard from their captors the receptacle would be disabled after they’d left.

The stone walls of the Academy had dropped away in a mist as Hannah and the Admin had been teleported elsewhere. The area that had materialized around them gave every appearance of being a dilapidated barn. Wood planks formed the walls but were so weathered from time that there wasn’t a straight one in the bunch. Gaps between the planks cast odd shafts of sunlight into the room. Dust motes floated through the air, tickling Hannah’s nose.

Hannah and the Admin had been guided to one corner of the structure, where they’d been given water to clean and refresh themselves. All things considered, this new batch of captors had been far more courteous than the chancellery guard.

The Admin didn’t seem to agree. “Ruffians,” he said. “Uncouth ruffians. They’ve gone and damaged my robes. My best robes, mind.” To emphasize the point he tried to brush stray bits of old hay from his clothes. It didn’t help that both he and Hannah were sitting on moldy old hay bales while they waited. Waited for what, Hannah wasn’t sure.

“Doctor, shh,” Hannah hushed the Time Lord absently. She was trying to overhear the low conversation of their captors.

“I am *not* your Doctor.”

Hannah glared at the man. “No. You’re not. If you were, you’d probably have talked us out of this situation already. Now be quiet. I’m trying to hear.”

The Admin harrumphed and fell into sullen silence.

The rebels were gathered at the other end of the barn. Most of them were looking outside as if expecting something. Even so, a couple were keeping a close eye on their prisoners. At least they didn’t have their blasters drawn anymore. The conversation of the little group was too quiet

to hear, even with the Admin quieted.

“How would he do it?” the Admin spoke into the near silence.

“What?” Hannah was only half paying attention to the Admin as she continued to observe the rebels.

“This Doctor of yours. How would he extricate himself from this predicament?”

Hannah considered this as she studied the Admin. “I don’t know. He just would. He just sort of slides sideways into a situation and takes control.”

“Oh, he just slides into a situation, does he?”

“He... has this way of getting people to do things they don’t want to do before they realize they don’t want to do them.”

“You make him sound magical.”

Hannah said nothing but thought to herself, *He is*.

One of the rebels pointed through the door, dragging Hannah’s attention back to the small group. They seemed to be equal measures of nervous and excited. In the distance Hannah heard a hum similar to that of the chancellery air car that had found her outside the Citadel. For a moment she considered that rescue was on its way. If the chancellery could be considered rescue.

The rebels didn’t seem concerned by the approaching sound. That dispelled any notion that the air car was transporting guards from the Citadel. Surely the rebels would be drawing their weapons if their enemies were outside.

Hannah heard a dull whump, which she assumed was the air car setting down. The faint sound of crunching gravel came to her ears. Two tall men entered the barn, silhouetted against the light from outside. Between them was a woman only a little shorter than they. She exchanged some words with the rebels then made her way across the barn floor.

As the woman neared, Hannah first thought her to be quite elderly. Her shoulders were stooped, her tread slow, and her features were saggy as though she’d lost a lot of weight in a very short time. Closer to, Hannah saw that the woman wasn’t as old as she’d first thought. Mid to late forties, if that. The woman had thick, dark hair that was only just starting to show signs of greying.

As Hannah regarded the woman she, in turn, regarded Hannah. Hannah felt uncomfortable in the grey prison coveralls and head bandage she still wore, but she met the other woman’s gaze unflinchingly. That seemed to amuse the woman. At least, a small smile tugged at the corners of her mouth gracing her oval face.

The woman turned her gaze from Hannah to the Admin. She studied him for a few moments.

The Admin said to the woman, “Well, it seems the rumours of your death were just that: rumours.”

“Yes,” the woman replied with a refined voice, but one with a catch in it. “I’m only sorry the events of this morning couldn’t have been a rumour.”

“The explosion?” the Admin asked. “Yes. It seems like your movement for a better universe is off to a shaky start.”

“A more... aggressive faction than my own.” The woman looked pained. She dipped her pointed chin towards the ground before catching sight of Hannah watching her. She gave Hannah her full attention when she finally spoke, “They tell me you’re a stranger here. And a bit of an enigma. A woman from Earth.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Hannah said.

The woman nodded, but Hannah still saw the brief sign of a wince on her face.

“I’m sorry,” the woman apologized.

“For what?” Hannah asked.

“It’s my fault your world was destroyed.”

Realization dawned on Hannah. “You’re the leader of the rebels. This Roma —”

The woman raised a hand. “Please, no names. I would rather history forget me. And that it may forgive my mistakes.”

One of the rebels approached, pulling a wooden bench along with him. The woman smiled gratefully as she lowered herself to a seated position.

“I imagine you’ve proven quite the problem to President Quella,” the woman spoke to Hannah again. “If not her then certainly to Castellan Azter.”

“You seem to know what’s going on,” Hannah said.

“I give that impression, don’t I?” the woman smiled again. “The truth is, I know only bits and bobs. Hopefully, I know enough. This time.”

“To do what?” Hannah asked.

The woman rested her hands on her knees. She stared into the shadowed rafters of the barn. “To fix things. That’s all I’ve ever wanted to do.”

“You made a mistake and now you want to bend time to your will to correct it,” the Admin sneered. He drew himself straight on the hay bale he perched on. “To absolve your conscience. How selfish of you.”

The woman looked at the Admin not unkindly. When she spoke it was with such weariness that Hannah found herself wanting to console the other woman. “Selfish? Yes, I suppose to a Time Lord who believes unshakably in the non-interference edict, it would seem selfish. I often question myself on that. I wonder if it would seem selfish to the trillions who died because of my mistake.”

“What *was* your mistake?” Hannah prompted as she rested her elbows on her knees. “If you don’t mind my asking.”

“Though they don’t like to admit it,” the woman said, nodding towards the Admin, “there are forces in this universe even more powerful than the Time Lords. A struggle between dark and light. Chaos and order. My mistake was failing to see how the dark had masqueraded as the light in time. I realized my error, but not before yours and a hundred thousand other societies were obliterated.”

“I don’t understand,” Hannah shook her head.

“It doesn’t matter,” the woman shrugged. “Ever since that day, order has been weakened. It has taken some time, but chaos is on the rise once more. This time I fear it can’t be stopped. Not without you.” This last was addressed to the Admin.

“Me?” The Admin looked surprised.

“Yes, you. Doctor.”

“Wait,” Hannah said to the leader of the rebels. “Just wait. You know he’s called the Doctor too?”

“Oh, yes,” the woman nodded. “And I couldn’t have been more surprised when I learned. I thought all Time Lords needed to take a part in the universe. I was wrong. All this time, the only one who has truly mattered is you, Doctor.”

The Admin was silent a moment. Finally, he said, “Then you know how my timeline was changed. How this Chronographer Atticus from another time and place killed my granddaughter.”

“I don’t know all the details,” the woman shrugged. “But I know enough. I know that if you

had been traveling the universe then my own life would have taken a different course. And that when chaos tried to deceive you, that you would see through it. That you would stop it. That worlds that have boiled away would still be out there.”

“I’m just one man,” the Admin shook his head. “I’m not this Doctor that the two of you think I am.”

“No, you’re not,” the rebel leader agreed. “But in another lives-time, you could be.”

The Admin rubbed his chin and sighed. “We’d have to return to the time splinter if there was to be any chance of changing things.”

For the first time, the rebel leader looked surprised. “You’re accepting of this? I understood the great Admin was one of the most devout advocates of the policy of non-intervention. Or have my meager words convinced you otherwise?”

“Oh, it was nothing *you* had to say,” the Admin replied. He threw a quick look in Hannah’s direction. “For a semi-evolved simian, Ms. Redfoot can be quite persuasive. After a fashion.”

The rebel leader turned a soft smile towards Hannah. “Then you have my most sincere thanks, Ms. Redfoot.”

“Hannah, please,” Hannah said, hoping at least one of these Time Lords would take the hint.

“Hannah then,” the woman nodded with a smile. She continued as she pressed herself to her feet, “Well, we’d best be going. It’s not every day one has a chance to save the universe.”

Hannah and the Admin rose to their feet as well. Hannah brushed hay from her coveralls. Her thoughts went to the precious choker she’d been given before leaving Earth. One of the few ties she had to her past. It was probably hidden away somewhere in the Citadel. A pang of guilt ran through her that they’d have to leave it behind. Even so, it was just a *thing*. Fixing all of time seemed to be a bit more important.

The Admin was speaking with the rebel leader as they crossed towards the door of the barn, “If Ms. Redfoot and I are to travel through this time splinter, we’ll need some way to open it.”

“What would you suggest?” the woman asked.

“I’d imagine some sort of sonic device for modulating the splinter would suffice.”

“Something like this, you mean?” The rebel leader produced a palm sized silver cylinder from her white robes. Hannah’s eyes widened as she recognized the device.

“Some sort of sonic probe?” the Admin asked with a frown.

“Screwdriver, actually,” the woman corrected. “I’ve found them quite useful in my journeys.”

Hannah looked past the rebel leader and the Admin. There seemed to be some commotion going on near the door. A couple of the rebels were pointing into the air outside the barn. Hannah strained her ears and could hear a faint hum in the distance.

One of the rebels ran to the leader’s side. “Ma’am, we’ve just detected chancellery air cars inbound. We’ve overheard their comm traffic. They tracked our transmat source.”

The rebel leader shut her eyes and took a steadying breath. “Faster than we’d anticipated. Very well. Prepare the transmat. We’re leaving.”

“We can’t,” the young rebel who’d brought the news said. “They’ve already projected a dampening field. We can’t get a transmat matter stream out. We’re trapped.”

The wind from the air car’s flight whipped Castellan Azter’s hair about her face. Before leaving the Citadel she’d traded in her long robes for the more practical red tunic and trousers of the

guards. She'd foregone the traditional helmet. She felt it was important her people be able to recognize her to draw strength and conviction from her. It was never easy fighting against members of your own society, even if they were deluded insurgents.

Two other air cars escorted the one in which Azter rode. All told, she had nearly forty guards with her as they descended to the ramshackle barn standing in isolation in the plain overshadowed by the Citadel. Even with the relay inside the city, the transmat beam the rebels had used didn't have a great range. The chancellery technicians had quickly pinpointed the beam's source. Commander Jenric had seen to it that a dampening field was already being projected to ensure the rebels couldn't use their transmat again.

As the air cars touched down, Azter was the first one on the ground. She led her squad towards the barn.

Azter barely had time to call a warning to her people before a burst of blaster fire emerged from the barn door. She dove to the hard ground, sending up a small puff of dust about her. She snapped off a couple of quick shots and rolled aside as the rebel blaster bolts tracked towards her. Shots beamed forth from behind her as her own forces returned fire.

Through the glare of the blaster bolts, Azter caught a brief glimpse of the interior of the barn. She spotted the Admin and Ms. Redfoot and a third figure. Azter smiled. It was the rebel leader.

"It's Castellan Azter herself", the rebel leader said, ducking away from the barn door as blaster fire arced towards her.

Hannah felt it didn't make much difference standing in the doorway or not. The dry wood of the barn was doing little to provide cover. Blaster bolts tore through the walls. Some had started small fires that one of the rebels was frantically trying to put out.

"You seem to be outnumbered," the Admin said. "Let me try."

"I wouldn't," the leader said.

The Admin waved her concerns away, he rose from where he was crouched next to Hannah and approached the doorway. "Azter! Azter stop this right n—"

"Doctor, get down!" Hannah screamed. She yanked on the Admin's robes, pulling him to the ground as a volley of blaster bolts flew through the space he'd just occupied. "I don't think she's going to listen to you."

The rebel leader agreed. "She saw me. I know she did. She'll burn this barn down before risking that I have a chance to escape."

"Can't we use that?" Hannah pointed at the console of the transmat device situated by the rear wall of the barn. So far it had gone unscathed from the interchange of blaster fire.

"Ms. Redfoot," the Admin said in a very professorial way. "Had you been listening, you'd know that the chancellery guard had erected a dampening field. We can't transmat through that."

"The Doctor could," Hannah shouted, not knowing if it was true or not. "He'd find a way. He'd *make* a way."

The Admin frowned. "How many times must I tell you? I'm *not* the Doctor."

Hannah shook her head and palmed away angry tears. "I don't believe that. He's there. In you. Somewhere. You just have to find him. I saw all that computer equipment in your office. You still tinker. Why can't you just, just reverse the polarity of the neutron flow? Or, or invert the time vortex in asymmetrical patterns?"

“You’re talking rubbish,” the Admin admonished as another blaster bolt zinged by his head. “You can’t just... You can’t... Unless you amplified... With the sonic... It could work.”

The Admin scrambled away, running low under the hail of blasts.

The rebel leader looked over at Hannah, “I don’t know what you said to him, but it seems to have worked.”

The two women followed in the Admin’s wake. When they reached him, Hannah saw he already had a panel pulled off the side of the transmat. His hands had disappeared into the machine’s innards. The buzzing whir of the sonic screwdriver filled the air, still audible over the ripping sounds of the blaster fire.

“Won’t be but a moment,” the Admin proclaimed.

“Doctor, we don’t have a moment,” Hannah said. To underline her point, part of the front wall of the barn chose that instant to collapse.

One of the rebels, a young man, was nearby. He waved to catch his leader’s attention. “Ma’am, we’ll buy you as many moments as we can.”

“Reyk, no,” the woman replied. “We’re all escaping.”

“You’re the only one that matters,” Reyk said. “You and the Doctor. Some people do great things. Others are merely there to clear the path for those great things to happen. Good luck.”

The rebel leader winced as the young man ran away, waving the other rebels to his side. They stormed towards the barn door, their blasters flashing red fire. “You too,” their leader whispered.

Hannah couldn’t watch the rebels charge. Feeling sick to her stomach, she pressed a hand to her mouth trying not to gag.

“Doctor, hurry,” Hannah screamed through her fingers.

“These are delicate adjustments,” the Admin said. The lights that had been glowing inside the transmat went out. The Admin snarled. He slapped the side of the device and the lights were resurrected. “As I said. Delicate.”

A final volley of blaster bolts tore into the barn. Joists and support beams creaked, groaned, gave way. The roof of the barn fell. Hannah screamed.

Castellan Azter watched with grim satisfaction as the barn collapsed upon itself. Smoke and dust billowed from the ruined remains. The wine of blaster fire petered off then vanished entirely.

Azter rose cautiously from the ground, ready to duck again at the first sign of any rebel still standing to fight. When no blaster bolts emerged from the wreck before her, she eased forward. Other guards surged past to secure the area.

“Commander,” Azter called to Jenric, “I want bodies, alive or otherwise. In particular their leader. We need her to show the rest of Gallifreyan society that justice has prevailed. That the threat to their security has been ended.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the commander replied. He seemed less enthusiastic than Azter would have expected but she didn’t let that diminish her own feelings. Mostly relief that the situation was over.

The commander moved forward to join his forces in searching the remains of the barn. Azter anticipated walking away with at least a few live captives. After all, misguided though the rebels were, they were still Time Lords. And Time Lords took a *lot* of killing.

“Ma’am,” the commander’s voice broke into Azter’s thoughts. “I think you’d better see this.”

Azter hurried forward. She picked her way carefully over the smouldering timbers of the barn to a corner that was still mostly standing. In that corner rested a transmat. A still functioning transmat. A still functioning transmat that showed the successful completion of a matter stream transmission.

One word tore from Azter's throat, "Escaped."

Hannah nearly vomited as she materialized from the transmat beam. She staggered trying not to fall to the ground. Around her was what she took to be the gravel strewn plain where she'd first landed when arriving on the Time Lords' planet.

"Shake it off," the Admin said. He looked more than a little pleased with himself. "After all, our traveling isn't done yet. We still have to return to your time stream, Ms. Redfoot."

"Hannah," Hannah said.

"Eh? What?" the Admin didn't seem to be paying too much attention. Typical.

"Please, just call me Hannah."

"Yes, yes," the Admin waved a hand.

Hannah finally caught her wind. She spotted the leader of the rebels standing a short distance away. The woman looked frailer than even a few minutes ago.

Hannah cleared her throat. "Are you, you know, all right?"

"Hmm?" It seemed to take a while for Hannah's words to reach the other woman. "No. No, I'm not. Those were my friends."

It took Hannah a moment to realize the woman was talking about the other rebels.

"They followed me because they believed in me, in what I believed in. That we, Time Lords, should make a difference. More deaths. Always more deaths." The rebel leader took a steadying breath. She smiled sadly at Hannah, "If you ever have anyone you care for, try not to ever leave them in their moment of need."

Hannah's stomach squirmed. She couldn't help but remember how she'd turned her back on her family and friends to travel with the Doctor. She put the thought from her mind and pointed to a low rise nearby. "I think the time splinter was just on the other side of that hill."

"Capital," the Admin said already turning in the indicated direction. "Come along, you two."

The three trudged up the hill. It was steeper than the uniform red gravel made it appear. The rebel leader faltered in her step. The Admin was leading the way and didn't see. It was left to Hannah to help the other woman up the grade.

"I rather thought you might arrive here," a familiar female voice said as the trio crested the hill.

Hannah regarded the assemblage of Time Lords standing before them. At their head was President Quella. She was bedecked in what Hannah took to be her full presidential regalia. A large, double-arc crest was settled about her shoulders. Across her chest she wore an ornate, segmented band of gold. In her hand she clutched a dark sceptre. A gem encrusted circlet of gold adorned her head. She was an imposing sight.

Behind her, Hannah heard a whine fill the air. She turned to see chancellery guards materializing from nowhere. Among them was Castellan Azter. The guards had followed Hannah, the Admin, and the rebel leader through the transmat beam. Azter hurried her forces up the hill to take custody of the escapees. She stopped short when she spotted Quella.

"Madam President," Castellan Azter said. "My congratulations. You've captured the —"

“Why did you not inform me you had lost the Admin and Hannah here?” President Quella interrupted.

“The situation was precarious, Madam President. I needed to ensure their safe return.”

President Quella waved to the guards and their prisoners. “Bring them forward.”

Hannah found herself pushed none too gently towards President Quella. A flicker of light in the air caught Hannah’s eye. If she strained, she could just make out the edges of the time splinter. It had drifted closer to the ground again but had contracted even more than since last Hannah had seen it. Now it was only as big across as a tennis ball.

The president of the Time Lords walked past the Admin and Hannah and stopped before the rebel leader. The two women sized each other up.

President Quella turned to the Admin. “It’s good to see you restored to us. If a little worse for wear.”

“Madam President,” the Admin said, “I must tell you that the situation with Ms. Redfoot is not what it seems. The situation in general is not what it seems. I’m supposed to be —”

“Traveling through time and space with this young woman.” Quella nodded at Hannah. “Yes, I know. Don’t look so surprised, Hannah. I am high president. It’s my job to know these things.” She turned her attention to the Admin and the rebel leader. “I connected with the Matrix. Through it, I studied the time stream. I saw how your two lines were *supposed* to be intertwined. And how they presently aren’t.”

“Wait,” Hannah said. She pointed between the Admin and the rebel leader. “These two? They’re supposed to be traveling together?”

“For a time, Hannah,” Quella conceded. “I saw too, my dear Admin, the shatter point where your life could have gone one way or the other. And you, my dear,” she said to the rebel leader, “I even saw how you gained access to the Matrix yourself. How you learned who the Admin really is or was. Cheeky.”

“Madam President,” the rebel leader said, bowing her head humbly. “If you’ve seen all this then you must understand the importance of sending this man back.”

“You can’t do that,” Castellan Azter spoke up. “You can’t allow this woman to use the events of today to further her agenda.”

“Peace, Azter,” President Quella raised a quieting hand. “The president of the Time Lords can never be seen to be endorsing the trivial changing of the time stream. It is an abuse of one of our most sacred trusts.”

Hannah’s heart fell. They had come so close.

“No,” Quella reiterated as she stared into the Admin’s eyes. “The president cannot cause the time stream to change.”

Castellan Azter moved forward to seize the rebel leader.

“And so,” Quella said, pressing a hand to the coronet she wore. “I have no choice but to resign my presidency.”

Azter had just enough time to say, “What?”

The Time Lords of old had mastered some impressive technology. Many of those secrets had been lost, obscured in the passage of time and the ceremony that Time Lords shrouded everything in. The ancient artifacts of the presidency were the perfect example. They went beyond merely the decorative. The coronet Quella wore allowed her to marshal and multiply her

mental energies. She directed those energies against the assembled Time Lords, using her will to subdue theirs, locking them in place.

The headache that had been plaguing Quella all day increased. Not from any mere pang of conscience, but from the collective weight of the mental energies of all the Time Lords present struggling to be free

“Madam President –” the Admin started.

Quella struggled to breathe. She could feel the other Time Lords battering against her consciousness. “There’s no time. You and Hannah must go. Now.” Quella gasped at a particularly intense assault. At the forefront, she felt the hard edges of a sharp and determined mind. Castellan Azter was unifying the thoughts of the others against Quella. “I cannot hold them long.”

The Admin looked like he was going to argue. Hannah placed a hand on his arm, drawing his attention. She shook her head at him. The Admin’s face was creased in anger but he said nothing. He produced the sonic screwdriver from the folds of his robe and aimed it towards the time splinter floating at shoulder height. The crack flickered. Bolts of static circled its edges.

Quella felt a mental blow, like a dagger through her hearts. She collapsed to one knee. “I can’t...”

“Not by yourself.” The rebel leader knelt before Quella. She extended her hands and took Quella’s face between them. As contact was made, Quella felt the assault of the other Time Lords lessening. No, not lessening. Being shared. President and rebel leader stood together against the tide of the fury of the Time Lords. They couldn’t hold it long, but with luck they could hold it long enough.

Through half lidded eyes, Quella watched the time splinter widen. The Admin and Hannah stepped through. The Admin looked briefly back. Apology was written on his face though he never said the words. But then, he was the Admin, he was the Doctor, and Quella knew he would never apologize for what he was.

Hannah shivered against the sudden coolness of the atmosphere of the *Continuity Station*. She watched the Admin in silence as he used the sonic screwdriver to seal shut the time splinter from which they’d emerged. For long moments he stood staring at where the splinter had been.

Hannah hadn’t known what she was expecting would happen when they stepped through the splinter. Maybe that the Doctor would look like the Doctor again, but no, he still wore the long robes of Gallifrey, still bore the extra weight of the Admin. Hannah herself was still clad in the unfashionable grey coveralls of a Gallifreyan prisoner. She felt the bandage wrapped around her head from when she’d caught it on the TARDIS console. That seemed like such a long time ago. Her head didn’t hurt anymore. That was something. She hoped that meant she was fully healed, though removing the bandage could wait for later.

The Admin squared his shoulders. “Right. Let’s be done with this. Where’s this Chronographer Atticus of yours?”

Hannah looked around. They hadn’t emerged in the same place where Hannah had first gone in. Instead they appeared to be standing on a low-ceilinged gantry running under the central nexus of the station. Hannah spotted a staircase at one end of the gantry. The Admin followed her gaze, nodded to himself, and set off at a brisk pace.

The two time travelers clattered up the stairs. Chronographer Atticus was there, stationed at

his computer bank. He was typing frantically into a control panel. The movement of Hannah and the Admin climbing from the steps caught his eye.

“Again you two?” Atticus squawked. “There will be no stopping me.” He turned to his computer and increased his typing speed.

“Computers is it?” the Admin said. He turned to a nearby computer as well. “I may not know who this Doctor chap is. I may not know anything about this timeline. About who I’m supposed to be here. But I do know one thing. I’ve been maintaining computers for centuries. Let’s just see you try to keep up.”

The Admin’s fingers flew with confidence over the computer controls. Graphics and displays that Hannah had no clue how to interpret flashed across the monitor before the Admin. Atticus emitted a series of *cheeps* as he tried to keep pace with the Admin. Emergency lights started flashing in the darkened nexus. Hannah had no idea what the two scientists were doing but clearly the result wasn’t good.

Atticus grew more agitated. With a loud squawk he lunged for his blaster, sitting on the edge of his desk.

The moment seemed to stretch into eternity as Atticus pulled his gun around to aim at the Doctor. Hannah saw the face of the young rebel who’d sacrificed himself for his leader. She remembered the young man’s words, if not his name. *Some people do great things. Others are merely there to clear the path for those great things to happen.* The voice changed, rose in pitch and it was the leader herself who now spoke to Hannah. *If you ever have anyone you care for, try not to ever leave them in their moment of need.* Hannah’s thoughts returned to when she’d first landed on the station with the Doctor. She’d seen herself through one of the time splinters. Seen the bandage about her head showing her fully healed. Seen the coveralls. Seen the moment that had happened next.

It was such an easy decision it didn’t even seem like a choice.

As the purple beam erupted from Atticus’s blaster and arced towards the Admin, Hannah took a single step. The bolt caught her in the chest and hurled her spinning to the floor.

Before Atticus could fire again, the flashing lights were joined by blaring klaxons. Atticus spun towards his computer console. The equipment surged with energy and exploded. Atticus was flung from Hannah’s sight.

The beaked form was replaced by a vision of the Doctor, no, the Admin, leaning over her.

“Did, did you do it?” Hannah asked. She seemed to be staring at the Admin from one end of a tunnel. A tunnel that grew longer with each beat of her heart.

“I stopped the machine. There will be no time weapons now. As for the rest? Who knows?”

Over his shoulder, Hannah saw all the time splinters pin wheeling through the air. They sparked and glittered in a dazzlingly bright array.

“It’s beautiful,” Hannah muttered.

“Hush now,” the Admin said.

“Doctor.” Hannah’s chest felt like it was being squeezed. All colour had gone from the world and there was only the brightness of the splinters. “Thank, thank y...”

Everything faded to white.

Hannah opened her eyes to whiteness. It took her a moment to focus on the gentle light of the circles lining the walls of the TARDIS. The time machine’s reassuring hum filled her ears. Her

heart felt tight, but the pressure lessened with each moment. She raised a hand to massage her chest. Her fingers brushed over the bottom of the ornate choker around her throat.

Hannah moved her eyes to take in her surroundings. She was seated in the old wood and leather chair the Doctor kept in the TARDIS control room. The Doctor's dark coat was spread over her like a blanket. She grunted as she straightened herself in her seat.

"Ah, Miss Redfoot," the Doctor's voice filtered into Hannah's ears. "You're awake. Good. I rather thought I'd have to roust you myself."

"S'going on?" Hannah stretched.

"We are on our way to the heart of the Horsehead Nebula. Well, what you humans call the Horsehead Nebula. From the planet Fairitax it looks rather more like an octopus."

Recent events rushed into Hannah's mind. She sat up abruptly and the Doctor's coat fell to the floor.

"Don't you dare scream," the Doctor raised an admonishing finger. He grinned and said, "Well. Maybe just this once."

Hannah found herself too shocked to make any kind of sound.

"Yes, quite," the Doctor said and busied himself at the TARDIS controls.

"Doctor?" Hannah heard the uncertainty in her own voice as she finally found it.

"Yes?" the Doctor answered without looking away from the controls. His lips twitched as though he were repressing a laugh.

"Doctor." Hannah forced her voice to steadiness as she drew near the console, studying the man working the controls across from her.

"Yes," the Doctor replied, keeping his gaze averted from Hannah. Despite his attempts, she could clearly see a mischievous grin on his features. He looked so much younger with a smile in place.

"It is you, Doctor?" Hannah felt a little silly repeating herself, but she had to be sure. "Not the, not the —"

"The Admin?" The Doctor paused in his work. He stared into the distance. The extra weight of the Admin was gone from his face and frame. "I guess you could say it's both of us."

"But how —"

"I sabotaged the controls on the *Continuity Station*. Stopped Atticus from enacting his heinous plan — delicious word heinous. Are you feeling peckish? I know I could do with a bite and a cuppa."

"But what happened?"

"Oh, that." The Doctor looked uncomfortable. "Unfortunately, Atticus had all that free floating time energy gathered around from his experiments. It had to go somewhere and that somewhere was into itself. With us standing in the middle. I won't bore you with the details. Suffice to say that the varying timelines collapsed together. My past is where it's always been. In my past. Except the parts that are in the future of course. A little rougher around the edges but more or less back in place. The Admin's memories are there too, although they mostly deal with shuffling papers from one stack to another and eating biscuits. Eugh."

"I thought I was dead," Hannah whispered.

"Not to put too fine a point on it, but you were. In one timeline. Then, as I say, they all collapsed together and now you're not." After a moment, the Doctor added, "Best not to think too much about it. It doesn't do to contemplate one's mortality from the far side of it."

Hannah shook her head and wished she hadn't. She had the definite stirrings of a headache coming on. She watched the Doctor as he returned his attention to his controls. She wondered

what had happened to Quella and the leader of the rebels on Gallifrey. Hannah supposed that she'd never know now. Still, there was one Time Lady that she *could* learn more about. That she felt it only right – for herself, for the lost Gallifreyans, even for the Doctor – to learn about.

“Doctor?”

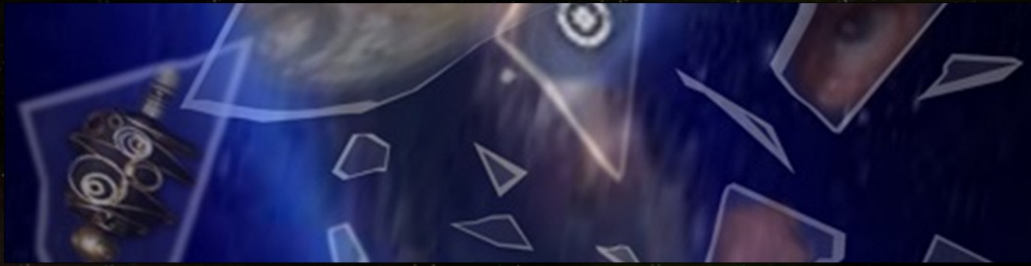
“Hmm, yes?”

“Tell me about Romana?”

The Doctor turned his gaze to Hannah. He hesitated so long Hannah wondered if he'd really heard her.

Finally, the Doctor said, “Oh, very well. But that's a long story and one best told over a cup of tea. Do be good enough to fetch us both one.” After a pause he said, “Hannah.”

Hannah smiled. She rose from the chair and replied, “Yes, Doctor.”



Civilizations rise and fall on the experiences that make them. So too do people. Change the past and a civilization may not rise. Change the past and a man's destiny may not be fulfilled.

On a space station drifting among the remains of a dead planet, the Doctor and Hannah confront an alien scientist bent on destroying a race before it can even evolve. As events spiral out of control, Hannah finds herself whisked away to the world of the Time Lords. But not the world the Doctor knew.

Pursued by the Time Lords and avoiding a band of insurgents, Hannah's only hope of returning to where she came from lies with a man who has no reason to aid her. Now Hannah must convince the Admin to change time in order to set the universe right and save the Doctor from a fate of walking death.

This is another story 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

