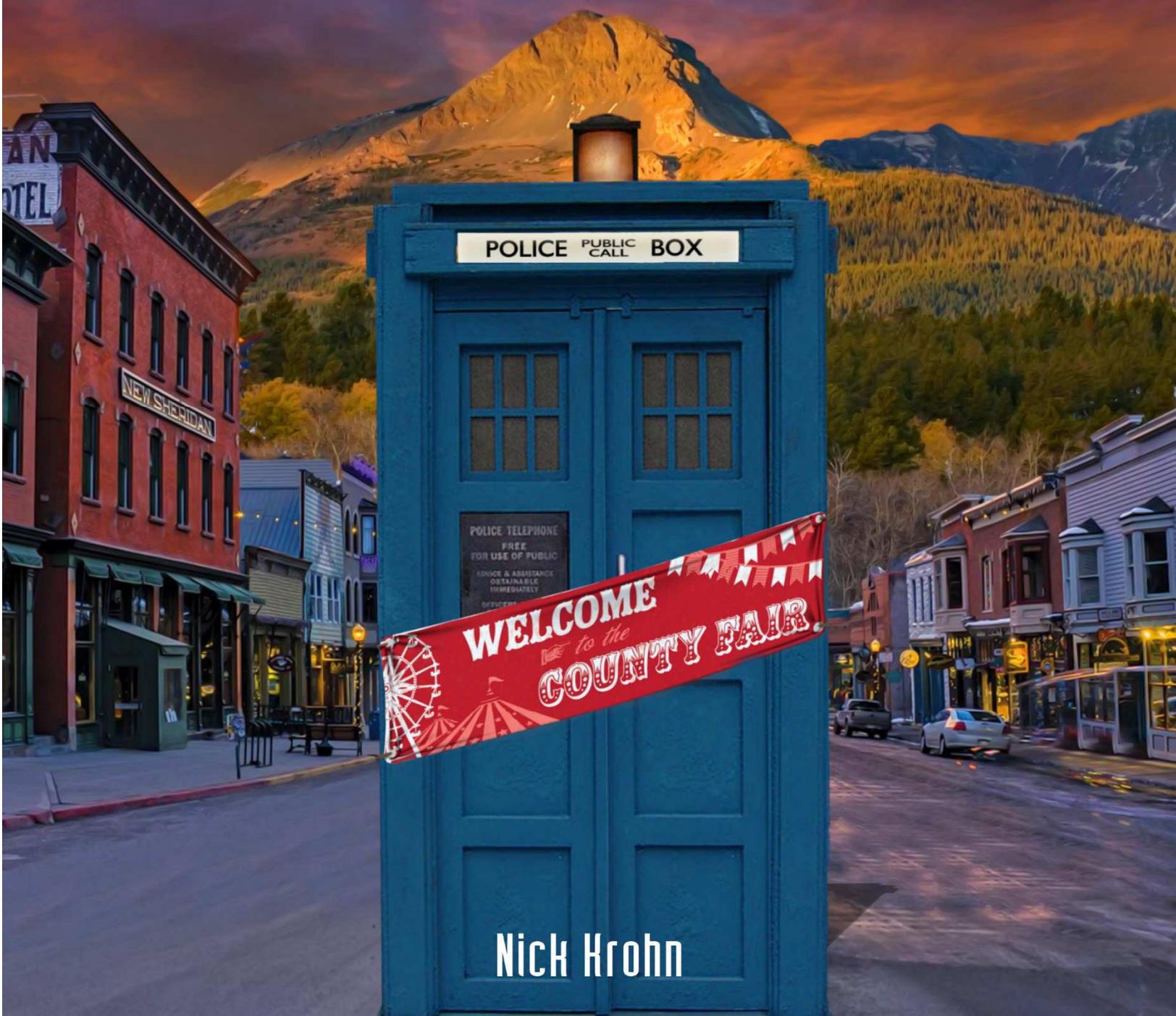


THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

Terror in Timberland



Nick Krohn

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Everything had seemed so normal as she had driven into town three hours earlier. Almost abnormally normal, in fact. At the time Kara had chalked it up to driving thirty-six of the last forty-eight hours and the radical changes in climate, culture and driving habits between Vero Beach, Florida and Timberland, South Dakota. After months working as a stage manager for the Orange State Repertory Summer Stock Theatre, she was looking forward to a long weekend at home before the season finally opened.

Kara knew she had been lucky to get a job at any summer theatre considering her age and experience, but the pay was terrible, and the season of plays were not among the best. After all, every summer stock theatre relies on producing shows that sell tickets. “Butts in seats put food on our table,” as her boss liked to put it, and thanks to the reliable audience of blue-haired old ladies OSRP enjoyed, she was being paid fairly well. Even so, as grateful as she was, their big musical this year was “The Mikado,” which, as a person of Japanese heritage, she found deeply problematic and would be happy when she didn’t need to sit through any more rehearsals full of the W.A.S.P.-iest chorus girls on earth painted up as Asian stereotypes.

Kara pulled her car into her parents’ driveway. “Home again, home again, jiggy jig” she said as she dragged her backpack from the passenger seat. It was good to be home.

* * * * *

When someone returns to their hometown after their first year in college, often they are struck with how different the place seems. Some of the houses have been painted different colours, or perhaps the new gas station makes the town no longer feel quite the same. It’s as if a familiar skeleton had been stripped and replaced with new flesh. Kara thought of none of these things, as she ran for her life through the streets of her hometown.

Her sweat chilled her arms as the ninety-degree heat of the day plunged down into the sixties now that the sun had left the sky. She turned left down Bleeker Avenue and quickly dashed down a small alley separating properties in the small residential area that bordered the downtown square. Still no sign of her pursuers. Her mind, focused by the adrenaline charging through her veins, picked out strange details in the jagged shadows thrown by the streetlights. *When did everyone buy trampolines for their kids?* she wondered.

She took the next left, running with all her might. Her only hope was to reach the police station. Kara heard an approaching engine and scrambled into a nearby driveway just in time to

watch an old farm truck rumble past. People sat in benches secured to the sides of the truck bed. It would almost have reminded her of a hayride, except this was the wrong time of year and there was something off about the people. They were sitting ramrod straight and barely swaying with the roll of the truck. *I have to get to the sheriff's office*, she thought, slinking along the side of the car she had hid behind. *Only one more street to go.*

Kara finally burst from a side street into the town square. Dominating the square was the courthouse, with its imitation Renaissance façade that was common among American courthouses. As Kara had crossed the country from her summer job in Florida she had seen dozens of municipal buildings that were nearly identical, as if at the turn of the 20th Century the small towns of America had all decided to build Greek temples, and all did a uniformly bad job of it. The ground floor of the courthouse was occupied by the Sheriff's office. A sigh of relief escaped from her as she saw the lights were still blazing inside. She had made it.

Across the square, in the courthouse parking lot, the headlights from at least a dozen cars, including the farm truck and every squad car in the Sheriff's department cast a blinding glare. The people from the farm truck stood facing the headlights, regimented in two rows. On either side of the Sheriff's office entrance stood two uniformed deputies. A small figure, his features obscured by the headlights, paced before them, waving his arms at the new arrivals. It reminded Kara of a ham actor in a Shakespearean history play giving a rousing speech to the troops. Even more eerie were the deputies: they stood with the same rigid pose as everyone else.

She knew something was wrong. She darted across the street and into an alley. There would be no help from the Sheriff. She cut northwest across town, past the entrance to the fairgrounds. On either side of the gates were banners declaring "County Fair Next Week! Livestock Shows Every Day!"

Humboldt Avenue was, for a town like Timberland, an enormous thoroughfare, and Kara felt extremely exposed as she crossed it. As she made it to the other side, she looked back the way she had come and instantly regretted it. Three figures had stepped into the street. The tallest and only male figure was looking back to the east, and the taller female was looking south. The smallest figure, however, was looking straight at Kara. The figure pointed at Kara, and the heads of the others snapped round to stare at Kara, who froze in place. The figure shouted something, but from where Kara stood, all she could make out was a hoarse, inarticulate grunt. Even without hearing the words, the tone carried menace, but Kara stayed rooted to the spot. The ranks of townspeople began to move towards her slowly at first, but they began to build speed almost immediately. As they broke into a run, Kara had a vague, numb recollection of a zombie movie where the creatures had moved like caffeinated leopards. She'd had to turn off the TV after ten minutes and spent the rest of the night breathing into a paper bag. At the front of the pack, Kara recognized the face of her father. Finally Kara's brain rebooted. She turned and ran, taking every turn and switchback she could take as she made her way toward the only truly familiar building on this side of town.

She was panting by the time she reached the high school. Even in her increasingly frantic state she knew not to bother with the large glass double doors on the front of the building, and instead moved around to the rear of the building.

When she had been a student here, there were occasions when kids needed to get into the school at times when the building was supposed to be locked. At these times, it was customary to try a window the cafeteria workers almost always left unlocked. It was a secret passed down from upperclassmen to freshmen since time out of mind. Hopefully, the cafeteria staff hadn't bothered to break their bad habits.

The window had been left unlocked, but unfortunately the kitchen had been somewhat rearranged since her graduation, so instead of landing on a sturdy stainless-steel prep table, she slid from the window into nothing but empty space and tumbled to the floor. She pulled the window closed and scrambled through the kitchen and cafeteria, trying her best to ignore the soft pain in her ankle.

Once inside the school, it was fairly easy to move around freely. True, the teachers locked their classrooms, but usually a student breaking in after-hours only needed access to their lockers (their own or someone else's) or the other public spaces in the school. Or, perhaps they just needed an out of the way darkened corner for a romantic moment. Kara found it a little more difficult to think of where she could find a place to hide until the people hunting her gave up. If they gave up.

She sprinted up the stairs to the second floor. Timberland High (home of the Bears) had gone from a familiar old haunt to a dangerous labyrinth. There had to be somewhere to hide, and she knew this place like the back of her hand.

"You can't hide," her father's voice boomed through the hallways, seeming to come from everywhere at once as she raced past Mrs. Kendall's geography classroom. "You can't escape. We will find you. Surrender now, and you will not be harmed, sweetie."

Her stomach sank as she realized what a terrible mistake she had made. *Mom and Dad went to school here, too. Of course they know how to get in through the kitchen window.* She cursed herself for thinking she could find safety in these halls.

Kara turned down the hallway, away from the stairs she had taken and wracked her brain trying to think of something, anything that her parents wouldn't know about. Her sneakers skidded across the heavily waxed floor as she flew around a corner past what looked like art classrooms. Something new must have been put in here since the late eighties. *What's here? What can I use?* She cast her gaze around her but found nothing. Everything was the same as when she had first walked here as a freshman six years ago and would probably look the same until they finally tore the place down. Same metal doors, same bookcases lining the halls opposite the lockers.

She heard footsteps ascending the stairs, the familiar click of her mother's low heels that she wouldn't stop wearing because she hated being so short. Kara had moments. She looked heavenward and prayed for a sign. To her surprise, she found one in the pattern of dots on the tiles of the drop ceiling.

* * * * *

Two minutes later, Kara tried to relax and slow her breathing as her mother's footsteps drew close. She tried to ignore the metal rails biting into her back as, just below her position in the supports of the recently installed drop ceiling, her mother's phone squealed the three most annoying measures of "The Brandenburg Concerto" at maximum volume.

"Ken? Did you find her?" she barked. Kara's mother had never really been comfortable with cell phones. Even less so as her hearing had begun to deteriorate. Like many middle-aged parents in denial, Kara's mom behaved as if everyone else in the world was mumbling. And, of course, cell phones worked like two soup cans connected by a piece of string, so she shouted into her phone. "No, I didn't find her. If I had found her, I'd have called you. You called me so I thought you had found her!" There was a pause as Kara's father's voice wafted from the phone into the hallway, his exasperation evident. "Well, fine. She's not up here, anyway. I think she just ran through the building. Is anyone checking the fairgrounds? Why not?" The carping faded into the distance as Kara's mom walked back to join her husband.

Kara finally released a breath she didn't know she had been holding. *Okay, I'm safe for now*, she thought. *Now what?*

* * * * *

One of the local vehicles pulled up behind Tyrnn as he stared at the school. He was about to sigh but thought better of it. Bad enough this planet stank as it did, but the air was like breathing lake water. Intolerable, and it gave him and his companions a strange, growling tone to their voices. They even annoyed each other with their hoarse, gravelly speech.

Footsteps approached, and Tyrnn knew before he turned round it would be Mirlon. Her features were the smooth, wavy crags of Kraal nobility, but set in an expression of worry Tyrnn had learned was a symptom of her chronically bleeding heart.

“What is going on, here, Tyrnn?” Mirlon barked.

“*Commander Tyrnn*,” he reminded his junior officer. “A subject has temporarily escaped capture. I am led to understand it was the return of a former permanent resident. The error is being corrected.”

Mirlon shook her head in frustration. “I told you this plan was impractical and unsustainable. This cannot work for much longer.”

“It doesn't have to, Lieutenant. Nevertheless, your objections have been noted. Yet again.” Tyrnn turned his back on Mirlon, hoping she would take the hint.

Before she could stop herself, Mirlon blurted out, “I thought the Kraal had moved beyond this sort of unethical behavior. Even if it works, this is wrong.”

Tyrnn snorted in derision. “The ends justify the means, Lieutenant,” he sneered as he marched away to meet the replicants leaving the school.

“No, Commander they don't,” Mirlon muttered. “The ends never, ever justify the means.”

* * * * *

Hannah poked her head out of the TARDIS and grinned. “It's perfect.” She stepped out into the morning sun and took another look at her surroundings. The TARDIS had materialized next to a trash bin that had been butted against a tall wooden fence. Similar bins lined the otherwise empty alleyway. Simple suburban America practically radiated off the pavement of the service alley. Across the street from the mouth of the alley stood a large gate with banners declaring “County Fair Next Week! Livestock Shows Every Day!” Hannah's smile grew even wider as she tied up her raven hair. “Exactly what I asked for.”

The Doctor pocketed the key to the TARDIS as he joined her. “Of course, Hannah. I may not understand your need to see such a place, but if an American county fair you need, then an American county fair you shall have.”

They walked down the alley, Hannah breathing in the clean country air. “Oh, come on, Doctor. When was the last time you had a real, ground-level, regular experience on Earth?”

The Doctor thought for a moment. “I believe it was 1963,” he said, “and lasted approximately fifteen minutes.”

“Then you're overdue for one. Besides, fairs were a big deal when I was a kid. The crowds, the exhibits, the food – speaking of which, have you ever had a walking taco?”

“I don't think I've ever even heard of such a thing.”

“Well, then that's the first thing we need to do.”

“Does every county fair in this country have walking tacos?” the Doctor asked. Hannah chuckled. “Absolutely. It’s basically a law.”

* * * * *

The fair had not lived up to Hannah’s expectations. The exhibits were incredibly dull. Highlights included a large poster with information on the birthing process for pygmy goats which included illustrations, and photographs that made Hannah glad they had not yet found the walking taco vendor. What really bothered her, though, was the distinct lack of people.

“This is weird,” Hannah muttered in the Doctor’s direction. “This place should be packed. I don’t think I’ve seen ten people here who aren’t working.”

“Yes, I didn’t want to say anything, but it’s hard to deny,” the Doctor said. “Nevertheless, I think we may have found the walking taco stand.” He pointed toward a small shack next to a barn full of restored antique tractors. A large, oddly ornate sign which read “WALKIN’ TACOS HERE!” was mounted above the window.

“Two please,” Hannah said to the large, round faced fellow behind the counter as she held out a ten-dollar bill.

The money disappeared beneath the counter. “Coming right up,” he boomed and set to work. The Doctor seemed puzzled as the man opened up small corn chip bags and began stuffing them with seasoned meat, cheese and lettuce. Finally the man shoved a plastic fork into each bag and handed them to the Doctor and Hannah.

Unable to resist, Hannah asked, “Aren’t there usually more people here?”

“Oh heck yeah,” the man said with a distinct Western twang. “Last year we’d have lines, even this early. I don’t know what happened.”

The Doctor poked at his food, still examining it. “We’re not from around here, but it did seem a bit odd. Do you think there might be something wrong here?”

“Couldn’t say, I’m just here for the week, then I’m on to the next fair,” he said. “It was a lot busier last year. And more friendly, too.”

“What do you mean, more friendly?” Hannah said.

“Just... I don’t know. Some of the people here seem normal, but most of them will barely talk to you. Like they’re thinking about something else. Last year I could barely shut most people up long enough to take their order.”

“Why do you think it’s different now?” Hannah asked. Behind her, the Doctor took a bite of his food.

“Dunno. I would think it was something like maybe the mine wasn’t doing so good, but when I drove into town last night, it was busier than an anthill.”

“Well, thanks anyway,” Hannah said as she and the Doctor walked away.

“That really was quite good, Miss Redfoot,” the Doctor said as he threw away his empty corn chip bag. “However, I think something strange might be going on here.”

“Me too,” she replied, looking around at the empty fairground. “Where are all the people?”

“Shall we take a stroll around town and see if we can’t find them?”

* * * * *

As they walked through the town, Hannah began to feel as if there were invisible eyes watching them. “Yes, Miss Redfoot, I get that feeling as well,” the Doctor said when he told her. “This place simply does not have enough people in it.”

“Everything is just a little... off. It’s the little things.” Hannah pointed across the street to the propped open doors of Timberland High. “Like that. Those doors shouldn’t be open. And look at the parking lot. School probably starts again in a couple of weeks, so there should be a few teachers here getting ready for the new school year.”

“Well, they’re certainly not at the fair,” the Doctor quipped. “If we’re going to get to the bottom of this, we will need to do more than wander the streets.” His wild hair streamed back in a sudden breeze as he gave Hannah a winning smile. “I think maybe we should poke around the school a bit, don’t you?”

* * * * *

Nostalgia washed over Hannah as she trotted behind the Doctor down the halls of the school. The low hum of the water fountains, the smell of the ancient paint clinging to the cinder block walls—it was almost like being transported back to high school. Almost. Once again, things were not quite right.

Everything was covered in a thin film of dust. It was obvious that the janitors hadn’t been here for at least a couple of weeks. The dust even covered the floors, except for a few trails where people had obviously been running around at some point. The trails separated at the foot of a wide staircase. “Everyone going a different direction,” the Doctor muttered. “Searching.” He dashed up the stairs, but Hannah hesitated as she took a second look at one set of footprints. She caught up to him as he was making the turn to go to the top floor. “Doctor, wait up a second.” “I recognize one set of shoes. The small ones. Those are little girls’ shoes.”

He ran a hand through his hair. “Are you sure?”

“I’m not entirely sure there isn’t a little boy somewhere who wants to wear Power Pony Princess sneakers, but they are child-size footprints.”

“Interesting.”

“So was somebody trying to track down a little kid? Did she get lost?”

The Doctor shook his head. “No, that set of footprints was definitely one of the hunters, not the prey.”

Hannah smirked. “So I should be on the lookout for a creepy evil child?”

He failed to notice her sarcasm. “Yes, that would be prudent for the time being.”

* * * * *

The third floor seemed to be a jumble of different types of classes. Art, literature, and a room with two tables on a small, raised dias that Hannah assumed was for Speech or Debate. This floor seemed quieter than the others. Almost deliberately quiet. At an intersection of two hallways, the Doctor had kneeled next to a couple of black marks on the tiled floor.

“Somebody took this corner pretty fast,” Hannah said as the Doctor shot to his feet.

A blur and a rush of wind went past Hannah’s face toward the floor, right through the space the Doctor’s head had occupied a split second before.. There was a sharp *slap* as the Doctor caught the baseball bat before it hit the floor.

Holding the bat was a tall Asian woman about Hannah's age wearing jeans and a blue t-shirt with bright orange lettering that said, "Orange State Summer Rep 55th Anniversary Season" in frilly letters across the chest. On the sleeve, Hannah noticed the word "CREW" in the same font.

"Now, now, Miss, if that thing had hit the floor it would have made a conspicuous amount of noise, don't you think?" the Doctor said.

She was wild-eyed, panting, almost out of her mind with fear. "You won't take me without a fight," she muttered.

"We won't take you anywhere you don't want to go," the Doctor said in a soothing tone while keeping eye contact with her. "I'm called the Doctor, and this is Miss Hannah Redfoot. We are here to help you."

"How do I know that?" she said with a hysterical giggle. "How do I know you're not one of them?"

"Who is them?" asked Hannah.

"You tell me," the woman said.

"I don't know what's going on here, but you seem like a fairly sensible person who's been pushed to the breaking point," the Doctor said, releasing the bat. "I promise you we are not here to take you away."

"How can I trust you?" she said as she leaned back against the cool concrete wall and brushed tears from her eyes. "How do I know this isn't a trap?"

"I guess you don't," Hannah said. "But then again, we could ask you the same question, right?"

"Yes, we could," said the Doctor, "but I believe I have a much more productive line of questioning. Who are you? How did you get here? What kind of trap are you so afraid of?"

"Keep your voice down and follow me," she said. "I'll tell you everything once we're hidden."

* * * * *

A few minutes later, after she had led them out a window on the third floor, across the blistering heat of the tarred roof and through a service hatch into the library storeroom where she had been hiding out for the last three days, she kept her promise.

Her name was Kara Sato, and she had come home to visit her family, only to be attacked by them and hunted across town. Her mother, father, and little sister were eventually joined by several other citizens, including local law enforcement. Once she had found this hiding place, she had watched through the room's single window as the town had been swiftly taken over. Every morning more and more of the people she had known her entire life had acquired the slightly stiff walk that she had come to dread.

Every night her father came to the school again, wandering the halls hoping to catch her, so daytime was safer for her to venture out. She had left the safety of her hideout to scavenge for food from the cafeteria once each day, which is how she had run into the Doctor and Hannah.

"Doctor, this sounds like pod people. Are these pod people?"

The Doctor shook his head. "No, pod people are safely in the realm of fiction, though I have a feeling you are not far off the mark. This feels like something I have encountered before."

Kara goggled. "This is familiar to you? How can anyone's life be that weird?"

"That's a good question," Hannah said. "I've never figured it out."

"Is there anything else you have noticed?" the Doctor asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Any information might be valuable. For example, who exactly has changed? Is there a strategy at work? The police and other town officials are obvious targets, but what about the regular citizens? Are there any commonalities?”

“Like what?”

“Anything. Do they all live in the same place, work in the same place?”

“Almost everyone works at the mine, so that’s probably not helpful.”

The Doctor pressed on. “Fine, do they all live in the same place?”

Kara brightened. “Actually yeah, it all spread out from the north, but not evenly.”

“Well, that’s no good then,” said Hannah.

“Not so fast, Miss Redfoot. Let me make a guess, Miss Sato. The people you saw get taken over were mostly from family groups. Husbands, wives, younger children.”

Kara thought for a moment. “I guess so, yeah.”

“And the elderly was mostly left for last—unless they were town officials. The same probably applied for single people – unless they worked in the mines.”

Kara shot the Doctor an appraising look. “I don’t believe in psychics, Doctor.”

He grinned. “Oh, you’d be surprised, but in this case, it was nothing more than some simple deduction.”

“Okay, fine, whatever. So what do you think happened? Why is everyone crazy?”

“It depends,” the Doctor said, striding across the room to a toolbox in the far corner. “First we need to know whether your family had their minds altered, possessed by an outside force, or completely replaced with duplicates.”

“All three of those are real possibilities?” Kara asked.

“I’m afraid so, but to determine which it is I will need this,” he said as he spun round brandishing a screwdriver, “and some rope.”

“You’re setting a trap?” Hannah said.

“Yes indeed, and for that trap I shall also need Miss Sato’s help.”

* * * * *

That night, as Kara dashed into the school gymnasium, she prayed the man only seconds behind her wasn’t actually her father. In a strange way, that would be a comfort.

Her father barreled headlong into the gymnasium, a snarl on his face, totally focused on capturing his prey. So focused, in fact that he failed to notice a few of the lights had been turned on, or the loop of rope on the floor. The rope tightened around his ankle, and as he fell the worst part for Kara was that he didn’t scream. He just grunted, the way her father always did when he was surprised. *Please, please, please don’t be my dad.*

“Miss Redfoot,” the Doctor said, wrapping the rope around the wrists of Kara’s father, “the tape, please.” Hannah dashed forward and taped their captive’s mouth shut just as he gained enough presence of mind to scream.

Kara paced behind the Doctor, trying to control her anxiety. He felt her father’s neck. “No pulse,” he said. He drew the screwdriver from his jacket. “So I’m willing to bet—”

The Doctor jabbed the screwdriver into her father’s face just before his left ear. Kara stifled a scream. The Doctor gave the screwdriver a twist and her father’s face fell off. Instead of bone and tissue, a crazy mass of wires and electronics that seemed to tangle up behind a pair of swiveling mechanical eyes.

“Oh, thank God,” Kara said. “It wasn’t him.”

“I can certainly sympathize with your relief, Miss Sato,” the Doctor sighed. “Myself, I was hoping for mind control.” He reached into the robot’s circuitry and gingerly pulled a wire free. The robot went limp. “Instead it’s the Kraal.”

“What’s a Kraal?” Hannah asked.

“Oh, good, I thought I was the only one who didn’t know,” Kara laughed.

The Doctor did not share her levity. “They ruined their planet’s environment, so they now go around the cosmos trying to either find a new planet or scrounge up the resources to repair it, usually by criminal means.” He dusted off his hands and thought a moment. “Let me guess, the mine nearby digs up palladium or more probably rhodium?”

“It’s actually a platinum mine, but it also produces rhodium.”

“So they’re trying to save their planet’s atmosphere by scrubbing it on a massive scale. I could almost feel sorry for them if they didn’t stoop to such methods to try to solve their problems.”

“I’m okay not feeling sorry for them,” Hannah said.

“Yeah, me too,” said Kara, who paused a moment. “Did they kill Mom and Dad? Kira?”

The Doctor put on his best comforting smile. “I doubt it. They are in danger, to be sure, but I think they will be safe as long as the mine is producing. Which should be our next stop.”

A siren began to wail somewhere in town. “And we should probably get going,” Hannah said. “Right now.”

The Doctor rose. “Yes, it seems like they have made some improvements to their androids since I last saw them. They have wi-fi now. Let’s go, Miss Sato, and if you would, lead the way.”

* * * * *

Hannah and the Doctor followed Kara into the school’s basement just as the Timberland P.D. (or their replacements, at least) screamed up to the school. She led them past the various ventilation machinery into a far corner of the room. There was a metal door covering a narrow doorway. Kara swung it open and revealed a few steps going down and a dark, seemingly endless hallway.

“These old steam tunnels run across most of the town. Our parent’s always told us to stay away from them, so of course we explored every inch.” She turned on her phone’s flashlight. “Come on.”

* * * * *

She led them through the tunnels for a full ten minutes before calling a rest.

“The mine is miles away,” Kara said. “If we’re going to get their fast, we’re going to need some real transportation.”

“I was just thinking the same thing, Miss Sato. Fortunately, I have my own transportation. I don’t suppose these tunnels go all the way to the gates of the fairground?”

* * * * *

Mirlon laid her datapad down on her desk and wondered again whether she was doing the right thing. *Of course saving our planet is the right thing to do, but is this the right way to do it?* Doubt twisted in the back of her mind.

Tyrnn stomped through Mirlon's workstation on his way to the command center. "Order production to be doubled. Sweet Oseidon, I want to go home. The only thing worse than the smell of the natives is the stink of their mud ball of a planet." He slammed the door without waiting for a response.

Tyrnn was of the old school. He didn't even carry his datapad with him. Mostly what they were used for in the field was direct management of labour and resources. As Tyrnn saw it, he was a Commander. It was Mirlon's job to pass important information to her Commander. When he had been a Lieutenant he had no doubt obeyed orders without question. This was a skill Mirlon had not, and probably never would, master. She always had questions, doubts, reservations. Which was why she was here, under Tyrnn's command. Someone with an inquisitive streak needed someone like Tyrnn to mind her.

Sighing, she picked up her pad again and the doubt in the back of her mind leaped forward and demanded to be heard. *What if these aren't even your orders? Oseidon had been subject to the odd military coups in the past. Do the oligarchs even know we are here? It all seemed so confusing. Is it confusing? Or is it just that you know you are helping to commit an atrocity? If the continued survival of the Kraal can only be saved by these means...maybe we should not survive.*

The lights on Mirlon's command console all turned a violent pink and began flashing as a high whine filled her workstation. Even over the deafening hoots of the siren, she could hear Tyrnn stomping out of his office. She disengaged the siren and waited for the inevitable.

The door to Tyrnn's office crashed open. "An alert! What's the code? Have the workers rebelled?"

Mirlon consulted her datapad's screen. "An alien object has been discovered; a ship coded as... a ten-zero-eleven? I'm not familiar with that code. What is it?"

A grin of eager anticipation passed across Tyrnn's face. "Is the object in the shape of a large blue box?"

"Yes, Commander," Mirlon said.

"I suggest you review the reports of the Kraal's previous mission on this planet, Lieutenant. That box is the vehicle of a Time Lord called the Doctor."

* * * * *

The tunnels had led Kara, Hannah, and the Doctor to the southern end of the fairground, where a heavy metal door had been concealed on the side of a large concrete bunker. Kara explained that during World War II these structures had been built to store arms in case of foreign invasion. "Now, they're used mostly for storing the fencing for the livestock pens over the winter."

The Doctor peered around the edge of the door. "A much better use for them, I'm sure. All clear. Let's go."

As they moved towards the edge of the fairground, the Doctor's head swiveled, as if he expected them to be discovered, in spite of the fact that the fairgrounds seemed even more deserted now than they had earlier in the day. "You seem a bit nervous, Doctor," Hannah said.

"It's not paranoia, Miss Redfoot, I assure you. I don't have time to go into my prior contact with the Kraal but believe me when I say we must all be on our guard. If we are separated, even for a moment, one of us could have been replaced by an android replica. A keen eye and a critical mind are essential for survival in this situation." The Doctor crept along the low concrete wall surrounding the fairground as he led the way back to the TARDIS. "Keep your heads down, it's possible we are being watched."

* * * * *

Across from Mirlon's workstation, Tyrrn was glued to the video feed from the leader of the android squad he had dispatched to lie in wait for the Time Lord. The viewer relayed what the android was seeing: a small gap in a rough wooden fence looked out onto the alleyway where a tall blue box stood next to a few trash containers.

"Strategy, Mirlon," he crowed. "The troops will lie in wait, and at the appropriate moment, we will finally have the Doctor at our mercy. He has been very clever thus far to pass undetected through Timberland, but now it doesn't matter where he tries to hide. He will come back for his vehicle. Check the androids' network. Make sure he hasn't managed to discover us."

In the normal course of things, the network was rarely checked apart from at the beginning and end of each day, since errors were so rare. Nevertheless, when she checked, Mirlon found one of the android units had been deactivated, and its partner had been dispatched to check out the situation. Then a dialogue box appeared. The text read: "Distribute this information to the entire network? Choose One: Affirmative – Negative"

Mirlon thought for a moment, then tapped "Negative."

"No, commander, there doesn't seem to be any reason to believe the Doctor might know of our presence here," she said. Commander Tyrrn grunted happily and returned his focus to the viewscreen. Almost without thinking Mirlon deactivated the entire data sharing network for the androids. She smiled to herself. If Tyrrn didn't kill her for this, she would sleep a little better at the end of this cycle.

* * * * *

The Doctor peeked over the wall again at the TARDIS across the street, only a few meters away. "No, I don't think this is wise. We will have to find another way."

Kara was visibly frustrated. "Okay, even if I believe that weird-looking phone booth is actually your spaceship, what's the problem? There's nothing there. Let's go."

"Oh, no, Miss Sato, there is definitely a problem. Take a look, Miss Redfoot. Spot the difference."

Hannah peeked over the wall. Just like before, across the street was an alleyway lined with bins and cars, and next to one of those bins stood the familiar sight of the TARDIS. It was almost exactly the same... except for the cars. She ducked back down next to the Doctor. "The whole place was deserted earlier," she said. "Those cars shouldn't be there. You're right, Doctor, it's a trap."

"We're still going to need transportation to get to the mine," said Kara.

"First we should probably go back to the tunnels," the Doctor mused. "I presume you can bring us out in a different residential neighbourhood? We should be able to get a car there."

Hannah was perplexed. "How do you plan on getting a car?"

"Why, the old-fashioned way, Miss Redfoot," the Doctor said with an impish grin as he held up his purloined screwdriver. "We're going to steal one."

* * * * *

It was far easier to steal a car in a town occupied by hostile alien android duplicates than Hannah thought it should have been. Apparently, the robots were ferried around the town on large farm trucks, so it was fairly easy to find an empty house with an abandoned car in the driveway, and since Timberland houses usually had their driveways in the rear of the house, they were almost completely under cover the entire time the Doctor was fiddling around under the front wheels disabling the alarm of a small, blue family sedan.

The Doctor bounced to his feet, screwdriver in hand, and deftly broke the lock on the driver's side door. "Ah ha. I do believe we are in business," the Doctor said as he slid into the driver's seat. In a few moments he had popped off the housing of the steering column, messed with a few wires and had used his screwdriver to activate the ignition. The car purred to life. The Doctor's face lit up with a proud grin. "You never lose it," he said.

"Always something new with you," Hannah muttered as she slid into the front passenger seat.

* * * * *

The Fleetwater platinum mining facility was a surface mine, meaning the soil was scraped off the side of a hill and then the desired elements were extracted. Even lying on her stomach on top a hill, it looked grim, and she said so to the Doctor.

"It is, unfortunately, not the best thing for a planet to mine constantly, especially mining for things that are sitting in landfills. Why not break down your refuse to get what you need? I've tried to tell people, but will they listen?"

Kara was growing impatient. "Yes, Doctor, but before we save the Earth, can we please save my family?"

"Who's to say we won't be doing both today?" the Doctor quipped. Hannah shot him a nasty look and he softened. "Nevertheless, your point is taken." He squinted at the pit mine below him. "I cannot see any way in, however."

Kara scoffed. "Is that all you need? Come on, I'll get you through the side door."

* * * * *

The "side door" was actually a loose bit of fence on the far side of the facility. Generations of teenagers had used this as a place for clandestine gatherings, far from the prying eyes of adult supervision.

There was a line of crumbling buildings once used for administrative purposes, now succumbing to the elements. As empty as they seemed, Hannah once again felt eyes on her. She was grateful for the Doctor's caution as he flitted between buildings and carefully checked around corners before waving her and Kara to join him.

"Miss Sato," he said in a hushed voice, "is it far to the active mine we saw from the hill?"

"It's hard to know exactly, Doctor. Remember I've been gone almost a year." She pointed to a low, rocky ridge ahead of them. "Last time I was here, there was mining going on just over there, but I wouldn't be surprised if they had moved on since then."

Fearing detection, Hannah and Kara followed the Doctor as he crawled up to the edge of the ridge. Below, the mining operation had indeed moved on, but the space was still being put to use. A spacecraft stood at the edge of the mining pit. It's blocky, moss-coloured bulk dominated the scene, even though the most horrifying sights lay closer to Hannah's position. Just down the

hill, surrounded by a tall, wicked-looking fence were rows of mismatching tents. People milled about the tents, falling into lines. Raised walkways allowed the squat, chainmail-clad guards a good view of their captives. Just outside the camp, several Kraal were setting up some sort of alien device that seemed to be made entirely of valves. “Doctor, are those the aliens you mentioned?”

“Yes, they are, Miss Redfoot.”

“They look like someone microwaved a samurai action figure.”

“As you would if your species had been exposed to radiation for generations,” the Doctor chided.

“Half the town must be down there. What is going on here?”

“Slave labour,” the Doctor said. “But it stops today.”

Something small and round pressed into Hannah’s back. Behind her a hoarse, rasping voice said “No, Doctor. It stops tomorrow, when I return to Oseidon a hero. In the meantime, I am Commander Tyrnn of the Oseidon defense force. I would like to ask you some questions about how you found your way here. Come with us.” Hands hauled her to her feet and she barely caught a glimpse of the Doctor’s face before he disappeared into the small mob of Kraal overseers and android guards. In all her time with him, she had never seen the Doctor so coldly angry.

* * * * *

The cell was not the worst the Doctor and Hannah had ever been in, but that didn’t say much. Except for the solid steel door it was a featureless concrete room with a single, tiny window letting in the feeble twilight. The entire situation seemed depressingly difficult to escape.

“What now, Doctor?” Kara asked.

“We wait, Miss Sato, for an opportunity to present itself.”

“How are you so sure that it will?”

The Doctor gave her a grim smile. “If they wanted us dead, they would have killed us. If they want us alive, then we must have something they need. Don’t worry, they’ll be along to intimidate us any minute now, which will give us some information to work with. Then we will formulate a plan.”

* * * * *

A few minutes later the door groaned in metallic agony as Tyrnn stomped into the room, followed by what appeared to be a junior officer. A pair of android guards stood by the door as Tyrnn paced the room, glaring at the Doctor. “You have caused my people a great deal of trouble in the past, Time Lord,” he growled.

“Time what?” Kara sputtered.

Tyrnn rounded on her. “I find it hard to believe even your simple primate brain failed to notice the true nature of this creature. Did you never even question why he seemed to know so much about my people?” Tyrnn sneered at the Doctor. “I believe the local cliché is ‘it takes one to know one.’”

“The Doctor doesn’t invade,” Hannah said. “It’s more like, I don’t know, tourism.”

“It wasn’t tourism when he doomed my homeworld to a hideous, wasting death by radiation poisoning.”

“Doctor, are you really an alien?” Kara chimed in.

“Tyrnn, that is an absurdly broad interpretation of the facts, and yes, Miss Sato, I’m not from your planet, but I am trying to save it.”

“You could have saved Oseidon, Time Lord,” Tyrnn growled. “But you didn’t even try.”

“I was a little busy stopping you from wiping out all life on this planet so you could move in and colonize it.”

“Forgive me, Doctor, but I don’t believe that saving my people was high on your list of priorities. Your reputation is that when you are motivated to do something, most often you achieve your goals.”

“You flatter me.” He shifted uncomfortably on the floor. “If you wanted my help, all you had to do was ask. Why not simply formally request aid? In any case, I am here now and willing to help. Let these people go and I promise I will do all I possibly can to solve Oseidon’s radiation problem.”

“I don’t think so, Doctor. Here is what will happen instead. My lieutenant,” he gestured toward the junior officer, “will prepare an interrogation room. Once it is ready, I will ask you how you found my operation here. If I do not like the answer, I will hurt you. Then I will ask again. If I still don’t hear something I like, I will then hurt your friends. Consider your options carefully, Doctor. And if you somehow manage to escape, don’t bother trying to reach your vehicle. We have retrieved it from its hiding place. Central Command will have many fruitful hours dismantling it.” He swept his way out of the room, his lieutenant in tow, who gave Hannah a strange backward glance as the door slammed shut.

“I don’t think he’s going to believe you just came here to try a walking taco,” Hannah said.

* * * * *

Tyrnn all but ran back to the ship, all the while mumbling darkly about “alien interventionists.” Mirlon was beginning to worry about Tyrnn’s stability. The only reason relieving the commander of duty had not seriously crossed her mind was she did not relish the questions she would have to answer when Central Command heard of it.

He rounded on her with fiery eyes. “Prepare the interrogation room at once, but do not delay plans for our departure. It’s absolutely vital we leave on time.” Mirlon was going to ask why it was so important to depart at the scheduled time, but was prevented by the door to Tyrnn’s office sliding shut before she could get a word in. Again.

Sighing, she plugged her datapad into her workstation and began issuing the interrogation orders when a message arrived from Central Command. It read: “Orders as of this time and date: Order 974C is hereby rescinded. Retrieve rhodium by humane means, barter if possible. Last mega-cycle’s failed coup means the government wants to project a benevolent image. Once again, Order 974D is hereby rescinded. Do not detonate explosive device on withdrawal. Message Ends.”

This was the first she had heard of any explosive device. For the first time it occurred to Mirlon that perhaps she had been assigned this mission to keep an eye on Tyrnn instead of the reverse. She hastily activated the intercom and informed the Commander of their change in orders.

“Those orders are invalid, lieutenant. You are to proceed as I have ordered. Is that clear?”

For once, everything was completely clear to Mirlon. “Yes, Commander, I understand.”

“Excellent. Oh, by the way, I have called up two of the security details to guard my workstation. It occurs to me this planet has grown increasingly hostile. Prudent, don’t you think?”

“Yes, Commander.”

“Good. Now ready that interrogation room. I’d quite like to have a little fun before we take our leave.” The intercom clicked off, and Mirlon began to experience a powerful crisis of conscience.

* * * * *

Hours passed, and the waning twilight had given way to the leaden darkness that only exists far out in the country. Outside the small, single window in the cell, gave the sky a cold glowing brilliance that somehow left Hannah even more unsettled. She was beginning to worry the Doctor really was without a plan, and she told him so.

“Miss Redfoot, I do not have a plan as such, but I trust there is always a way out, although in this case that way relies on someone doing the right thing while under considerable pressure to do the opposite.”

Kara scoffed at this. “That’s not much to go on, Doctor.”

“Nevertheless, Miss Sato, it is all we have. Try not to worry and have a little faith.” She grumbled and fell into silence again.

A few minutes later, the door creaked open, and the junior officer, flanked by two android duplicates of sheriff’s deputies, entered the cell. “The prisoners will accompany me to their interrogation.”

“Our interrogation?” Kara blurted. “I thought you were just going to interrogate John Carter here.”

“John Carter was a human on Mars, Miss Sato, I really don’t see how that applies.”

“The prisoners will be silent.”

* * * * *

It turned out that Hannah, the Doctor and Kara were being held in a half-underground sort of bunker. It seemed to be part of the mining facility, although Hannah couldn’t imagine what its original purpose might have been. As they were led across the mine, Hannah noticed townspeople pushing crates up a ramp into the Kraal’s spaceship. She wondered if Kara recognized any of them.

The junior officer led them to a small, empty warehouse on the edge of the mine’s property. Inside, there were bins with unrefined ore all along the outer walls. The walls were solid, but a large skylight let in the moonlight. In the center of the moon’s glow the TARDIS stood, as it always did, seemingly as if it belonged there.

The junior officer spun round in a flash and barked “Androids, stand down. Authorization Zed Zed Eight One Two.” The Androids stopped dead, and for a long moment looked like wax figures before they fell clattering to the floor in a heap of limbs.

“I am Lieutenant Mirlon of the Kraal Defense Forces, and on behalf of my people and Central Command, ask for the help of the Time Lords.”

The Doctor gave a satisfied sigh as he brushed off his coat. “And not before time,” he said. “On behalf of the Time Lords of Gallifrey, I accept your request, although you’ll have to make do with just me for the moment. You may call me the Doctor. And these are my friends Miss Hannah Redfoot and Kara Sato.”

“At this moment, Doctor, I will take all the help I can get.”

“And how can we help?” Hannah asked.

“And why should we help?” spat Kara.

“Now, now, Miss Sato, let’s hear her out before we condemn her, shall we? I have a feeling she wants help to get her people off your planet.”

“That is exactly what I do want, Doctor. This is all madness. I only wish I could have found the courage of my convictions before now.”

“Yeah, me too,” Kara snapped.

“I will submit myself for to your authorities to judgement when this is over, but first we must save these people.”

“Fine, we’ll get everyone back into town, then you can go to jail,” Kara said.

“We’ll discuss this later,” the Doctor said. “For now, there are, unfortunately, larger issues at stake. Mirlon, how can we shut this operation down?”

“Doctor, you don’t understand. The mining here is nearly done. The ore is being loaded for transport back to Oseidon where it will be used to scrub our radioactive atmosphere. That is not the real problem.”

Hannah scoffed. “How is slave labour not a ‘real’ problem?”

Mirlon sighed. “When we take off, Tyrnn intends to detonate a fusion device that will scour everything off the surface of this planet for a radius of approximately thirty of your local distance units.”

Even after everything Hannah had seen with the Doctor, she was still shocked. “Wait a minute, you’re talking about that thing made of pipes outside the detention camp. They’re going to scorch the earth in a thirty-mile radius?”

“No, Miss Redfoot. They merely plan to do so. It will not happen.”

“You have a plan?” Kara asked.

A sly grin dawned on the Doctor’s face. “Indeed I do. All we need is a little time, a compelling distraction for Commander Kyrnn, and of course, a pilot who can handle a Kraal spacecraft.”

* * * * *

Mirlon had never been terribly good at lying. Even lies of omission were difficult. This had seriously impeded her career in the military, as she was well aware. In spite of this, as she entered Tyrnn’s office, the anxiety she had carried since the Doctor had told her of his plan seemingly evaporated. All that was left was a powerful sense, that for the first time in her life, she knew she was doing the right thing.

“Commander,” she said in a clear, steady voice, “the Time Lord awaits you in the interrogation chamber.”

Tyrnn spun round in his chair. “Excellent. I must admit I had my doubts about you, Lieutenant. Nevertheless, you have followed my orders to the letter, even when it seemed you disagreed with them. I’m afraid I can only rate your performance on this mission as ‘satisfactory,’ but I must say I have no complaints. Your personality notwithstanding, of course.”

“I do my best for our nation and our people, Commander,” she said. The lie of omission came so easily it sent a thrill up her spine.”

Tyrnn went so far as to clap his hand on her shoulder. “That’s the spirit,” he said and led his personal guard off the ship. She monitored their progress and said a silent prayer that the Doctor knew what he was doing.

* * * * *

“Why do we trust her?” Kara hissed at Hannah from their position huddled behind a supply shed across from the Kraal’s prison camp. “Why do you trust either of these aliens?”

“I trust the Doctor because we have been travelling together a long time, and he always does his best to help anyone who is in trouble. I trust Mirlon because the Doctor trusts her. He’s usually a good judge of character. Plus she’s our only chance.” She ducked a bit further back, pulling Kara with her. “Here they come.”

Tyrrn reminded Hannah of a painting of Napoleon she had once seen in a history textbook. He seemed to be all swagger and confidence, but if you looked close enough, you could see that it was all just a show. “Okay, just another few seconds. Remember, when we get inside the camp, you’re going to have to do the talking.”

Kara nodded. “I know what I have to do. I just hope I get the chance.”

* * * * *

Mirlon watched as the android guards she had reactivated stood at attention on either side of the warehouse doors. It was all up to her now. From a certain point of view, what she was about to do amounted to treason, but it was the right thing to do.

* * * * *

The Doctor sat in a chair, chains around his chest and legs with his arms behind his back as Tyrrn entered the warehouse. The fluorescent lights that flooded the room with light buzzed over his head.

Tyrrn stopped a few feet away from the Doctor. “In accordance of the laws of my people, I offer you the chance to surrender with honour before I torture and interrogate you.”

“I assume the torture will still take place in any case?”

“You assume correctly.”

The Doctor shifted his weight in the chair and sighed. “Well, I suppose that’s just as well. I’ve never been good at surrender anyway. I don’t suppose you’d like to surrender to me?” Tyrrn barked a full-throated raspy laugh. The Doctor shrugged. “Just thought I’d ask.”

“I will enjoy this, Doctor.” He gestured to the outside guards who slid the warehouse door shut.

* * * * *

The warehouse door slammed shut on Mirlon’s viewscreen, and she entered the override code for the android network and began issuing new orders.

* * * * *

Hannah watched as a guard on the elevated walkway slumped over the railing, dropping his gun in the process. “Okay, here we go.” She turned to Kara. “Alright, Kara, you’re on.”

They sprang from behind the shed as the citizens of Timberland noticed the commotion. Kara’s voice rang out through the camp, with a tone of authority that surprised Hannah. “Everyone, listen to me. Some of you may know me or remember me. I’m Kara Sato, Timberland class of

2019. My friend Hannah and I are here to help. The android guards are down, so we need to get you out of here double quick.” Kara took a deep breath. This was going to be the hard part. “Now, I know this is going to sound crazy, but there is only one fast way out of here.”

* * * * *

As the door slammed shut, Tyrnn’s attitude became positively sinister. “Doctor, I understand your people can actually die and come back to life several times.” He drew a wicked-looking laser pistol from a holster behind his back. “I’d very much like to see that, so feel free not to answer this question. How did the Time Lords know of this mission?”

The Doctor fixed his eyes upon Tyrnn’s weapon and said with absolute sincerity, “Emergency Override one nine six three, disarm the commander and hold him for questioning.”

In a flash, one of the androids snatched the pistol from Tyrnn’s hand while the other grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and lifted him off the ground. The Doctor sprang to his feet, the chains falling to the floor.

“Really, Commander,” the Doctor said as he ran his hands through Tyrnn’s jacket pockets, “I didn’t expect you to fall for the oldest trick in the book so easily.” The Doctor finished his search, finding nothing. “Sit down, Commander. Let us reason together. Once you’re securely chained to the chair, of course.”

* * * * *

Half the town of Timberland had made orderly lines under Kara’s swift, firm direction. Once Kara reconnected with her family, the Satos took over and Hannah was basically superfluous. Her duties were largely relegated to checking tents to make sure nobody was sleeping through their liberation. Back at the ship, she checked in with Kara. “That’s everyone,” she said. “Look, I gotta hand it to you, you really got these people in line quick. I thought you were scared out of your wits by this situation. I misjudged you.”

Kara laughed so loud several people were startled and looked around for an alien attack. “No, you didn’t, Hannah. I’m still half-crazy with fear, but if there’s one thing life as a regional theatre stage manager prepares you for, it’s getting people to the right place at the right time. After a few months herding fifteen actors, herding half a small town is a breeze.”

* * * * *

“This was Mirlon’s doing,” Tyrnn spat. “What did you give her to make her turn her back on the survival of her species?”

“Your species will survive, Commander. Once this situation is cleared up, I will help your people make their planet livable again. Without theft or slavery, I might add.”

“Your lies do not tempt me, Time Lord. I know what your promises are worth. Although in this case, you won’t live to tell about it.”

“Ah, yes, your fusion device. I’d like the detonator for that, if you don’t mind. I’d hate for you to get any funny ideas.”

“It’s on a timer, Doctor. Care to try to defuse it?”

“Don’t be ridiculous. It’s not on a timer, Tyrnn. You need the rhodium far too badly to risk it being vaporized because of some delay in your takeoff.”

“So you say, Doctor, but can you take the chance?”

“You refuse to help me in any way?”

“Yes, I do, and I will happily die with you if it means ending your threat to the Kraal once and for all.”

Dust tumbled from the rafters as a low hum filled the warehouse followed by spears of blinding white light through the skylights as the Kraal ship passed overhead.

“Commander, I assure you I will help your people. I reached an agreement with your Lieutenant.”

“Former Lieutenant,” Tyrn growled. “And she is just naïve enough to believe your lies.”

“All right, I can see you’re set on this. My only real goal here is to keep this mine and the nearby town from being razed. What will it take for you to spare these people?”

Tyrn chuckled darkly. “You wish to bargain for the lives of these apes? Very well, Doctor. What am I bid for the town of Timberland?”

* * * * *

The hatch closed and even as the inner seal was still locking, Mirlon was already lifting off from the Timberland High football field, the Satos still shepherding their town back home. Hannah was rummaging in a closet under one of the consoles in the ship’s bridge. “What do these things look like?”

“They’re small, round and yellow. Like one of your local fruits,” Mirlon said as she set the course back to the Fleetwater mine.

“Lemons?”

“Yes, lemons. There will be five or six, all connected by a cable.”

Hannah popped up from the cabinet holding a bundle of oblong yellow metal tubes. “These?”

“Yes, those.”

“These look like bananas, you know.”

“No I do not. How do you people keep all of these things straight? Every tree, plant and bush on this planet produces some sort of fruit or vegetable and most of them are poisonous.”

Hannah thought for a moment. “The weirdest thing about what you just said is that it’s true. Anyway, what do I do with these things?”

“Twist to disconnect them from the cable, but don’t press the buttons on the ends. I’m not sure what localized anti-gravity will do to your species. Now strap in, the silent running mode will feel a little rough.”

* * * * *

“And, of course, you will keep the traitor Mirlon,” Tyrn said. He was enjoying negotiating with the Doctor. He gave up so much and asked so little.

“What will Mirlon do here?” the Doctor said. “She is an alien on a planet that more or less is unaware of alien life? You just don’t want her telling Central Command you’re planning to use the atmospheric scrub as political capital in the next election.”

“I assure you I have no ambitions whatsoever in that direction.”

“I have heard that one before.”

“Very well, Doctor, I’ll take her and execute her before I take off. How would that be?”

“Fine. You can have your ship and the rhodium, and I will take Mirlon and the detonator. Do we have an agreement?”

“As soon as I see my ship.”

“May I use your communicator?”

* * * * *

Mirlon burst back onto the bridge to hear the Doctor talking to Hannah on the communicator. “All right Doctor,” Hannah said. “Mirlon agrees to the terms, she’ll turn us around. Five minutes, Doctor.”

Mirlon took up the controls again. “Well, so far everything is working out. Just barely, but it is working.”

Hannah smiled. “We should be fine. Don’t lift off just yet. I told the Doctor five minutes. It won’t take five minutes to move this ship two hundred yards, and we don’t want to give Tyrnn any reason to suspect.”

* * * * *

The Doctor and Tyrnn felt the hum of the Kraal ship returning. There was a muffled impact as it touched down.

Tyrnn’s face was a picture of innocence. “There is my ship. Release me, and let’s be done with this.”

“First, the detonator. Then I release you.”

Tyrnn fidgeted in his seat. “Oh, very well. My right boot has a hollow heel.” The Doctor soon figured out the spring mechanism and the heel swung open and a small black box popped neatly into the Doctor’s hand.

The Doctor released the lock on Tyrnn’s chains. “Ever true to your word, Time Lord. When it suits you. I’ll just load up my fusion device and be on my way.”

The Doctor rolled open the door on the warehouse. “I think not. I feel much safer if we both know the detonator and the bomb are both in one place.” He turned and smirked at Tyrnn. “Besides, how could you trust me not to blow you up once you reached a safe distance?”

“I admit you have a point. Still, I would like to take it with me.”

The Doctor’s face grew hard and stern. “Commander Tyrnn, I have given you the means to save your planet. I have even given you the means to take over your planet. If you have any small reservations about the deal you have made with me, I should think those two things alone should give you plenty of satisfaction.”

“Meaning?” Tyrnn said.

“Meaning I’ve been genuinely nice to you today. Very nice. Don’t ruin that now. All you have to do is take off and fly back to Oseidon and you can have everything you wanted except my death and the deaths of almost a thousand humans. You got a good deal. Take it and go.”

The hatch opened and Hannah and Mirlon emerged. Tyrnn looked them, then back at the Doctor. “Very well, I will be content with what I have.”

The Doctor’s face softened. “Considering what you have is the opportunity to save your race and rule your planet, I don’t think that will be terribly difficult for you.”

Without another word, Tyrnn boarded the ship. Hannah and Mirlon joined the Doctor and as the box-like green craft lifted off.

“I can’t believe you are giving him the whole of Oseidon,” Mirlon said.

“Do you think he’ll actually scrub the atmosphere?” Hannah asked as they followed the ship’s slow ascent.

“Yes, that’s the worst part,” Mirlon said. “He will fix the planet.”

“Of course he would. He has no desire to rule a dead planet,” the Doctor said. His face brightened. “Then again, it will take him almost three weeks to get there. It will only take us three minutes in the TARDIS. We should be well on our way to having the problem solved before he ever arrives. And if Central Command is as averse to these methods as you say, he will simply go to prison. He’ll never achieve his ambitions.”

“We will be grateful for the help, Doctor.”

* * * * *

Tyrrn’s altimeter pinged when he had finally reached a safe distance. He gave a grim chuckle as he pulled a small black box from beneath his control console. “No, Doctor, I will not be content until I have my revenge on you and Mirlon. I may press the button, but truly your naivete that kills you. Goodbye, you fool.”

* * * * *

Six miles above the Fleetwater mine, Tyrrn’s ship evaporated in a ball of fire. The Doctor sighed. “I told him, all he had to do was just leave. I hoped he would do it.”

“He always thought he was the smartest sentient in the room,” Mirlon said.

“Never a good assumption,” said Hannah.

“He was not the best my people have to offer.”

“No, but there are plenty of kind, decent wise souls on Oseidon, and we should do whatever we can to save them,” the Doctor said. He opened the door of the TARDIS. “Come on, Miss Redfoot, let’s go save a world.”

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DIVERSIFY OR DIE

MATTHEW JAMES & HAMISH CRAWFORD

Ten years after the Sheffield Independent named him one of "Britain's Brightest Teenagers", Ted Kenworthy has it all: happily married to Sandra, with a baby on the way and his cutting-edge research garnering interest from an American corporation. So why is he so full of anxiety? Why does he worry about Sam R.T. McNess and the yes-men at Twenty-First Century Synthetics? And why, on the day of his major breakthrough, have two strangers—the Doctor and Hannah Redfoot—arrived?

**COMING SOON
FROM THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT**

INFECTION VECTOR

RICHARD HOOVER



A trip to Timberland, South Dakota to sample some classic county fair delicacies soon becomes a mystery the Doctor and Hannah are compelled to unravel. The county fairgrounds should be a near riot of activity, but they are nearly deserted. The people they meet are friendly, but standoffish.

While investigating, they encounter Kara, a young woman who has spent the last few days on the run from everyone in the town – including her family. Something or someone has taken control of the entire town, and only good luck and better reflexes has kept Kara out of the clutches of the invaders.

Soon, the Doctor, Hannah and Kara find themselves unraveling a sinister plot laid by an old enemy of the Doctor's with the fates of the entire town of Timberland in the balance. Their only hope may lie with Mirlon, an invader whose conscience is troubled by her orders.

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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

