

THE  
**DOCTOR WHO**  
PROJECT

# STORM OF THE CENTURY



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## Prologue

The Doctor draped his prodigious lengths of scarf on the coat rack and added his wide brimmed hat for good measure while running his hands through thick curls to which he was only now starting to get accustomed. The Time Lord circled the console, where a cup of tea waited to guide him through his studies. He inspected the data, from dusty tomes to cleanly engineered holomitters, while referencing the colorful nebulae on the TARDIS scanner for navigational feedback.

“One is beginning to wonder if aliens of your ilk ever sleep?” Harry Sullivan appeared from a hallway freshly showered with his own steaming cup in tow. He was a pleasant man, whose humor and charm downplayed his own intelligence and competence as a physician and naval officer. Observant and disarming—quite a combination. “Sarah’s positively bushed.”

“No rest for the wicked, I’m afraid. Rather a lot to do. All our answers lead to more questions—that old chestnut.”

Harry pointed his coffee mug at the nebulae beyond, “That is quite a sight, just gorgeous! Let me guess- it’s made of acid and eating through the hull?”

“No such luck, Harry. Copeland’s Nebulae. Quite a view, eh? All of the colors of radiation play merry hell with most sentient navigational technology. I would put the chances of hull breach and horrific demise in the low single digits.”

“I haven’t seen colors like that since I dated that hippy girl from Leeds. Never assume a brownie is a brownie is the lesson there. Why are we here? Too much to hope for sightseeing?” Harry smirked.

The Doctor looked somberly into the pinwheeling colors, lost in thought. “The Ark we visited recently was not the only refuge for humanity against those solar flares. Several space-faring arks were sent into the unknown. One such ship, the *Sojourner*, was never found.”

“And I take it you have a theory?” Harry asked.

“It would be nearly impossible to chart its path and it may well have been destroyed. Given the countless human colonies which sprang up over the centuries to follow it can be a bit tricky to narrow it down.”

Harry clumsily gestured at the scanner with his cup. “And you think Copeland’s Nebulae may play a part in finding the good ship *Sojourner*? Makes sense, I suppose. Like the Bermuda triangle in our own little ramshackle planet?”

“Alas, I’ve reached a bit of a dead end. I may just put an algorithm in the background of the TARDIS navigational system to passively scan and compile data as I zip through this region of space/time. Who knows, maybe we can find that message in a bottle someday?”

Harry grimaced and raised his cup, “Lost at sea. What a fate. Fair winds and following seas, old chaps!”

“Funny thing about a time machine; It will be the nick of time no matter when it happens!” The Doctor flashed a toothy smile and raised his tea in return.

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## Later (relatively)

The Doctor pulled his knit sweater into place as he entered the control room. He could hear the distant laughing of Maggie in the study as she watched a sitcom with Kaylaar—often stopping to explain the humor and correct reasonable cultural misunderstandings from the situations. A yellow light blinked on the control console begging his attention. The TARDIS algorithm had its outcome requested centuries before, quietly compiling data as it passed through temporally and physically. How many centuries, what joys and sorrows, had unfolded in that time? The data summary gave no hint. It took barely a few moments to read the data, before the Doctor watched a culture bloom from the crash of the Ark project’s lost vessel- the *Sojourner*. There was no joy that his hypothesis proved correct following the incident with the Wirrn so long ago. And down the rabbit hole the Doctor went—as many tragedies tend to have in common, faith was placed in technology rather than people, and this mobile Ark drifted off-course in its icy slumber into Copeland’s Nebula where most rescue efforts and later historians could not detect it. And it crashed with no hope of a distress signal on a habitable planet later to be known as Markonis.

With a simple series of gestures on the control pane, the time rotor went to work, and the Doctor witnessed the crash from high above. The worst moments in the old Time Lord’s life were always what he could not do. Should he intervene, everything that followed would be lost—all the sacrifice for naught. And the dominos would reverberate in time in ways that could makes things far worse. History is not a kind tapestry, and often subject to more horror and struggle than times of peace and elevation. The hibernation ended to a desperate struggle for survival for the refugees on the *Sojourner*. And survive they did, the memory of the crash lost in time as the people did what people always do. They made families, fished, hunted, threw away and relearnt the past lessons of their ancestors all over again. Humans build culture from their hardships, language from their environment, and eventually build and populate an entire world. The culture, the language, and the world can be markedly different to their point of origin, and the isolation and hardship that built Markonis was a quintessentially human story of inspiration. The Doctor was even more impressed that all of this triumph nestled in the folds of the nebulae, its shroud so all-encompassing that the story of Markonis remained hidden from even the Time Lords. Its early ages saw its people regress to hunter-gatherers, forced by their isolation to rebuild their society almost from scratch. Eventually this planet was returned to the galactic collective and prospered from trade of abundant resources and visitors to its tropical environment.

The Doctor nodded and nearly dismissed the screen when something itched at the back of his brain. The readings. The weather. The legends. Something else was hiding in the mists of time and the radiation of the nebulae. The old Time Lord smiled as he found something he could do for the lost Ark—perhaps far later than he liked.

## Chapter One

Sigurt ran.

He ran for his life.

With every step, he cursed his every decision that led him here: signing up with the freighter crew; leaving his ship to drink; the fight that got him thrown out of the hotel. And he cursed the storm beating him low. The rain was hammering down from the raging storm, with only hints of violet sky peeking out. The winds staggered the fleeing young ship-hand as he reached the rooftop. He dared to glance over his shoulder; he saw no pursuers. Blood ran down his tattooed arm, blending with the puddles at his feet. He ducked behind holo-marketing machinery on the roof, which painted the night in garish orange.

Hoping to find salvation from his vantage point, his heart sank as he saw the city locked down tight. Every window on every building shuttered, every door sealed tight. The signature screaming neon marketing, plastered to every surface, lit the deepening night. The normal leisure sounds and pleasures of this paradise world called Markonis faded into the background, replaced by Sigurt's racing heart. He was being hunted. It was absurd. The dull pain told him it was also very real. His breathing returned to a semblance of normality as he swept the long hair matted down by the rain away from his face. Scrambling down the ladder to the alley way, that chill struck him again. Sigurt could feel the eyes watching him. As he turned slowly, a cowed figure stood at the other end of the rooftop. Red glowing eyes cast tracers through the pelting rain and the grey dusk as they moved. The figure was tall, shrouded in a dark cloak standing unnaturally still. Aside from those two specks of red cutting through the squall, Sigurt could see nothing of the figure's face. It stood, nothing but a silhouette, a dark abyss even against the darkness of this landscape. Sigurt caught a glimpse in the flash of lightning and would have sworn he could see a horrific smile, complete with jagged teeth.

"CHOOSE," boomed a discordant voice, loud enough to cut through the wail of the storm.

"What!? What do you want with me!? Why are you doing this!?" Sigurt called out.

"YOU RAN WELL, I WILL HONOR YOU. CHOOSE HOW YOU WILL MEET YOUR END..." The voice rang out again as lightning lit the sky. The figure approached.

Sigurt screamed.

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With a mechanical wheeze, a blue box materialized on a beach of crimson sand at first light. The ocean roared and swelled with massive dark waves. The door opened and out stepped the heavy work boots of the Doctor; a young-looking man with old eyes, whose knit beanie and long blue-green balmacaan coat whipped in the wind. The Doctor was followed by Maggie Weitz, who fumbled with the zipper of her fleece jacket while taking in a world far different than her own, as her shoes sank into the maroon sand. Finally, Kaylaar pulled the door closed behind and scanned the surroundings without emotion; his face tended not to betray thoughts in most situations. Kaylaar stood the tallest of the trio with longer dark hair, athletic build, his unassuming, shapeless smock tending more towards the practical than stylish.

“If it’s all the same to you, Doctor- I would appreciate a weather report before we rush headlong out of the TARDIS towards whatever has captured your fancy at the moment. I never have the foggiest idea what to expect,” Maggie offered as she tied back her dark frizzy hair, only for its strands to blow loose and surround her face nearly immediately.

“While attire is less of a concern to me, I concur with Maggie that it seems you have landed us in quite the prodigious storm.” Kaylaar’s brilliant golden eyes fixed on the tempest sending waves in desperate flight to the beach.

“Not to worry, you two. I’ve landed precisely where and when I wanted. A break in the storm will occur presently.” The Doctor offered a small smirk. “How’s that for a weather report?” Maggie and Kaylaar exchanged a doubtful look, but moments later, the rain stopped, and the distant but intense sun shone. The Doctor raised his eyebrow in response to their skepticism.

“Welcome to Markonis; which translates from the native tongue as ‘Paradise.’ This planet fully lives up to its reputation for fair weather year-round and brisk trade, with a nearly nonexistent crime rate,” the Doctor stated. “Markonis is a planet of beauty and abundance, except for a terrible mystery.” He turned to face his friends.

“Was it too much to hope for a beach vacation without a terrible secret?” Maggie quipped.

Kaylaar studied the hologrammatic billboards and talon-like spired buildings in the distance. He could imagine the people who dwelled in these buildings: technocratic consumers, somewhere near the middle percentiles of civilization. Their passions at a dangerous intersection of growth or destruction. Kaylaar’s experience of galactic society, even outside his travels with the Doctor, had made him skeptical of technology as the sole solution to social problems. Nevertheless, he considered the Doctor’s sketch and found his interest piqued.

“Interesting. Given the likely elevated level of technology and relative health of the people that can be seen from our landing site; one would think this population capable of solving most problems they would encounter.” Kaylaar deduced.

“Every hundred years, on the precise mark of a new Markonian century, exactly and without fail...a terrible storm rages and several poor souls disappear without a trace. This has been happening for a millennium on an otherwise peaceful planet! Ten horrible dawns. Ten disappearances. And they’re no closer to explaining why, perhaps preferring to get back to their brisk trade and non-existent crime and hope it won’t happen next time,” the Doctor explained. “Well, not this time, I say. I ...we will discover why.” He lit up with the flash of determination his companions had come to know when the Time Lord was on a mission.

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The predator restlessly paced the nest among the remnants of its prey. Each sight summoned the memory of the successful hunt, and the predator basked in the visceral elation of its conquests. This elation sustained the hunter, until the gnawing drive led to the next hunt, in the next howling storm. Until then, the only thing that mattered was peak performance. It pushed itself to the razor's edge of ability daily. The cost of perfection was compulsion. In preparation. In awareness. In discipline. Being idle was not an option. Complacency and sloth were weaknesses that left an unbearable hollow ache and disgust. The predator was convinced that those feelings did not matter, should be forgotten. Nothing before the hunt mattered, not really. Few creatures in the galaxy know what they are truly made for. The hunter might pity them, if the hunter were capable. The prey should thank the hunter. The hunter showed them that life only mattered, only became most vivid and urgent, and could only be fully experienced when fighting to hold onto it. The predator would spare the prey the indignity of dying shriveled and meaningless, having never known this core thrill of existence.

A sound intruded on the edge of the predator's consciousness. There was an incursion. However cautious the predator was, there were those that would track the hunter. Neither hunter, nor hunted, and in fact their pursuit could turn him into the target. That could end the cycle; and this could never be allowed. The storm would hide the predator while it watched and assessed the threat. The hunter's blood ran hot thinking of stalking the trackers, turning the tables once more on them by showing them the only thing that mattered. Always room for more trophies...

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The soaked inspector, Elant Gul, cursed under her breath as she set up the evidence tent and flood lights. She was short, and endowed with an athletic build, dark hair, and deeply tanned skin. She wore lightweight, multi-functional work pants, boots, and a high visibility vest, which doubled as a life jacket when her duties took her onto the water. Elant was jittery by nature, and the rare prospect of a crime to investigate made it impossible to keep her hands still. They idly rested at times on the stun pistol on her belt, or else played at a number of pouches integrated into her belt and trousers were the beacons, scanners, and first aid supplies that were detective standard issue. As Elant tugged at the pocket-flaps, she wondered grimly which of these supplies she would need first.

The rain had subsided to a slight drizzle, but still managed to wash evidence away at an alarming rate. She looked up from the crime scene to the mouth of the alleyway where the police beacon floated and projected a warning that the area was sealed. The chime alerted her that people approached, much to the Inspector's irritation.

"Good day, Inspector. I imagine this is the scene of the latest disappearance?" the young man stated flatly. This serious figure somehow carried the manner of someone both out of place and immediately in charge. Behind him followed a woman whose wide eyes tracked the evidence drones busy at their tasks, and a tall associate who seemed to take in the scene with little expression at all.

"And you would be...?" Elant spat, resenting this stranger's air of authority. To mark her territory, she marched to the apparent spokesman and meeting his intense gaze with her own.

"If you have to ask that, I seriously question your skills as a detective. You know very well who I am!" the undaunted gentleman fired back.

Elant sighed, “I bloody well told the mainland this morning that the last thing I needed was corporate detectives to babysit while I investigate the disappearance! May as well throw my opinion into the ocean for all good it does! That about sum it up?”

“Top marks. I am called the Doctor. Behind me are my associates; Agents Weitz and Kaylaar who represent sector shipping interests. Since we’re here, perhaps we can be of assistance rather than a burden?”

“Detective Sergeant Elant Gul. Region four lead.”

The Doctor’s mind seemed already well into the task at hand. “A pleasure, Detective. If you would be so kind as to catch us up on the evidence?”

“Blood, and lots of it. No way to know how much with the storm, but possibly enough that the victim died. The scanners peg it as a single blood type with a seventy-eight percent probability that it came from our missing ship hand, ‘Sigurt Almstedt,’” she said referencing at her data pad.

“Seventy-eight percent still leaves a lot of room for error. Why are you so sure this is where the crime occurred?” Kaylaar asked.

The inspector gestured near the Frenazzi’s feet, where several broken teeth lay in a puddle.

“I’m afraid those are a match to the ship’s dental records...”

Maggie winced at the sight. This reaction raised Elant’s eyebrow: typical corporate stooges, she thought. No doubt they think the worst thing that could happen in the sector is a lost crate.

“And come see here...” She gestured to the Doctor.

The Doctor knelt, pausing only to remove his coat and hand it to Kaylaar.

"Let me guess," Gul said wearily. “Don’t want to get grit on your fancy coat?”

“Just trying to preserve the crime scene, in fact, Detective Sergeant,” he replied with a trace of testiness. The Doctor rolled up the sleeves of his Aran fishing sweater and inspected an odd object lying nearby. On closer inspection, he saw two odd items, in fact. The first was a hand-held tool of some type, made of a crude dense polymer with a wedged end opposite a heavy blunted end with a small sharp protrusion. It would intuitively fit in one’s palm and could be useful in a number of ways to a ship hand. This one was well worn, with chips and notches along the business ends and some manner of rubber grip along its center, which didn’t seem original to the item.

However, the Doctor had not seen something of this design and had to admit as much to Elant Gul. The Doctor handed the object to Elant and asked her its purpose. She suppressed her urge to score a point and explained, “The common term is a ‘granter,’ they’re a quite common piece of kit among the freighter crews. They are pocket tools that pry, hammer, and open containers.” She pressed the grip to demonstrate. “The central location of the grip makes toggling between functions easier.”

“Rather clever, I must say.” the Doctor replied with a smile.

“I’m all too familiar with them, since our weapon scanners at the port don’t always catch them—don’t give off any energy emissions, you see—and so more than a few of them make an appearance when a fight breaks out among the roughnecks in the bars.”

With this explained, the Doctor now realized the second odd item lying on the beach was also a granter, albeit of a distinctive design.

“May I?” the Doctor asked, gesturing to the other granter. Elant nodded. He inspected the second tool. This one was different: flawless and brand-new, not a single mark could be seen. It seemed heavier as well, made of a sturdier or more luxurious material.

“Perhaps, Detective, the presence of two of these impromptu weapons points to a shipmate or other crewman as the culprit?” Kaylaar speculated.

“I thought the same thing until I scanned it,” she replied. “Calcanium IV elemental composition and flawless to the molecular level. It’s exceedingly rare, difficult to produce and it’s harder than any substance we have of a similar density. Exceedingly valuable too, one would imagine, given its exotic nature”

Maggie took the second granter and studied it. “If it’s a common tool, why would someone go through the trouble to make one so expensive and posh? It would be like making an egg whisk out of diamonds!

“Well reasoned, Mags. Why indeed?” the Doctor agreed.

“I think we are still missing something here,” Kaylaar said.

“And what is that?” Elant replied.

“A body,” Kaylaar offered simply.

“Here we go again...” Elant said and took a deep breath, “No one knows why the storms come every century, maybe something to do with the ocean or the moons, but I’ve been an officer for quite some time. People go missing from time to time, even on Markonis.”

“We’ve been given to understand your little paradise planet is crime-free,” Maggie countered.

“Crime-free doesn’t mean accident-free,” Elant retorted witheringly. “The problem is this strange quirk of our calendar, which happens every century. The more people talk about it, the more the gullible dupes believe it. But take it from me. There is no cult or supernatural explanation needed to explain common crime, however rare, or people dumb enough to go swimming during severe weather...”

“Everything is connected, Detective Gul. The question is...how?” The Doctor said as it began to rain again.

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The interior of the TARDIS tended to shift with the Doctor’s mood; sometimes imperceptibly. The lights were lower now: what Hannah used to call “night mode,” the Doctor recalled. The interior largely shifted with the particular needs of the occupants—positioning areas used more frequently by the crew closer to the control room; sometimes placing a soothing hot beverage within reach. The urgency of the present situation required the Time Lord’s full attention but, like any vessel, the captain must know her and always be aware this particular mistress could be temperamental.

The Doctor paced the deck plates around the console, burdened with worry. The weight of centuries bore down on his shoulders as he turned to again inspect a screen on the console. The monitor appeared to be primitive and tube-based, but it could also stream data in all universal formats at a near constant flow. The Time Lord would flick a similarly primitive-seeming dial or switch to slow or stop the data stream, his mind seeming to flow at the same rate. Whatever the data indicated, it was obviously troubling. His scalp itching as he contemplated these findings, the Doctor pulled the knit hat from his head and stuffed it in his coat pocket. As he did, he discovered a small colored clay stone, which begged his attention for a moment.

“Doctor, may I be of assistance?” Kaylaar climbed the few stairs to the console where the Time Lord seemed transfixed by the common pebble.

“Of course, your company is always welcome, my friend. Where is Mags?”

“The library again. She seems quite amused to read history books decades and centuries past her temporal origin.”

“Oh yes,” the Doctor replied absently. “How’s that book club of yours going?”

“Tell me, Doctor, do you worry she could use this information to influence events when she returns to her own time?”

“Not especially, though it is possible. Honestly, it’s not as linear as all that. There is a certain tolerance to deviation within the timeline; otherwise, my people and others with chrontal technologies would not be able to so much as land a TARDIS without unraveling the web of time. Don’t get me wrong, any action taken must be done with some care. But I also tend to choose my companions with some mind to their integrity and character...but then again I’ve been wrong before, I must admit.” The Doctor’s reply trailed off into rambling, clearly secondary to his inspection of the stone by the light of the console.

“So a less skillful or careful time traveler could indeed cause damage?” Kaylaar considered.

“Oh yes, catastrophic in fact...”

“And yet you seem transfixed by that stone, despite the situation?”

“My thoughts are also not quite so linear. This is a simple sedimentary formation with clay, a few flecks of copper, and likely a gemstone within of some type. This was discovered in a region of Earth known as Wyoming. A place I met a dear friend, a companion, who knew me and traveled with me...in another life.”

“Perhaps you can visit when our business is concluded? I would be happy to visit this region of Earth with you.”

“She would not know me. Not in the same way. It might be too much for her to accept how different I am. Might be too much for me too. My race has distinct phases of life, and we can be quite different in each of these chapters, even if they all comprise the same book. While they are all facets of the same stone, they can appear quite different and have different...angles.

“Perhaps like that stone this change will require some shaping to get to the gemstone within?”

“I like to think that the clay has just as many uses as the gemstone. Perhaps not as glamorous, but certainly as functional. The stone should be taken as a whole, I suppose. I do find aspects of my present self to be rather pragmatic, or even cold, but maybe I should view this less as the tool but more the wielder and purpose. Often I find I am who I need to be. Thank you, Kaylaar.”

Maggie Weitz emerged from the far hall and approached, prepared for what was asked of her. “I’m not much for geology metaphors but you seem a decent sort. Of all the shapeshifting aliens I know, you are in the top two.”

The Doctor laughed despite himself, “I would not consider myself a shapeshifter, Maggie.”

“You are, you just don’t do it as often from what I’m hearing,” Maggie smirked.

The trio turned inward into a huddle as their mirth subsided, the gravity of the situation seemed to creep in once more.

The Doctor leaned on the main console as if it helped to steady his mind. “From what I can determine, this threat is not of this world and likely not even this galaxy. Often, I find when beings fall through the cracks of the world, the culprits have surprisingly few motivations.” His voice dropped, and his companions could feel his bitterness as he listed off the petty sentiments. “Ego, hatred, power, or even hunger to name a few. Whatever the reasons, this threat is smart and methodical. Covers its tracks and tends towards the brutal rather than efficient. There is no safe method to stop this menace and we must all play our parts perfectly for this to work.”

“For what to work?” Maggie asked.

“I’m afraid there is grave risk involved. If we get this wrong, we might vanish in the storm as well, become this century’s lost souls of Markonis.”

Maggie shifted with a worried look, “I’m no hero and won’t make much of a living as an inspiring speech writer but I will do what I can to help. Of course, I’m scared a bit, but they were too I imagine. The worst horrors in history all began with good people looking away and being glad it wasn’t them.”

“I know you worry about what you are asking of us. I worry you will try to shoulder the responsibility of any harm that may befall us. That is not your burden to carry, and I will not allow you to strip me of the weight of my choices. So I choose to help these people and fully understand the cost. It’s no more than police or soldiers on a thousand worlds who choose to serve. And I am ready to begin.” Kaylaar offered.

The control room’s light brightened as the Doctor spun to the console panels to make ready for the next phase of the plan. He chose his friends well, and almost pitied whatever villains hid behind this storm.

## Chapter Two

Detective Elant Gul had learned to trust her gut in her career and when she ran out of leads, she followed her instincts into the warehouse district with Agent Weitz, who offered at least a glimmer of hope at some progress on the missing ship-hand. The city had locked itself down tight after the months of preparation; every window shuttered, every door locked and barred. The streets were empty; the only motion the occasional brave freighter leaving the port; quickly accelerating up through the chaotic atmosphere into the calm of space. The pastel light from the ceaseless marketing danced for no audience, and Elant scanned the empty streets for danger. Elant spent her career here as even paradise had its problems, but word of the missing had got out and the officer felt that many of these shutters were shut tight against more than the storm.

The rain parkas helped a little, but the storm was whipping itself back up. Debris flew down the streets of the island in the screaming wind; begging for attention as Maggie Weitz studied the screen on the device the Doctor gave her. Maggie could barely hear the beeping but knew they were getting louder and closer together. Inspector Elant Gul walked alongside, her left hand no longer fidgeting, but cradling the stun pistol on her belt and the right hand shielding her eyes from the driving rain.

“Fine, since you are going to make me ask—what does the scanner do?” Elant asked.

“It’s from...the mainland; a new invention of the Doctor. It should help us find our culprit. I think.”

“A benefit of being a private contractor, access to better funds and technology I suppose.”

The detective offered a skeptical look as the scanner led them down a narrow embankment, leading to a storage warehouse. The exterior was plain enough, tan masonry with large land docks for cargo transports and windows on the top for light. Elant scanned her badge over the door sensor, triggering the override and the notable clicking sound of the heavy door unlocking. Freezing air immediately rushed past the pair from within as the party entered the dark building. It was hard to resist the grim image of a coffin lid being pried open, especially with the frigid gust of air releasing. With a final glance at Maggie, the Inspector drew her stunner and led the way, while freeing a light beacon from her belt to float ahead, banishing the shadows.

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The prey walked.

The laborer marched in the brutal storm, wearing neon orange stripes on durable but breathable cloth. The garment may have been fitting for the typical, mild weather of Markonis, but it was no help in this squall. The chemicals within the stripes were designed to glow when exposed to salt water, and transmit locations—assuming, that is, that they worked as designed. Few wished to evaluate these safety measures personally. The freighters were finally battened down for the squall that loomed off the coast and their crews sought their entertainment and shelter as their duties were complete. This laborer looked in need of neither entertainment nor shelter: his features were stern with broad shoulders, a stocky frame, and a wild auburn beard. He finished a stout cocktail and tossed the container onto the ground to begin its customary rapid decomposition in the puddles.

The prey turned left down a side road leading back to the shopping district. The usual sleepless tourist trade and less legitimate offerings were nowhere to be found. The brutal weather did not change the pace of movement; lightning cracked across the sky; the storm's intensity reinforced with the rumbling thunder shortly after. A sudden pain in the center of his back threw the prey forward against a market stall. Rolling to his left, he saw a thick wooden bolt strike where he was sprawled the moment before. Sheeting rain framed the dark cowed figure that loomed, gripping an ancient looking crossbow with heavy combat gloves. The eyes were impossibly bright; the unnatural scarlet emanations left tracers in the night from the movement as the figure turned to regard its victim. The face bore a horrific visage with a jagged, smiling maw.

“THE PREY DOES NOT HUNT THE PREDATOR...” a horrific voice boomed forth.

“I’ll pass that along, perhaps now is a suitable time...!” the bait shouted in reply, as he threw a makeshift market stall between them and ran with all speed down towards the crossroads.

Kaylaar abandoned the pretense of the dockworker in a blur, as both the strain and ruse were now useless, and his effort could be better used fleeing further injury or death. Every moment was agony and seemed its own eternity, as Kaylaar was certain a bolt would blast the life from him with every step. As he suddenly changed his direction, a whistling past his head confirmed his fears. Rounding the corner, he poured on speed while zigzagging towards the rendezvous point. He dared to steal a glance; he saw the predator calmly stalking his trail, with a grim certainty.

Impossibly, the echo of the booming laugh sounded out from across the distance as Kaylaar leaped for the fire escape ladder. Halfway up the first flight, a searing pain flooded his weight-bearing leg. The shapeshifter looked down to see a deep gash bleeding freely next to a bolt buried in the mortar of the building. The rungs were slippery, and the wind threatened progress as the hunter's prey scrambled towards the roof; half expecting each moment to be the last. As Kaylaar finally reached the roof, his breath hot in exhausted lungs, and reeling in vicious pain. His hopes were dashed as the dark figure stood motionless in the center of the roof. Its red eyes smoldered as it advanced towards its prey.

“YOU RAN WELL, I WILL HONOR YOU. CHOOSE HOW TO MEET YOUR END. CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON TO MAKE YOUR FINAL STAND.” The voice was deafening, even over the storm, as the monster closed the distance.

The young shapeshifter contemplated a moment in the driving rain while shrugging off the borrowed work jacket, “My people were in a vicious cycle of war for hundreds of years. To be raised in such an atmosphere forced us to face certain truths. One being, what you call a weapon is simply a tool, without the mind and will to wield it. Another being that we were all trained for it. My abilities evolved in my people for a simple reason. Survival. For the weapon, I choose myself.”

Kaylaar seemed to blur in the downpour, even to the predator's enhanced vision. When the blur cleared, the Frenazzi stood taller—his eyes had taken a reflective sheen to enhance the vision, which was the only clue that all senses had been sharpened for the purpose at hand. Density had increased in hands, knees, and feet while skin had thickened in vital areas for protection. Around the knuckles, protrusions of calloused bone formed, and limbs had lengthened notably for reach. The new form's breathing was rhythmic, as the symphony of the Frenazzi's survival was engaged; lungs surged and expanded, heart rate tripled to transport the air, and all manner of crisis chemicals similar to adrenaline pushed the bleeding edge of the changeling's abilities.

The predator seemed taken aback for a moment at this, before settling into the oldest rhythm of mortal combat. The outer shell of the figure hardened, and protruded ridges along its knuckles in response. The only thing that ever mattered was moments away: another kill.

Kaylaar hooked the injured leg behind the predator and shoved it off its feet onto the standing water of the roof, quickly following the creature with a series of snap kicks. The cowed figure rolled to its feet, casting off the heavy damp cowl and cloak to reveal tactical armor beneath, with heavy weave gauntlets. Faint red light emanated from devices secreted throughout, likely powering the suit. The Frenazzi cursed under his breath as he recognized the technology he faced. It was resistant if not proof to most energy, projectile, and exotic weapons that one would meet in the galaxy. It bore a linked cloud artificial intelligence and could adapt to threats in real time. The dark warrior forced the armor into a similar state as the Frenazzi's own abilities to equal to the playing field and beat Kaylaar at his own game. The two squared off again. Kaylaar's leg was swelling and aching, blood continued to leak into his pants and the rooftop; fists raised before him with a practiced stance. A universal constant where life was found was that the prey often bore tooth and claw as well and overconfident predators could find themselves mauled and consumed. The armored form stood easily on the balls of its feet; arms relaxed at its sides. They met simultaneously.

Kaylaar landed blow after blow on the shadowy form, staggering it backwards only to find himself thrown back or redirected. Hardened fists were swelling from raining strikes on the armored abdomen and head. The tide turned and storm raged at its peak around them. Kaylaar saw it now not just as miserable, but melodramatic, a nightmare of torrents and fog broken up by the eerie advertising holograms and the omnipresent lightning. The lightning lit the sky almost nonstop as the two battled mercilessly in the wind and rain. Suddenly, with a deft block, the enemy smashed its prey, with an elbow strike on his temple laying him out bleeding on the roof.

"YOU HAVE FOUGHT WELL. YOU WILL TAKE A PLACE OF HONOR IN MY COLLECTION." The horrid, discordant voice rang out as a weapon materialized in its gauntlet. Slowly it approached its victim.



## Chapter Three

The freezing warehouse less than a mile from the sea emanated frigid waves of cold. Paired with the heavy rain outside, Maggie began to shiver almost immediately while checking the screen of the device in her palm. Terror struck for a moment. It just all seemed so absurd. Maggie Weitz felt like she was pulled into a quite different storm with the Doctor. She was flung in the far future...or past? Using a piece of technology that she could not begin to explain, to thwart a menace that was likely alien and certainly beyond comprehension. Maggie thought back to those frantic weeks after Ollie had died. She was highly strung even when she was doing absolutely nothing, but there was a period of a few months when Maggie grew terrified of a neighbor three doors down who drank heavily and screamed into the night. Something about his yelling scared her enough that she would double-check the locks. His screams of despair were the more terrifying because they matched the ones she was too wracked with grief to loose herself.

Now she was breaking down warehouse doors with a future cop to stop some supernatural force from kidnapping or murdering people in space Hawaii. Something about this made her feel more scared and alone. Maggie couldn't read Kaylaar the way she could other people. There was little body language, or at least not the same to give context to his words. The Doctor was the opposite in many ways. He communicated on so many levels and at such speeds sometimes that it was like drinking from a fire hose.

But they were her friends, and they were in danger. These people who went missing had families and the Doctor could stop this from happening to anyone else. He was no more content than Elant Gul to accept these disappearances and horrific deaths as a matter of course every hundred years. He could even help those who had vanished. More than anything, at this moment he trusted her. This handsome alien who surfed the length and breadth of reality and time trusted her. And that was enough to keep walking into the cold dark. Margaret Weitz who once slugged Terrence Hogsten for groping her friend and broke his nose—the Maggie who made the top marks in algebra at University despite working full time. Mags that carried on with a broken heart was bloody well marching into that warehouse to help her friends. Kaylaar and the Doctor needed her—she could sort out the rest later.

Elant Gul tossed a few silver marbles in the air from a pouch, and they zipped to equidistant points in the darkness and warmed to emit light for the pair. The warehouse was bog-standard, a

vast empty expanse of concrete and sheet metal, for storage and transfer of goods from one ship to another. The storage and equipment for moving items were, in this vein, merely larger versions of the standard racks and rusted cargo drones along the walls with crate loaders and other equipment. In this dark, drab space, there was one detail that struck Maggie as amiss. A close distance away was a large metal crate, with what Maggie assumed was a light—it had the conical head of a desk-reading lamp and protruded from the base, which was attached by thick cord like a dryer vent. Maggie followed the length of this cord to a large ship that had no business squatting in a small, unassuming warehouse.

The ship bore no obvious fins or apparatus to maneuver in an atmosphere and the surface looked perfectly rounded and seemed impossibly slick, with no damage or imperfections that could be seen by the light of the drone emitters. The ship rested motionless on overengineered gravity projectors which left no imprint below. This vessel seemed like a contradiction to the casual observer. It had a large cargo area in the back, but the subtle engines were closer to a high-end racer in the Detective's mind. If someone had the money to build a custom ship like this, what in the world would the purpose be? Aside from a few support columns and equipment along the walls, the ship seemed alone.

"This ship didn't land here, that much is certain," Elant Gul offered.

"You seem pretty certain. Why is that?" Maggie replied, pulling her parka close for comfort as well as warmth.

"There are no openings large enough in this building to land a ship this size, so either the building was built around it, which makes little sense, or..." Detective Sergeant Gul broke off, barely able to contemplate the second option.

"...or this is not a traditional ship at all," Maggie concluded. "Yes. Of course. I'm no expert but can assure you there are diverse ways for a ship to land."

"Only one way to find out..." the detective said, while obviously hesitant to enter the vessel.

As Elant approached what looked like the main entrance on the exterior of the hull, the cone pivoted and fired a shimmering blue bolt. It missed the officer by less than a meter and sent both intruders scrambling for cover. The cone fired several times, with a short whine indicating a buildup of some kind between. Elant Gul fired her stunner several times from behind a column, and fumbled with settings along the side when there was seemingly no effect. Maggie's heart was hammering in her chest, cursing how fast her mustered bravery lapsed in the heat of it. She looked to the officer, who finished fiddling with settings on her side arm, and turned the corner to fire when the blast wave from the cone washed over her, then passed through without leaving a mark. An agonizing second passed, while Officer Gul just blinked before holstering her weapon and turning to casually leave.

Maggie was in shock and shouted from behind cover, "And just where do you imagine you're going? If you haven't noticed, we are in a bit of a situation here!"

A glazed look overcame the detective, and as she spoke the affect and inflection drained from her voice. It was as if she were reading words she did not understand. "This all seems to check out, Ms. Weitz. Let's head back to headquarters and we can debrief the Captain." Just as blankly, the officer meandered towards the exit casually checking messages on her com device.

Maggie looked from the zombified Elant Gul to the cone's weaponry, whirling and spinning to target her. "Right then." Maggie sprinted from behind the cover and zig zagged towards the cone—the whine and blasts missing by a breath as she reached the target and pulled the cord from the cone box from the ship and the whine instantly stopped and drooped as it was before.

Elant blinked again, as if unable to process what just happened. “What did you just do? Where did this come from?” To Maggie’s relief, the life had returned to Elant’s eyes, and her voice was once again sassy and sarcastic.

“I’m not a technology wizard, but I know a damned plug when I see one.” Maggie’s retort was slightly diminished by her gasping for air that comes far less easily after exertion in middle age.

“This ship didn’t land here, that much is certain,” Elant Gul offered, staring at the warehouse as if it just appeared.

“Are you having a laugh? You just got zapped by the cone over there, then ‘lah-de-dah’-ed your way out, leaving me to sort it.”

“That thing shot me? Then I just started to leave?”

“Right. You went into a daze, said something like ‘everything checks’ out and off you swanned.”

Elant frowned. “Well, that is clever. If that is the case, then it’s some kind of...camouflage memory...influencer.”

“I can’t tell you how nice it is to see other people struggle to explain technology.”

“If it just blasted people, then others would come looking,” Elant reasoned. “This way, people stumble across it, get convenient amnesia, and this stays hidden. Who knows how long it’s been here, unnoticed? Or more to the point, noticed, then immediately forgotten.”

“Right then, let’s have a look inside – shall we?” Maggie flashed a smirk and felt unstoppable

A single door appeared in the hull as they approached and brilliant light poured out, bathing the area in a bright white glow. Elant recalled her light beacon and tucked it into her belt as she held the stunner out before her, all her senses scanning for danger.

Maggie and Elant crept through the doorway and entered a bright room, with a workstation in its center. Dozens of holographic projections of numbers, symbols, and maps stemmed from a central panel in front of a flight chair. Elant, her training taking over, swept the room with her weapon, her attention turning to a small antechamber off to the side of the control room. Within she found a spartan living space comprised of a bed, several closets, waste & hygiene facilities and adjacent supply chamber.

Maggie approached a ramp leading down and away from the control room. It was pitch black and imposing. The Inspector crossed the room, and after a deep breath, entered the darkness within switching on the stunner’s embedded light.

The light flared on suddenly as the pair reached the bottom of the ramp. Elant yelped in surprise and almost fired her weapon. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the brilliant light. Standing before her was a room of armed figures standing on platforms, locked in a state of permanent combat. It took a moment for Elant to realize they did not move. At least a dozen were on the front row alone. All were suspended on pedestals, their attire from different periods in this planet’s history. Exotic weapons hovered over data plates beside the platforms. Some figures were completely foreign, a few species even unfamiliar to Elant Gul. Everyone locked in a terrifying instant: fighting for their lives.

“Oh, it’s horrible!” Maggie whispered. “Are they...dead? Some of these poor souls are wearing primitive skins and leathers. Does this monster hunt on different worlds?”

“I don’t think so, not according to the readings at the bottom of the platforms. They seem to be in a state of suspended animation—although none is without serious injuries. All of these victims seem to be from Markonis but that is...impossible. These clothes, artifacts—I’ve only seen

relics of them in museums and these seem made yesterday. These are from our very distant past when the Ark crashed from Homeworld, and we were forced to re-learn everything. This fishing pike still has blood on it! This ship would have to have been here since the dawn of civilization.”

Maggie almost replied and felt guilty withholding what she knew and decided to change the subject, “There was only the one bed and limited provisions... a hunting caravan perhaps?”

“Trophies, these are trophies...” The detective voiced the macabre truth. “Agent Weitz—this thing is hunting your friends; we have no time to waste.”

Maggie produced the Doctor’s tracking device and walked back into the main cockpit trying to find the perfect spot. Running through the instructions in her head, Mags finally exhaled as the yellow light flicked on as the Doctor said it would.

“What is that and how do you know it will interface with this bizarre tech?”

“The Doctor said it’s looking to crack the shell; there would be, like, an electronic immune system and this thingy is the virus. I can only hope we’ve arrived in time.”

## Chapter Four

The hunter loomed over the battered Kaylaar with a bizarre truncheon, buttons studded along the hilt. Suddenly, the power went out on the weapon and armor forcing the enemy to a knee as he turned to regard a grinding sound behind him. Appearing from thin air was a blue police call box. The door creaked open to reveal a young man with a determined expression and long coat, stepping out into the storm.

“You may remove the absurd mask, that’s enough posturing for now…” the Doctor shouted over the storm.

“I HAD WONDERED…” The enemy removed the amplified mask with a slight hissing sound, “how you figured into all of this.” The voice shifted from discordant and mechanical to a regular organic shout as the helmet landed on the ground.

“You are not of this place, and you have caused quite enough damage to the fabric of time, I think. I am the Doctor, and your cruelty and predation on this world are at an end!” As the Doctor shouted, he calmly paced to the center of the roof.

With great difficulty, the hunter stood his full height against the oppressive weight of the armor. Beneath the mask was a late middle-aged man of heavy build with a close-cropped beard and shaved head.

“How did you learn of the Century Engine?” the hunter asked, his voice quavering despite its loud volume. “I was so careful…”

“Temporal radiation; you are not as clever as you imagine by half. You have ripped a bleeding hole in time, like a jagged knife untidily slashing through fabric. The radiation is quite easy to detect when you tear through the substrate of time rather than actually learn how to sail along the vortex.” The Doctor gestured to the fierce gale blustering around them. “Where do you think this storm came from? It is the same storm, spilling out into every time period, its fury and destruction gaining each time; and it will only get worse unless you are stopped.” The hunter quivered even more at the Doctor’s coldly contemptuous gaze. “You are a child with a dangerous toy, and your fun is at an end.” The Doctor moved between the warrior and the prone Kaylaar, struggling to pull himself to an elbow.

The bearded man raised his face to the rain and closed his eyes, preparing himself. The storm raged on and the three shared a serious moment of silence. All three knew this was not over.

“I think you will find that your weapons and abilities have been switched off. You made a flaw that gave away the game. It was the ‘*granter*’ you see...the weapon chosen by your latest victim that gave you away. You perfectly materialized the weapon based on a three-dimensional full-spectrum density scan; that technology cannot be found, either in this era or galaxy. The question remains: who are you and why are you doing this?”

“Bored. That’s who I am. Bored. I hunted from one end of the galaxy to the other for decades. I used every weapon to hunt everything. I lost the feeling of victory. I lost challenge. Then I began to fight professionally: soldiering, hand to hand, weapons; everything. I built the armor, purchased every cutting-edge weapon tech and advantage. It was glorious; I blasted through Daleks, cut down Ice Warriors, and nerve shocked Cybermen. But they had no fear; that ingredient that changes the taste of the victory. Nothing fights like a creature cornered; that hope when dashed is all that makes me feel alive anymore.” The hunter regained some of his aggressive swagger as he looked across at the Doctor. “But one thing I did have, you arrogant whelp, was wealth and celebrity. There was nowhere left for me to go, no prize worthy of my mettle. So, what was I to do? I traded it all for the Century Engine in the underground economy. I was no longer limited by time. I was no longer hunted by law enforcement, with simplistic virtues and values. So, I began to hunt this backwater world and found my purpose. I was the horror in the storm across the centuries and my prey fought for their lives in the most vicious and ingenious ways. You think I shall surrender?” he laughed, “That freak is my trophy now earned in battle; you may run...or die with him.”

Thunder rolled as, in one smooth motion, the predator marched forward through the weight of the unpowered armor and raised his truncheon to smash aside the Doctor and take his prize. The Doctor, in a smooth motion, sidestepped, removed his soaking coat, and threw it over the armored hunter’s face while glancing down at a device in his hand whose blue tip blinked intermittently. The Doctor frowned. Not yet. Maggie needs more time.

“You’ll not harm my friend. This is your chance to surrender peacefully.”

The hunter angrily tossed the wet coat aside. “So be it, Doctor. CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON!”

“Doctor, no!” Kaylaar managed, uselessly struggling to rise despite his injuries.

“I choose what you can never truly wield: observation, knowledge, and faith..”

The laughter could be heard over the storm as the warrior struck again, this time at the Doctor. The Time Lord stepped under the strike and used the weight of the predator against him, tossing him to the ground. The laughter stopped and was replaced by cold rage. The slow heavy blows, any of which could cripple or end the Doctor’s life, were dodged and then redirected, as the Doctor moved like a river around the enemy.

Realization started to sink in. There were no adaptations in this battle to even the playing field. This was the perfect insult. This decisive moment only resulted in rage and recklessness. This arrogant fool facing the warrior chose no weapon, nor even any form of combat. His inaction stole the taste from the kill. The hunter’s breathing became labored as he struggled under the weight of the armor and the lightning-quick throws and dodges by the Doctor. Physical youth and Venusian Aikido versus the skill of a galactic level fighter whose armor now was nothing more than oppressive weight. It became apparent that exhaustion was setting in, and the frustrating Time Lord remained fresh and out of reach. The hunter’s eyes flashed, and his teeth gritted in wounded pride as he raced forward, throwing aside the truncheon in favor of tackling the smaller Doctor to the ground. The Doctor produced a probe from the slash pocket of his sweater, its blinking tip now solid blue. The color was so intense that it left a streaming tracer in the darkness and rain. In one

motion the Doctor clicked a subdued switch forward towards the armor then the hunter fell flat on his face as the armor locked every joint all at once.

As if on cue, the storm began to fade, the Doctor knew- in every century as time's jagged wound began to heal. The early flecks of gray and peach light peeked across the horizon sparkling across the ocean and rooftops, signaling the end of a long night. The first stirrings of paradise began quickly as the businesses of the tropic destination set to work. Kaylaar pulled himself painfully to a knee, feeling exhausted just from watching the fight and still straining at his painful shapeshift. "I don't understand. Why not do that as soon as you stepped out, Doctor?"

The Doctor picked up his sodden coat and looked down sadly at the frozen heap of state-of-the-art battle armor. His centuries-old eyes locked with the frozen ones of the hunter in understanding and pity. "Because he had to know he was beaten. It's the only way with men like him. I also needed to buy time since I would only have one shot to lock on to the frequency of his armor. That Century Engine's artificial intelligence cloud may have adapted if I acted too soon, and we would have played our last card. I trusted Maggie and that trust was well placed. And even then...I wasn't entirely sure it would work." The Doctor laughed, sitting down in exhaustion on a nearby ledge.

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The Doctor stood next to the TARDIS under a clear violet sky, on the beach in the crimson sand of Markonis. The storm had long since passed, making room for paradise, and the crew had taken a well-deserved vacation as Kaylaar recovered from his injuries. The Doctor had sorted things and the companions reluctantly filtered back to the TARDIS—Maggie with shopping bags and a fruit drink in her hands.

"Have a good rest?" the Doctor asked.

Maggie nodded. "And I should be kitted out for wherever your old ship takes us next. How's Kaylaar?"

"Fit as a fiddle." The Doctor pointed out to the crashing waters, where Kaylaar uncertainly paddled with a group of Markonian youths. "Just getting his sea legs."

Maggie leaned in and sniffed at the Doctor's coat. "And you finally got the 'wet-dog' smell out."

He sniffed his lapel and nodded ruefully. "It wasn't easy. I suppose the detective was right-I did get grit on my coat!"

"Doctor, Maggie!" Elant called out as she approached from the road, weaving past the crowds of indolent holidaymakers. Something of their carefree nature had affected Elant: she ran eagerly rather than trod wearily, and her hand waved above her head, rather than playing nervously on the handle of her weapon. The Doctor gave a pleasant wave in return as she met the crew on the beach to say goodbye. Maggie dropped her loot and embraced the detective. Kaylaar climbed out of the water and said his goodbyes as well, bowing slightly and smiling.

"Detective Sergeant Gul!" the Doctor smiled, "I take it the proceedings went well?"

"They did indeed, Doctor. There was more than enough evidence on his armor. My testimony also played a part, and now we've put that monster away for good. Attempted murder carries a life sentence on this island. Markonis has extraordinarily little crime for a reason. We always catch them, and the sentences are quite strict," Elant replied.

"I know this must have been difficult for you..." Kaylaar offered.

"Yes. Finding out that time travel is possible for some reason made me feel very...small."

The Doctor considered a moment. “I’ve traveled for quite a long time now and there are few simple truths—but they do exist and are no less true for being simple. No one is insignificant. Ever. Our actions, be they cruel or kind, echo in those around us. They reverberate in the generations and the fabric of time itself. You were crucial to stopping a great wound that will heal properly now.” He indicated the untroubled, placid Markonians around them. “People, important all, will return to their lives and times and those wounds will also heal and avoid the ache of their absences. And you made that possible. I thank you in their place, as they cannot.”

“That is exceedingly kind. I may need to dip that in a drink or two to help it digest fully.” Elant smiled. “While everything I thought I knew was turned on its head, there is comfort knowing you all are out there; that I’m not alone in this fight. I didn’t care for leaving out the details of his arrest, but I agree it’s better those poor souls he captured get to go home.”

“Oh yes,” the Doctor agreed. Fortunately, a side effect of long term suspended animation is short term memory loss. We were able to use the Century Engine’s logs to return his poor victims to their proper place in history and then destroy that infernal machine. It should be moldering in some empty corner of null space by now.”

With one last heartfelt handshake, Elant said, “Thank you all so much for your help. The people of Markonis, even if they don’t know it, owe you all a great debt. Farewell, calm seas, and fair weather to you all!”

The TARDIS door closed, with a pneumatic wheeze, and the big blue box faded from sight, leaving Elant Gul with her thoughts on the perfect beach in cool morning. No storms on the horizon.







After saving the Ark from the menace of the Wirrn, the Doctor seeks to find the sister ship that represents humanity's last hope from extinction only to lose the trail in the enigmatic Copeland's Nebulae which shrouds the history of the lost vessel even from the prying eyes of the Time Lords themselves!

During the hunt the Doctor discovers the wreckage of the ark and the civilization that sprang from it far too late to intervene.

Another mystery is discovered as the The Doctor, Maggie, and Kaylaar investigate a massive storm that descends every century in the planet's history without fail- and people vanish without a trace! An evil across time lurks somewhere in the deadly squall and the Doctor and his companions may too disappear in the storm of the century!

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