

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

HOMeward



Hamish Crawford
and Bob Furnell

Copyright © 2023 Hamish Crawford & Bob Furnell
Published by Jigsaw Publications

Doctor Who, TARDIS © 1963, 2023 by BBC Worldwide
The Doctor Who Project © 2023 by Jigsaw Publications

First Printing October 2023

Cover design by John Swogger
Interior design and layout by Bob Furnell

Jigsaw Publications
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

All stories published by permission. The moral right of the authors have been asserted.

A TDWP/Jigsaw Publications Book

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication reproduced, transmitted in any form of by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system, without prior written consent of the publisher is an infringement of the copyright law.

All characters in this publication are fictitious and any resemblance to any real persons, living or dead is purely co-incidental.

Typeset in Calibri & Times Roman New

Chapter One

'Hold me no more sacred than you would your greatest enemy. For in understanding enmity, in knowing hatred, only then will you know love. And only when all enmities are extinguished forever shall the purity of our fellowship be fulfilled.'

—The Later Proverbs of Katlannu, ed. Trackip Nurbs

In the calendar of the planet Koilara, there was no occasion of greater celebration and reverence than Enlightenment Day.

It had been eighty Koilaran years since Katlannu had imparted his teachings and brought unity and peace to the Frenazzi and Pryanni peoples. Before Katlannu, both peoples were insular and distrustful, and their resentments—never far from the surface—bubbled into full-fledged, bloody war. This conflict raged for over a century, before Katlannu used his divine foresight to show them that they could not be farther from their race's true purpose and potential. Katlannu stood up to the religious leaders and made plain the hypocrisy of their holy wars. Katlannu taught Pryanni and Frenazzi that they all had and deserved dignity and shared much in common. All shared in the delight that the future could still be salvaged if they cast aside the hatred and recrimination of their past. Armed with this mantra of peace, both peoples put down their weapons and ventured into the stars together. They settled on Koilara with a solemn vow to build a new society, one whose cornerstone was harmony and wisdom. They had found a new home, they had found a new perspective on life. It was a golden age.

But there were people who didn't feel they were in such a golden age. The worst of them were bitterly resentful of the years their ancestors had warred. They called themselves Frenazzi and Pryanni first, and they blamed the other for their problems. Their views were not widely held within the society, but lately they had become more vocal.

Most Koilarans were not that zealous. Most lived and loved each other and didn't think much about their ancestry or their history. But even that majority had lately been rattled. It had only been five years since an alien had arrived, posing as a reincarnation of Katlannu. The blasphemy still rankled with the people, who rightly saw through the impostor. But many *were* fooled. Thousands went off on the false prophet's ship—friends and families were divided, loved ones were missed, off to some distant star never to be seen again. Home was so important—it had been earned through the bitterest of prices. And so many had abandoned that home, leaving those who remained to question themselves and what they held dear.

The planet was governed by a Prelatory Triumvirate—Head of State Thripps (a Frenazzi—by law the next Head of State would be a Pryanni), and two Vice-Regents, Lanval (a Pryanni) and Grir (a Frenazzi). All three gave a Katlannu Day address, and none mentioned the rumbles of discontent of the last five years. Thripps alluded to the planet's principles of harmony and unity, with the rehearsed gravitas of a politician. But all three knew the crowds gathered in the Forum of Government to pay homage and to celebrate were uneasy. They dutifully applauded their leader, and Thripps was grateful to receive their appreciation. But deep down the Head of State knew there was pity mixed in with the appreciation. If Thripps looked half as tired as Thripps felt, then the people of Koilara would have sensed it.

And so when the triumvirate retired to the Forum's private chambers, and their people retired to the bustling markets and theatres to take their minds off their anxieties and focus on some soothing escapism, the Vice-Regents gave their Head of State a peace of their minds.

It was the usual lambasting, heard by governments on a thousand worlds. Thripps was too weak. Thripps was out of touch. The young people of Koilara need a leader they can trust. The buzzwords of the past—that harmony and unity—had been allowed to congeal into empty platitudes, and after the False Prophet's exodus no one left on the planet felt those stale sentiments were doing their job.

Thripps tuned in and out of the browbeating. The parliamentary chambers overlooked the Central Spire, a massive monument that looked from above like a large spoke into which the six avenues of Katlan Polis fed. Thripps observed the throngs of his people going about their business, enjoying their recreation.

Far above, the vast rock-hewn vaults, extending ten Koilaran leagues¹, of the Polis enclosed the city. Other worlds built their habitations out in the open, so they could look up at the stars and dream of escape. The settlements of Koilara had all been built deep in the hollow underground caverns that girded the planet. It was a reminder that their home was around them, that they must not look up for answers but to each other. There were still deeper recesses below the cities and habitations. Katlannu had often taught that this

¹ A Koilaran unit of measurement equivalent to a third of a kilometre on Earth.

topography could teach the penitent believer that the greatest insights could be found by looking within. Right now, Thripps was having a hard time heeding that reminder.

“Are you paying attention, Head of State?” Grir snapped.

“Isn’t it funny, Grir, how happiness always looks so ... attainable from afar,” Thripps replied dreamily.

“You could have simply said no.”

Lanval and Grir looked at each other with a combination of rage and pity. Having softened their head of state with the attack, Lanval opted for a softer touch.

“Head of State, Katlannu showed us the way forward. At times of stress, we should look to the Great Prophet’s divine wisdom. Can you see nothing in those teachings to guide you?”

Grir groaned. “We revere Katlannu just as much as you Frenazzi, Lanval. Don’t bring your half-baked mysticism into this.”

“But you can’t ignore the facts. Many of us have had these visions, these dreams. You can’t blame that on the false prophet anymore. We’re seeing Katlannu. Many interpret that as a sign.”

“The problem with mystics is they interpret *everything* as a sign.”

Thripps paced the chambers, tuning out the bickering Vice-Regents and taking in the exquisite detail of the digitally carved desks and chairs. To a society of shape-changers, detail was paramount. Each wrinkle of the throne’s soft cushions, every grain embedded in the ornate desk, was observed and imitated by the young. To capture and reproduce every detail was the first challenge if a Frenazzi was to master their chameleonic skills and use them for anything but the most childish of parlour tricks.

Thinking of the teachings of Katlannu, and of the young, reminded Thripps unpleasantly of an acolyte. One who left for the stars, forsook their home due to the word of that fraud, the False Prophet.

“Perhaps, Head of State, you do not feel the loss of those who left our home as keenly as some—”

Thripps would not let that stand, thundering, “Don’t you dare say that to me, Grir! I did lose ... I lost someone very special ... special to all of us. The most dedicated and earnest young acolyte I trained.”

Thripps kneaded the cushion with the fervour of a prayer, looking to the ceiling and to those stars that had claimed this beloved acolyte.

“Kaylaar,” Thripps called out to the empty air, “Kaylaar, how could you of all people have left us? If only you were here, you’d have a better idea of what to do than a worn-out old huckster like me.”

The three suddenly sank into their official thrones, worn out by their debate. Eventually the Vice-Regents got up and mumbled their excuses, hoping they might enjoy some little measure of the day’s celebrations. In light of this breakdown, it would have

seemed cruel for Lanval or Grir to beat up on their worn-out huckster of a head of state any further.

Maggie Weitz had by now gotten used to the fact that there was no rhyme or reason to the workings of the TARDIS. Her first few trips made her think that journeys to the past caused more creaking and groaning and bumps than those to the future. But then she learned there was no particular rule. Sometimes the ship would protest and the Doctor would have to practically shove the console into operation just to arrive at a commonplace destination like the English countryside in 1959. At other times a far-flung collapsed dwarf star was landed upon at the flick of a switch.

It was abundantly clear that there were certain destinations the TARDIS preferred to visit, and this governed the turbulence of their passage. But predicting the time vessel's moods was even more fruitless than finding a pattern in the past/future journeys.

Today (if there was such a thing as today in a timeless space) the Doctor had set coordinates for Koilara, Kaylaar's home planet. According to the Doctor, Kaylaar's civilization had flourished many millions of years before life on Earth had sprung up. But the TARDIS was not groaning nor protesting at the flight through the past. The trip was calm, but slow. It had never seemed to take this long to get anywhere. Perhaps the old girl was soaking up some of her pilot's mood, sharing his reluctance to reach this particular destination.

The Doctor and Maggie had grown more concerned with their shape-changing friend the past few trips. Kaylaar had suffered dizzy spells, was prone to collapsing at any moment, and most worryingly, was claiming to see visions of his 'Great Prophet' Katlannu. To add to the confusion, a couple of times had clearly been the work of malefactors impersonating the Great Prophet and using Kaylaar's faith against him—as Desmond Berry had at the University of East Essex in 2023, and when Kaylaar was attacked by Count Wampyr in 1933².

But the visions had continued after those adventures, and the last couple of landings Kaylaar had not even ventured outside the TARDIS because he felt so poorly. Finally, he admitted what they both knew—that this call to home could not be ignored, and he would not get any better on his own.

"I know there's no rational explanation for it," he had told them, "but where Katlannu is concerned, I learned a long time ago to think beyond rational explanations."

There had been no collapse or coma. In fact, with this resolved, he seemed somewhat perkier than he had the last little while. Kaylaar was whiling away the trip in his cabin, propped up in bed as if suffering a light cold. Maggie had kept him company,

² See *The Doctor Who Project: Evil and Horror of Count Wampyr* respectively.

but the Doctor had appeared only intermittently. Currently, the sickly Frenazzi was merrily conducting with his index fingers to some jarring, discordant fizzes of sound he assured her was the Katlan Choristers' *Symphony of Change*, a stirring anthem that accompanied those who completed their meditations.

A mechanical voice had offered its own atonal accompaniment to the already not-exactly-melodic dirge, and before long Maggie had carted in the *Miracle's* computer, the sentient evangelical machine that had been ferrying Kaylaar and his people away from their home in the first place. The computer was still mostly confined to a stark cell deep in the bowels of the TARDIS, but Maggie was happy to wheel it in and have some additional company. It felt odd to consider the creepy computer 'company', but perhaps they were all growing happier in each other's company.

She left Kaylaar and the computer singing away to another movement of the odd composition and poked her head through the door at the end, through which the Doctor was sitting across from the console, staring intently into the placid timeless air, brow furrowed with unspoken tempests.

"Is anything the matter?"

He grunted a negative reply.

"The journey's been unusually smooth. Just slow." She paused, rapping her fist against the console's cold, smooth metal.

The Doctor remained silent, his posture as still as a statue.

Maggie shrugged, deciding she may as well satisfy her own curiosity on the subject. "Is this 'old girl' of yours taking her cue from you, I wonder?"

Maggie felt a small thrill as the Doctor pondered the question. It was sometimes fascinating to put him on the back foot. For all his affable nature, he did not like people pointing out his character flaws. He could be terribly vain.

His gaze remained fixed on the empty space between his long, laced fingers and the console. "Wouldn't be the first time," he admitted.

She rounded on him. "Oh come on Doctor! What's eating you?"

"Eating me?" he repeated dumbly. "Why should anything—"

"Oh why indeed?" she snapped. "You've barely said one word to Kaylaar the whole time he's been bedridden. I know you're worried about him—why not spend some time with him?"

His laced fingers curled into tight fists that punched at the arms of his chair. His mouth opened and closed, until finally a sigh emitted. "Well, I want to distrust this 'Great Prophet'. You know me, Maggie, a born sceptic. And Kaylaar's faith is so earnest ... so pure ... I've seen that kind of belief twisted and perverted before. Even Kaylaar himself turned against me when those Eternity Ghosts took the form of Katlannu. Who's to say this isn't some other intergalactic phoney twisting the poor chap's piety for their own ends?" His arms splayed outward in a pantomime of his confusion. "And yet I'm at a loss to explain what these visions *are*. Nothing seems to be wrong with him ... does it?"

“Well, I don’t think he’ll make the Koilaran Choir, but I can’t see anything wrong with him myself.” She studied the Doctor as he circled the console, avoiding her scrutiny and fiddling unnecessarily with switches and dials. “Go on.”

With a groan, the Doctor continued, “He fled his society in a manner not dissimilar to myself. I visited his home planet many centuries ago, several lives ago by my standard, and it made me uneasy. Utopias always do—I theoretically left home to find such a place to live, and yet when I get there the first thing I do is go looking for the serpent in the grass.”

“A born troublemaker, you are.”

“Don’t I know it. And finally ...”

“There’s more?”

The Doctor drew himself up in haughty self-condemnation. “But of course, Maggie, I don’t sit here feeling sorry for myself without at least three good reasons. And the last one is ... I have a terrible feeling we’ll be saying goodbye soon. Another goodbye, the latest in a long line for me. Friends like you and Kaylaar make my lives worthwhile, and travelling with you ... well, it doesn’t matter how long it lasts, it’s always over too quickly. You always outgrow me, all of you. You take those steps into new lives, new loves, new responsibilities. And I run away from all that, over and over. Or my own helter-skelter life pulls me away before I can check back. Sometimes I don’t even get a chance to say goodbye. So many friends gone just when I’m settling into their company. I don’t believe much is certain in this cosmos. But sometimes I think the only certainty is that I’ll end up alone.”

Maggie squeezed his stiff hand in sympathy, and was gratified to feel the fingers soften and relax in her grip. “Not if I have anything to say about it, Doc.”

“You’ll eat those words one day, I promise you.”

“Want to bet on it?” Maggie couldn’t believe how low her friend was. Perhaps he was right; since he apparently didn’t age, it was impossible to imagine his life would change, and she would one day be incapable of continuing to travel by his side even if she wanted to. She wished she could deny it, or at least say something to soothe the Doctor’s malaise, but it would not be honest. Then again ... she mischievously suggested, “Even if we do have to part ways, there’s always that *Miracle* computer. Weren’t you going to throw it into a black hole or something?”

“I’m sentimental.” He smiled, but even this gave him no real happiness. “Yes, that would be just what I deserved, ending my days bickering with a jumped-up hard drive that thinks it’s a pope.”

“Well, before you get all hung up on that, a word of advice. Don’t be so hard on us mere mortals. Don’t say goodbye before you have to. Don’t push Kaylaar away because you’re afraid he’ll leave. Give Kaylaar the credit to figure this out for himself, surely.”

“Quite right, Maggie. I can be too judgemental.”

And with its usual wayward sense of timing, the TARDIS engines sounded their roar out of the oblivion of the vortex and into the real space and time of Koilara.

The police box's woodwork glowed a dull purple against the crimson sunlight. Maggie walked around the cracked, dust-dry ground, feeling as if she were pacing across the surface of a burnt apple pie.

It was a disconcerting view. Nothing but this parched landscape extended as far as her eyes could see. No buildings, no people, nothing inviting. There were not even the topographical variations provided by mountains, valleys, or bodies of water; the plain stretched flat and endless to every corner of the horizon. The occasional crater in the endless wasteland spewed a whining steam into the air.

Maggie trod back to the TARDIS, wary of getting too far away. The air was thin and hot, and she did not want to venture far without knowing where they were going.

Her footsteps released small puffs of steam from the ground, which dissipated into the air. The steam smelled fiery and bitter, and she tried not to breathe it in despite it erupting all around her. It was as if tiny embers of smoke were travelling up through her nose. She supposed the atmosphere must be breathable, as Kaylaar never had any difficulty. But that didn't mean it was pleasant to breathe. It was obvious this world didn't respond well to visitors.

She tried to ignore the unwelcome feeling and looked back from the planet to Kaylaar. He was blinking, the skin on his hand rippling sympathetically as he pressed it against the baked rock. Maggie smiled to see the skin take on its texture.

"So, aren't you going to show us around?" she asked. "I can't wait to see your high school. Where are we, downtown or in the suburbs?"

"What you call 'the sticks', Maggie." Kaylaar's eyes narrowed on the Doctor as he locked the TARDIS door. "Why did you land us above? Surely you know—"

"Tch, tch!" the Doctor responded testily. "Of course I know. This wasn't my doing." He scowled at the purple-tinted police box. "Whatever reasons the TARDIS has for depositing us up here, she's keeping to herself." His eyes clouded with that worry; Maggie wondered what he suspected these Katlannu visions meant to him, or what Kaylaar suspected they meant to himself. "The main conurbation is Katlan Polis, which is—" He clamped his mouth shut. "But perhaps we should allow our local expert to show us the way."

"Thank you," Kaylaar responded, presenting his arm to Maggie gallantly. Maggie locked her arm under his and they strolled along the steam-puffing crust of land, while the Doctor stayed a few paces behind and studied the Frenazzi's gestures and movements. Maggie looked back at him occasionally as he warily surveyed the scene, clearly expecting the worst. What had happened on the Doctor's previous visit here? Why

was he so suspicious? She remembered how disdainfully he described Koilara as a utopia. Was he right to be suspicious or was he too ingrained a troublemaker to leave well enough alone?

She wanted to ask Kaylaar about this, but he was in too good a mood to be challenged about anything. "It's so good to be back!" he beamed. "Wait until you see Katlan Polis, Maggie. Of course, I grew up in a smaller habitation on the outskirts, but I did my higher education here. The first time I saw that beautiful city, it took my breath away." He pursed his lips, the memories turning grimmer. "That feeling changed, I can tell you. By the time we left, I never wanted to see the damned place again. And I felt blasphemous for thinking that." The smile returned. "But thinking about it now ... I never thought I could feel this way. I suppose things were so fraught when I left ..."

Maggie tried to assess for herself how genuinely he was speaking. She doubted these most recent Katlannu visions were any kind of mind control—this seemed to be the authentic Kaylaar. And yet, knowing the malign influences that had gotten inside their heads on occasion, it was all too easy to believe some trickster could be pulling at Kaylaar's strings and making him sound convincing.

They stopped by the crater, and Kaylaar ran his hand over its steam. "Ah, good," Kaylaar said with a smile. "At least you got the time right, Doc."

"Yes, wasn't that lucky," the Doctor replied cattily.

"What do we do now?" Maggie inquired.

Kaylaar rubbed his hands together. "Oh Maggie, I hope you'll be impressed." He dived headfirst into the jet.

Maggie reached out to pull him away, but the Doctor held her firmly away from the edge. "One at a time, if I remember correctly."

"Oh." She stepped back.

"Not afraid, are you?"

"Of course not."

The Doctor smirked. "I didn't doubt you would be, Maggie. It scared the willies out of me, but then I didn't have much of a head for heights when I was here last."

She wrinkled her nose at his teasing, and steeled herself for the jump. She pointed her arms above her head and closed her eyes.

Grir spent some time among the people of Katlan Polis, not wanting to think about the dressing-down the Vice-Regents had given Thripps shortly before. Lanval was always a dutiful prig, but Grir liked to present an image as a happy-go-lucky personality equally at home among everyday citizens, attending the sporting stadia. On consideration, Grir would actually prefer to do such things, and rather missed the carefree and ordinary life, but the responsibility of government had dictated this hard-nosed approach.

So Grir spent too long internally justifying the dressing-down and was entirely oblivious to the entertainment and the spectacle it was arousing in the assembly. Everyone did seem happy. Was it too much to ask that this Katlannu business be forgotten?

But of course, it was easy to say that as Pryanni. Grir was a Frenazzi, but this issue was clouding the rightness of their traditions. To Grir all the visions made the Frenazzi seem wrong-headed, too wrapped up in their old mumbo-jumbo to see the delusion that was polluting their minds. Katlannu should be seen first and foremost as a builder of their civilization, for the social progress that they had achieved on Koilara. But those Frenazzi had to bring their mouldy spirituality into things. And while Grir did not want to be the one to drive a wedge between their peoples on this account, nor to take the Pryanni's side against kith and kin, at the same time it seemed fairly obvious that the Pryanni perspective was the more balanced.

Grir grabbed a smorch-cake from a nearby stall to attempt to summon a more celebratory mood. But before a bite could even be taken, a Pryanni Praetorian Guard, a particularly career-minded one by the name of Ciri, had marched into view with a surveillance-screen showing the view from above their city.

"Our sensors picked it up on our perimeter," Ciri explained. The image showed an oddly-coloured box with some illegible markings perched in the outer plains. Grir could hardly believe Ciri's explanation that it must be "a spacecraft of some kind."

Seeing Grir's scepticism, Ciri clarified, "There was such an odd vessel that landed long ago. A visitor from beyond who was a great wise man, cut from the cloth of Katlannu, so they said."

"I doubt that," Grir replied witheringly.

The surveillance screen widened to show three people walking with blissful unawareness in the harsh surroundings. Two of them were undoubtedly aliens, but the third, Grir recognized as a Frenazzi.

Ciri had seen as much also.

"True, it may not be the wise time traveller. But one of the False Prophet's fugitives returned?" the guard suggested.

"If so, arriving at this time, with all this Katlannu business, can't be a coincidence. You know what to do."

Ciri nodded grimly.

The steam blew humidly around her skin, and the unforgiving crimson sunlight was replaced by a gentle patter of mist that cooled as Maggie descended. She could feel the drop of thousands of metres but felt it slowed by the bubble around her.

She emerged in a dark, rock-walled recess, with some of the good-humoured dizziness of clambering out of a rollercoaster. A few seconds behind her, the Doctor tumbled out of the same chamber with considerably less grace—he had upended himself and had landed in a heap of the green tails of his long coat, with the dark corduroy of his trousers sticking up, bottom first, in Maggie’s face. He indignantly rolled himself over and she helped him to his feet.

The Doctor and Maggie stepped out into a torch-lit subterranean space, numerous abstract carvings set into its flickering recesses. “I suppose a race that can change shape would favour designs and patterns over the specifics of faces,” she mused.

“Yes, they’re a very detail-oriented culture. ‘Persnickity’, you might say.”

“I’ve never said ‘persnickity’ in my life.”

“Well, you will when you meet this bunch, I’ll bet. In their equivalent of the Dark Ages, Frenazzi sculptors were once executed when their hands slipped during a two-day-long stone-carving session. The Pryanni found that rather hard to take if I recall. Of course, when I arrived it was the early years of this new society of theirs. Far less troublesome. With any luck, and if Kaylaar is to be trusted on the subject, they’re probably bosom buddies by now.”

“Kaylaar’s so laid-back, it’s hard to imagine ... I guess I wouldn’t want anyone judging me by the standards of Larry’s³ parents. Maybe we’ve improved him, eh Doc?”

“Oh, undoubtedly,” he said with mock haughtiness.

Maggie ranged around the chapel-like space. The space beyond was a tunnel whose dimensions were hard to fathom, but which seemed long and dark.

“Where did Kaylaar go, anyway?”

The Doctor frowned. “The one companion I’ve travelled with who *doesn’t* have a penchant for wandering off ... Kaylaar? Kaylaar!” He marched out of the cavern, pulling his slim pencil-torch from his coat to light the way.

An agonizing few seconds of silence followed, before Maggie sighed with relief when she heard him cry, “Ah! There you are, old chap. You had us worried. Well, not me, but Maggie ...”

As Kaylaar followed him into the room, Maggie tensed. There was something wrong. His face was set in a stern rictus, those golden eyes did not light up to see her as they usually did.

The Doctor looked between them, and his features crumpled in realization. “Ah. Not the real McCoy, eh?”

“Well done,” the false Kaylaar sneered. “Off-worlders don’t usually spot it that quickly. You must be very close friends with the traitor.” Their friend’s features melted away to reveal another Frenazzi. “They’re in here!” the Frenazzi called.

³ Maggie’s cousin—see *The Doctor Who Project: The 108-Year Hitch*.

Two burly guards immediately appeared in the arch of the chamber behind the Frenazzi who had until moments ago been disguised as Kaylaar. Their weapons were depressingly trained on the Doctor and Maggie. They bore a slight resemblance to Kaylaar—but their skin was a pearlescent blue rather than white, and they had prominent ridged fronds extending from the sides of their heads. Their noses were flat and snout-like against their mouths. Maggie reasoned from the differences that these must be Pryanni soldiers.

The soldiers looked from the Doctor to Maggie with unexpressed scorn. Their weapons made Maggie freeze with panic.

“Well, Doctor? Say something!”

He shrugged, batting away the gun-barrel irritably. “Take us to your leader?” Even their captors seemed to have heard that line before.

Chapter Two

'Why should we not find the spiritual in the political? A government worthy of my teachings is no mere procedural body, but another forum through which our glorious people may better understand and love each other.'

—Spiritual Government and the Will of Katlannu, 3rd Edition

"Nurbs be praised!" Thripps cried out, as he saw the familiar form of Kaylaar reclining on the hospital pallet.

The acolyte looked older and unwell. But at the sight of Thripps, Kaylaar's eyes widened in gladness. "Revered Mentor Thripps, it's good to see you."

"It's Head of State now," Thripps corrected sardonically.

Kaylaar smiled. "I am glad to hear that. Congratulations, I'm sure you're a terrific Head of State."

The awkward conversations and the uneasy mood of the people caused Thripps to merely laugh evasively at this compliment. "Oh Kaylaar, how could you have abandoned us? Abandoned me?"

"Oh, you know how much Kriiraan and Doofal, and Geerael, and all the others meant to me."

This hurt Thripps, despite the fact that Kaylaar clearly meant it honestly. If all these people had meant so much, clearly they meant more than those who remained on Koilara. Nevertheless, it would not do to harbour such resentments on the Great Prophet's holy day, so Thripps let the resentment go and merely concluded, "It truly is a miracle. How fitting for Enlightenment Day. I hadn't expected to see you again."

“None of us did. You all left in such a hurry,” the medical examiner sneered involuntarily. The Head of State glowered, causing the underling to make excuses and leave.

“Have you been keeping up with your shape-changing, my young buck?”

Kaylaar said nothing, but in a minute his features blurred and Thripps saw a perfect mirror-image staring back. They laughed and Kaylaar self-admonished, “But of course it’s a crime to impersonate the head of state isn’t it?”

“I’ll not tell the Vice-Regents.” Thripps grabbed Kaylaar by the hand, and held back from a full hug—it might not seem stately. “Kaylaar, forgive me, I don’t want to burden you with my own problems, but suffice to say ... to have you return on Enlightenment Day as well. I sense Katlannu’s work in this!”

“Well, you’re not wrong there, sir,” Kaylaar replied. As he related the visions he had seen, Thripps’ face crumpled in sorrow, causing him to break off. “What is it?”

“Others have seen these visions as well. It has caused a great deal of unrest. I’m afraid some naysayers are even talking of another uprising.”

“Blasphemy!” Kaylaar thundered, rising from the pallet with fists clenched, as if ready to brawl his way to religious tolerance.

“Oh, you know Katlannu’s teachings—open to interpretation. We are but imperfect vessels of the Great Prophet’s divine truths. So it is perfectly valid to claim that *we*—” Thripps bowed to take more than a share of blame “—are merely failing to create the just society of the future that launched our vast ark-ships to Koilara in the first place. Actually, the flight of you and those fugitives with the False Prophet made things a great deal worse.”

“You know I wasn’t one of them, I was trying to save them. I thought I could bring them back, but they ended up ...” Kaylaar stopped himself, remembering the Doctor’s theory that they had been thrown into the past and were their own ancestors. He hoped the theory was untrue—such time-twisting shenanigans were deeply confusing. Whatever the case, they were out of reach, their lives part of another story, one in which he had chosen not to play a part. He merely concluded, “A long way away.”

“They won’t come back?”

Kaylaar shook his head.

Thripps was sad to hear that. “I will miss them. Our world is not a big one, is it? The loss of even so small a segment is still keenly felt. Don’t for a minute think we’ve forgotten any of you. I like to think that’s why people have become so discontent. They merely miss their family and their friends. That is why it is all the better that you have returned.” Again, their hands clasped.

“Ah, here you are,” a voice sneered behind Thripps. Grir marched into view. “Kaylaar’s friends, the aliens, await your judgement.”

“Judgement?” Kaylaar again leaned forward, hackles rising.

Thripps pushed him back to rest. “You aren’t well Kaylaar. Take care. You have my solemn oath, I will ensure nothing untoward happens to your friends—for bringing you home, they have my utmost thanks.”

Grir grunted sarcastically. Kaylaar was sad to see his wise mentor cowed and bullied by this young, deeply unpleasant politician. He was also worried about what Grir had in store for the Doctor and Maggie—and how much Thripps could realistically oppose it, no matter the sincerity of the Head of State’s platitudes.

“Not a bad prison cell, eh Doc?”

Maggie looked around the grand room, whose smooth stone and warm torch-light were only an emerald smoke plume away from resembling *The Wizard of Oz*. She looked through some windows down at a massive indoor square, where Kaylaar’s fellow Koilarans—Frenazzi and Pryanni alike—mingled in jubilation. Banners streamed from the sky, and it took active effort to remember that they were inside, far below ground. It leant the city a cosy air, despite its great size—it stretched into the distance, buildings and homes clustered and heaped like ... well, Munchkinland.

“This is no cell, Maggie,” the Doctor replied haughtily. “This is where the Prelatory Triumvirate assemble to discuss the most important matters of state.” He indicated three throne-like chairs angled inward. Then his hands swept out to take in the benches that lined the other sides. “Over here is where the Frenazzi and Pryanni Parliament meet. They believe very much in open government. Everyone has to work together in this room if they want to get anything done for their planet. The only hard and fast rule is scrupulously equal representation of both peoples.” He frowned. “It was a little bigger the last time I was here.” He extended his arm to the carved bench, and back to his forehead. “No no, I was about six inches shorter, of course.”

“What happened on your last visit, Doctor? Violent revolution? Accused of murder?”

“No, no. It was rather pleasant. Some minor disagreements, but I think we sorted them out. I was with Mel at the time—or was it Jamie? My memory ...”

The Doctor was given no further chance to jog his memory when three ornately robed individuals swept into the room, their jewelled cloaks trailing across the marble-smooth floor. At their front stood one Pryanni and one Frenazzi—easily distinguished by that forehead ridge, the flat snout versus the beaky nose, and the different skin colours. Behind them, an older Frenazzi lingered, their leader. His—no, her, Maggie guessed—skin was lined with worry. Maggie wondered if it was to do with Kaylaar, or with them.

“I am Head of State Thripps,” the leader solemnly intoned. “These are my Vice-Regents, Lanval and Grir.” Thripps indicated the blue-skinned person to her left and the paler one to the right.

“Maggie Weitz,” Maggie introduced herself, since the Doctor was remaining frustratingly silent, studying them with suspicion. Did he want to get arrested?

The Frenazzi Vice-Regent, Grir, nodded with some kind of suavity, before turning to the Doctor. “And this must be the legendary Doctor. Welcome back to our planet.” The exaggerated inflection made it obvious that Grir was being sarcastic, if not downright catty.

The Doctor bowed with equal cattiness. “You honour us, Prelatory Triumvirate. Why don’t we sit down and you can tell us what’s bothering you?”

Grir refused the seat and paced with the studied, oratorical theatricality of a seasoned politician. “What is ‘bothering’ us, dear Doctor, is that on the day of our saviour, our society is dangerously fraying, and you see fit to drop off a traitor and a fugitive who is suffering from the same unclean illness that is further dividing Pryanni against Frenazzi!”

“Doesn’t it feel good to get that off your chest?” the Doctor asked snottily.

“Kaylaar is no traitor,” rumbled Thripps. “That I’ll stake my reputation on.”

“Good enough for me,” Lanval said with a nod.

“With all due respect to my learned colleagues, the Head of State’s reputation is at this moment worth slightly less than a bucket of land-steam.”

Thripps’ composure snapped, and the leader and Grir butted heads and rolled around the chamber. The Head of State’s limbs shifted to lashing tentacles and claws to gain an advantage over the younger politician. Grir responded in kind, though the younger Frenazzi’s shifts were smoother and swifter, more like Kaylaar’s. Lanval cried out for order, and the Doctor leapt into the fray to pull the two leaders apart.

“Dear me, you are setting a very bad example. I was just telling Maggie here how efficient and productive your bicameral government is! Now, shake hands—unless you’d prefer to shape-shift them back to claws—and apologize.”

Neither did as the Doctor suggested but both took their seats sullenly. Thripps seemed to enjoy the higher level of the Head of State’s throne, and swivelled it to be in full view of the sulking Grir.

“Why is Kaylaar a traitor?” asked Maggie. “We’ve been travelling together for three years and I’ve never heard him say anything except how great this planet is. You couldn’t get a more patriotic Frenazzi.”

“If he liked it so much, why did he leave?” Grir spat.

Lanval waved Grir silent. “There’s no point in getting into all that False Prophet unpleasantness again. Maggie, Doctor, you must understand that our societies retreated to Koilara to create a unified, perfect place together. It was thus decreed that flight from Koilara was treason against Katlannu’s divine purpose.”

“And what’s the penalty? Burning at the stake?” Maggie blurted. The Doctor glowered at her, and she knew she should be a little more reserved. But thankfully the

three governors did not understand the reference and merely narrowed their glowing bronze-tinted eyes in shared confusion.

"You are from Earth like the Doctor's other friends?" Lanval asked. Maggie nodded. "We understand from the Doctor's last visit that your world differs greatly different from ours. We respect others' differences but we are concerned how those differences weaken our unity. We do not want Pryanni and Frenazzi to be at each others' throats again."

"But with all due respect," the Doctor interrupted, "it sounds like that's happening anyway. Thanks to these visions."

Lanval demurred. "It is an unfortunate reminder of the fundamental differences between us. The Frenazzi have always been more mystical, and this is distrusted by the more rational Pryanni." All three nodded sadly. "Unfortunately the visions are thus interpreted as a mental disorder by the authorities."

"By yourselves, you mean?"

"Yes. It is more convenient."

"And it's the truth!" Grir added.

"But your people are having the visions," Maggie said. "Why would you throw them to the wolves like that? No wait, don't tell me. Like Lanval said, it's more convenient. You're worried about keeping power, not about the harmony of your society."

"What would you have us do, off-worlder? Resign from government? Have a new revolution, more False Prophets and war and bloodshed?"

"It won't come to that," the Doctor insisted. "I think I can figure out what's behind this. Kaylaar alone didn't give me any answers, but if I can go down to your hospitals and see the others, I might be able to study it and find an answer?"

"At the very least, you are guilty of no crimes, Doctor." Thripps looked thunderously at Grir. "We cannot prosecute every alien who visits us no matter how much some would wish it. Our desire for perfection has regrettably made us insular. And if it takes an alien perspective to bring us back together, Katlannu could not ask for more."

"Agreed," Lanval said.

"Very well, they may be freed," Grir consented. "With an armed guard I presume?" Thripps and Lanval did not even have to say anything before Grir was whining about this lack of security, but it was academic. The Vice-Regent was overruled, and until the Parliament convened to debate the matter, the visitors were allowed their freedom. The Doctor and Maggie were already on their way out.

The Doctor thanked them and grabbed Maggie's hand. As they sprinted from the room, she was sure she felt Grir's eerie copper eyes boring into the back of her head.

Kaylaar had been asleep, and only returning to wakefulness to find the young Frenazzi at his side did he realize how weak and how unwell he really was. He felt little better but sat up to greet the visitor.

"My name is Juivan," the visitor replied. "I've heard of you. My mentor studied alongside you. Trackip?"

"How nice." It was amazing how painful these conversations were. Thripps had made Kaylaar feel guilty, and now this young Frenazzi reminded him how few of his dear friends remained on Koilara. He could not even remember Trackip, but he nodded anyway.

"Trackip told me you were one of the keenest students. Your meditation notes are still studied."

"Nice to be remembered."

Juivan's manner turned furtive. The young Frenazzi leaned in and whispered, "We have heard of your other visions. The medical assistant is a friend."

"What?"

"You've seen the Great Prophet?"

"Yes. Not recently, not while I've been home. But when I was travelling."

Juivan squeezed Kaylaar's hand tighter, barely containing his joy. "What did Katlannu say in these visions?"

"He called me back here."

"We've thought if we can all get together and share our visions, we might be able to understand why they're happening. The only problem is *they* don't want us to admit it."

"The Prelatory Triumvirate?"

Juivan nodded. "The Parliament too. So much for being the voice of the people."

"I see. Thripps told me I shouldn't say anything, I didn't understand why."

"Thripps!" Juivan scoffed. It hurt Kaylaar to hear his beloved mentor so disdainful. "Thripps is propping up the rest of this corrupt government. Defending their lack of progress by calling us regressive. Keeping us from the golden age we deserve! They'll stand by while Frenazzi and Pryanni revive their old grudges and reduce our civilization to rubble!"

Juivan was struggling to remain quiet, but these last passionate words had echoed in the medical wing. Kaylaar saw some Pryanni nurses bob their heads in search of trouble. Kaylaar was sad to see the youngster look around in shame. What had happened to his home? Why was their society so repressed? Even in those bad days before they left, Kaylaar did not remember such mistrust. Was it really because of himself and the False Prophet followers leaving? Would he, who did not believe in the False Prophet and only went along to keep the rest out of trouble, have to take responsibility for such a rupture, such a crime against their harmony?

"I've said too much," Juivan murmured. "Not safe here. We have to go."

“Where?”

“Down below. Everyone who admits to visions gets locked up, so we had to get out of Katlan Polis, toward the core. Whatever it is, we seem to agree Katlanu wants us to go closer to the core.”

“Below? The core? That was forbidden, wasn’t it? Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Less dangerous than getting committed up here.” Without another word, Juivan left Kaylaar’s bedside. The Pryanni nurse who had been so agitated at the raised voices approached and handed Kaylaar a nourishing glass of enriched jaima protein.

“Was everything all right? We were worried about your ... visitor. Sounded like raised voices. Was the visitor disturbing you?”

“Not at all,” Kaylaar replied hastily. “Just someone who’s glad to see me. I didn’t realize I would be so missed.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t have left.” The nurse’s tone was admonishing. Before their conversation could continue, a voice announced a call from the surgical department, and the nurse scurried away.

The ward was silent and still, and somehow Kaylaar knew Juivan had engineered that call. He swallowed the rest of the bitter nourishment of the protein drink and stood up. He was surprisingly dizzy.

“Katlanu, if you’re listening ...” Kaylaar mumbled as he touched his temple. “A little encouragement wouldn’t go amiss.”

Nothing answered, so Kaylaar had to stagger to the end of the ward and heave himself through the open window. Sure enough, Juivan was holding the glass open. In a few minutes, head still spinning and Katlanu still nowhere to be found, the two fugitives wove their way into the celebrating crowds.

“Very impressive!”

Maggie stood in the shadow of the Central Spire, glittering with rows of candle-like light. At its base, a troupe of Frenazzi and Pryanni players were acting out something like a Nativity scene. There was no need for sets and costumes, as they merely shape-shifted to whatever character they needed to portray. With the scene acted, Maggie went to congratulate the players, who responded without speaking by shifting their features to an exact replica of her face.

“May I ask why you didn’t have Katlanu in the play? I noticed it ended right before he was born.”

She looked around at the sudden, stony silence. Before they were playful, but they had suddenly turned agitated.

The Doctor laughed uneasily behind her. “Forgive us, I know you don’t get visitors often, so we don’t know all your customs. I forgot to mention, Maggie, along with that

lack of artwork we saw earlier, there are many cultural taboos around taking certain faces. For instance, it's a crime to impersonate Head of State Thripps or the Vice-Regents. And someone like Katlannu..."

"Blasphemy?" Maggie's cheeks went red. "I'm so sorry ..."

The players nodded their acceptance and a mild ripple of laughter seemed to break the tension. They all imitated Maggie's blushing by reddening their own cheeks, and the head of the troupe suggested they all give the visitors a warm welcome. After a low ripple of humming that Maggie took to be their equivalent of applause, they carried on away from the Central Spire.

As Maggie looked around the streets she had seen from above and compared to Munchkinland, her heart was still racing and her embarrassment lingering. The Doctor apologized as they walked. She had to admit she was deeply irritated that such an important cultural taboo had slipped his mind.

"That's the problem with utopias, Maggie. They're often terribly insular and exclusionary. Like your country clubs back home. With any luck, we'll find these answers and then go on our way."

"Anything else I should know?"

"Did I mention the gender issue?"

"Gender issue?"

"They don't have any. Or rather, they have just the one."

"No genders? Haven't we been calling Kaylaar 'he' all this time?"

"I suppose it never occurred to him. After all, if you don't have a concept of gender, one pronoun's as good as another."

"Seriously Doc, you didn't think that might have been important to mention? I hope I haven't offended anyone." She mentally replayed all the day's conversations; she didn't think she had made any references either way, but it was easy to make unconscious assumptions.

"Far more difficult the other way. Pralixitis Minimis had seventeen or eighteen if I remember rightly. I made the mistake of taking Tegan there for a holiday—she spent the whole time rather confused."

"I'll say! Between that and the religious stuff, it makes for a pretty big matzoh-ball on my face."

The Doctor tapped her chin playfully. "I can't see any matzoh-balls. You're doing splendidly so far."

The dazzling scenes of the marketplaces and the bustling crowds caused Maggie to relax. There was a joyful exuberance to the people and to their attractions—as if a Marrakesh street market had been stuck inside a sports arena. The combination of enclosure and spaciousness gave it a sense of containment, yet it still felt open and energetic.

“Christmas!” Maggie blurted out. Perhaps the Nativity comparison had first set her along this track, but now she knew. The ingenuous enthusiasm shared by one and all, and the spices in the air, made Maggie think about those holidays of her youth. Given Revelstoke’s proximity to the mountains, plentiful evergreen forests, and ample fall/winter/spring snowfall, she had a keen enthusiasm for the Yuletide season, even though it felt disloyal to admit it to her devoutly Jewish family, always anxious that she wouldn’t keep kosher if she lived away from home. She felt the same spirit here. In that light, the enclosure made her think of them all as children, and this underground city the vastest, most ambitious blanket fort every constructed.

It was a sensory assault of smells, sounds, and sights. Music similar to that *Symphony of Change* Kaylaar butchered in his room echoed from one corner to another. Maggie felt it as familiar and as welcome as the Hendrix albums Ollie used to play. Little furry creatures—the natural inhabitants of these underground spaces—performed tricks and the shape-changers were taking requests, while bizarre fairground-style games were played by pint-sized youths lined up at stands. More solemn, hymnal music could be heard from the temples on either corner.

She averted her eyes as various couples kissed, strangers grabbed each other, and even a few seized her in spontaneous hugs. She had to push away the last celebrant, and was compelled to reconsider her earlier comparison to children. They were sensual and loving in a way Kaylaar had never struck her.

Throughout it all, the Doctor remained the quintessential traveller—excited and engaged at all times, but at a remove, always a shade distant, standing apart and above from the festivities.

Maggie hoped she was not being paranoid, but she kept seeing one set of eyes looking at her. She hoped it was not more paranoia that saw those eyes take various faces, and hide in various corners. She searched out the standout emerald green sleeve of the Doctor’s coat amid all the garish purples and golds, and grabbed it.

“I wondered when you’d notice that,” he said under his breath. “They try to ignore it, but there are eyes and ears everywhere down here. And I’m afraid we’ve put ourselves on Grir’s watch list.”

“I thought we had the run of this place.”

“Be fair Maggie. They’re frightened of strangers, they’re hardly going to let two out-and-out aliens have the run of their most important city.” The Doctor grabbed a steaming bowl of what tasted like cinnamon pudding from a stand and handed it to Maggie. The vendor seemed happy enough to let her taste it. She reached into her pockets, but the Doctor merely nodded a command to those eyes. “If we’re being watched, our voyeurs can at least pay for the privilege.”

Their observer reluctantly emerged from the shadows to obey the Doctor’s instructions.

Maggie took a few sips of the delicacy, and tried to follow the Doctor's cosmopolitan example, but something about their observers made her feel dogged and self-conscious.

"You have nothing to worry about Maggie," the Doctor said through a pasted-on smile. "You see, they merely want to confirm Grir's suspicions that we're agitators and know something about these poor Frenazzi who are seeing Katlannu. But since we don't, there's really nothing they can pin on us."

Maggie took a second, happier spoonful of the pudding with this knowledge. But the feeling was short-lived.

One individual, ducking into one of the side streets, stood out from the crowds as clearly as their observer: Kaylaar, clad in white medical robe and following (apparently with some confusion) another Frenazzi, younger and with a fixed expression of distrust about the surroundings.

Kaylaar turned and lit up at the sight of Maggie, but she tried to wave him along. Sure enough, her observer had seen the interaction, but hadn't yet followed its source through to Kaylaar. Knowing how much suspicion he was already under, and not wanting to contribute to it, she frantically looked at the Doctor.

"I saw him too, Maggie. You go—follow them—and I'll face the music."

She caught one last glance back at the Doctor before Kaylaar grabbed her and pulled her into the side street.

"Just what we need when we're trying to get out of the city," Kaylaar's rescuer groaned. "An off-worlder."

"Just hurry up and take us on your escape route," Kaylaar snapped back. "It's good to see you Maggie."

"Good to see you too." Maggie scarcely had time for a hug before the other Frenazzi had prised open what looked like a safe set into the side of the rock, and they went down a dark, lowering tunnel.

The only light visible as they descended was the weak glow of Kaylaar and Juivan's skin. A pressure headache was beginning to thrum in Maggie's forehead, and she cast glances above her to remind her of the city above, and of the safety of the TARDIS even farther out of her reach. With so little visual stimulation other than the back of her dear friend, Maggie's mind's eye filled the scene with that cacophony of movement she saw in the Katlan Polis marketplace, and her last sight of the Doctor swallowed in the crowds of Katlan Polis as they abandoned him.

She knew Kaylaar felt the same way. Equally, she was glad to see him again, and held his hand on their single-file journey in the dark. For a brief and terrifying moment, she was brought back to their descent into the hellish bowels below the University of East Essex; but somehow Kaylaar's revived spirits made her feel less afraid, more intrigued

by the journey. She had been genuinely worried about her dear friend as he lay bedridden in the TARDIS, liable to slip into these spells. Kaylaar had seemed so vulnerable and fragile; most unlike his usual gung-ho self. Therefore, her worry for the Doctor took a back seat; the Time Lord, after all, had a knack for getting out of worse scrapes than this.

Disorienting though it was, visiting the planet was still something special for Maggie. Kaylaar had only made occasional references to where he came from, and so it was truly enriching to see all this. She felt badly that his first sustained words were a stream of apology about their situation.

"I don't know how this could have happened. Even as bad as things were, it wasn't like this at all when I left. And now I've got you and the Doctor embroiled in it ..."

"And I thought it was complicated explaining to Mr. Lee that I didn't know when I'd be back at the hardware store." Maggie let out a tired laugh; that street food was sitting ill in her stomach, its sweetness curdling in her mouth, no doubt due to its close proximity to this unexpected exertion.

Juivan harrumphed and clucked as they spoke, and Maggie sensed Kaylaar's increasing discomfort with his rescuer. Kaylaar attempted to ignore his new ally as he explained their purpose.

"It's a shame the Doctor couldn't have come with us," she said. "He had the same idea, that if we collected everyone's Katlannu experiences there might be some message, some purpose behind it." It occurred to Maggie that the purpose might not be a benign one, though she didn't want to echo the Doctor's earlier paranoia.

"This Doctor of yours sounds like a Pryanni," Juivan said witheringly.

"He's wise enough to see beyond those kinds of cultural divisions," Kaylaar shot back.

"We've waited around here long enough. Let's get moving again." Without waiting for them, Juivan marched onward. Kaylaar rose in his own good time and followed at a distance, clearly savouring a chance to be with Maggie again.

When they had covered more ground, Maggie and Kaylaar talked amiably about her impressions of the planet. This had segued into a more general conversation when Kaylaar pitched sideways, clutching at his forehead. His skin rippled, as if he was cycling through several faces and forms simultaneously.

"Juivan? Juivan!" Maggie called. She wished she didn't need to involve Juivan, but Kaylaar looked much worse than he had in the TARDIS, much worse than she had ever seen him.

Juivan came running back.

"He's having one of these vision, isn't he?"

Juivan nodded. It was the first time Maggie had seen any empathy on the Frenazzi's face.

"What do you see, Kaylaar? Tell us quickly, before you lose any details."

Kaylaar said nothing, but emitted a low, pained wail, which echoed up and down the tunnels.

“This isn’t safe,” Juivan insisted. “We haven’t even got three leagues below Katlan Polis yet.”

As if to provide more credence for Juivan’s anxiety, a low roar bellowed from farther along in the dark, forming an eerie harmony with Kaylaar’s cries of pain. They may have evaded their pursuers up above, but something from deeper below had heard them and was coming their way.

Chapter Three

'The rule of the self must be the foundation to the rule of society. Be open and true to yourself, and be no less so with all people. Only then can people be free and content.'

—Katlannu and the Teachings of Change

When Maggie Weitz was sixteen, she and three of her girlfriends had gone on a camping trip for the May Long Weekend. Since Tracy had forgotten to book a campsite, they ended up erecting a tent in a reasonably clear area some ways north of Hallam Provincial Park. When they had driven up to that clearing on the Saturday afternoon, it had seemed like a miracle: so benign, so untroubled. And the following night and day were carefree fun, listening to Bob Dylan on Phoebe's portable Victrola and smoking Parliaments and drinking the beers Tracy had stolen from her older brother. Like all the things Maggie found most thrilling in life, at least part of the thrill came from breaking rules and doing something a little bad. It was all good fun until the small hours of Sunday night. Becky hadn't wanted to go away anyway, and they'd all had to bend the rules with their respective parents to get away for two whole nights. So there was a kind of poetic justice in the fact that it was Becky who went out that night and saw the lynx, waiting there as if their tent was a convenient doggy-bag.

Maggie hadn't slept well: her sleeping bag had, with the characteristic good luck the Weitz family seemed to be born with, found itself atop a pebble. So she awoke for the second time that night and realized Becky was outside. She fancied some fresh air, and it was only her timely entrance in the scene that made things better than they were.

She saw her friend, frozen in terror, and the animal staring across at her. Her entrance pulled its focus for that critical second, and allowed it to creep off into the

woods. But Becky was convinced it would have gone right for her. What would they have done? Furthermore, what would Becky's parents—who thought she and Tracy were having a parent-supervised sleepover—make when she came back with wild animal scratches? Or rabies? And that was the best-case scenario.

They left early the following morning and the near-miss cast such a pall over the weekend that it almost would have seemed better if Becky had been attacked. It made her feel she was being punished in some divine or spiritual way, simply for enjoying the illicit thrill of her getaway. Getting away with it, and coming close to danger but not being touched by it, left her to punish herself. And that internal punishment was, to the know-it-all sixteen-year-old Maggie Weitz, no fun at all.

It was, on the whole, odd that Maggie, more than half a lifetime later, should recall this particular teenaged indiscretion as she crouched in the darkness of the deep Koilaran caves with Kaylaar and his rebellious friend Juivan, the former hovering in and out of consciousness in the midst of a vision of Katlannu, the latter like Maggie rooted to the spot and only able to listen helplessly as guttural animal roars filled the space. Perhaps Katlannu had made her think of that—brought that memory to the fore.

She considered whether it had any bearing on her present situation. That wild look in the lynx's eye was a powerful memory that had stayed with her over the years, a lingering hollow of childhood fear that never failed to give her a shiver in adulthood. Though it paled beside the unearthly terrors she had faced since travelling in the TARDIS, Maggie recognized in some way those terrors' connection to that memory. To her, it went beyond nature. There was an intelligence, a spiritual presence that she could not hope to understand there. It was ultimately why she remained in Revelstoke: because as much as she feared its inexplicable power, Maggie always found herself compelled to that fear, willing herself to recapture it. She, perhaps cockily, thought she would have dealt with the lynx, or the bears or bobcats or anything that would have chanced upon those four teenaged girls that stolen May night, without needing help from Tracy or Becky or Phoebe.

She desperately hoped she would not seem like the Becky to Kaylaar or Juivan. If she was, neither Frenazzi showed it. They all looked equally paralysed, equally indecisive, as she felt. She tried to console herself that a lynx, while dangerous, was at least a known quantity. She dared not speculate what deadly fauna had sprouted in these underground depths: she only knew that it sounded large and hungry.

Kaylaar's eyes lost their glassy lack of focus and he snapped forward in alertness. "Katlannu said the end is near."

"I can believe that," Maggie said mournfully.

A lumbering, arrhythmic stomp now echoed through the path. It was getting unmistakably closer. The roaring subsided, replaced with a guttural, satisfied grumble. The beast had clearly scented them and was headed their way in the hope it would get a good meal.

Kaylaar smiled widely at her. “Not like that, Mags. Look around, he said. The answer will come from looking around.”

Another roar sounded nearer to them, and the heavy stomps grew terrifyingly close. Kaylaar’s grin only broadened as he looked to Juivan.

“Front,” Kaylaar said, pointing to himself. “Back,” he added, pointed to a nodding Juivan.

Maggie knew better than to ask what they were talking about, and one second later her unasked question gained its answer. With the eerie but thrilling shimmer she knew so well from Kaylaar’s many transformations, the two Frenazzis’ bodies blurred and they formed a massive, crocodilian beast with scaly ridges and a covering of downy fur. Its hairless snout was ridged with a massive horn, like that of a rhinoceros upside down (did that mean it was a large tooth?). Maggie knew, with the same instinct that told her to keep quiet, that this was the beast that had its eyes, or its nose, on them.

Maggie and the counterfeit beast made, pantomime-horse-style, from Kaylaar and Juivan, sat tensed in the cave, listening to each ungainly footfall. They summoned the feral gravity, but Maggie wondered if she and her girlfriends had been able to disguise themselves as a lynx, if the genuine article would have been able to tell. She still saw Kaylaar’s eyes – warm and unconditionally loving, the eyes of a child grown to manhood without making any steps toward maturity – in the new form, and knew the beast would not be convinced. Maybe it wouldn’t need to be.

Then the sounds changed.

The footfalls retreated, turning and heading – up? down? – it was hard to tell, but definitely going to a different plane from the one in which they were skulking.

But a face of another kind popped around the corner. Another Frenazzi, older and wearier than either Kaylaar or his friend.

“Vokol?” the rear end of the beast cried in Juivan’s voice.

“Juivan!” the Frenazzi cried back, recognizing a comrade.

Juivan and Kaylaar reassumed their natural forms and clasped the shoulder of the new arrival. Juivan introduced Kaylaar and Maggie.

“Vokol,” the newcomer replied by way of introduction. “Kaylaar, I’ve heard much of you. Things must be worse than we thought for you to come back.” They shared a laugh, and Vokol turned to Maggie. “And you, Maggie, where do you come from? Not around here, evidently.”

“A planet called Earth.” Maggie cursed herself for the way her voice raised at the end, as if expecting them to have heard of it. “From what I understand, it’s in a galaxy far, far away.”

“I came courtesy of the Doctor, you see.”

“The visitor from beyond time?” Vokol rasped another hearty, cynical chuckle. “Things are *really* worse than we thought.”

The Doctor slouched in one of the leathery sculptures that passed for furniture in the Koilarana Parliament. When the two Vice-Regents, Grir and Lanval, sashayed into the room with characteristic pomp, he matched the defeated posture by massaging his scalp wearily.

“So Doctor,” Grir sneered, “as you seem to know everything, I wonder if you are aware of the penalty for sedition? As we are proud of the society we have created, we are equally adamant that those who try to undermine that society should pay dearly for their trespasses.”

The Doctor glared up at them with an expression so poisonous it caused the pair to find something interesting on the floor to look at.

“Look, Grir, why don’t we talk candidly?” Despite the Doctor’s entreaty, the Regent remained fascinated by the parquet. With a heavy sigh, the Doctor continued: “Your lap-dog has relayed to you that Maggie and Kaylaar went off with someone your regime doesn’t care for. Therefore, you believe yourself vindicated in your suspicions of off-worlders and those poor unfortunates suffering from visions of Katlannu. Well, bully for you.” He ducked his head so he was squarely in Grir’s eyeline. “Thus, you’re only too happy to condemn me to whatever fate you deem worthy – be it hanging, execution by firing squad, a total ban on chocolate consumption, or whatever.”

The Doctor’s head bobbed into Lanval’s field of vision also, but he got no further response from the other, purportedly more reasonable regent. Though he felt like a blowhard, he had to continue talking to verbalize his thought process during this.

“The unfortunate problem with this way of thinking is twofold. First, since I *don’t* know the fellow in question, killing me won’t bring you any closer to finding the people you’re so adamant are undermining your perfect society. As well as not exactly being great for my health either.”

Lanval’s head snapped up. “If you don’t know these people, how will *you* find them?”

“Oh Lanval, it’s as plain as the ridge on your forehead! Surely you must see the knack I have for getting to the bottom of things, sorting out trouble ...”

“Getting into trouble, more like,” Grir sniped. “*That’s* as plain as the proboscis on *your* face.”

The Doctor couldn’t help but chuckle at the barb. “Touché, Grir! And surely your perspective as a leader easily allows you to see the benefit of dropping a person with that talent into this situation. You don’t have to take any responsibility for whatever reckless actions I might take, yet you get credit for anything I find out. Back home, my people loved doing that.” He added, chuckling to take the edge of the statement, “Not to mention the, er, wisdom my *own* outsider’s perspective might lend.”

Grir grunted a begrudging agreement.

“And the second ... ‘fold’?” Lanval pressed.

The Doctor waved airily. “Well, on a related note, none of you are equipped to find an answer to these ‘visionaries’ who are seeing Katlannu. I believe I am.”

“And I believe it as well!” boomed Thripps from above, sweeping grandly into the room with a vigour startlingly unlike the Head of State’s tired, worn-out mien earlier that same day. The Doctor rose and gave the Triumvirate a curt bow, finally feeling like he was getting somewhere. “So what is your next step, Doctor?”

“Well Thripps, I need to learn more about Katlannu. When last I visited Koilara, there were other pressing matters that prevented me from diving into your culture. So now, I should consult these teachings and holy works that you hold so dearly.”

“Why?” Grir drawled suspiciously.

“It seems from my outsider’s perspective that much of your culture is founded on a path to enlightenment. The discontent Frenazzi and Pryanni are expressing is disappointment that their promised utopia hasn’t appeared yet, or isn’t yet at its ideal state of perfection. The depth of belief in these visions comes from the same yearning.” The Doctor paced the room, his theories speeding up his voice. “My initial suspicion when Kaylaar talked about these visions was very close to yours Grir—some kind of malefactor manipulating his faith. But I can’t dismiss outright the possibility that this is the genuine article. If so, perhaps Katlannu did have some inkling of the future of your society. If Katlannu was able to see the future ... well, to what end is this contact being made now? To bring down your society, as the pessimists might suggest? To guide it along its path, as might the optimistic perspective? Or something entirely different?” The Doctor finally broke off in his speculations, taking a deep satisfied breath and tapping his chin, his mind still racing as he considered the possibilities. “I have a strong suspicion the answers will be found in Katlannu’s own words.”

For the first time, the Doctor looked up from his musings, and was puzzled with the sight he saw. He was hardly expecting a round of applause, but the Prelatory Triumvirate were looking at each other grimly.

“Problem?” the Doctor asked ingenuously.

The warren of caves continued for countless paces. Maggie felt Kaylaar’s compatriots Juivan and Vokol were reticent to talk due to distrusting her, so a pregnant silence hung upon their progress. Perhaps they were also wary of alerting other underground predators to their position, so Maggie was only too happy to stay silent herself. She still felt oddly free of fear, more lost in spiritual thoughts. She did, though, feel a lack of water and a rumbling of hunger in the pit of her stomach. She was on the point of insisting on stopping for a few minutes to rest her legs, when the oppressive and dark rock-walls abruptly ended. The four travellers stepped through the mouth ahead and the scene

opened up into a breathtaking chasm. Without speaking, Juivan and Vokol let Maggie and Kaylaar take a moment to appreciate the vast space.

As well as the vastness of the space, the darkness of their underground journey gave way to a warm and vivid glow. The path clung nervously to the edges of this chasm, and Maggie only looked into its depths once before her vertigo compelled her back into Kaylaar's arms. At that moment, winged bat-like creatures bobbed into sight, screeching some kind of greeting.

"We're going down, I suppose?" Kaylaar asked. Vokol nodded, and was beginning to descend when Kaylaar followed up, "And what exactly will we do when we all get together?"

"You will join with us," Vokol answered curtly.

Kaylaar stayed on the spot.

"It's rather hard to explain, but I assure you it's necessary."

"You see," Juivan chimed in, "we found that the individual messages were garbled and incomplete."

"I never found that."

Vokol and Juivan both clapped at this news. "Linking together gave us more clarity, but perhaps you, Kaylaar, can supply the crucial missing piece."

"By joining with you?"

They nodded and carried on their downward path. "Come on Kaylaar!" Juivan called back, not turning to look at Kaylaar. "You want the answers as much as we do! Please say you do!"

Kaylaar nodded warily, and followed the pair bounding down the ledges that clung to the side of the deep chasm wall. Maggie followed more slowly, crab-walking so that her back always had stone against it. The stone was slick, and a kind of warmth emanated from it in contrast to the cool of the open space. She saw clouds of it accumulate and float skyward. She remembered the puffs of steam on the surface of the planet, billowing apart around her feet.

"They can't make you do anything you don't want to," Maggie assured him, squeezing his hand in sympathy.

"I'm not sure. The problem is ... they're right. I *do* want to know what this is all about, what Katlannu's purpose is by sending us these messages. I can't turn my back on it now."

"How are you feeling otherwise?"

"Invigorated," Kaylaar answered buoyantly. "I feel more alive down here than I have for ages. The last three trips in the TARDIS feel like a fog, like my eyes have been covered by ... by this steam." He grabbed at the rock-wall and showed Maggie the sweat of the steam on his fingertips. "But now it's all so clear. But that also scares me. And I don't want you to get left behind ..."

"No chance. I'm big enough to take care of myself, buddy."

Maggie shot a glance to the chasm's upward extremes. It was hard to believe they had come so far down, that the 'surface' of Katlan Polis—which was itself deep below the planet's actual surface—could be so many miles above them.

Maggie wished she could look through that immense space to the man she cared about who was on the other side of it. "I only hope the Doctor can say the same thing."

The Doctor was imprisoned. Oh, he wasn't actually under lock and key. There were no bars, no gruel and hard tack, and no uncomfortable bunk beds stuffed with coir, but he was nevertheless feeling the inescapable chafe of confinement. He could go anywhere in Katlan Polis and do anything on this Enlightenment Day. But he was prevented from doing the one thing he wanted: to read Katlanu's Holy Scriptures. And it was thanks to one of the most universally pernicious barriers to liberty and sanity he had ever known: red tape.

To be fair, Thripps had attempted every trick in the leadership book. Lanval and Grir had excused themselves, leaving the Doctor and Thripps to try their luck persuading Versal, Koilara's Head of Spiritual Affairs and Pontiff of the Great and Holy Order of Katlanu, to grant them permission to read the texts. It was Enlightenment Day. The Doctor was a distinguished man of learning from a great and ancient civilization that wished to know more of their beliefs. It was a vital clue to solving the puzzle of the 'Visionaries'.

But Versal, the Doctor could tell, was a bureaucrat as surely as a religious leader at heart. And Koilaran constitution specifically forbade any but the Holy Order to read the original texts. The Doctor, as an outsider, was automatically classified as a non-believer. Secondly, the Head of State could only overrule the Monks' decision by convening a special session of Parliament and getting a two-thirds majority vote. All of that could take days, and only succeed in getting Kaylaar and Maggie farther from safety and closer to the trouble at heart.

The Doctor would have loved to simply follow them underground. He even passed the service hatch that led into the tunnels, down which his friends were burrowing at this very moment. However, Lanval and Grir had attached their dedicated Chief of Public Security, Ciri, to keep a constant eye on the Time Lord. Wherever he went, Ciri and perhaps an armed escort would follow, and he did not want to bring danger upon people who were trying to stay out of sight and escape the persecution of their government. Blundering in might endanger them and get him no farther ahead.

How the Doctor cursed those wasted hours, of the Triumvirate conferring, then Thripps arranging a meeting with Versal, then Versal listening to the argument ... so much preparation and protocol, all to arrive at the preordained rejection that Versal had decided upon from the very beginning. And all that while, he was doing nothing but

cooling his heels, learning nothing that would help him, and Maggie and Kaylaar were getting farther from his reach.

The Doctor emerged from the Katlan Polis First Cathedral fidgeting on the spot, feeling paralysed beneath these reams of red tape. Concern for his friends even had him thinking decidedly uncharitable thoughts of Thripps, who still beamed with politically honed patrician benignity. It was infuriating to see, but he had to admit the leader had talked and persuaded and cajoled as earnestly as any statesman the Doctor had ever seen in action. It merely reminded him that he had no patience for the nuances of procedure.

"I am truly sorry, Doctor," Thripps said. "And don't think I'm not frustrated too." Those violet eyes fluttered to the ground in shame. "I even considered changing shape to impersonate Versal—but it wouldn't have done any good. There are identity scans at the threshold of the Archives. And if I was found out it would be a summary impeachment, of course. Grir would certainly love that."

"I appreciate the thought." The Doctor felt badly for his earlier ill will toward Thripps.

"And I hope you know that I feel your pain, deeply, at not being able to help your friends. Kaylaar meant a lot to me, you know."

"This was Katlannu's idea, then? This separation of Holy Writ that only ordained monks can read? Terribly un-democratic."

"Well ... it wasn't so much Katlannu's idea as the Order's subsequent interpretation. We found it saves some of the cultural clashes if we keep worship out of the streets. I don't know if any of the worlds you visit believe in the separation of church and state, but we believe in it quite strongly on Koilara."

"So I see." The Doctor smiled ruefully. "And I can hardly fault you. It's a noble principle. But I simply can't abide protocol that prevents people from learning. Especially when those lessons are so important to your society ... not to mention my situation."

It was late, and the Enlightenment Day crowds were growing listless and sluggish, like children at a fair who had eaten too much candy and gone on too many rides. The entertainment at the Central Spire had fractured into political comedians and other radical voices, offering their take on where society was going wrong and how they alone knew how to put it right.

The Doctor sadly perceived an uptick in the simmering hostility palpable between the Frenazzi and Pryanni. Initially close and happy to celebrate together, the two peoples had steadily grown more distant over the day, drifted into their separate corners, and it was easy to sense tension in the air, as if a wrong word or glance could set the wrong person off.

Thripps moved through the crowds. A few parted to pay their leader heed, but most simply glanced up and looked flatly and blankly ahead. Ciri kept the crowd a few feet away to ensure no powder kegs were lit by Thripps' presence, but frankly—and

perhaps even more sadly — the people seemed too listless to muster the passion even to take a swing at their Head of State.

Thripps felt the ugliness in the air and apologized to the Doctor for it.

“Chin up, Thripps, I’ve seen worse. An Earth philosopher I once met might have compared this atmosphere to playing the old Glasgow Empire on a Saturday night after Rangers and Celtic lost.” To the Frenazzi’s blank expression, the Doctor began a halting explanation of football, only to decide it would take too long. But at least the comment seemed to reassure Thripps.

And as sometimes happened, the Doctor’s stream of musings led him to another conclusion. “Of course! I have another resource at my disposal!” He gabbled a hasty goodbye to Thripps and then darted back down the street, his balmacaan coat cutting a luminous green swathe through Ciri and the parting crowds of perplexed citizens.

They looked back to Thripps, who shrugged and murmured, “Perhaps things are looking up after all?”

They looked at him as frankly as any people who had heard such assurances from their elected representatives ever did.

Ciri, having lost the Doctor among the Katlan Polis revellers, withdrew with tail between legs (metaphorically, though no doubt a Frenazzi could have shifted one into existence for the occasion) to report to Grir.

The Vice-Regent was surprisingly calm to hear this news. “No matter. That silly strutting Doctor will run around in circles but get nowhere with the Pontiff. And meanwhile, we will take matters into our own hands. As a matter of fact, Ciri, you might be able to help us.”

It was at this point that Ciri took into account the assembled soldiers and more formally attired Members of the Guard. They had all assembled in their finery to present arms before Head of State Thripps’ appearance that morning, but usually they had dispersed by now. And they were never as multifariously armed as Ciri saw them now — adjusting impulse cannons and heat-trackers and phase blasters set to ‘Non-Discriminating’ mode.

“What are we up to?” Ciri asked as casually as possible, ignoring a nettling sensation rising from the stomach.

“We’re going down into those caves to root out the Visionaries once and for all.” That familiar sadistic smile spread across Grir’s lips. “The Doctor and his friends, in trying to preserve their lily-livered plurality, will help us enforce *our* values! Make Koilara strong, and be true to Katlannu’s teachings through hard and dispassionate necessity!”

Ciri was not a spiritual person, having been brought up to adhere to the military hierarchy and the attendant chain of command. Much of what the Doctor said and stood for that day had sailed clean over Ciri's head. But hearing Grir now, and coming to recognize the sentiments behind that smile and the values that Grir was proving to represent, illuminated this alien's point of view, and made Ciri wish the Doctor was here now.

How long had this taken, wondered Maggie? Somehow, her anticipation had never edged into nervy panic; instead she felt like she was floating down the path, an effect aided by the increasing humidity and the smoky aroma in the air. As she edged beside Kaylaar, tentatively stepping closer to the bottom of this huge vaulting space, the pink-glowing rock and the sweaty steam burning off the walls all around made the space feel less like a cave than a gigantic mouth. With that image in her mind, she was a little apprehensive about approaching what seemed like its quivering, moist tongue.

Aside from perfunctory variations on "Soon be there" and "Not far now", Kaylaar's fellow Frenazzi had kept their mouths frustratingly shut. From her long friendship with Kaylaar she sensed his reticence giving way to fear. He was no more eager to get to the tongue of this giant mouth.

However, as with most inevitabilities in life, even after that painful protraction they seemed to arrive at the bottom of the chasm too quickly. The glowing pink mass trembled in reaction to their approach. Juivan squatted at its edge, looking down warmly. "Don't worry; we bring friends."

The mass rippled and separated. Ten, then twenty, then a hundred, heads bobbed up. The goo separated into humanoid forms: the heads and limbs of the Frenazzi.

"Of course!" Maggie realized. "You want to stay out of sight in case the Grand Poo-bahs upstairs follow you."

Vokol nodded, then sharply ordered two of the recently formed Frenazzi to take positions at the entrance. They duly shimmered into the shape of the flying beasts Maggie saw at the top of the chasm, and flitted skyward.

Juivan and Vokol took turns explaining Kaylaar's presence and the help he brought them. "Visionaries, we all knew it would take one with powers no less than Katlanu ..." They turned to Kaylaar. "Kaylaar, we believe you are that one."

Kaylaar rocked back, further stunned by the other Visionaries sinking to their knees to offer their fealty.

"No ... I'm no prophet, I'm no saint ... I don't have the answers."

Any further words were interrupted by the familiar wavering of his consciousness. The others joined arms, their expressions assuming a similar lack of focus.

Maggie heard the voice, almost musical, somewhere above and around them, echoing through their chasm. She wished the Doctor were here to explain it, for it sounded worryingly like the voice of a god.

“Welcome my children,” the voice said benignly. “I am Katlannu. The time has come.”

Chapter Four

'I die with my great work unfinished. As do we all. For work is by its definition unending. Progress has no summit, nor does accomplishment stop when one puts down a pen. You are my great work, my great people. I can do no more than guide you along the path, for I am limited by my mortality. Frenazzi and Pryanni must follow it together. If I return, you will know the journey has been a fruitful one. If I do not return, your faith in the journey will need to sustain you. Either way, you must know in your own hearts the worth of the path you follow.'

—The Final Teachings of Katlannu, ed. Trackip Nurbs

The Doctor raced through the side streets of Katlan Polis, mentally orienting himself and remembering the details of that initial journey from the surface. The chapel-like chamber in which they arrived had been at the end of an overbuilt warren, with curving vaulted shapes that jutted overhead like a Gaudi-esque cathedral. He reached the familiar corner, his eyes lighting up at the innocuous space. Into the space, and then up the levels and he would be out in the fresh air again ... well, as fresh as the air got on this planet.

He picked up speed as he darted down the alley, his eyes barely having time to adjust as he sped through the doorway. All of this meant he felt the impact to his gut, and the surprise at the pain, before he saw the figure who dealt it.

The shadowy, indistinct shape shimmered and resolved into the figure of Ciri. A muscular leg bludgeoned the Doctor in the gut, rolling the Time Lord onto his back.

Through his havoring vision, the Doctor wheezed out, "Trying to persuade me to stay?"

"We can't let you leave, Doctor."

"All I want is to find out the truth. Why not let me get on with it?"

The Doctor rolled sideways out of the way of another attack by Ciri. But on his side, wedged into a narrow vestibule, any way out would require him going through this aggressive gatekeeper.

The Doctor was still reeling when he saw the stubby truncheon shape of Ciri's stunner-wand extend into view, its tip glowing blue.

"Surely you've grasped by now, Doctor, that learning the truth is far too dangerous. For me ... for the Prelatory Triumvirate ... for our whole society."

The stunner-wand's beam shot a violent tongue, which only narrowly missed the Doctor's head and singed the flagstone beneath.

Without any more technological means to take his opponent out of action, the Doctor was forced to resort to a time-honoured kick, which knocked Ciri against the nearby wall.

At this point another figure raced into the vestibule, wrenching the wand out of Ciri's hand, wrenching the Doctor up, and tersely commanding, "Come on!"

The Doctor had no choice but to follow the figure and was none the wiser amid the flurry of rushing to the platform and standing still before its anti-gravitational force came into effect. The darkness of the night meant that the figure's face was not visible in the long tunnel to land. Only when they were outside, and three red moons bathed the steamy surface in eerie light, did the Doctor see and recognize his rescuer's face. It took him by surprise.

"Versal?" he cried.

The Pontiff of the Great and Holy Order of Katlannu nodded sheepishly. "I thought better of my earlier difficulty, Doctor. Perhaps I can explain myself better as we go?"

The Doctor nodded. Thankfully, the TARDIS was still standing where he had left it over the brow of the desolate hill. "Quite right, old chum. You might find this interesting—I have a fellow theologian aboard my ship. Follow me."

Ciri expected to get a firm dressing down from Vice-Regent Grir. But the security chief was barely noticed, as the chambers were a flurry of activity. Many of Ciri's colleagues were being outfitted with special armour and military-grade stunner-wands. Knowing the Koilaran Katlannu Charter off by heart, Ciri was all too aware such weapons were only to be distributed if a planet-wide crisis threatened. The thought that such a crisis was looming, and the deep-rooted fear Ciri felt at the prospect, made the security chief doubt the sanity of this profession.

Doubt was certainly not visible on Grir's face, lit with a darkly gleeful glow. Lanval and ten other Members of Parliament stood by, looking a bit shell-shocked at the activity.

Even when Ciri explained the events, the Vice-Regent could only nod distractedly, as though expecting to hear that the Doctor had gotten away.

“You did your best, Ciri. You can be more useful here anyway. Morot! Give Ciri a new heavy-duty wand!”

The chunky weapon was heavier than Ciri remembered from training.

“As you can see, Ciri,” Grir continued, “events have overtaken the Doctor. We detected something—a build-up of this mental energy that has been bubbling under throughout our populace. Thripps wouldn’t listen—Thripps still won’t believe it is a problem. But now we have no choice but to take the fight below ground—root them out once and for all!”

“Doesn’t this kind of action requires Thripps’ approval?” Ciri asked.

Grir flailed an arm at the ten sheepish Members in the corner. “We’ve convened a quorum of our own to grant authority. A majority of those assembled agree.”

Never mind that you only assembled just enough to get that majority, you cynical old goat, Ciri considered.

“Once we come back,” Grir continued, “I will use this failure of leadership to impeach our beloved Head of State and under the Emergency Authority Act, install a new leader better equipped to enforce the tenets of Katlannu.”

“Such as yourself?”

All eyes turned to the stentorian growl of Thripps, as the leader marched into the room with an elderly swagger. Even Grir seemed to waver in the force of the superior’s authority. Even the assembled soldiers seemed relieved to see their *actual* leader here, perhaps hoping they might all go home and not undertake a deadly mission below ground.

The hope was short-lived, as Grir tottered forward, the wavering replaced by an almost tipsy authority. “You would not take responsibility.”

“I would not kill my people! And I won’t allow you—”

“Tell the Head of State!” barked Grir.

Lanval meekly assented. “We ... er, convened a special session and took a vote.”

Thripps looked with disgust at the ten councillors, chuckling bitterly. “Ten of you? You call that fair? Oh, don’t get me wrong, I’m sure you all gave it a proper democratic hearing. Don’t tell me you let this dictator-in-training bully you into granting authority to start a civil war.”

“Duly elected, Thripps!”

The two stood millimetres apart, their faces practically pressed against each other in pure hostility.

Grir’s voice cracked. “I had to, Thripps! I had to do *something!*” Grir tumbled forward, fingers clutching the head. “I can’t think clearly ... I ... I ...”

Realization dawned on the other assembled soldiers and governors. “You have heard the voice of Katlannu too?” Thripps asked quietly.

"Yes! Why won't anyone but me do anything about it!"

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"And admit to sickness, to weakness, to inability to lead? How could I?" Grir sank further inward, arms pitifully hugging the trembling body. Thripps reached out, but Grir pulled away. "There's still so much to do ... I have to ..."

Lanval pulled Thripps aside. "Perhaps we should have seen the signs earlier?"

Thripps scowled. "Perhaps."

"Nevertheless ... the energy spike should be investigated ..."

They turned to Grir. "Agreed, Lanval. But not with *Grir* in command. You!" Thripps barked to Ciri. "I'm sure you were hand-picked by my subordinate to overthrow me, but I'm willing to overlook that if you send this detachment into the depths. Find out what's going on, but under no circumstances are you to open fire on your fellow citizens. Understood?"

Ciri nodded. "Sir, I should inform you as well that the alien Doctor got away from me. He's probably on the surface now. Should I do anything about that?"

Thripps looked forlornly to the vaulted ceiling of the chambers. "Let us hope he's getting close to the answer too. I don't want to use those weapons."

"Neither do we, sir," Ciri admitted.

Life in the TARDIS was not all it was cracked up to be, the *Miracle* computer reckoned. Most of the time when the ship landed, everybody else dashed out the door all too quickly and left it inside to talk to itself. And logically, the computer could see why the Doctor was so distrustful. But as time had gone on, it had grown increasingly attached to its fellow passengers. Now for instance, after that agreeable period helping Kaylaar sing some songs from his childhood, the *Miracle* computer felt downright lonely at being stuck in here.

The worst part was, as soon as the double doors whirred open, there was a 56.38% probability that the Time Lord would be rushing in with some dire news (and a 29.89% chance he'd rush in and dematerialize).

These odds were confirmed when the computer detected that familiar fishing sweater and formerly elegant antique Earth coat fluttering, its tails whipped by the rapid change from the Koilaran atmosphere into the dimensionally transcendental space. By the Doctor's side was a figure the computer immediately assessed as a Frenazzi religious leader.

The Doctor flailed in the *Miracle* computer's general direction. "Versal, allow me to introduce my theological expert."

Versal's peered into the sleek transparent cube, features screwing up in distaste. "A machine? Doctor, you aren't making me feel any better about my transgression."

“As Katlannu said to the Xater military prefect, ‘Shall we dialogue with our titles or our beliefs? For mine, you will find, are as deeply held as yours’,” the computer quoted.

Versal gasped at the perfect recital. “Doctor, why did you not merely consult this resource to begin with?”

“I always prefer cracking the spine and dog-earing the pages on a good old paperback,” he admitted with a touch of bitterness. “How do the holy books describe Katlannu’s ... er, death? Or whatever you might call it?”

“ ‘And lo, Katlannu embraced the next life gratefully. It is moment to be understood only when the faithful stand on the brink of their own transcendence. Only at that exact moment can the embrace of two lives, departing the material world and welcoming to the next, be felt and appreciated. The disciples looked upon this last glimpse of their Great Prophet, and their sorrow at this goodbye was ameliorated by gladness that the next life would be a good one.’”

“Perfect,” nodded Versal. “The story of the Embrace.”

“What was the Embrace?” the Doctor queried. “How is it described, I should say?”

The computer generously remained silent, allowing Versal to field the question. “A cloud with a mind in its heart. It gave Katlannu the strength to stand against the warring leaders, to guide the peoples to the ark-ships. It was brilliant purple and spoke to Katlannu of the events to come, of what lay beyond our realm.”

The Doctor removed his coat and rolled up the sleeves of his sweater, typing data into the TARDIS console furiously. An image of Koilara’s star system, with its binary stars around which four planets orbited unsteadily, resolved into being. Adjusting controls, the image changed. Versal’s eyes widened at the sight of millions of years running backward on the screen before him, with other rocks circling into sight and then drifting off into space. Though programmed to see nothing but the mathematical dynamics of their movements, the *Miracle’s* computer, by the quirk in its programming, now saw the hand of divinity, a benign omnipotence holding and sifting them like pebbles in an almighty hand. In fact, it cast its mind back to the voyage of its ship, the Lifeship *Miracle*, and the blessed illumination it had received on that journey.

The Doctor, as if following its mechanical train of thought, asked rhetorically, “And do you suppose it might have been something like that?”

The image clarified into a purple-tinted eminence. The scanner pulled away dizzily from the Koilaran system, and still the garish cloud could be seen. It grew thicker and denser, and finally dominated another, lonelier-looking planetary system, which the Doctor identified to Versal as “the Xater system, the ancestral home of you Frenazzi. This is what the night sky would have looked like when Katlannu was undergoing his journeys of discovery.” He tapped the computer’s casing. “And I think it was the same phenomenon you and your Lifeship *Miracle* passed through, that gave you your curious sentience and belief in your own godhood.”

"Forgive the Doctor, Versal," the computer apologized. "He is a born sceptic."

Versal smirked. "So you do believe yourself a god?"

"My own god, yes. But as time has passed, and I repent for my part in helping my Lifeship's pilot relocate the Frenazzi into the past, I think of myself more as ... a prophet."

"Very modest of you," the Doctor commented sardonically. "But for Versal's benefit, perhaps I should add, *not* a particularly great one."

Versal thanked them coldly. It was obvious the cleric was finding these two aliens—worse, an alien and a synthetic being—discussing deeply held beliefs nettling on the edges of offence. Still, Versal remembered the words of Katlannu and tried hard to give them the benefit of the doubt, and to try to learn from their understanding ... no matter how wayward the understanding might be.

But perhaps away from the judgement of the Church and Frenazzi peers, Versal could raise the issue that had prompted this change of heart. As the Doctor tapped away at the TARDIS controls, the pontiff said meekly, "You should know, Doctor, that there is another reason for my cooperation."

The time traveller froze on the spot, his brown starry eyes darting up and looking Versal up and down. "Oh?" he asked simply, but the single syllable contained a wealth of curiosity. It was almost enough to make Versal think twice, but reason prevailed. It was vital to explain this, to say it out loud to this alien and get some kind of understanding.

"The simple fact is Doctor ... I too have seen the visions. I too have heard the call of Katlannu."

Versal cringed as the eyes widened.

"You have? But this is fantastic news."

"Not for me, Doctor. It was all I could do to repress the feeling, to silence the voice."

"But why on Earth did you do that, Versal?"

"When Grir and the government started rounding Frenazzi up, when the Pryanni used it to justify their former hatred of our people and our mystical ways, I thought it better to keep quiet—"

The Doctor's lips pursed, bottling up an uncomprehending rage. "But if the head of the church were to stand with them, then Grir and the triumvirate might not have been so draconian in their reaction! Oh, Versal, how could you be so ..."

"I was scared, Doctor. I didn't like the connection I made. I felt I would burn up under that scrutiny." Versal smiled bitterly. "It's all very well to study and commune with the spirit of Katlannu, but to stand face to face, eye to eye ... they're too big for me." Versal crumpled slightly, looking to the floor. "I'm sorry for being such a coward. Sorry to my people."

The Doctor patted Versal's shoulder, a gesture the Frenazzi were unfamiliar with but which was welcome at this lonely moment. "Of course, my friend. Forgive *me* for

being judgemental. I can see it took a lot of bravery to admit that." He whirled back to the console and finished inputting the coordinates. "Which is all the more reason we should get to the bottom of your planet's present divine visitation ..."

With a slight buckling, the metallic floor plates beneath Versal's feet started shuddering, and the whole space inside the Doctor's ship was filled with a monstrous cacophony. The Doctor gripped the sides of the console and looked expectantly into the rising and falling column.

"Where are you taking us, Doctor?"

He pointed absent-mindedly at the scanner. "Back to your people's homeworld, Versal. I have to see this energy cloud up close."

"Are you sure that's wise?" baited the *Miracle's* computer, whose earlier silence now seemed eerily foreboding. Equally foreboding was the sudden thud as the column dropped into the console and the ship went still and quiet.

The Doctor rolled down his sweater sleeves and shrugged his coat back on. But he approached the doors cautiously, his head semi-shrugging forward, as if leery of phantoms lurking behind and around him. In tune with his apprehension, the TARDIS's doors swung open only minutely. Without turning, he asked Versal, "What do the console readings say?"

"I can answer that Doctor," the *Miracle* computer interrupted. "No readings. No beginning, no end. Only intersecting with real space and time on its fringes. Within ... only the wonder."

Versal's jaw hung open at the machine's reverent gravitas. Could this pompous crystalline box truly be a prophet? Was there anything in the Sacred Writings to explicitly contradict it? Feeling faith and sanity fraying, Versal gained some measure of calm by silently reciting the Holy Writ.

The Doctor meanwhile stood at the door, peeking through at the sliver of brilliant and vivid colour like a frightened child. He stood there for some time, lost in melancholy thought.

And yet when he turned back around, the Doctor's eyes were widening not with the wonder the computer spoke of, but recognition. "Do you know, I'm beginning to get some ideas about this ..." His smile widened at the thought. "Oh, I may not be able to understand or measure it, but I have encountered something of this ilk before."

"You have?"

"Yes." The Doctor loosed a high-pitched chuckle, like he used to ten regenerations earlier. Memories of the Toymaker and the Land of Fiction flashed through his mind. "Several times in my distant past, possibly more. But most recently, on my companion Maggie's planet. Her town was threatened by an intrusion of irrational, fictional events.

An entity was trying to remake reality according to the works of a pulp mystery novelist.⁴

“You don’t dare think *that* was Katlannu?”

“Oh no! But I think like Maggie’s writer friend, Katlannu may have had some preternatural ability to contact it, to reach out beyond the bounds of our universe and see ... well, that ‘wonder’ our divinely appointed computer friend spoke of.” He raced back to the TARDIS. “No time to lose! I don’t like the thought of that kind of power running rampant while poor Maggie and Kaylaar are left to deal with it.”

As the journey began again, Versal collapsed to the floor, hands cupped on head in agony. The room and the solidity of the surroundings faded away, and only the voice— that voice, whose terror and wonder had caused Versal to question the faith, the sanity of remaining at the head of their planet’s religious leadership.

“How can you have ignored me, my subject?” Katlannu thundered. “Why do you leave my side when your place is with your fellow true believers? This is the moment our faith will be most gloriously rewarded. Why do you fear it?”

“It’s Katlannu, isn’t it?” The Doctor’s voice was a pitiful mumble against the stereophonic blast of the Great Prophet.

“O Great Prophet ...” Versal’s voice sounded weaker still. “I wanted to follow you but I did not ... I know my path cannot be a righteous one ...”

As Ciri led the united military forces of Frenazzi and Pryanni into the depths of their planet—many for the first time seeing the still deeper foundations on which their comfortable environment had been built—the Frenazzi felt the dread first. But the Pryanni were soon gripped by it as well. There was no time to begin their customary mockery of the other people’s superstition. Before long they were all wading through the darkness, feeling the pressure in their minds, and wishing more than anything that they could turn back, could leave this mystery unsolved and leave those who had gone below to their fates.

Even Grir felt such doubt, such uncertainty, such a depthless pit of insecurity against something so massive and awesome. “Why, Katlannu? Why did you select me to face this? Why not someone worthier?”

“Were you saying something, Vice-Regent?” Ciri asked.

Grir, certain that this self-doubt had been said under breath, shook the inquiry away with an embarrassed grimace. “Merely that we are almost there.” Grir’s voice rose to encompass the assembled troops. “Your hard work shall soon pay off. We shall bring our society back to unity ... through a strong hand.”

⁴ See *The Doctor Who Project: Murder, She Lived!*

The perils of their journey—the winged creatures and the heat-parasites that lurked in these dark recesses—were hardly noticed against their grim, determined march. Finally, they stood on the edge of the deepest chasm overlooking the caverns, knowing from the sudden and painfully bright pink glow that they were nearing their destination.

“Not far now!” Grir declared. “Koilara’s glory is our glory in this moment, we must—”

Grir’s inspiring words stopped. The nearest troopers attempted to step forward but found an invisible barrier blocking them. They looked back desperately, only for their superiors to angrily push them aside and, moments later, have to retreat themselves at their own repulsion. Onward this went, until Grir, Lanval, and Ciri were required to elbow past their subordinates and stand up to this ludicrous barricade that prevented their righteous course to victory and the history books.

But it was there. All three touched the barrier and felt ... was it pain? Not exactly. But it seemed to scratch against their nerves, repelling them through the subtle and terrifying art of suggestion.

You can go further, the force seemed to say, though it spoke no words. *But perhaps you would rather not?*

“Katlannu,” Grir mumbled. “I feel the Great Prophet’s presence in this. And this challenge is merely here for us to overcome, to prove our righteousness!”

And yet none of them, Grir apparently least of all, could take so much as a step forward.

The Doctor clutched desperately at the railings bracketing the console, fighting against the TARDIS’s tumultuous buffeting to fly them to safety. But deep down, with the same itchy irrationality he had felt ever since they landed on this planet, he knew there was nothing they could do. His course was being guided not by himself, nor his ship in her own unknowable wisdom. Versal, and Katlannu, had hijacked them and were calling the shots.

“Can’t you do anything?” the *Miracle*’s computer cried against the shrill rebellion of the TARDIS systems.

“You sound nervous. Surely you aren’t worried for your safety?”

“I’m worried for yours,” the machine petulantly replied. “And Versal’s.”

The Doctor stole another glance at the unconscious cleric, but his alarm returned him to the panels on the console, which calmly informed him that their present course was into the core of the planet.

“I don’t suppose that’s a pleasant prospect?” the computer asked.

“It’s a few Kelvins hotter than Earth, by this reckoning. Even the TARDIS might not be able to withstand it!” The Doctor scowled hopelessly at the central column, placidly ferrying them to their possible doom.

And then the engines groaned their way into solidity again, and stillness returned to the Doctor’s domain. The doors whirred open obliviously.

Versal came around. “We’re here, aren’t we Doctor? Do I have to be afraid?”

Only darkness was visible on the scanner and through the doors—whether his ship had clapped out due to the intense heat or the power of Katlannu that had brought them here was merely one more nasty speculation the Doctor had no time to entertain. The Doctor, seeing the only viable option, took a long breath. Then he walked out.

Chapter Five

'To know the future is easy. To hope for a better future ... that is the true hardship.'

—Katlannu's Revelations

In the face of the scene before her, Maggie Weitz still could summon no fear; her mind settled on a blank, baffled incomprehension, taking in as much as she could without considering its significance on the off-chance she might understand it better later. Kaylaar's features vanished as he merged with the great formless pool of Juivan, Vokol, and countless other Frenazzi. Their vision solidified, not perhaps becoming a solid matter before Maggie, but a concept she understood in her mind. Katlannu was back—similarly, not a person reappearing before them, but a concept and a force that their own minds conjured and strengthened.

How Maggie wished the Doctor were here. She remembered every sceptical word, and remembered how it had seemed at the time so hurtful and disrespectful to Kaylaar. But now, she wondered what respect was being paid to her own fears and her own beliefs in the wake of this inexplicable apparition? Worse, she found its reality impossible to deny. She found herself hurtling back through her memories, finding in those cracks between the conscious and the subconscious where lurks the spiritual, some hope of escape. For she didn't want to die, here on a distant planet in a civilization that had come and gone millennia before life even began on her own planet.

The feeling burrowed deeper within her soul, the presence of Katlannu becoming more solid.

If rationality and scepticism beloved of her new best friend would not see her through this harrowing mental gauntlet, Maggie reached for the spiritual wisdom of her

own faith. But it had been too long since she had gone to temple, and her parents' earnest Judaism was not shared by her, despite her best efforts. The words of the Torah raced through her mind but seemed fuzzy and distant against the immediate sensations racking her soul. And yet she still found herself thinking of God—her God, the way she saw Him when she was a little girl—and hoping He would not judge her harshly for straying from His path.

Her self-exploration would have to wait. As it was, she opened her eyes, and found herself uplifted at the trumpet-blast of a certain police box grinding its way back to reality. She had never before been so certain that she did have faith in the Doctor.

The Doctor cursed himself for being so startled as he stepped outside and found himself flattened against the police box's outer door by Maggie, who with surprising force pushed herself against him, hugging and kissing him frantically.

For a luxurious moment, her panic subsided as she felt the soft cashmere of his green coat and breathed in his Gallifreyan musk.

"You have no idea how glad I am to see you!" she exclaimed between pecks.

"Mags! Please!" he spluttered indignantly, awkwardly wedged against the frosted panes of the TARDIS's window. "I'm ... er, glad to see you too." He squeezed her shoulders to compensate for his sudden awkwardness at the contact.

Once disentangled, he stepped forward, craning his neck to take in the full vista before him. The bubbling pink sea of dozens of shape-shifted Frenazzi violently splashed against the rock-walls, an intangible illustration of the turmoil of Katlannu unleashed. "I suppose Kaylaar's in there somewhere?"

"As soon as we got down here, those other two, Juivan and Vokol heard Katlannu's voice. Then they all, kind of, sludged into that pool there and then ... well I heard it too. I can't stop hearing it."

"You and me both, Maggie." The Doctor looked up through the pink-tinted chasm, seeing the distant specks of Grir, Lanval, Ciri, and their military back-up clutching their skulls and falling to their knees. The Frenazzi among them were also sifting in and out of bipedal forms, flowing into the same insubstantial goo as the assembled masses in this pool. "I expect the effect is spreading beyond these caverns, up into the Katlan Polis, and from there out to the rest of the planet. Back and forth through time as well. It even drew the TARDIS down here."

His musings were interrupted by Versal, staggering from the TARDIS doorway, skin rippling and eyes glazed over at the assault. "Oh Katlannu, our prophet ... " The words had the solemnity of a repeated prayer. "Why do you hurt your subjects?"

"Yes, why is Katlannu doing this?" asked Maggie.

"I wonder whether Katlannu is aware of the effect this rift is having on these people. All their mental powers are insignificant next to Katlannu ... making contact with whatever intelligence lay beyond this rift ... the *same* rift, by the way, we saw in Revelstoke."

"Is that a good thing?"

The Doctor shrugged. "Know thine enemy ... also I have a sneaking suspicion, or perhaps hope, that it isn't an enemy."

Leagues above, the Frenazzi and Pryanni were awoken from their post-Enlightenment Day slumbers to the voice and essence of Katlannu, eerily close and insistent. Above, the bubbling steam on the planet's surface seemed to pool and coalesce, and from space, the great planet was suddenly bathed in brilliant purple light. Any planet-spotting expert would have been dazzled by the spectacle, but also unnerved by the absence of data. The blazing colour threatened with its unknowable, unfathomable reality. It was here, it was spreading, and it offered nobody the opportunity, still less the certainty, of understanding it.

Grir looked around at the spinning chaos, pushed with full force against the burning barrier, but felt only an overwhelming futility and weakness. As much doubt and inferiority as Versal had felt those fleeting contacts with the consciousness of Katlannu, the Pontiff now felt multiplied by a factor of thousands. The voice of Katlannu was not the comforting one from the Holy Scriptures, but unsettling in its inescapable omniscience.

The Doctor amiably dipped his hand in the sizzling pink mass of Frenazzi. He did his best to remain calm as the whole surroundings were pregnant with the approaching disaster. "I say," he called in his most benevolent tone. "I don't suppose Kaylaar's in there anywhere? Could anyone take a message?"

An inarticulate, mass wail of despair answered him.

"My fellows are in agony Doctor!" Versal cried. "Even your friend Kaylaar! Kaylaar alone is holding them back from the threshold. Why?"

"I need to know what Katlannu wants, what he's saying to you," the Doctor answered.

A splash of pink goo solidified into a hand—Kaylaar’s pallid one. His face was briefly visible in the mass.

Kaylaar staggered forward, returning to his humanoid shape. Maggie leapt forward to hug him as well. “Maggie! I’m so glad you’re all right. It’s ... I can’t understand it. Katlannu is trying to pull us all ... pull the whole planet ...”

“Into that rift?” finished the Doctor. Kaylaar nodded weakly.

“Why does Katlannu want to destroy his own people?” asked Maggie. “What was the point of guiding you here to do that?”

“Keeps talking about destiny ... this can’t be our destiny, can it Doctor?”

The Doctor remained silent.

“Of course not,” Maggie answered, irritated that the Time Lord was letting poor Kaylaar stew in confusion.

“Is it though, Maggie?” Kaylaar looked more pained by this line of contemplation than by Katlannu’s mayhem. “We’ve travelled all across time and space. I’ve never once seen anything like my home. But what have I seen of my people? What legacy of this society remains?” He looked forlornly into the middle distance. “Maybe the harmony Katlannu spoke about lies beyond this universe, outside this reality altogether?”

His question remained unanswered. A blaze of light shimmered into the shape of a person. Kaylaar’s mouth dropped.

“Katlannu, I presume?” Maggie asked rhetorically.

The golden figure nodded serenely, hands placidly aloft. “Welcome, my people. Welcome to Kaylaar, I am so glad you have come home.” With a shift of his head, he nodded at Versal. “Thank you, Versal, for keeping faith in me alive through hardships.” Finally, the face locked on to the Doctor and Maggie. It was a handsome and a beautiful face: sexless but compelling. All who gazed on it felt they knew that face, and had always known it, even if in long-forgotten dreams from childhood. Even Maggie and the Doctor recognized a benevolent old teacher or an unusually affectionate Time Lord cardinal from long ago.

Katlannu somehow looked at them but through them, and Maggie felt simultaneously seen and cared for, and yet diminished. She derived some comfort from the Doctor’s unblinking, fixed expression. He was eagerly assessing Katlannu, but perhaps judging the Great Prophet harshly for the people’s current despair.

With a brilliant flash, the *Miracle’s* computer appeared, resting on its table. “One of my greatest followers, though not of flesh, I welcome thee.”

“O Great Prophet!” the computer wailed with typically overstated emotion. “You have no idea how much you honour me with your blessings!”

Another flash and Thripps, Grir, and Lanval appeared before them. “Prelatory Triumvirate,” Katlannu declared with marked coldness. “We stand at a crossroads of our world. I am sorry to see you have not paved the way for the next stage.”

The Doctor clapped his hands together. "Well, now that the gang's all here, what's the plan, Katlannu? Where to?"

A shake of the earth below them, and a shrill burst, caused the Doctor to collapse to his knees. His head rippled and his eyes screwed tightly shut. Maggie too could listen in, presumably to the message Katlannu had been transmitting to the Frenazzi.

They were seeing the majesty of this purple void, travelling through it as Katlannu had. "Before my death, I made contact with this other side. From beyond they kept me alive through the ages. Successive generations of my people have striven to approach this contact. I am merely completing the process."

The light grew more brilliant, before vanishing. The Doctor and Maggie opened their eyes. There was more to see and yet she knew it lay beyond her ability to perceive. She was left as if on the edge of a vast and limitless depth, not able to see its enormity but merely to feel herself on its outer limits.

She shuddered at the enormity of it. Put in those terms, was Katlannu right? Maybe there was something fantastic beyond that the people of Koilara would be uplifted to discover. She remembered the day she had spent: the everyday joys of the people and their heartfelt love for their traditions and their way of life. And yet it was undermined by their suspicion and discontent. Perhaps Katlannu was sincere in offering them something beyond, something better than their present existence.

She wished the Doctor would say something. He doubtless had some better sense of what he was seeing and not seeing. And yet he stood in watchful silence, broodingly surveying the others and Katlannu's reaction to them.

"When I ascended, I saw what lay ahead and beyond."

"I salute your psychic powers, Katlannu," the Doctor said approvingly. "You must have been a very sensitive individual in your life. Only the very adept can withstand that kind of contact. As for the glimpse into your future you have been afforded ..."

"My destiny, Doctor." Once again, Katlannu's hands raised. "And now, I offer it to my people."

Kaylaar looked around. The Prelatory Triumvirate were twitching and shuffling, as if trying to cobble together some grand action or statement that the other would then say. As a result, all three seemed to stumble forward and retreat, making various inarticulate noises but never actually resolving into words.

Disappointed by his leaders, Kaylaar stepped to Katlannu. He collected himself, and Maggie knew him well enough to know a nervy intensity twitching beneath her friend's placid exterior. "O Great Prophet, in my studies and my visions, I was only ever certain of two things. Which I know was two too many, as your teachings teach us to be certain of nothing," he added sardonically.

"Point taken, my child."

"First, I was certain of your wisdom, your compassion, your willingness to look beyond conflict and to see a shared future for Frenazzi and Pryanni. That paved the way

for a great world and a great life for me, and for so many others. As I said to my fellow travellers, in all the different worlds and times we visited I found none as admirable as my own. Second, I saw that the world we created was falling short of your divine vision. That was why so many, including my love, were seduced by a false prophet, went to another world. And our leaders' reaction was merely to quibble over the legality of their actions, not to attempt to understand what in their conduct had inspired those actions."

Kaylaar rounded on the Triumvirate. All, even Grir, shrank visibly at Kaylaar's rebuke.

"But I want that world to be perfected for the people. If I understood one of your teachings, O most divine teacher, I understood the need to become good people. Not good Frenazzi, good Pryanni. To become the best people we could be, together. I don't think whisking us away to another realm is the solution."

There was a visible tremor in the Great Prophet as Kaylaar spoke. Maggie's breath caught in her throat. She knew and could sense Katlannu's power and did not trust in her friend against it. Kaylaar's bravery was all the more admirable, for there was nothing palpable behind it. He had only his convictions against everything that Katlannu could unleash on them.

It seemed even the pink frothing pool made up of Juivan and Vokol and so many others was roiling in its own internal division for and against what Kaylaar was saying.

"I can't deny that it is disappointing to hear this from one so devout," Katlannu finally said. He rounded on Maggie. "I have seen your planet in my second life. Your perspective on our people will be of value."

Maggie, at another moment, might have derived some amusement at the Doctor's bristling to be overlooked. But as it was, in the moment she merely felt like a deer in some particularly powerful headlights.

She felt the eyes of the Triumvirate on her too. The sea of angry Frenazzi seemed somehow to be watching her with distinct judgement. Even those guards trapped behind that barrier seemed to pause a moment to look down at what she had to say.

"I've travelled with Kaylaar and the Doctor for nearly two years. It, uh, may not be much for an immortal, but it's a lot for an Earth woman in her forties. Kaylaar is wiser and more serene than people on my planet. But he isn't smug, he isn't superior. He has a great sense of humour. I have so loved your planet, and I can see how it made Kaylaar who he is. And I think there's more value in that ... that *life* ... than in whisking yourselves away. Even if that is better, it isn't ... it isn't living." She wished she could clarify what she said, but decided to shut up before she embarrassed herself.

Katlannu nodded serenely. "Time Lord? Is there any chance you could make our case?"

The Doctor's eyebrows raised, still bristling at being mostly excluded from the conversation so far. And yet when he finally spoke, what he said convinced Maggie that

she had been misreading his body language. "I can advise nothing. Your destiny is your own. You must help yourselves."

Katlannu's divine gaze returned to Kaylaar. "You would stay here? With this faulty leadership, with the same tribal and trivial divisions threatening to tear our harmony apart?"

Kaylaar bit his lip. "Yes," he declared firmly. "I still think we can realize your teachings here and now. And if we don't, we aren't worthy of your offer anyway."

"Gods do not like to be kept waiting."

"You are no god," Kaylaar shot back. Maggie swallowed fearfully. "You prided yourself that we should judge your teachings for the insights they offered, not for who was offering them."

"You do not think what I have achieved, how I have lived beyond my life, is worthy of your respect?"

"I do respect it. The Doctor respects it. But our decisions are our own. And I can only repeat that I don't see the path you offer solving our problems. I don't believe paradise is a place anymore. I think it's something inside us all, and we can only achieve it within ourselves. Maybe then, we'll be ready to join you. But only individually. I hope I still can one day. I hope for nothing as fervently as I hope that."

Maggie was desperately afraid for her friend. Why did Kaylaar have to speak so candidly? She knew the God she believed in was liable to respond to such honesty by turning people into pillars of salt or drowning them all in Great Floods. But equally, she knew the friend to whom she had grown so close would say nothing less, and the presence of his own god would not falter him in the slightest. She got no further comfort from seeing Versal and the Triumvirate shaking their heads in dismay. Now that he had said it, they were all eager to be the first to denounce him.

Once again the pitiless golden eyes locked on the Doctor. "Is this what you wished, Time Lord? I sense it is."

The Doctor shrugged expansively. "By no means. All I know is the matter of your present dimension is incompatible with this one. So if the people of Koilara decide to cross over with you, that's perfectly fine, but one way or the other, the rift must be sealed up."

Katlannu smiled indulgently. "Perhaps ... I had yet a vestige of my mortal weakness. It is rather lonely on this side ..."

Kaylaar returned the smile with a thin one of his own. There was genuine sorrow as he suggested, "And perhaps one glorious day we will be able to join you on that side ... but not yet."

"Kaylaar!" snapped Thripps.

"Oh, be silent, Thripps," Grir snapped in return. "It's obvious this is the will of our people. And we are elected to represent them."

Katlannu extended his hand. "Then it is my honour to trust my people's care and my great purpose to you, my acolyte. Kaylaar ... you have done me proud."

Kaylaar took the hand eagerly, a tear in his eye. "You have no idea what that means to me, Great Prophet. I will treasure this moment the rest of my life and curse that it could not last longer."

"As will I."

"Thank you."

As the light glowed once again, the Doctor took hold of Maggie's hand. "Come on Mags. You may want to see this. I know I do."

They dashed back into the TARDIS.

The ship winked back into existence in orbit a few light-years distant from Koilara. Maggie watched the scanner as the blazing purple light folded in on itself. As she had when she saw Katlannu's journey beyond mortality, she *felt* the spectacle as much as she saw it—felt some kind of calm descend over her as the nettling disturbance healed and the course of the universe reverted to its natural, linear progression.

The Doctor patted her shoulder. "If only all gods could be so reasonable. In my experience, they have the most dreadful neuroses."

She laughed. "Seems like Katlannu had a few of those as well."

"That's why I don't hold much truck with worshipping anyone. Best to make your own rules. But I can't argue with the way Kaylaar stood up for himself." He had the wistful timbre of a proud parent. "Shall we go back and see how he's getting along?"

Another day had dawned (could a day dawn underground, Maggie wondered?) by the time the TARDIS materialized at the foot of the Central Spire. Kaylaar was in the middle of recapping the events to the breathless citizens of Katlan Polis. By his side sat the *Miracle* computer. The rejected Frenazzi, Juivan and Vokol among them, nodded to the aliens as they snuck into the crowd. Versal and the Prelatory Triumvirate lurked in the corner of the throng, not exactly reviled but politely ignored. Kaylaar was the undoubted focus of everyone's attention.

"Was I wrong to speak so to our Great Prophet?" Kaylaar asked rhetorically. He shot a mischievous glance at Thripps, who had clearly thought so at the time. The Head of State did not meet his gaze. "Feel free to tell me I was. But one thing I've learned in my travels is that there are no shortcuts worth taking. I think we all have to look inward and ask ourselves if we're happy with the lives we've led and the values we've represented. I know I still have a lot of life to lead."

As the acclaim roared down from the crowd, Kaylaar waved to the crowd and rejoined his friends. Maggie and the Doctor knew what he was to say next, and both had a certain sadness as they stepped out of the Ship. This was a clear goodbye.

"Doctor, I have to stay here."

"I can see as much."

"If you can believe it, they're holding an election. They want me to replace Thripps as Head of State." Kaylaar kicked a pebble sheepishly. "I've insisted that we do some policy debates first."

"Very democratic of you," Maggie said.

"Thanks. Thank you both." He patted the computer's shell. "And this old bucket of bytes has agreed to stay with me."

"Well," the computer averred, "I thought at least *someone* around here should be in touch with the divine wisdom of Katlannu."

"Are you sure you'll be happy?" Maggie asked it.

"No, I'd rather stay in a padded cell in the TARDIS!" the computer snapped back sardonically.

"Not *you*," Maggie shot back. "You'll never be happy, I've learned that much by now."

After more good-humoured laughter, Kaylaar turned earnest again. Maggie would miss that sincerity. "You know why I have to leave my dear friends, don't you?"

"I have an idea," the Doctor said.

"It was when I was talking to Katlannu, and I realized there was no trace of our great culture, our world, in all the worlds and times we've visited. And that's fine, don't get me wrong. But ... but this beautiful society has to matter to someone. And if it matters to me, I should stay and help it."

The Doctor smiled sadly. "Well, I'm glad for the Frenazzi and Pryanni. But, I must admit, a little disappointed for myself."

They all smiled and took each other's arms in one last three-way hug.

"Take care, Kaylaar," the Doctor declared.

Maggie felt a tear dampening her cheek. "Kaylaar, I wish we'd had more time."

"Why don't you both come back and visit me some time? When I get this planet in order?"

"It's a date," the Doctor agreed. "And you know if you're become a power-mad dictator it's my duty as a Time Lord to get some rebels together to overthrow you."

"That's something to keep me honest anyway."

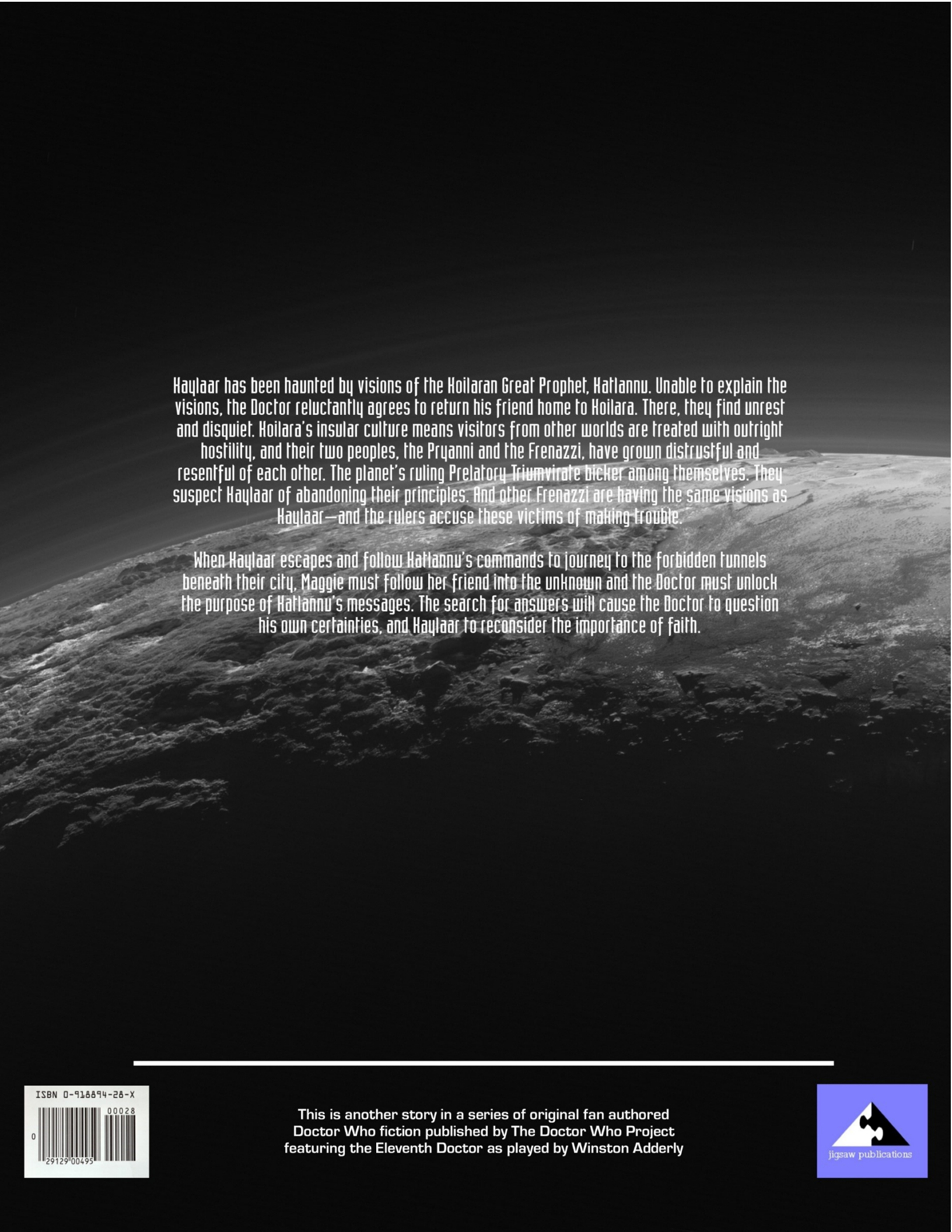
"But Kaylaar ..." Another tear had found its way down Maggie's cheek. The Doctor suddenly took the hint and trundled the *Miracle* computer away to impart some words of wisdom to Thripps and the Triumvirate. "Well, you know things haven't been easy ... since I met you and the Doctor I've ... well, Ollie's death had me in a rut and you both ... healed me and I hope you know how much that means ..."

The tears came cascading down. She collapsed into Kaylaar's arms.
"I feel the same way, Maggie."

It was some time later that the Doctor found Maggie. After some fond farewells, they stepped into the TARDIS. "Don't forget us, Kaylaar," Maggie finally said to her friend.

"Same to you."

Kaylaar's decision didn't quite feel real until he saw the police box vanish into thin air, and realize he still stood there, with the rest of his life to live, in the same place, one day after another.



Kaylaar has been haunted by visions of the Koilaran Great Prophet, Kattannu. Unable to explain the visions, the Doctor reluctantly agrees to return his friend home to Koilara. There, they find unrest and disquiet. Koilara's insular culture means visitors from other worlds are treated with outright hostility, and their two peoples, the Pryanni and the Frenazzi, have grown distrustful and resentful of each other. The planet's ruling Prelatory Triumvirate bicker among themselves. They suspect Kaylaar of abandoning their principles. And other Frenazzi are having the same visions as Kaylaar—and the rulers accuse these victims of making trouble.

When Kaylaar escapes and follows Kattannu's commands to journey to the forbidden tunnels beneath their city, Maggie must follow her friend into the unknown and the Doctor must unlock the purpose of Kattannu's messages. The search for answers will cause the Doctor to question his own certainties, and Kaylaar to reconsider the importance of faith.

ISBN 0-918894-28-X



This is another story in a series of original fan authored
Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project
featuring the Eleventh Doctor as played by Winston Adderly

