

THE  
**DOCTOR WHO**  
PROJECT

**RETURN TO SKARO**



**Hamish Crawford**



Copyright © 2023 Hamish Crawford  
Published by Jigsaw Publications

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

First Printing November 2023

Cover design by Jack Drewell  
3D Dalek design by Tumblewee. Used by Permission.  
Eleventh Doctor character image Tenaj Williams. Used by Permission.  
Interior design, layout & back cover design 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



## Prologue

Maggie Weitz was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Or was it the ‘other penny’? That was the funny side of being away from home so long—those little phrases that people say thoughtlessly never sounded right. But dropping either pennies or shoes to register an inevitable reversal would mean little in the village of Vabel: they didn’t have pennies, and wouldn’t take kindly to an off-world visitor like her dropping their rough clog-like shoes.

The point was, they had arrived here three days earlier and had done nothing but relaxed. The people greeted the Doctor as a great hero and there was some kind of festival going on. Thanks to the Doctor’s good reputation, Maggie had been similarly welcomed. Three days had passed in utter tranquillity—eating too much and filling the days with idle pursuits. But as she awoke in the delightful guest cabin they were granted as honoured guests, she felt the unpleasant twitch of anxiety in her back, and began to ponder this phrase. Whether it was a shoe or a penny, it would drop soon, she was sure. When would it all go bad? What was wrong here?

So far, aside from occasional bouts of indigestion at the Vabel villagers’ rich celebratory diet, Maggie couldn’t see any problem. The community was happy and self-contained, an agrarian paradise. The people were charming and adorable—very like humans, but with a blue tint to their skin, which made their pale hair golden in the light of the planet’s sun.

Maggie left her suite and was greeted by the young farmer, Gadon. In Earth terms, he looked in his twenties, and he was so taken with her that she felt smitten herself. She knew it was because she looked exotic on this world—her dark hair and freckled skin must have been intriguing to these Adonises.

On top of that, his company had been welcome. It had not been long since she and the Doctor had said goodbye to their good friend Kaylaar. Two others, Azaxia and Simon Denon, had travelled briefly with them, with the latter returning to his home in eighteenth century Madagascar only recently. Since then, the TARDIS had taken them to a few uneventful destinations—the ‘hidden asteroid’ of the Metumic system, London in the late twenty-first century (where they had prevented a massive economic swindle orchestrated by Davy ‘the

Lobster' Lobsinger), and then the grand opening at the Globe Theatre. The Doctor was wonderful company, but Maggie found herself missing that third voice—a 'normal' friend with whom to share the wonders of time and space travel. It made Gadon's company especially welcome.

However, as lovely a sight as Gadon was this morning, Maggie was hoping to see the Doctor. If her sometimes brutally candid cousin Larry were here, he might have linked the peace and quiet she had endured to the Time Lord's absence. They had arrived at nightfall to great ceremony, and then during the second day the villager's leader, Yonidi, introduced the head of the scientific corps. They quickly regaled the Doctor with bewildering accounts of the progress they had made since his last visit. The Doctor nodded with that keen interest in which he held all scientific progress, and enthusiastically agreed to visit the scientific council in the larger city.

"Our society realised that benign science is the key to progress," Yonidi explained to Maggie, "The Doctor taught us that, so our scientific community is eager to gain his perspective on our work."

Maggie thought about that guiltily. For she also saw a trace of worry on the Doctor's face. He could be a hard man to impress, for all his generosity, and she wondered what had happened on his last visit to this planet that made him so anxious. Because he was undoubtedly anxious. Even as they sat at the commemorative feast, she caught him looking over his shoulder, looking out to the mountains that ringed Vabel, as if expecting dragons to come peeking over their tops.

"What are you thinking of, Maggie?" Gadon asked as they strolled around the square.

"Oh, just ... dragons. They're beasts from my planet's mythology, they appear in this book called *Lord of the Rings*. Your world is kind of like it."

"Beasts, eh? I hope you don't think I look like a dragon?"

Maggie laughed guilelessly, the thought so comical she actually snorted. Composing herself, she said, "No no. You all are more like Hobbits. They're the nice people in the book."

Gadon was happy with the comparison. From what she remembered of reading the book, the Hobbits were short and stocky. These people were a good deal taller and more strapping.

Across the square, the extraordinary vegetables and mushrooms that were the villagers' food source were being harvested, and water was being purified in a simply turning mill. She had learned they did have amazing technology—their energy supply was entirely renewable and travel between parts of the planet was faster than anything on Earth. So, that nagging voice at the back of her mind asked, why had the Doctor stayed in that city so long?

Yonidi ran across the square. "Maggie!" she called. "I have news from the Doctor!" This was a familiar routine: every morning he would send a message.

"Let me guess: things still going well in that city, and I should stay put?"

Yonidi nodded, a little crestfallen. "It's nice for a politician to feel she has some sense of purpose," she teased Maggie.

"You're sure I can't go down there and visit him myself?"

"Honestly," Yonidi replied, "we don't see why not. But the Doctor is concerned for your safety."

Maggie pursed her lips. "He forgets that *I'm* concerned for *his* safety when he's out of my sight. Trouble finds him like a magnet. Did he at least say when he'd be back?"

"I can't imagine it will be much longer."

“Oh well. I’ll have some breakfast while I wait.” Before the midday sun grew too hot, Maggie was in the habit of hiking in the beautiful foothills that led to those imposing mountains, where there were beautiful clear lakes she swam in. Gadon also took her around in one of the transport bubbles, and she had seen several of the other villages and towns that comprised this continent. The more places she travelled, the more the Doctor’s suspicion and caution seemed baffling.

After breakfast, as she, Gadon, and three of the other villagers set out for the hike, she asked them all, but asked herself as much, “What’s there to be afraid of on the planet Skaro?”

## Chapter One: The Nightmare Returns

The Doctor had encountered many Thals, at many different periods in their cultural development, over his eleven lifetimes, and knew them to be among the bravest and noblest races in the universe. Any people who could live a mere ocean away from the deadliest tyrants ever created and retain their principles—remain good in the face of such unambiguous evil—were admirable beyond expression. And it always heartened him that they managed to survive and flourish, managed to carve out victory and ensure better futures for their descendants.

Yet in the company of Arvell, the Thals' Minister of Scientific Advancement, the Doctor was reminded of the Thals' history. For their nobility and peace-loving nature was not their innate state of being, it grew on the bitter soil of their almost total extermination, and generations of warfare with the Daleks' ancestors the Kaleds. One would hope that any people who stared mutually assured destruction in the face for so long would put a concerted effort into rejecting it utterly. In that respect the Thals could teach humanity a thing or two. But Thals retained a trace of their earlier bellicose nature: they had an aggressive nature, rarely seen but potentially worrying.

The Doctor had never gone that far back to Skaro's history, but he understood from his earliest research into the subject that the Thals were the more warlike of the races, and their aggression was hatefully targeted against the Kaleds, or the Dals, who were peaceful scientists and teachers. Whether it was propaganda or not, it was a useful reminder that their nature was not always so benevolent.

Of course, the Doctor himself had brought out that primordial fire, organised them into a fighting force, for arguably selfish reasons. He wondered if that part of Arvell's makeup was not down to ancestral nature, but the interference of a selfish time traveller desperate to recover his Ship's vital fluid link and leave the planet.

He had spent three days in Davius City, the Thals' largest metropolis. Arvell and his council had regaled the Doctor with details of their energy programme, the artificial food they had salvaged from the Dalek city that had brought an end to famine on Skaro. Now they



were looking to space: the morning after the Doctor arrived, he had supervised an unmanned orbital shot and a moon landing, and now Arvell was enthusiastically running over the specs of their first manned flight capsule. Thanks to the renewable geothermal energy source within the core—the horror of the Neutronic War made them spurn the Daleks’ energy projects, and static electricity was utterly forbidden—rockets could propel themselves into orbit without the three-stage process of those cumbersome Apollo and Mars Probe missions on Earth.

They were truly advanced. And Arvell was a first-rate mind. And yet as they went through this display, and the bombastic young scientist expounded the council’s theories, his own ideas, and cooed with delight at the Doctor’s approval, he sensed there was more than mere scientific curiosity burning in those vivid violet eyes. Unmistakeable embers of anger and revenge burned—sometimes brightly and sometimes more dimly, but always present. The Doctor knew them so well because he recognised them in himself.

He had known immediately that they landed on Skaro. In their years of travel together, Maggie had not encountered the Daleks, and he hadn’t got around to lecturing her on the ‘Galaxy’s Most Dangerous’. He occasionally wondered whether he had finally defeated them for good. It had been a lifetime since he had last looked down on their hateful eyestalks and listened to their grating cries for wholesale extermination. As they sat through a welcome feast in that beautiful village of Vabel, and he met their leader Yonidi and the farmers and artisans who called this planet their home, the Doctor wanted everything on Skaro to be all right.

By his reckoning, this was about two hundred years after his first visit. He gauged this, and was immediately embarrassed, by the enormous statues of himself (holding Temmosus, the Thals’ leader, in his arm), Susan, Ian and Barbara in the courtyard of the Davian Congress, which showed about that much wear and tear. In that time, they had reduced the planet’s radiation to virtually nil, and they had rebuilt their society. “What an indomitable people you are!” he said, with utmost sincerity, to Yonidi.

“We are grateful to you for making it so.”

“What I did ... was nothing,” he insisted. “Staying to rebuild is the hard work. This world is what *you* have made, and you deserve to be proud of it. I am in awe of you.”

He said the same thing to the council, to Arvell, and the Congress when they met him. It was important that they understand how remarkable their achievements truly were.

But there was an elephant in the room, and he waited an entire day to mention it.

“What of the Daleks? I have to ask, you understand.”

The Prefect Thal, Palet, smiled benignly. “That is the last thing you have to worry about, Doctor, I assure you.”

“I’ll need a bit more assurance than that,” he maintained. He was happy to spend the day in their Tracking Complex, built on the rubble of that horrendous rocket silo out of which they had once launched their final assault weapon on the Kaleds. He pored over the data, the readings, and the life signs from that menacing continent across the ocean.

“Nothing,” he concluded in satisfaction. “As far as you can tell, nothing.”

“You don’t believe us, do you?” Palet rubbed the Doctor’s shoulder. “We also have perimeter detectors set up to register any movement or activity within their city, and a defensive barrier only passable from the outside. Even if a Dalek woke up tomorrow, it would be trapped in there, a sitting Maggedon for our weaponry.”

“The day of the Daleks is over!” Arvell added, and the entire Congress erupted into applause—they were clearly used to applauding their apparent victory. The Doctor smiled as convincingly as he could.

The scientific council had retreated to monitor the progress of their capsule, and the Doctor promised he would join them in a few minutes. “Take all the rels you need, Doctor,” Palet assured him. “I know it’s a lot to digest.”

He walked in the city’s main square, again moved to ponder these people and their hard work. Trees lined the streets of Davius—trees he had previously only seen as parched desiccated skeletons on the burnt-out landscape. Strange birds chirped in their branches. It was utterly charming.

He rounded a corner and saw that statue of his former self—a slightly exaggerated likeness, and amusingly filtered through the Thals’ own conception of beauty. The milky marble colossus cradled Temmosus, the Thal who had been so needlessly exterminated on that first trip.

He looked up at the alabaster likeness of his earlier self. “What would you have done, old man?” he asked the statue. “Would you be gone by now? No, of course not. You’d have been just as flattered by all the generosity, just as eager to see these people in this moment of history and want to witness what happens next. Because that curiosity in me burned in you too. It’s my fatal weakness. Always has been. How long before it does the job?”

“We Thals,” a young girl’s voice called behind him, “say that talking to yourself is a sign of mental illness.”

He blushed as he turned, looking between the severe teenager who had overheard him and the statue. “Not a good likeness, I see now,” she said.

He smiled. “It is, actually. Or at least it was.” He touched his cheek. “I’ve changed, not the statue.”

“We always knew you were more god than person, I suppose that’s the proof of it.” She was pleased to see him bristle under the flattery. “So you’re the famous Doctor. There’s a lot of talk in my class. The hero returns. Some of us think it’s the last sign we need of our oncoming Golden Age.” Her voice dropped sardonically. “Others say it’s a sign of oncoming disaster.” She crossed her arms across her chest and bowed in the current version of the Thal greeting. “My name is Rellay. I meant no disrespect. It is an honour for you to visit, forgive my loose tongue.”

“Not at all. It’s nice when people are honest. To tell you the truth I don’t much care for pomp and circumstance.”

Rellay looked him up and down. His sixth sense tingled unpleasantly. She was chewing her lip, holding back her wish to tell him something. His mind raced—was there something more than met his eye? Was he so intent on accepting that things were getting better that he was being wilfully blind?

“I suppose they’ve ... shown you that project.”

“Is everything all right with it?”

“Of course. It’s as Arvell said. Just a test flight.”

The Doctor took a step nearer. “My friend, Maggie, is in the village of Vabel. I need to know for her sake if everything’s safe on Skaro ...”

His eyes bulged desperately. He saw the connection with Rellay, saw that she was on the verge of telling him something ...

And then her attention was thrown by someone approaching from behind.

“Enjoy your visit, Doctor, I hope we’ll meet again,” she said pointedly, before bowing and carrying on her way.

He turned, suppressing his rage when he saw Arvell and Grallat, their faces lined with concern. “Doctor,” they cried breathlessly.

“Now, now, catch your breath, chaps,” he said with a bit more bitterness than he intended. “What’s all this rushing about, then?”

“It’s the rocket, Doctor ...” Grallat wheezed. “We hadn’t intended—”

“It went out of control,” Arvell interrupted, talking over his fellow scientist with suspicious urgency. “It came down in the Dalek city!”

## Chapter Two: The Mission

Maggie, Gadon, and his young friends stood on the crest of a majestic hill when they saw the soft purple sky smudged by the grey clouds of the explosion. Whatever it was hit the distant land with nothing more than a distant rumble, and a minute later smoke billowed into the sky indolently, like a cigarette. From here, the visible horizon looked smudged and out of focus anyway, like an Impressionist painting. As such, the far-distant explosion hardly seemed cause for concern. The Thals jumped at it, but Maggie knew they were deathly afraid of any violence. The Doctor had been cagy, but she learned from Gadon and Yonidi that there had been a world war many hundreds of years ago, that made their society what it is today. Faced with extinction, they had embraced peace. Maggie hoped humans would show the same common sense.

For herself, in the moment, Maggie thought of the Doctor. What if something had gone wrong in that city? What if he was up there in whatever vehicle had crashed?

“Can we go there?” she asked Gadon.

“It’s across the ocean,” one of Gadon’s friends said.

Gadon and his friends looked at each other uncertainly. “There ... that land is not ours ... it’s ...” He swallowed, and Maggie saw they all shuddered. She realised that the crash itself did not unnerve them as much as where it happened. It looked extremely far off—dark water could be seen stretching. If she was going to get any answers out of them, she had to take their minds off that.

“Not where the crash happened,” she clarified. “Your city, Davius I think it was called. I have to make sure the Doctor’s all right.”

“We’ll have to ask Yonidi.”

She clasped his hand. “Please, Gadon. I have to know.”

“Of course, Maggie. If we can help, we will. Let’s go.”

They abandoned their pleasant day out and made their way back to the village.

\*\*\*\*\*

However, when they arrived, events took a different turn.

“Maggie?” a woman called. “Maggie Weitz?”

She stepped forward to greet this frail, elderly Thal.

“My name is Toral,” she said. “The Doctor sent me from Davius to fetch you. You saw the crash?”

“We certainly did,” Maggie replied. “Is he all right?”

“He wants you to bring the TARDIS. Could you show me—?”

Maggie looked from Gadon to this new arrival. He was regarding her suspiciously too, she noticed. “How will we bring the TARDIS to the Doctor? I’ve never flown it.”

“That’s all right,” she replied impatiently. “We understand all about it from his previous visit.”

Maggie weighed the pros and cons, ultimately deciding she had to know if the Doctor was safe. She indicated the way, and the two women made off, but Gadon called to her. “Toral? May I come as well? The Doctor made me promise to look after Maggie while she is here, and I wouldn’t want him to think I was shirking in my duties.”

The old lady looked him up and down. Maggie wondered what she was thinking: was her intention malign? Did Gadon suspect something? But she shrugged and said, “Very well, let’s get going,” so casually that Maggie felt bad to be so judgemental.

Only when Gadon gripped her hand in his and squeezed it, muttering under his breath, “Some of the city folk have strange attitudes,” in a tone heavy with innuendo was Maggie on her guard again.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor had been utterly contained in the aftermath of the rocket crash, agreeing with the Thal scientists proposing to send an air-skimmer into the city to recover it. “Doctor? Perhaps you would like to accompany this expedition?”

“Of course.”

Palet gripped the sleeve of the time-traveller’s green balmacaan with surprising strength. “If you’re assured there’s no danger, Sevrin?”

“We’ll monitor the situation from the air. Arvell is our Dalek expert, he’ll make sure none of them have crawled out of their casings.”

“That bedtime story carries no truck with me,” Arvell replied bluntly.

“The problem with bedtime stories,” the Doctor mused, “is that I’ve ended up in my fair share of them.”

Palet walked the team of eight scientists headed by Arvell and Sevrin, and their ‘interns’—also purportedly of scientific background, but plainly military-trained—to the air-skimmer. She looked over the craft warily before he boarded. “Report back every seventeen rels, understood?”

Arvell nodded.

The Doctor took a seat and watched over the start-up routine. The air-skimmer hovered into the sky without incident and in a matter of moments reached a formidable cruising speed. He sat quietly and observed the skyline; if he had any disquiet mounting, he didn’t show it. His face was a placid mask as the mountains soared past and the verdant pastures of the Davius continent slipped by. For a while nothing could be seen but the black depthless waters of the ocean that divided Thal and Kaled territories. Then more land

appeared: not the desiccated jungle he had visited all those lifetimes ago, as time had flattened and crumbled even those meagre remains to dust. The whole land mass looked like a stretch of dust, broken up only by miserable clusters of ashen rocks.

Then, savagely jutting into the skyline and seeming to thrust toward the tiny air-skimmer, the cold and twisted spires of the tallest peaks of the Dalek city could be seen. Arvell's orbiting test satellite—about which the Doctor had his doubts, which he intended to raise at the first opportunity—had caused minute damage to the centre as it crashed. He studied the Thal scientist's face, and saw surprise at this fact. Building after building stood proudly and as menacingly as ever.

"*Die tote Stadt ...*" he murmured to himself.

Arvell and Sevrin looked up from the air-skimmer's controls, their intellectual curiosity aroused by the Doctor's reference.

"An Earth composer, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, wrote an opera about the horrific aftermath of one of that planet's most terrible wars. It was called *Die tote Stadt*—"The Dead City'."

"We should be thankful it *is* dead. No sign of any Daleks," Sevrin muttered, the shudder audible in her voice.

"But this ... is 'dead' in a more literal sense. Dead in many more senses. It's a city constructed by the dead, for the purpose of spreading that death—of the soul as well as of the body—to everyone else. It's no home for anyone, just a cold and sterile mechanical prison, that's become a tomb for those forces of death. And it saddens me to say they deserved the death they got." The Doctor's eyes drifted from the city of the dead to Arvell, who flinched. "Shall we be touching down near your rocket?"

Sevrin answered for him, "Yes. It's just in that ruined district over there. We've managed to scrub the area for radiation, but I have some pills on me if anyone feels faint."

The Doctor plucked a glass bottle from the inside pocket of his coat and swallowed a capsule. "I see from the sensors that the rocket's impact released some radiation."

"It's dissipated quite quickly, as you can see from the reading."

The Doctor shrugged. "It just seems strange, since the fuel was entirely generated by your geothermal conversion plant. I'd hand out a dose of those pills if I were you, Sevrin."

Arvell moved to the rear of the cockpit, handing out rifles of an unmistakably Dalek design to the interns. They were alike in being young and looking out of their depth.

They climbed from their air-skimmer and took tentative steps down the Dalek streets. The Doctor took care to bring up the rear of their party, moving slowly and craning his neck to all sides so he could keep both the Thals and the shadows and harsh angles of the city in his view. Safe or not, he felt in his marrow that any moment his greatest enemy would come trundling out.

\*\*\*\*\*

The air-skimmer full of Thal scientists and the Doctor landed several hundred yards away from the southeast sector of the city, where the TARDIS materialised sheepishly. Maggie was sure the time vessel's engines sounded quieter and more reserved than usual. She had kept her eyes on this mysterious Thal visitor the whole time, and was even more suspicious at her smooth handling of the console. While Gadon had been wide-eyed at the marvel of the dimensionally transcendental interior, she seemed blasé about it. Nevertheless, there had

been no funny business about their short trip. They were outside now, walking along a desolate-looking street behind Toral. Gadon stood by her side, muscles tensed and ready to strike if anything about this visitor struck him as amiss. Amusingly, the fingers of his right hand played at the hilt of a sharp farming tool, like a trowel, he carried on his belt.

“What is this place?” Maggie asked, as she looked up took up at the blade-like spires and shadowy burnt-out skyscrapers, all in a lifeless matte hue, and down at the street, every inch of it plated in shiny and smooth metal. “This isn’t Davius City?”

Gadon shook his head. She could see that the Thal farmer was almost paralysed with fear. His fingers played across the handle like a child reaching for a safety blanket. He was consciously putting every effort into taking one step after another and keeping his eyes forward. This small woman couldn’t have made him that afraid.

“This city once belonged to our greatest enemies. Our race and another were pitted against each other in a futile war for control of the planet and annihilation of the other. Our generation is the first in over a thousand years to have a planet worth living on. *That* was our legacy, our inheritance.”

“And the people who lived here?”

“Dead. All of them, dead.” Gadon looked ahead to Toral. “Perhaps you should tell Maggie about the Daleks, Toral?”

“Da-leks?” Maggie repeated, shaking her head. The name sounded odd in her Canadian accent.

“The Doctor didn’t mention them?” the woman asked.

“He didn’t. We didn’t know we were landing here. We came by mistake.”

“The ship lands by mistake in the Doctor’s hands, but gets precisely where you want it to go, Toral?” Gadon said, a threat buried in his words.

She appeared oblivious to the suspicion embedded in the remark, making herself more suspicious by ignoring their conversation entirely as she turned corners in the streets, a clear target in her mind.

“Where are we going, Toral?” Maggie pressed.

“This way ...” she said airily.

As she turned a corner, Gadon pulled Maggie back. “I don’t know who she is or where she’s leading us, but I say we lose her and look for the Doctor.”

“And you’re sure there aren’t any Daleks about?”

“As far as I know there’s been no life here for four generations,” Gadon answered. Maggie noticed a definite lack of certainty in his tone. As she moved from one hulking, hollowed-out grey corpse of a building to another, she felt whether they were dead or not, these Daleks were watching and waiting. She gripped Gadon’s hand more tightly as they went out from the shadows into the exposed squares of the city.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor pushed in front of Arvell as they neared the crater left by the rocket. He examined it forensically, shaking his head in pantomime confusion. “Arvell my dear chap, I’m puzzled by the design of your rocket. It seems flawed for an orbital shot—not big enough, not enough fuel—but perfectly designed for a bomb.” His words hung unpleasantly in the air.

Sevrin looked in genuine bafflement to her colleague. The Doctor reasoned at once that she didn't know, or wasn't in whatever loop Arvell was. "Your leader, Palet? Did she know either? Or was this just a little hobby of yours?"

"All right, Doctor," Arvell snapped. "I suppose I won't last very long keeping anything from you. Our government chooses to keep the Dalek city intact, under that barrier, as a memorial to the futility of our Neutronic War. I've said for a long time we should flatten it and move on, bury the filth that were the Daleks off the face of our renewed planet, and look to the future. We've let the shadow of the Daleks limit our thinking for too long. There are others who feel as I do, but our governing elites must all maintain this pose of self-pitying peacemakers. So I hid an extra little payload in this capsule. I only wish I could have done more damage. We haven't had the chance to refine our weaponry in some time."

"Thanks to Palet and the Congress's leadership," Sevrin said sharply.

"What about your air-skimmer's anti-gravity technology, and these sidearms?" the Doctor asked, tapping the spindles of the Dalek-like ray bolted to the front of the interns' rifles. "That weaponry has been refined from your former foes, hasn't it?"

"They had some brilliant ideas," Arvell admitted. "Even you as a scientist must have known that from speaking to them."

"Their ideas were worthless for serving the twisted hatred that was in their core, Arvell. Make no mistake, scientific debate with a Dalek would only serve to make them want to kill you more slowly."

Sevrin dismissed the other members of the party, who shuffled back to the air-skimmer awkwardly, all as shaken by Arvell's sentiments as the Doctor's words. "What kind of warhead did you use?" she asked under her breath.

"One of the old ones from the Neutronic War we used against the Kaled City. It destroyed their dome, so I reasoned ..."

The Doctor let loose a bitter laugh. "The Daleks will have made sure their city was far in advance of the Kaleds' design." He turned to Sevrin. "Those weapons used minimal radiation shielding, didn't they?"

She nodded. "We have to get into the city quickly," she commanded the armed support. They quickly marched behind. She pointed to one underling. "You, contact Davius Control and tell them to re-erect the barrier."

"Why the urgency?" the intern asked.

"I studied the modifications Davros made to the Dalek mutants to better equip them," Sevrin explained. "He anticipated the planet would be totally radioactive and any survivors would have to absorb radiation and thrive on it. Therefore, any dormant Dalek can gain nourishment from fallout as easily as we would from our synthetic marrows."

"But there can't be any surviving embryos down there?"

"That whole underground control centre was hidden from us. No one ever charted its every nook and cranny."

"Precisely. And Daleks are particularly good at hiding." The Doctor nodded grimly, running a little faster into the dark entrance gate of the Daleks' Great Hall.

\*\*\*\*\*

The sky darkened, but not from the natural effect of the setting sun. It was as if a purple cloak had been extended over the sky.



“The Dalek city is walled off by a protective force field, as far as I know,” Gadon explained. “They must have lowered it to get air-skimmer inside and raised it again. Now we’re stuck here, thanks to this old woman.”

Maggie felt the eyes on her again. The TARDIS was safe at the end of that street, she knew, but what if someone was expecting the Doctor to arrive? What if Toral had landed it there to give it over to his enemies? “I feel like we’d better find the Doctor sooner rather than later.”

He smiled. “I couldn’t agree more.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Toral’s path had taken her into the catacombs. The Thal and the human thought they had shaken her off, but she wanted rid of them anyway. She had made better and more efficient progress than anyone, and had easily moved past the facades of the Daleks’ above-ground structures and into the underground where they did their worst work. The tunnels snaked through this city beneath the city, leading inevitably to the Daleks’ nerve centre. She knew, and could sense, that the Doctor was nearby. Her lure had worked; everyone had taken their positions; and no matter the cost, her mission would succeed.

### Chapter Three: The Dead City

Back in Davius City, Palet crouched over the Tracking Room monitors, wondering why she did not feel more at ease. The party had made contact and instructed them to raise the barrier around the Dalek city; they had duly complied. They were not sure why this order was given so urgently, but it was procedure to obey such orders without question.

She thought of Arvell and Sevrin, taunting each other about the Daleks scuttling about their city without casings. Those nursery stories had scared the life out of her when she was younger. They had taken it all too easily. And with the Doctor himself there ... it all felt too volatile, like she had lit a torch and then dropped it in a flammable room, then closed the lid.

"I'll be in my office," she instructed the technician at the monitor. "Inform me of anything irregular."

"Like?" the underling asked, unwisely.

"Anything at all, damn it," she barked, already on her way out and not looking back.

\*\*\*\*\*

Maggie felt increasingly light-headed as she and Gadon walked the shiny metal streets searching for the Doctor. Since that force field barrier had enveloped them, the air felt closer and imbued with an unpleasant humidity. There was a nasty smell in the air too—a clogging smoke that seemed to inflame and irritate her nostrils with every breath.

She was holding up better than her Thal friend though. Gadon's shaking had increased, and now he gripped her hand with furious intensity. The other hand was firmly wrapped around the handle of his trowel. Distant sounds and the lengthening shadows caused him to jump in terror.

"You haven't seen many cities, eh?" she asked.

"We Thals have come to prefer the country," he replied. "Even friends of mine who visit Davius have told me of it. A certain ... dread."

“Remind me never to take you to Toronto,” she joked. “Seriously, I feel it too. Here, anyway—Toronto isn’t *that* bad. These Daleks of yours must have been pretty special. In a horrible way. I can’t believe the Doctor didn’t tell me about them.”

“He probably did so for your own peace of mind. I know he is just as haunted by them as we are.”

That sense of observation was growing more acute. Then, when they rounded the entrance to one of the city’s grand (yet characteristically sterile) courtyards, Maggie heard the kick of a pebble against the metal. Gadon nodded, and kept talking while he crossed to the corner.

Maggie wanted to go with him—the poor Thal was shaking like a leaf. What if it was a Dalek? She knew the kinds of enemies the Doctor encountered. How would she be able to defend herself, and Gadon? That tiny farming tool wouldn’t do much against some alien death machine.

There was a burst of movement, and then he dragged someone around. She was a young woman, who looked (in Earth terms) in her teens, with a sullen expression and shortly cropped silvery hair. She pulled herself free and looked at the pair of them.

“I guess you’ve been following us?”

“Yes,” she replied curtly. “I snuck on the air-skimmer. My name’s Rellay. I’m a student at Davius Advanced Education Complex. You must be the Doctor’s friend.”

After the introductions, Maggie asked her where the Doctor was.

“Down there—where we believe the Daleks’ underground control centre was.”

Maggie’s stomach dropped, but she was not surprised, when the Thal student pointed to the curved entrance to the gloomiest building in the courtyard.

\*\*\*\*\*

The leaking weapon’s payload had damaged only some of the superstructure. Lower down and inside its workings, mechanisms came to life, and for the first time detected the Thals and the aliens now intruding in it. Though it had no intelligence, the city was imbued with the mechanical equivalent of instinct, an animalistic sense of self-defence. And it now perceived these invaders as threats and would deal with them as its systems dictated.

\*\*\*\*\*

The tunnels were overgrown by nasty grey vines—the Skaroine equivalent of cobwebs. The Doctor found the darkness a curious comfort, and even appreciated the need to crank every sliding door open manually. For the Daleks of this time were practically one with this dead city—it was how he had defeated them that first time. So if nothing worked, it logically meant none of *them* were alive either.

Irrefutable logic, but he still didn’t dare accept it wholesale.

And as the sliver of amber light from his torch caught wispy tendrils of web moving at the displacement of air from himself and the Thals progressing through the levels of the city, the Doctor felt his dread resurface. He reminded himself of the irrefutable logic and told himself he was being irrational; he hoped if he told himself enough times, he might convince himself purely by repetition.

Arvell exchanged the occasional observation, but the rest of the Thals were scared rigid throughout this descent. They had encountered their first Dalek relatively high up. It was interesting—though horrible—to note everyone’s reaction. As soon as they saw that unmistakable shape, they froze on the spot with an instinctive terror that could only come from five hundred years of fear, passed down across generations. That instinct immediately transmuted into their self-defence routines, and in the blink of an eye seven rifles were levelled at the round dome at the end of the tunnel.

The Doctor took a step forward and touched the casing, rolling it back and forth along the smooth metallic floor. Its eyestalk was pointed up at the ceiling, and its sucker and weapon hung limply below it. “Deactivated ...” he assessed.

“I prefer to hear ‘dead,’” Sevrin tersely replied.

“One of my ancestors brought one back to Davius,” one of the younger scientists told the Doctor. “Nearly died when the casing let loose an electric charge it had hidden.”

“Yes, the Daleks are notorious for booby-trapping their armour. Every inch the death machine, eh?” This he asked while staring into the top of the casing, as if taunting the Dalek that had once inhabited it.

As Arvell and the others moved on, Sevrin held the Doctor back. “Why do you think Arvell fired this weapon in secret? Do you believe his story?”

The Doctor shrugged. “You know him better than I do, Sevrin.”

“Could there be such dissent among our people? I’ve never even considered that some could be so blind to our achievements.”

“Some find it difficult to overlook the past. While thinking they’re looking ahead, they can become mired in looking backwards. Some don’t learn from it.”

“I’m worried, Doctor. You’ve encountered the Daleks again, haven’t you? It’s a matter of historical fact that some survived. What if we are the people who let them out? What if Arvell’s folly gives them new life?”

“I’m worried about that too, Sevrin. My knowledge of their history still has gaps. I’m thinking about it, don’t you worry. I’ll defend you and this planet—*your* planet—with my dying breath.”

“Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that. I’d hate to be the Thal who killed our great hero,” she admitted.

“I wouldn’t be terribly keen on it either,” the Doctor admitted in turn.

Their hushed conversation was interrupted by three new arrivals barging in to the corridor. The Doctor was crestfallen to see Maggie and Gadon, as well as the Thal student, Rellay, he had met earlier that day. Sevrin had her weapon drawn and pointed at them, a reflex that at least assured the Doctor she was serious about protecting her hero.

“What the blazes are you doing here?” he asked Maggie.

“Nice to see you too.”

The Doctor sighed and embraced her. It was genuinely reassuring to have her near. “You know what I mean, though.”

“Hey, I don’t want to be here either. Soon as I got down here my head started pounding.”

“That’ll be the radiation. Here.” He handed her a bitter white tablet.

As Maggie swallowed, she asked, “Didn’t you send for me?”

The Doctor's face turned to stone. Maggie looked between him and the Thal scientist, jumping to a nasty conclusion. "Let me guess, neither of you ever met anyone called Toral? Great. She piloted the TARDIS here, Doctor. She was no ordinary Thal."

"Ah, jolly good," the Doctor said, his sarcasm evident from his gritted teeth. "Another unstable element in an increasingly volatile situation. Come on!"

\*\*\*\*\*

The hydraulic door collapsed unexpectedly. Two of Arvell's assistants tried pumping it open manually, but it seemed stuck. "That's us separated from the Doctor and Professor Sevrin, sir," the intern, Alodem, observed.

"Truthfully, Alodem, it's the first time I've felt relaxed since I met that Doctor."

"Why's that, sir?"

"I don't know, he's a little too irrational for someone like me. A do-gooder alien from our legends, showing up to put us on the right track ... I always hoped he was a fairy tale, to be honest." Arvell was careful not to say aloud his further contemplation: that such a know-it-all alien expert drained a little of his authority away. Instead, he suggested, "Imagine having Alydon, or Ganatus, or one of those heroes, return to look over our shoulder?"

The intern checked the settings on his weapon. "All that matters to me is firepower sir. Whether it's the intellectual kind offered by the Doctor, or this kind." He patted the barrel affectionately.

"Did anyone notice it's getting warmer in here?" another intern commented.

Arvell had hoped it was his imagination. He remembered the Doctor and Sevrin's point—that any radiation might be enough to revive even a nearly dead Dalek.

Suddenly those empty casings littering the corridors and control chambers looked that bit more menacing.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next corridor the Doctor and Sevrin rounded was barred with another of the shells. Maggie looked it up and down—taking in the two lights at the top of its dome, its squat tank-like shape, the bumps on its skirt, and the two sticks bolted on to its front. She didn't immediately understand why she felt such a sense of eeriness from the static object. It was just an overgrown pepperpot, she tried to tell herself.

"So these are Dal-leks, eh?" she asked, the unfamiliar word still catching on her tongue. "Evil robots?"

"Dah-leks," corrected Rellay. "That's just their outer armour. Inside is an advanced mutant that artificially evolved from our people's sworn enemies."

"They drive it around?" She touched its strange metal. Maggie noticed the similarity between the spindly tube bolted to the casing's left side and the rifle the Thal scientist, Sevrin, was holding. She wondered if the Thals got the Doctor's customary lecture about disliking guns. He didn't seem in much of a lecturing mood now—he seemed almost as haunted as these people by being here and being surrounded by these husks, dead or not.

The sucker twitched. Maggie leapt back, and Gadon covered her, but they all relaxed when the implement fell off the casing, along with an entire panel of the bottom hemispheres. They were in even worse shape than they looked.

That sense of rancid decay was all around in the air, she felt. There was no way anything down here could be alive.

Then she realised it was something a little more than the usual decay she was smelling.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Sir!” the intern yelled to Arvell. “None of the doors are working! We’re sealed in!”

The Thal scientist desperately raced from one end of the narrow storage chamber to the other, trying each exit in the hope that he could shift it where his more muscular subordinates had failed. There was no luck. Each doorway felt clamped to the floor, magnetised.

And Arvell knew what that meant.

“How could this all have gone so wrong?” he muttered to himself. That feeling was only enhanced by the unmistakable sparks in the air of discharging static electricity, accompanied by a faint ultrasonic whine drawing nearer.

\*\*\*\*\*

The smell was getting intolerable, but it was only when a heavy steel wall slid down the centre of the control room that Maggie became worried. She and the Doctor were on one side, and Sevrin, Rellay, and the interns were on the other.

“Poison gas, Maggie! We’ve got to get out of here!” The Doctor heard banging from the other side, reasoning that Sevrin and the others must be having the same trouble.

The air was becoming thick with a vile shade of green.

The Doctor struggled with the circular Dalek-designed instruments, sparking them to life with his sonic screwdriver. “A bit of an advantage ...” he muttered between coughs. “I didn’t have this little chap with me last time.”

As the vapour became thicker, Maggie’s breaths felt like they were lined with flames. “Any luck with the door?” she asked desperately, trying hopelessly to move the panel manually.

“No ...but ... you won’t like this ...”

“Won’t like it? Can’t imagine it’s any worse than being poisoned ...” The room’s stark tables and computer screens were barely visible in the horrendous fug.

“Well ... I can’t get the door open ... but I can get the *floor* open.”

“Wha-?” Maggie began, but before she could finish the word she was tumbling downward.

\*\*\*\*\*

The floor on the other side opened at the same time, and Sevrin, Rellay, and the other soldiers found themselves falling head over heels, sliding down a vast chute. “The Doctor must have got it open!” she reasoned.

“Any idea where we’re going?” the soldier asked.

“Down?” Rellay offered.

The others gave her a look.

\*\*\*\*\*

After their freefall, the chute had opened up into a large, dark space. Maggie's landing was mercifully soft, although she reconsidered this mercy when she realised the softness came from thick, slimy mud lining the ground. The Doctor was on his feet, his sturdy chukka boots appearing to absorb the brunt of the surrounding grue.

"Are you sure there isn't some feline in your Gallifreyan DNA?"

"Eh?"

"How do you always land on your feet?"

"Oh! I have a few more centuries of practice." He helped her up, wiping slime off the back of her puffer jacket. "Nevertheless, a dry-clean is in order for us both, I think," he muttered.

"Never cared much for this jacket anyway," she said. She looked around. The opening of the chute was depressingly high above them. It was brighter than the levels above them, but even this was hardly comforting as the light was a sharp blood red.

Maggie paced uncertainly, her own shoes squelching in the mud, to an open door at the far end. A glass screen had been broken. She realised this was where the mud had leaked out.

"I've heard of a mud room, but this is ridiculous, surely," she called to the Doctor. As she looked back she saw him dashing toward her, pulling her away from the open door. Their two bodies pressed against the nearby wall, as he tentatively swung his head around to look into the smaller chamber.

"Empty," he noted. "Just as I feared."

"All the mud's came from in there, no? It's out here now," she pointed out.

"It's not mud. This is the incubation chamber. It's a kind of ... synthetic growth fluid for Dalek embryos."

Maggie shivered, the stuff in her hair and on her clothes now seeming another form of this horrific creatures' invasive power. She batted some of the slime off her, clutching the Doctor to her.

"It's disgusting, yes, but it won't hurt you. And at least no Daleks, I suppose," he added.

It was then that they both froze on the spot, perceiving the palpable sensation of movement through the murk.

At the same time, a distinctive aroma filled the air, rising above the earthy ambience. "Do you smell that? Kind of like ... bumper cars at the fairground?"

The Doctor was looking over Maggie's shoulder, and instinctively stepped in front of her. She turned, to find, wading through this grotesque pit, was a Dalek.

## Chapter Four: Who has the right?

Earlier that day, a dormant mind returned painfully to life. Its last memory was the death of those around it, starved of the energy it needed as its home died out. But then, through a blinding fog of pain, as a more wholesome creature would breathe clean air through its lungs, this mutated abomination sucked in nourishing bursts of radiation from the explosion many miles above.

The city too had absorbed some of that explosion, converting the energy release into the static the creature needed to survive. A few rudimentary defences kicked into gear in the levels above, separating the groups of invaders with the aim of confinement or death. And the creature had found a working casing. It was whole. It was a Dalek.

And it recognised the alien standing across from it.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Dalek sleekly rolled out of the muddy pit and drew level with the Doctor and Maggie. For a few horrible seconds the Dalek stared at the pair, eyestalk swinging up and down while its other two attachments twitched and quivered as if savouring its newly restored life. When it spoke, the blinking of its dome-lights and the metallic grate of its synthetic voice made Maggie start.

*“Ka ... Faraq ... Gat ... ri ...”* it announced, enunciating every syllable slowly but precisely. *“Your face is different, but my life-sign scans reveal you to be the same being. The Bringer of Darkness. The ... Doc ... tor.”*

Maggie had never heard her nameless friend’s title said with so much hatred.

The Doctor nodded tersely. “Correct. I’m not alone. Your enemies, the Thals, are upstairs, heavily armed. There’s no way you can outwit them on your own.”

*“I am ...not ... alone ... either,”* the Dalek rasped smugly.

\*\*\*\*\*



As soon as that freshly revived dormant Dalek had found its way into a casing, it did not take long for it to reactivate the embryo incubation process. Half-formed Dalek embryos, held in suspended animation in that vile chamber at the bottom of their control complex, soaked in the radiation absorbed by the city, donned their armoured casings, and were soon ascending levels towards the intruders. They had locked on to the life signs of Arvell and the other Thals, and had them trapped.

\*\*\*\*\*

Arvell was not fully prepared for the sight when the door finally, and with excruciating slowness, slid open. Two Daleks, alive and bearing toward them.

*"Intruders detected!"*

*"Fire!"*

One blast rippled across the body of a poor soldier, causing him to slump forward lifelessly. Two more blasts fired in unison, soaring over Arvell's head, melting a shelf and sending ore samples and storage crates toppling. In the chaos, he leapt back, taking cover under the newly created barrier. "Fire on them, you fools!" he screamed at the surviving interns.

They opened fire. One blast knocked one Dalek back, causing it to spin into its fellow. The survivor looked at its freshly destroyed comrade, then rolled backward at full speed, its weapon firing with terrifying randomness as it retreated.

"Not bad," an elderly woman, walking in from behind, told them. All three jumped, then levelled their weapons at her.

"How did you get past them?"

"I know when to stay out of sight," she replied. "My name is Toral. Send your underlings upstairs and come with me."

"Where are we going?" Arvell asked.

"To finish what you started, of course," she replied coldly.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Dalek swivelled its dome at the distress transmission of the comrade above. Normally, a whole team of strategists would be monitoring the situation, but there were only three of them, with the incubation of further embryos proceeding necessarily slowly in the absence of more radiation or static electricity. It was, in short, a lot for one Dalek to keep track of, especially with the Doctor feverishly plotting how to outwit it.

A further advantage came when the hatch door blasted open and Sevrin, Rellay, and the other interns entered. Before long three weapons of Dalek design were trained on the creature. Its eyestalk looked from the armaments to the Thals holding them, radiating contempt.

"I'm surprised, Dalek," the Doctor sneered. "Not impressed with how the Thals have adapted your technology?"

*"They could never hope to match our technological superiority,"* it sneered back.

"Why don't we kill it and get this over with?" Sevrin hissed.

Maggie saw the conflict on the Doctor's face, and was as surprised as the rest of the party when he thrust his hand up. "Just a minute, Sevrin. How many Daleks have been hatched today?"

*"Myself and three others. One has been killed in battle. Three remain."*

The Doctor wondered if his enemy was telling the truth. It was anybody's guess, frankly. "Three. And I assume you won't be able to brew up any more until your reactors are up and running, pumping out a bit more of that radiation and static electricity you love so much?" He turned to Maggie. "Daleks of this generation were almost entirely dependant on their city, poor things."

"Don't elaborate," she answered, still thinking of the grime on her jacket.

*"Your supposition is correct."*

"Let me put this to you. The Thals have built a peace-loving and stable society on this world. They easily outnumber and outgun you. You could never win in an outright war, contained in your city this way. Why not leave Skaro?"

"You can't be serious, Doctor!" Sevrin snapped. "Let them loose on the universe?"

*"Why should we leave Skaro? It is our planet! It is offensive to suggest we leave it to the Thals—genetically impure, ideologically weak. We are the superior beings!"*

"I beg to differ."

"There are thousands of us!" one of Sevrin's interns cried.

The Doctor cringed—it took only a moment for a Dalek to turn any concrete information about its enemies into a tactical advantage. "The Thals survived and flourished. To the victors go the spoils."

*"They only survived with your help. It was an unfair advantage."*

Did Maggie feel a twinge of pity for the monster? Its dome swivelled from one to the other of them, and its shorter stature and physical disadvantage made the Doctor seem bullying and threatening as he loomed over it. The Thals for their part had summoned a collective rage against the creature she found equally unsettling, and were keeping their weapons trained point-blank at it. Even Gadon, standing at the back, looked twisted from his former complaisant self into an expression of utter revulsion. If he had a weapon more effective than his trowel, she was certain he would have pulled the trigger already.

There was one exception, however: Rellay. The student was listening to the Dalek with something of Maggie's sympathy. She wondered what this young woman had learned of their conflict? Why had she been so dedicated to getting here on this dangerous mission?

Then there was Toral, the woman who was around here somewhere and had some mysterious agenda of her own. At least you knew where you were with a Dalek, she reckoned—albeit how long you survived as such was another matter.

*"Even supposing we left Skaro, where would we go?"*

"The Thals have embarked on a fledgling space programme. I'm sure they would help you on your way. There are other worlds, infinite worlds—*uninhabited*, crucially. You could settle and devote yourselves to self-improvement rather than destruction." He could not resist adding, "It's never too late to start."

Maggie whispered under her breath, "Is there any chance this tin can will go for that?"

"Of course not!" Sevrin interrupted impatiently, her finger tightening on her weapon's trigger.

The Doctor calmly placed his hand on the barrel of the weapon, and looked from Maggie to the Thal. "I have to give them the chance."

*“I will not discuss terms at gunpoint,”* the Dalek haughtily declared. *“I will speak only with Thal representatives, when certain guarantees are made. Do you not respect the need for negotiation?”*

“What will you talk about?” Rellay asked. “Our last ‘negotiation’ ended with Daleks murdering our leader, Temmosus.”

*“A ...misunderstanding. Perhaps we could broker peace.”*

In a flash, Maggie saw the Dalek’s mind working. It had understood the Doctor’s psychology and was telling him what he wanted to hear, stalling him before ... did she hear something else approaching? “Doctor! We’ve got to get out of here!”

The incubation room’s dank air was broken by the acrid sizzle of another death ray. A second Dalek had rolled in behind them. Gadon barrel-rolled under it, the weight of his large, muscular body pushing it away from the door and creating a gap for the other Thals to get through. Its weapon frantically pivoted to lock on to him, blasting toward the floor with dangerous abandon.

The Doctor moved farther into the chamber, yelling, “Get away! All of you!”

Maggie saw his strategy. The Daleks were more interested in him than them—the lead Dalek had kept its eyestalk on him like a magnet throughout this exchange. Now both Daleks’ interest in him had opened enough of a gap for the rest of them to retreat.

The last she saw of the Doctor, he was whirring his sonic screwdriver to seal the sliding door shut.

As they ran, Maggie dragging her heels and pushing against the cajoling of the Thals around her, Sevrin punched a nearby steel wall in frustration. “The Doctor cost us a tactical advantage. We’d have one Dalek less to deal with but for his decision to be so talkative with it.”

“We can’t leave him—”

“We must!”

“Sevrin’s right, Maggie,” Gadon insisted. “He’s the only man who can stand up to them.”

“Without a weapon?” a Thal intern asked.

There was no time to argue, and Maggie didn’t want to get any of them killed by standing around. She only hoped the Doctor could take care of himself.

She also realised, as they were making their way up to higher ground, that Rellay had stayed in there with him.

\*\*\*\*\*

Toral and Arvell were in the Daleks’ main control room. With power restored, they could hear a steady drumming, like a distorted mechanical heartbeat. He looked from one monitor to the other. Despite being written in the Dal script, he was able to interpret the information: the reactors were slowly coming back on line.

Toral stood at his shoulder. Arvell studied her as she looked around the room; she remained purposeful, intent, and vigilant. “Who are you?” he asked her.

“Someone as interested as you in ensuring the Daleks do not leave this planet.”

“Like the Doctor?”

A bitter smiled curled up her lip. “The Doctor. Did the Doctor tell you what he knows of Skaro’s future? That the Daleks will once again retake the planet, spread across thousands more and wage war against the rest of the universe?”

“I suppose ... not directly, no.”

“Well, all that is to come,” she insisted. “Once, many lifetimes ago, he was given a chance to stop them before they could arise. He went back into your history to make the future better. He failed in that mission. He *chose* to fail. It’s my job to succeed.”

“With my help?” It was all too fantastical, and Arvell’s head was reeling. Did that mean this woman was another godlike being from beyond time? Was all she said true?

She clapped her hands and manipulated the Dalek controls. “You’ve worked with similar equipment to this before, Arvell. You must be able to see some way to destroy them?”

He looked at the steadily rising power output. An idea crossed his mind. “I think so.”

\*\*\*\*\*

With the lifts now working, they were back up at what felt like the top in a few moments. Their ascent had been mercifully brief, but every foot of the lift’s elevation felt like an aeon. Sevrin checked the corridors, which now echoed with a sickly heartbeat sound. “We have to get out of the city before they activate any more of those defences,” she reasoned. “And we have to find Arvell too.”

This plan of action seemed exceptionally optimistic when they saw a cone-shaped shadow lengthen at the end of the far corridor. The now familiar silver shape glided in after it, and a cybernetic nightmare voice screeched, “*Intruders detected! Attack!*”

The Thals ducked to their haunches and fired a full blast at it. Their combined weaponry glanced off the silver casing, and only when a third soldier appeared behind them to fire his weapon, did the three beams in unison kill the Dalek. Its dome blew off and inside, Maggie got the clearest sight yet of the nightmarish living creature within: clawed green tentacles, dripping with bile, thrashed for a few horrible moments until they were still.

Sevrin nodded a tense greeting to the other Thal. “I have a nasty feeling the Daleks are adapting their shells to the frequency of our weapons. The next shots might not work.”

“Well, there are only two left, and they’re both down there with the Doctor,” Maggie observed.

“Shouldn’t we stage an all-out assault on them? We still have them outmanned.”

While she was mulling this over, a thought occurred to Sevrin. “Where’s Arvell?”

“He went off with a stranger,” Arvell’s subordinate informed her. “They went back that way.”

Maggie thought of Toral, their mysterious pilot. Had she intercepted Arvell? Did she have some purpose in mind for him?

Sevrin mused, “I’d bet they went back to the control room. I’ll catch up with him and you get this villager and the off-worlder back to the surface.”

“Can’t I stay with you?” Maggie asked Sevrin. “Please, I did come here for the Doctor.”

“Another target for the Daleks?” she replied cruelly. “All right, but I insist you take a weapon. The rest of you, get to the skimmer and prepare the launch cycle.”

“Are you sure that’s enough time?”

“It will have to be. As soon as the engines are powered up, transmit orders to Davius to launch all firepower at this city in twenty rels.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The two Daleks led the Doctor and Rellay to another lift-shaft, and now they ascended to the higher levels of the control room. He looked at the girl contemptuously.

"I suppose I shouldn't have stayed," she said, knowing what he was thinking from his expression.

"I was rather proud of getting my friend Maggie and your fellow Thals out of the way of the Daleks' blasters. I wanted you *all* out of harm's way." He glared between the two domes staring obliviously forward. "Sometimes I wonder how many I've helped exterminate by not being crueller towards you."

*"By doing so, you would acknowledge the superiority of Dalek philosophy."*

"We appreciate your predicament," the other Dalek said, its monotone sounding oddly simpering.

"Who knows? Perhaps today might end with you taking *my* advice. The offer still stands. You could leave this planet."

The lift opened and they glided into their brightly lit control room. The Doctor ducked his head through the arch and had to sidestep the other severely angled arches dotting the room. He kept Rellay in his peripheral vision, and made sure he was between himself and the Daleks—specifically their horrible weapons—at all times.

*"Thals have destroyed the Dalek on Level Seven."*

"And then there were two?" the Doctor mused, feeling the horrible temptation. How easy it would be to overpower these two in front of him? Fire some weapon at each dome; two shots. Would it not be better for the universe? Were his qualms really valid set against that? Perhaps that was what he hated most about the Daleks—the evil they brought out in him.

They drew nearer to Arvell, who was entering a sequence on one of their console. "*Step away, Thal!*" the one barked, only staying its firepower for fear of damaging the controls.

The scientist turned back to face them. That feral glee the Doctor noted when they first met was extremely evident in Arvell's expression. "This time you really *are* finished, you abominations! Your reactors will overload."

The Daleks pushed past him, scanned the readings, and conferred with each other. "*He is correct!*"

For a moment they forgot their murderous and hateful instincts and frantically wheeled around the controls, their brains collectively devoted to self-preservation. Knowing the moment would not last long, the Doctor grabbed Arvell and Rellay and ran out of the control room.

The same spirit of self-preservation pushed him frantically forward, and it was only when they had climbed into the lifts that he realised he had to practically push Arvell inside.

"Doctor, please ..." he sighed. "Leave me here. My arrogance started this. The least I can do is make amends by giving my life to ensure it ends."

"Quite right," Rellay spat.

"Rellay!"

"No Doctor, you don't understand. He's just like all the cushy and cosseted elites who run Skaro these days," Rellay continued venomously. "Unlike our elders and betters, we students know our history. We know the Thals started the war, the Thals are no better than

the Daleks. Our noble and peace-loving nature is just a lie we tell ourselves to wash away the shame of our ancestors.”

The Doctor looked between the pair and smiled sadly. “So ... what, then? You want me to send this lift back down so you can both die with your mortal enemies, facing the end side by side?”

“Why not, Doctor? Perhaps Rellay and her young friends are right. I’ve seen myself today and I don’t like it.”

The Doctor grabbed Arvell by the shoulders. “We’ll discuss that later, when we’ve made it out of here. But you do have something to contribute, something that will make up for what you’ve done here today. Now come on, you know I’ll force the pair of you onto that air-skimmer if I have to.”

He was relieved to breathe in the Dalek equivalent of fresh air as they emerged back out into the city’s main square. The air-skimmer’s engines were humming to life, and Maggie and Gadon stood on its landing strut, half-in and half-out of the door.

Sevrin saluted them through the windows. The rest of the Thals—minus the three interns murdered in the line of duty—sat in the cockpit, relieved to see Rellay and Arvell safe.

“Doctor—the TARDIS is that way.” Maggie pointed across the square at a sinister alley.

“And don’t think I’m leaving you either,” Gadon informed them firmly.

“Right!” he cried out to Arvell. “The pair of you, get in there. I’ll meet you back at Davius. Good luck!”

They climbed in, their movements jerky and sullen. The door slid shut and the skimmer took to the skies. For the briefest instant the grim purple of the energy barrier lifted to reveal the inky expanse of Skaro’s night sky. The skimmer flew through it and the purple blanket returned.

Satisfied they were on their way, the Doctor looked to Maggie and Gadon. “Come along then, I’m sure Arvell didn’t leave the reactor overload to chance.” The trio ran down the street and collectively sighed with relief to see the TARDIS parked inconspicuously in the shadow of one menacing skyscraper.

As the Doctor bundled them in, he felt gooseflesh prickle over his skin. Knowing what it meant, he turned to see another Dalek rolling implacably toward him.

“*This is your craft?*” it rasped.

“That’s right. Here to see us off?”

“*You are wrong to support the Thals. They are weak and divided. They cannot even agree whether they have the right to survive. Daleks are unified, strong. How can they be better than us?*”

“Doubt *makes* them better. Their division is a source of strength.”

“*Foolish sentiment.*”

“Empirical fact. Dalek philosophy can never allow for such things, so you will always be defeated. Trust me, I’ve seen it.”

The Dalek’s eyestalk bobbed up and down, apparently considering the Doctor’s words sincerely. “*Maybe ... we could change our natures ... maybe ... do we not deserve the same chance as the Thals?*”

“You’ve had the same chances, and we both know what you’ve done with them.” The shrill hum of the reactors building to detonation was thick in the air, but for a moment the

Doctor heard nothing. He looked across the street at his oldest foe and for the briefest moment wondered, doubted his own certainties ...

But then he felt Maggie's arms pulling him backward with surprising force into the TARDIS. At the same instant, one final parting shot seared the air.

As he threw the final switch, the Dalek's voice screeched its usual threats.

*"You cannot defeat us! The Daleks will reign supreme and exterminate all other life!"*

"Not today," the Doctor muttered grimly.

The scanner remained active, and he watched though it pained him to do so. He saw those buildings and streets swallowed up into the earth. The reactors' overload caused the entire massive structure of the Dalek city to implode, sucking itself into the vast chasm it created.

\*\*\*\*\*

The TARDIS materialised in the shadow of that vast marble statue of the Doctor cradling Temmosus. Palet led a phalanx of the Thal Congress, and they collectively burst into applause. Behind them, crammed into the available space of the city's main thoroughfare, thousands of Thals joined them, cheering and crying out in jubilation.

Maggie looked at the Doctor accept the acclaim, and knew he was inwardly torturing himself with the actions he'd taken—and perhaps more importantly, the actions he hadn't taken.

"Look Doc, I'll take the rap for this, OK? I pulled you into the TARDIS, because I'd rather have seen my best friend alive than see those Daleks crawling all over the universe."

"And I'd second that," Gadon added.

He hugged them both, allowing himself to collapse into their embrace. "Thank you both, for taking some of the weight off these old shoulders. I haven't felt quite my age for a long time. I appreciate the help."

Through the teeming crowds, the Doctor located Arvell and called over to Palet as well. "I expect you want to know what grand purpose made it so imperative that you not kill yourself in a vainglorious assault against the Daleks. It's quite simple. You are to begin preparations for the biggest exodus from this planet that has ever been attempted."

The circle of Thals looked at each other, then back at the Doctor, their eyes widening in incredulity. "Did I hear that correctly?"

"You did, Palet. The technology you've developed is sound. Go forward with your launches and work toward getting every Thal off this planet in one generation."

"One generation? That isn't nearly—"

"Then you must make it so."

"But the Dalek city has been destroyed. We saw it."

"Yes yes, I did too," the Doctor snapped. "But I have two good reasons for pushing this on you. I've seen the Daleks come back from worse, and neither you nor I can afford to think for a minute that they were totally eradicated by that measure. As we saw, they find a way."

"But our home Doctor—"

"It's hard, I know. But the survival of your people is more important than the land you inhabit. Take it from me. I know you have the strength to manage it."

“And what of Rellay and her generation? How can we turn around this ... bitterness that infects the heart of our society? What if we grow to think our race truly does deserve extinction?”

“You can only persuade them through engagement, through debate. You can’t change the past, but when you make the future, you must do so with help from her and the people like her.”

“It’s a lot to take in,” Arvell sighed. “But I was looking for a way to put our past behind us, and this is that way. I’ll get to work immediately!”

The Doctor gave him and the Thals around him a hearty group hug and then left them to their preparations. He found Maggie in the throng, and together they walked to the TARDIS. Thals were running their hands along its woodwork, hugging and touching it as if it were some holy relic.

Gadon stood by the doorway. “I hope you don’t mind the over-enthusiasm. It’s all I can do to keep from hugging it myself.”

“Fair enough,” the Doctor conceded.

Gadon thrust his hand forward in his charming approximation of human manners, taught to his ancestors all those generations ago to them by Ian Chesterton. “From what you said, I gather this is goodbye, Doctor.”

“Yes.”

“You wouldn’t think of coming along, Gadon?” Maggie suggested. “We could always use friends. Not everyone is as welcoming as you guys.”

“What a temptation. But I’m sure I should play my part in this project to leave our dear Skaro. What about you? *You* could always stay here longer.”

The Doctor firmly shook his head. “I pushed my luck hanging around Skaro for three whole days. I dread to think what perils I’d bring upon you if stayed any longer. Thank you and Yonidi, and the whole village, for their hospitality. You honour me.”

“You honour us, Doctor.” He nervously bent forward and kissed Maggie on the cheek. “Safe travels.”

They stepped inside, and Gadon and the Thals around cheered still more rapturously when the trumpeting engines of the TARDIS rumbled up and the majestic ship faded from solidity.

\*\*\*\*\*

A few moments passed with nothing but the TARDIS engines filling the air. Maggie slumped into the parson’s chair in the corner of the console room, barely able to keep her eyes open. In a moment, she would get up and make herself some coffee.

The Doctor leaned against the console, taking some time to commune with his oldest friend. “You know Maggie, the Daleks will survive. I’ve seen them out there, after all.”

“Time can be rewritten?” she asked sleepily.

“Sometimes. But ... their evil is too strong to die out entirely. Against that, I’m just one man.”

“Well, they didn’t get you this time.”

“Thanks to you.” He crossed to the chair and squeezed her shoulder in heartfelt sympathy.



They both froze as another, unwelcome sound filled the control room. A metronomic, sarcastic clapping.

*Clap. Clap. Clap.*

They whirled around to see the petite form of the old Thal, Toral, clapping and pacing toward them.

“Ah, Maggie told me about you. Not a Thal, I take it?”

“That’s right Doctor. So, you win again, eh? And the universe is a little safer because of you and your whimsical sense of adventure.” She had stopped and drawn level with the Doctor. Maggie rose from the chair, her earlier exhaustion forgotten. She felt on her guard, and ridiculous though it was, the frail little woman now exuded an aura of menace—as bad as the Daleks. “It won’t do, will it?”

“What?”

“You know what I mean, Doctor. You can’t be judge, jury, and executioner for all of time and space. It’s about time someone else took over. Someone with a sense of order and precision.”

“Like you?”

“Modesty forbids...”

“Who the hell are you?” Maggie cried.

“Manners, dear. We are called ... the Preservers.”

“Never heard of you,” the Doctor said with a haughty sniff.

“The universe is in a frightful state, Doctor, and we think you are more hindrance than help.”

“If you want to solve the problems out there, you’re more than welcome. I wouldn’t mind a holiday.”

Her nose wrinkled. “You know how your holidays always end up Doctor. No, I’m afraid we shall have to take more ... proactive measures.”

She raised her hands, and the control room faded to a harsh and all-encompassing whiteness ...

\*\*\*\*\*

Maggie jolted forward from her sleep. “Oh no,” she said to herself.

She was in her bed, at home in Revelstoke.

She ran down the stairs. Outside, the sky was an icy shade of blue, and in the distance, snow was falling on Mount Begbie. CBC Radio was playing its soothing medley of morning classical music.

But Maggie Weitz could not have been less soothed.

She crossed to the window and looked up at the few listless clouds ambling through the blue-grey sky. The street was as quiet and empty as ever a street in Revelstoke was. She looked up at the sky, straining to see through it and reach out to her friend.

“Doctor, where the hell are you?” she asked desperately.

## Epilogue

The TARDIS was alone now, in flight. But there was no destination programmed and no pilot to enter it. The ancient time vessel felt, in its own inexplicable way, an echo of fear at being so alone. It missed the Doctor and cried out for his presence. Right now, it would even have been happy for one of those unruly companions of his to take the controls. Maybe not the Australian, though.

But no one was here to help. It would drift through the time vortex forever unless it got its act together.

The mind within it overcame its overwhelming panic and got to work. With some effort, it activated levers, and twisted dials. It could find the Doctor, but it needed friends to help him when it got there. With great effort, the TARDIS took control of its own path.

It materialised on a riverbank in Hammersmith, the exact spot where long ago, the Doctor had said the hardest goodbye of his life.

A dark-haired woman—the woman who had left the Doctor on that day—happened to be strolling nearby and saw it arrive. Her eyes lit up with recognition and thrill. She ran toward it.

**To be continued in The Doctor Who Project's  
Doctor Who 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary story:  
"A Mild Curiosity in a Junkyard"**



Two hundred years have passed since the Doctor's first fateful visit to Skaro. Now it is a prosperous and peaceful planet. The Thals have regrown their crops and put the ghosts of the past behind them. They are even launching fledgling satellites into space. The city of their deadliest enemies is sealed off under a forcefield, an ocean and a continent away.

It's all too good to be true, and the Doctor knows it. The Thals' finest scientific mind, Brvett, has traces of his people's warlike nature, and the younger generation are questioning their people's moral fibre. So when a Thal test rocket crashes in the middle of that dead city, the Doctor is suspicious. Before long, he and Maggie and a group of battle-trained Thal scientists are right in the middle of that city, their worst fears confirmed.

The Daleks are born anew, and this could be the pivotal moment to stop their evil from spreading forever—or else let it lay waste to everything in its path. Once, the Doctor was forced to ask himself if he had that right—now, forces are conspiring to put that question to him again.

---

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



