

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT

SENSED PRESENCE



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It was nearly time to begin tonight's communion with the spirit world. The Professor gazed into the mirror, cleared his mind, and began the rituals that he performed every week at this time to prepare himself for his task.

He breathed in and out. In and out.

Then, he intoned in his well-trained baritone, "Rubber baby buggy bumpers. Rubber baby buggy bumpers..."

Another sweltering June sun had set on Mount Pleasant, Illinois, but this had no effect on the temperature. In the American Midwest, people do not so much walk through the summer air as swim through it, and here the humidity seemed to take on the properties of a poorly laundered towel as it wrapped itself around the town. Buildings began to sweat. Even the ancient pines on the Piedmont State University campus wilted in the suffocating summer fug.

Despite the weather, the bars and restaurants lining Mirkwood Avenue were as busy as ever. The local watering holes hummed not with the raucous cries of underclassmen on their first bar crawls, but of the town's permanent residents breathing a collective sigh of relief at the chance to indulge in the small-town life that eluded them for so much of the year. For these few precious months, the several thousand college kids artificially inflating the population had gone home to bother their parents for a while.

The 'townies' relished their chance to frequent the legendary local establishments of every college town: the all-night diner (Grill-It-Great, Townsend St.), the record shop owned by the immortal hippie (Primo Kush Records & Tapes, Maple Ave.), the bar that never checks your I.D. (The Fireplug, Mirkwood Ave.), and the coffee shop just off campus that's always been there (The Learned Lion, Prospect Drive).

The Learned Lion (or just ‘The Lion’ to those in the know) had been in business since 1875. It was opened by Dr. Augustus Dearborn, Professor of Advanced Mathematics, and passed down through his family (all of whom have also taught at the university) ever since. The tale told on campus was the eccentric Dr. Dearborn became frustrated with his graduate assistants’ inability to brew a cup of coffee fast enough. His solution was to open a coffee house directly across from the Mathematics Building and then include a foot race in the interview process for all future graduate assistants to ensure they could bring his coffee before it grew cold. More than a century later, incoming graduate students still competed in sprints in front of the building bearing his name.

In front of the Lion’s ancient yet well-maintained brick façade stood the obligatory A-frame sign with the day’s message scrawled in chalk across it. Today it read...

Séance In The Catacombs With Prof. Palladius
TONIGHT & Saturday, 8:30, in the TUNNELS! \$8

The current owner of the Lion was Dr. Heather Dearborn. She taught History, making her the first of her family to teach a subject other than mathematics, but aside from that, she fit the specifications of a Dearborn as exactly as Augustus himself.

Heather was determined to keep the Lion above water no matter what it took. The last few years had taken a severe financial toll on the business, and she had been forced to get creative. During lockdown, she had delivered the full menu all over the county, which kept the Lion afloat, just barely. Now, she needed to keep people coming back into the store, so the Lion now served sandwiches, cheesecakes, and pastries all day, and had all kinds of live entertainment, including Phillip Carver’s séances.

Her mother, a physicist and staunch humanist, had found out about the séances last week. What followed was an hour-long lecture on the evils of Spiritualism, beginning with ‘the charlatan Fox sisters of upstate New York’ and ending with ‘that dreadful man who talks to the families of disaster victims.’ Heather had tried to explain that Phillip didn’t do that sort of thing, but, when her mother got in these moods, the best thing was to let her wind down on her own; she would reach equilibrium when her calls stopped going to voice mail. In the meantime, Phillip drew in lots of business, and his audiences stayed in the shop for hours after the show, drinking lots of expensive coffee.

In the back of the Lion, behind the kitchen, Phillip Carver completed his ritual. “...a rat-a-tat-tat-a-tat-tat a tattoo. And a dragon will come when he hears the drum. At a minute

or two to two today. At a minute or two to two. Yes, a dragon will come when he hears the drum at a minute or two to two.”

He checked his pockets. He checked his secret pockets. He checked his makeup.

He was ready.

He threw the leather satchel containing his props over his shoulder as he brushed aside the beaded curtain separating him from the kitchen and nearly collided with Heather on her way to her office.

Heather’s eyes goggled as Phillip hovered around the corner in his costume. He wore a black velvet wide-lapelled suit jacket, matching waistcoat and black brocade trousers. His black patent-leather shoes were immaculately polished and above his deep orange ascot Phillip wore dramatic black eyeliner and his goatee and moustache had been virtually drawn on to match. Above it all was a silken turban with a flashing amethyst. Heather blinked, forcing herself to remember this was her friend since childhood. It was always surprising to see someone so mild mannered dressed as a steampunk butler with a turban. “Oh, hey, Phillip,” she stammered.

“I’m heading down to set up now,” he said.

“Good, we’ll start sending them in around quarter after. Holler if you need anything. Break a leg.”

Phillip mumbled his thanks as he slipped past the velvet rope Heather had strung across an ancient stone staircase. A faint breeze disturbed the ruffles on the front of Phillip’s shirt. With a sigh, Phillip flicked on the hidden light switch behind the door’s frame, which lit up the ‘spooky lights’ under the steps. He descended the steps reciting his introduction under his breath. “Ladies and gentlemen, I do not read minds, I do not conjure spirits. I commune, I observe. I receive what messages I may and deliver them as clearly as my meagre skills allow...”

A short walk across the basement brought him to an old wrought-iron gate, which he unlocked with the key in his pocket. “Of course, any reasonable person would be sceptical of someone who claims to commune with another plane of existence. We must all be sceptical. I ask not that you shed your scepticism, only your cynicism, my friends...” Now, he technically left the coffee shop and entered the system of tunnels beneath the town, where his performance would take place. “Let me guide you, safely and securely, as we take a brief sojourn beyond the mundane and see if we might find solace, illumination, and hope for the future tonight...” Above him, a car passed by on the street, but the tunnels were deep enough and their shape and construction such that the echoes were given a soft sound, like a tired ghost yawning. It was a perfect background noise for a professional medium pretending to talk to spirits. Only a few

people ever seemed to connect the sound to actual traffic. When people wanted to believe, everything became evidence.

He had been doing the character of 'Professor Palladius' as a party trick since junior high, but had never really considered going completely professional until the internet came along. It started out with a video channel and grew from there.

A while ago, Heather had called and said she needed a performer to help bring business back to The Lion. Phillip and Heather went way back. Once in grad school, he would have been homeless if Heather hadn't taken him in. Phillip owed Heather so many favours that there was never any chance she wouldn't get what she needed. So Phillip had set up shop down here, in this circular junction of tunnels. Hank Jenkins, who ran the craft brewery out on Denham Avenue, built and installed the table and chairs at cost plus free coffee for six months, and people came from all over for Phillip to do hundred-year-old mind reading tricks with too much eyeliner in his granny's old turban.

"What is *that*?" Maggie shouted over the over the tortured sounds of the TARDIS. The column in the centre of the console refused to move from the bottom point of its usual up-and-down cycle. A sonorous bass note shuddered turned the entire TARDIS into a tuning fork. "I swear I can hear it in my teeth."

The Doctor was struggling to stay upright in front of the console. "I'll have this under control in a minute," he said in a surprisingly confident voice. "However, in the meantime, grab hold of something secure. I'm afraid something has gone terribly wrong." He flipped switches on the console.

"Terribly wrong with the TARDIS?"

"With reality. I think someone's been messing about with causality in this time zone. We need to materialize and check things out."

Without warning, the column slid up to its topmost position, where it again locked up. The TARDIS lurched again, and Maggie grabbed the only secure piece of furniture in the control room: the coatrack.

"Fine by me. Anything to stop that damned noise."

Mrs. Geddi's swirling soft-serve hairdo quivered with delight as Phillip's eyes narrowed in 'concentration' on her face.

"I am receiving an 'A'," he said with deadly seriousness.

"Yes, that's correct," Mrs. Geddi cooed as the rest of St. Luke's Women's Guild tittered.

“Now, please continue to focus on the name, and also a powerful image associated with it.”

A hush fell over the darkened room. Phillip tilted his head back, allowing the lights to strike his makeup in the most dramatic manner.

“I believe I see an ‘R’?”

Mrs. Geddi’s face drooped. “I’m sorry, no.” The St. Luke’s Women’s Guild were audibly disappointed.

Phillip rolled his eyes toward the ceiling for effect. “You must not apologize for my failures, Mrs. Geddi.” He placed his left fingers on his temple in the classic ‘psychic’ pose and screwed his eyes shut. After a brief pause as he ‘gathered his powers,’ his eyes flew open in revelation.

“Yes!” he declared. “I see it so clearly now. Mrs. Geddi, you are going to a warm place, a country of romance and mystique. Could I trouble you, Mrs. Geddi, to send me a postcard from—” Phillip pulled an index card from his jacket pocket, which he flipped over to reveal the word ‘SPAIN’ at the dramatic moment “—Spain?”

Mrs. Geddi practically swooned.

Maggie followed the Doctor out of the TARDIS and found him adjusting his toque, still carrying the small, square-ish contraption he had produced from beneath the TARDIS console room floor under his arm.

“Even if that thing can detect someone fiddling with time,” Maggie said, “what makes you think you can stop them?”

The Doctor flipped a switch on the device as he flashed Maggie his most charming smile. “I have stopped wars using only sweet reason, you know.”

Maggie fanned herself as she blew a strand a hair out of her face. “You know this is America, right?”

As if echoing Maggie’s suspicion of the country, the machine made an angry squawk and the Doctor adjusted a dial. “This is a college town, Maggie. They’re different.” His face brightened as one of the lights on the machine turned green. “This way.” He strode down the alley.

Phillip placed the fishbowl full of folded papers in the centre of the table. “I have not seen the names on these slips of paper, but we will see whether I may make contact with any of them. I must also warn you I may encounter someone else entirely if they have a message for one of you. We must simply remain open for whatever comes. Now let us join hands and attempt to touch the Beyond.”

The ladies of St. Luke's Women's Guild, while making up only about half the audience, remained the most vocal and the most willing to play along. The tunnels beneath the town were not exactly forgotten, but they were not used for much. They were built during World War II when Piedmont State's scientific departments were greatly expanded. For some reason, whatever 'Alphabet Soup' agency responsible for the construction was really into providing 'steam heat and winter pedestrian safety' for the town. Only they'd never installed the pipes or allowed civilians into the tunnels until 1958.

They were very well maintained thanks to government grants, which was why Mount Pleasant had such fantastic roads. Nobody really knew why all the federal government considered the streets above the disused steam tunnels of a small college town so important as to pay for their upkeep for almost a century, but it made these old tunnels a perfect place to do something like this: old and creepy, yet safe and clean.

The Doctor sat next to Maggie on the bench. Behind them, a rough stone wall hemmed in a cemetery. Half of its tombstones were so old they couldn't be read and half so new they had pictures of race cars and beer cans etched into them. Next to that was the coffee shop the TARDIS had materialized behind. Across the street was a huge green lawn that separated the town from what looked like a university campus.

Maggie wiped the sweat out of her eyes as she looked at the device in the Doctor's hands. The lights all twinkled happily. The small screen showed a small wireframe representation of a local map, superimposed with wavy lines. She had no idea what any of it meant, but none of it seemed like an error message. "Are you sure you're using this thing correctly?"

The Doctor sighed and shrugged. "I'm no expert on Progressive Nonlinear Chronometers. I'm not using it *incorrectly*. I think these readings must be genuine." "So what's the problem?"

"These readings shouldn't be possible."

"Why is that?"

"Look around, Maggie. Does it look like the early 1870s, the late 1930s or the mid 1960s to you? Because according to this, this street has had all of those times happening to it recently. Sometimes simultaneously." The Doctor stood up. "And it looks like something is building up right now."

"I can feel the etheric plane drawing closer," Phillip intoned. "Do not be afraid, my friends, if you feel them too, not just as vague sensations, but as hands on your shoulders,

bodies brushing past. This experience is called a 'sensed presence' and is perfectly normal. Now, let us begin." Phillip closed his eyes and concentrated.

A hush fell over the audience. Especially with groups like the Women's Guild, Phillip found it best to let his solemnity set the tone. The low rumble of a car several streets over resonated through the tunnel walls, giving everyone a shiver with perfect timing.

"I am feeling something distinctly now," he said as he tried to recall everything he had memorized from earlier. The low rumble continued, almost like a train instead of a car, now with a higher pitched noise mixed in. It reminded Phillip of his grandmother's dryer when he was eight years old, right before it blew out: an oscillating, keening whir. Then the noises suddenly faded into the background.

"Oh, my dear Lord in heaven and all the saints," said Mrs. Geddi. "How did you do this, Professor Palladius?"

Phillip opened his eyes. The tunnels were awash with a soft blue glow that came from the dozen or so spectral forms floating a foot above the floor and smiling at Phillip and his audience.

After three decades of practicing stage magic, any time Phillip saw something that looked impossible. His mind instinctively searched an internal file of magical principles and methods to explain the effect he was seeing. As a middle aged lady's ghost looked at him quizzically, a bemused smile on her face as she regarded his make-up, Phillip realized there was no natural way to produce the effect he was seeing. His skin crackled with adrenaline and suppressed fear, while the St. Luke's Women's Guild giggled like schoolgirls confronted with an unexpected ice cream cone.

"Doctor, I'm not doubting there is a problem in this town, but no one is altering the time stream in a coffee shop," Maggie said as she stared through the windows of the Learned Lion.

"I suspect the disturbance is not inside, but below," the Doctor said, tucking away the chronometer. "I should have trusted the old girl when she dropped us here."

"I can't believe you're serious."

The Doctor held the door open for her. "What's the worst that could happen?" He gave her a knowing look. "It is air-conditioned."

Maggie smiled and gave up. "Let me order my coffee and cool off a little before you find the time warp, all right?"

Phillip goggled at the apparitions. They were real. At least, they looked real. Actual ghosts. He was not prepared for real, actual ghosts. His audience seemed to be coping just fine, however. They had leapt to their feet and were playfully sticking their arms through the phantoms, waving at them. One man was even engaged in an impromptu game of ectoplasmic 'Patty Cake.'

The only person other than Phillip not currently partaking in the festivities was Mrs. Geddi, who was circulating through the crowd handing out small collapsible umbrellas. A few Women's Guild members refused, producing ones from their own handbags before returning to their frolics with the ghosts.

Meanwhile, Phillip did the only thing he could think to do in such a situation – throw his arms out dramatically with splayed fingers, as if he were making this happen. He felt like a fool, but he supposed it would have to do until he could come up with something better.

The irony was that this was far and away the most successful performance of his career. He always left a tip jar near next to the exit. Usually it would have ten or twelve dollars. Now it overflowed with cash. An old lady he didn't recognize shuffled past and shoved another fiver into it.

The St. Luke's Women's Guild were live on every form of social media, and if they had followers that did not include each other, there could have been serious media consequences for Phillip, the Learned Lion and the entire town of Mount Pleasant. So far, the news was fairly well contained. Mrs. Geddi, having exhausted her supply of spare umbrellas, was wandering through the chamber taking pictures of every ghostly face she could find. The ghosts didn't seem to mind, and mostly seemed puzzled.

Phillip's arms were burning from the faux-magical gestures, so he let them flop to his sides.

"Are you all right, Professor?" Phillip spun around and found the incredibly round, incredibly old Mrs. Saalvechter behind him. Mrs. Saalvechter was the President of the Women's Guild and attended almost all of his séances. "Has communing with the spiritual plane taken it out of you?" She dug around in her handbag. "Would you like a peppermint?"

"No, thank you," he said, realizing he needed to pull himself together.

The ghosts milled around (and through) the audience, and he tried to take in as many details as he could. Being a professional mind reader had more to do with seeing and remembering details other people forget than skills like acting or sleight of hand.

He counted eleven ghosts, six apparently female, five male, all in what looked like Victorian dress. Three of the men and one of the women looked older than forty; all the rest looked younger than thirty. No children. University staff? Finally he noticed they were much closer to the ceiling.

The noise had changed as well, becoming louder and higher pitched. The ghosts didn't seem to hear it. "Oh, where are they going?" Mrs. Geddi complained.

The Doctor sipped his iced coffee and surveyed the room. There were all the expected appointments: large windows, hardwood floors, high tin-tiled ceilings, dubious local art on the walls. "Enjoying your coffee?" he asked Maggie without a hint of impatience.

Maggie grinned. "Yes, thank you, it is quite good. I'm enjoying the air conditioning even more, though." She waved an arm at the Doctor's outfit. He had removed the toque but still had his shawl-collared fishing sweater and baggy green greatcoat on. "Honestly, how can you wear that? Don't Time Lords sweat? Even in here I feel like a poached egg, and you don't seem to feel it at all."

The Doctor shrugged. "I've gotten good at being comfortable with whatever weather I find myself in, I suppose. You have to when you don't have a home."

Resigned to the fact that her coffee break would soon be over, Maggie leaned forward to talk strategy. "So what's your plan? Do we ask the manager if there's a time machine in the basement or something?"

The Doctor held up his hand to draw the manager's attention. "I wasn't going to be that blunt, but I was hoping my accent would buy me some conversational leeway."

She considered this for a moment. "It probably will."

Second rounds were ordered and when the manager returned, the Doctor had turned his charm to full strength. "Thank you. Whoever thought of icing has coffee saved many lives."

The manager smiled. "I guessed from your accent you might not be used to the weather." As the Doctor made introductions, Maggie used all of her willpower to keep from rolling her eyes. An alien he might be, but there were times when he really had a keen eye for human nature.

"When we came in here, we were desperate enough to try to escape to your underground séance. We were ready to risk getting our socks scared off if we could get cool in the bargain. Fortunately, we arrived too late."

As the ghosts floated toward the ceiling, Phillip had given up pretending that he had any idea what was going on and began taking video of the ghosts himself. A short, pear-shaped bespectacled apparition came up to Phillip and squinted into his phone's camera.

Phillip couldn't help but feel awkward. He gave the spectral man a little wave. "Hello?"

"Might as well not bother, darlin'. Them full-floaters never talk back." Mrs. Saalvechter was the kind of audience member he dreaded the most: the devout believer

with lots of helpful criticism. “Unless they’re moaners. None of these are moaners, which is nice, but did you have to call up so many? No need to show off, honey.”

“I didn’t do this, Mrs. Saalvechter,” Phillip admitted. “I don’t know how this happened.”

The humming in the walls of the tunnel grew steadily louder and higher pitched, sounding like a hailstorm as the ghosts rose through the ceiling.

“Here it comes, ladies!” Mrs. Saalvechter shouted, and the members of the St. Luke’s Women’s Guild all snapped open their umbrellas. Mrs. Saalvechter gave Phillip a puzzled look as the din grew. “Didn’t you bring your umbrella?” The Guild gathered the wandering members of the audience beneath their umbrellas, sometimes forcefully.

“Why would I need an umbrella? What’s going on?”

“The clinkers, dear!”

It took a few minutes for Maggie and the Doctor – mostly the Doctor – to get the owner of the coffee shop to open up a bit about the séances below the store, but Maggie was still not seeing how any of this would add up to some kind of interference with time.

“Phillip’s been doing this stuff since he was a kid,” Heather said to the Doctor, “and it’s really just a magic show dressed up a certain way.”

“Nothing odd ever goes on at these performances?” the Doctor asked. Seeing that Heather found that question a bit silly, he rephrased: “Nothing odd that isn’t already part of the show, that is.”

“Phillip says somebody always shows up wanting to talk to a dead uncle, cousin, or dog, so he has a thing where he says he’s going to try to contact someone and the trick goes a different direction instead. Everyone leaves happy, but he doesn’t, you know – “Give anyone false hope?” Maggie interjected.

“Exactly,” Heather said. “I need the money for the shop, but I don’t want to take advantage of someone’s grief. It’s supposed to be a little spooky, but, you know, wholesome.”

There was a ripple of noise in the shop. Chairs pushed back and conversations cut off as space cleared in the centre of the floor. The lights flickered and a blue haze suffused the room.

Then, figures rose up through the floor.

Maggie thought they had a distinctly 19th Century look to them, and they definitely seemed to be, for lack of a better word, ghosts. The machine in the Doctor’s pocket began to *PING* insistently. He discreetly reached into his jacket pocket and retrieved his scanner, moving a dial to cut the noise off.

Heather took hold of the situation with practiced calm. “Okay everyone, let’s very calmly move toward the back door. Nobody’s in any danger, so just move slowly.” She

turned to the Doctor and Maggie and under her breath muttered, "Is this what you meant by something odd?" She looked down at the screen in the Doctor's hands. "Be straight with me right now. Do you know what's going on?"

The Doctor stared fascinated at the screen as he answered her. "I promise you we do not, but we are trying to find out. Nothing like this had crossed my mind."

He ran an arm through a tall, bearded spectre wearing a top hat. The ghost skipped back a couple of steps and gave the Doctor a scandalized look.

"Should the Doctor and I go check on your friend downstairs?" Maggie asked Heather as she gave the Doctor's shoulder a gentle shove.

Heather nodded as she continued to herd her customers toward the rear entrance of the shop.

"Please. There are also some customers down there if you could grab them as well."

"Why are we hiding under your umbrella?" Phillip asked.

Mrs. Saalvechter leaned in to Phillip's ear. "The clinkers won't hurt you, dear, but they will play hell with your clothes and your hair. Poor Ethel over there –" she nodded toward Mrs. Geddi, who gave a small wave, "would need a whole new wash and set, and that's almost forty dollars."

Once again this evening, Phillips was feeling like a guest at his own event. "I don't understand any of this, Mrs. Saalvechter."

"Cleta."

"I'm sorry?" he shouted over the increasing maelstrom of sound. "Oh, never mind!"

A gentle breeze wafted through the tunnels, coming from the east, in the direction of the university. The sound of hail became even more pronounced, and now Phillip could hear that it had a metallic edge to it, a distinct *clink*. Down the tunnels, in the direction of the breeze, there was a dim lavender glow.

Something skittered across the tiled floor of the tunnel, finally coming to rest against Phillip's wingtip shoe. He picked up the object. It was a small droplet of solid metal, as if molten iron had solidified in the act of falling to the ground. Another landed at Phillip's feet, then another. He looked to Mrs. Saalvechter. Inaudible over the noise, she placidly shrugged and mouthed 'clinkers.'

Tiny droplets of iron rained down in sheets through the tunnel. Two people appeared at the door to tunnels, and the ladies waved them off as the storm finally broke. A web of lavender fire ran across the ceiling. Electric bolts arced from floor to ceiling and back. A powerful gust of wind rushed through the room and Phillip saw a small, person-

sized object, like a coffin, fly through the tunnel at a blinding rate of speed. Then it was over.

Mrs. Saalvechter folded up her umbrella, barely worse for wear. "Good job, hon. Next time, though, not so much." She gave him a proud pat on the shoulder and trundled off, pulling the St. Luke's Women's Guild in her wake, gleefully crunching on the bits of iron on the floor.

The Doctor insisted on escorting the old ladies to the steps before going further into the tunnels, doing his best 'dashing young man' act and telling them to make sure not to trip on the first step. By the time the last one made their way up, they all seemed to be best friends.

Maggie had been more interested in the metal rain shower and miniature lightning storm. The psychic guy brushed the metal bits off a chair and collapsed. She almost thought the poor guy was asleep. "Are you all right?"

The man raised his head, and for the first time she noticed he was wearing a costume and makeup. He looked somewhere between one of those late night horror movie hosts and the way Vincent Price used to dress for talk shows on Halloween. He had on thick black eyeliner and enough eyeshadow to get a teenager in trouble with her mother. The look was so complete and carried off with such confidence that only in rare, flustered moments like this would anyone notice the greying temples under the black hair dye, the receding hairline or crow's feet. He performed his vanity in such a way you believed it was justified. All of this combined to slightly camp effect, coming off as friendly instead of threatening; like a vampire that had completed a twelve-step program.

He gave a wan smile as he collected himself. "I think I'll be fine." He rose, smoothed his evening dress and chuckled in a pleasant baritone. "In fact, my career may receive a significant, if unwelcome, boost."

The Doctor made his way through the small bits of metal. "Hello, Heather sent us to get you. I'm afraid we were a bit late. I'm called the Doctor, by the way, and this is Maggie."

"And I'm called Professor Palladius," the man said, his eyebrow made even more arch by the makeup, "but you can call me Phillip." His voice remained deep and theatrical, but something about his voice changed. Phillip was somehow less grand than his stage character, though Maggie couldn't put her finger on how this was so. "Did the ghosts cause a riot or something upstairs?"

"Thankfully not, but Heather did have her hands full, so we volunteered to check on you," the Doctor said.

Phillip gave the Doctor a searching look. "And what is your interest in all this, Doctor?"

“What makes you think we have one?”

Phillip grinned broadly. “I don’t suspect you necessarily, but you’re – forgive me for saying – definitely from out of town and you just happen to be here when this extraordinary event happens. Not only that, but you are able to keep your heads well enough to get yourselves sent into the centre of the action. And to top it all off, Maggie, your accent is, I believe from Western Canada, I’m guessing somewhere near Calgary? But *your* accent, Doctor, is supposed to be the King’s English ... or at least I think it is. I can’t quite place it. I think you picked it up elsewhere.”

Maggie managed to keep her jaw from hanging open, but she couldn’t hold back a “Wow.”

Phillip gave Maggie a pleased wink. “Years of practice. So I see I’m right. Yes, Doctor, I’m suspicious. But, as I said, I don’t think you’re here with ill intent.”

The Doctor crossed his arms. “And why not?”

Phillip waved dismissively as he waded through the iron droplets collecting his props. “Oh, please. If you had done this, why would you be asking me about it? I’ll make you a deal. If you can help make all this go away, I promise to lose all curiosity about your accent. Sound fair?”

“If this is going to give your career a boost, why do you want to make it go away?” Maggie asked.

“Are you kidding me? I have spent months managing the expectations of these people. They’re just starting to get the idea that their dead Aunt Dottie isn’t going to send them a message, and then what happens? Ghosts. Real, actual, proper, spectral, Patrick-Swayze-with-a-pottery-wheel ghosts. It’s a disaster.”

“Why is that?”

“Isn’t it obvious, Maggie?” The Doctor chuckled. “Because the good professor is as much in the dark as we are. He can’t talk to ghosts.”

“Of course not,” Phillip said. “Nobody can talk to ghosts. It’s a magic trick, but dressed up as the real thing. But that’s not what I do. I do mind reading tricks, mentalism, psychological magic. Entertainment. I don’t pull the name of your dead grandmother out of your head; I do your next year’s travel destination. Same trick, basically, but different stakes; plus I don’t feel like I need a shower afterward. Besides, ghosts aren’t real.” He shook his head. “At least, they weren’t until tonight.”

The Doctor bent down and scooped up a handful of the iron dusting the floor. “I’m not convinced they are ghosts, per se,” he said, studying the metal crumbs as they flowed between his hands. “Not exactly, anyway.”

Phillip opened his mouth, but was cut off as another light bloomed to life down the tunnels. This light was orange and accompanied by a noise with a decidedly more ‘Shop-Vac’ frequency, even though it still sounded like it was the size of a locomotive. Just as quickly it cut off, and as Phillip opened his mouth to speak the Doctor raised an admonishing finger to his lips.

The Doctor did an awkward dance through the metallic sand as he made his way to the tunnel mouth that had the orange light streaming from it. Maggie thought she could hear distant, muffled voices. It sounded somehow distorted, as if two fast food 'Drive-Thru' speakers were having a conversation.

The Doctor pressed his back against the wall next to the tunnel opening and sidled to the edge of the light, finally leaning out and peeking down the illuminated corridor. The lights blinked for a fraction of a second as the giant vacuum sound spun up again and the Doctor rejoined the group, motioning them to follow as he hustled toward the doorway leading into the coffee shop's basement.

As the jet engine roar came closer, the Doctor pulled Maggie and Phillip through the doorway into the coffee shop basement and flattened them against the wall out of sight of anyone in the tunnels. The Doctor pulled the gate shut, but as he took his place beside Maggie, the door slowly swung open again.

The engine cut out, and Maggie felt the silence that rushed in to fill the void as a physical sensation, like powerful wave against the shore. The Doctor's hand was on the gate, slowly pulling it back into place. Phillip did a frantic pantomime, emptying his pockets one by one, obviously trying to find a key.

Maggie could clearly hear business-like conversation. Whatever was making all this noise was close enough that there was a faint orange glow spilling through the doorway.

Phillip was frantic, making him clumsy. To keep his hands free he handed Maggie three decks of cards, a small clipboard, and a paperback copy of *The Time Machine*.

One of the voices down the tunnel laughed so loud the speaker began to crackle with the strain. The Doctor's eyes grew tight around the corners. His left hand held the gate closed as his right hand shot out, fingers splayed in an expectant gesture.

Phillip saw this, and shrugged as if to say 'What more can I do?' Both of his hands dived into his trouser pockets, and his eyes almost leaped out of his skull. He dragged his right hand out triumphantly, turning the pocket inside out in the process.

Maggie watched in slow motion as Phillip lost his grip on the key. It seemed to float into the air as he tried to grab it with his left hand. It bounced instead off his thumb, and tumbled toward the floor, where Maggie imagined the sound would ring like a bell, bringing the voices down the hall to investigate. There was no way to know if those voices were friend or foe, but Maggie was inclined to keep her options open, and getting caught skulking was never a good way to make an entrance.

Phillip made another grab for the key with his right hand as it passed roughly waist high and missed. Maggie's hands were full, and the Doctor was stuck holding the gate shut. There was no preventing the key from hitting the ground and making a sound. Maggie was surprised that she actually had a sinking feeling as she watched the key drop. She had always thought that was just an expression.

As the key fell, the jet engine noise suddenly revved up again, drowning the sound of the key out completely as it bounced to the Doctor's feet. He snatched it up, locked the gate as quickly as possible, but kept an eye on the tunnels. The orange light was getting stronger, and now it looked like an alien abduction scene from *The X-Files*.

As the Doctor moved between Maggie and Phillip, he hissed, "They're coming into the room now. We'll have to stay here until they leave. Whatever you do, don't move or make a sound."

Maggie nodded. Since Phillip seemed to have forgotten his stuff, Maggie proceeded to jam it all into her own pockets.

The Doctor flattened himself against the wall and with exaggerated care placed the gate key in Phillip's hand, who gave him a sardonic look for his trouble.

The lights coming through the doorway were so intense Maggie could see it through her eyelids. The jet engine roar was as all encompassing as the light, but this close, Maggie could make out new subtleties. It really did sound like a huge vacuum cleaner pulling up all the metal bits on the floor. *They're getting rid of the evidence.*

A flicker of movement caught Maggie's eye as she saw Heather bounding down the stairs two at a time. The café owner was completely focused on whatever she was seeing through the gate and didn't notice Maggie waving to stop her.

As soon as Heather's feet hit the floor of the basement, Maggie grabbed her by the shoulders and shoved her against the wall. Maggie said into her ear in the most commanding voice she could muster, "I know you don't know me, but trust me on this, you need to be quiet and not move for the next few minutes. Okay?"

Heather seemed to be in shock, but nodded as the vacuum noise cut out again.

There was a sound like two car doors opening and closing followed by heavy boots. The voices were finally close enough to discern.

"So she says to me, 'Mike, I don't need you telling me what's important. I know when something's wrong with me.'"

The other voice chuckled. "She didn't actually try that."

"Hand to God, dude. I said, 'Ma, I know my PhD is in physics and not medicine, but I think it's safe to say that if you can't feel your right leg, you should see a doctor.'"

There was a *swish* sound. They were sweeping the floor.

"Well, I am an M.D. and I am happy to tell you, that you are correct: a numb leg should be diagnosed by a professional."

"Thank you very much. Anyway, guess what she said."

"I don't know, your mom's crazy, Mike. I can see where you get it. Hey, where'd all this lawn furniture come from?"

Maggie looked over and saw Heather's face freeze over with restrained fury.

"Dude, this isn't lawn furniture, this is custom stuff. We're right under the Lion. They do séances and stuff down here now on Fridays and Saturdays. Maybe Sundays."

“Oh, crap.” ‘Dude’ approached the gate and Maggie flattened herself against the wall. “Do you think they were down here...you know?”

Mike snorted dismissively. “No way.”

Dude clicked on a flashlight and sent a beam through the basement. Maggie silently willed him not to get any more curious. “What makes you so sure?”

“Well, first of all, we monitor the police band every time this happens, and there was a call involving apparitions in the Lion, but not down here. If people had been down here, it would have been the very first call. Besides, my Aunt Dottie comes to these things with her church-ladies group. If she had been here my phone would be white hot by now.”

“Your aunt anything like your mom?”

“Identical twins, dude.”

Dude’s flashlight clicked off. “That’s good enough for me.” He resumed his sweeping and Maggie resumed breathing.

In reality, it only took them a few more minutes to finish sweeping up the bits of metal that the larger machine had not been able to pick up, but it felt like several eternities. Finally, their sweeping done, they turned to review their handiwork.

“You sure nobody saw any of this?” Dude asked.

“Well, reasonably sure,” Mike said, “but just in case I’m wrong, we roll down the tunnels and remove all the debris. And even if they did see, it’s not like any of it makes much sense anyway.”

Dude sighed and opened one of the doors on the machine. “That is true.”

Mike opened his door. “I mean, I’ve got a Doctorate in Physics and most of this stuff gives me a headache just thinking about it.” The doors slammed shut.

Unable to help themselves, the Doctor and Maggie peeked around the corner and saw a large, squat vehicle surrounded by a skirt of brushes on its base and ring of lights pointed at the ground on its roof. Its rear two-thirds comprised a large metal tank, and its front was a large Plexiglas bubble with two empty bucket seats and a bank of controls. At the rear two figures, whose bulky orange and white garments, topped with cylindrical helmets, looked to Maggie like space suits. They were wrestling a coiling tube with a wide nozzle back into its compartment below the tank.. The bright lights made it impossible to make out faces. The compartment snapped shut, and the Doctor and Maggie retreated to their hiding place.

The vacuum roared to life again and began its trip into the distance.

When the lights faded enough for comfort, the Doctor stepped away from the wall, pressed a finger to his lips and then beckoned for everyone to follow him upstairs.

Strengthening coffees were on the house. It seemed to Maggie that Heather needed the moment of everyday routine to help process what had just happened.

"I take it you've never had phenomena of this sort occur before," the Doctor said as Heather handed him a triple espresso.

"I'm sure I would remember ghosts coming up through the floor," Heather said with a nervous laugh.

"What about ghost sightings elsewhere?" Maggie asked.

"Well, this is a college town, there are ghost stories everywhere," Phillip said as he returned from removing his makeup. Strangely, Maggie noticed he only looked different, not less theatrical. "It's one of the reasons someone like me can make any money in a town this size, even as a side hustle. There are certain places that will always be considered haunted: campuses, theatres, opera houses, abandoned turn-of-the-century mansions with widow's walks on their roofs. And of course, since campuses hold so many of the other types of perpetually haunted buildings, they are a sort of 'compound haunted' place. If you believe in ghosts, which I don't."

Maggie was startled. "You still don't? After tonight?"

Phillip locked his gaze on her. He arched his eyebrow at the campiest angle possible. With a dramatic gesture he pulled up the left sleeve of his jacket, revealing the skin to be bare and unblemished. "Nothing up my sleeve," he said.

He reached his right hand into his jacket and produced from some inner pocket an 18-inch needle. He gently rang it against his coffee cup. "Completely solid," he said. With unnatural speed, Phillip drove the needle through the flesh of his bare arm halfway between his wrist and elbow. Maggie screamed, but Phillip remained blasé. A small trickle of blood ran down the needle and dripped onto the floor.

Heather shook her head ruefully and went back to preparing Maggie's iced coffee and over Phillip's pierced arm, Maggie saw the Doctor, eyes wide, with a grin like a delighted schoolboy.

Phillip moved the needle back and forth in the wound, causing more blood to flow out onto the floor. "Heather, I think I'll need a towel," he said in his blandest voice. Heather, who seemed more annoyed than anything, grabbed a fresh towel from a pile next to her prep table and lobbed it at Phillip's head, who deftly snatched it.

Still holding the towel, he drew the needle from his arm, and laid it on the table. Then he wiped off his arm and showed it to Maggie. "Look," he said, "no wound. No holes." Maggie looked, and the skin was as unbroken as before. "And no ghosts. Don't trust your eyes, Maggie. Just as easy to lie to your eyes as your ears. I know of what I speak."

"You know how to clean my floor, Boris Karloff?" Heather snapped.

"Yes, ma'am," Phillip said, and knelt down to do exactly that.

"He's right, you know," the Doctor said. "They looked like ghosts, but those two cleaning up were a medical doctor and a physicist. Two scientists knew what was going on. That suggests a scientific explanation."

"Thank you, Doctor," Phillip's voice said from beneath the table.

Heather placed Maggie's drink on the table, then sat down herself. "The lack of police presence here tells me they didn't take this seriously, but I have to assume it's going to happen again if I do nothing, right?"

"Well, that's not necessarily so, is it?" Maggie asked. "We don't know what they're doing. It might be expensive or just difficult to do."

Phillip stood up and returned to his chair. "Possibly, but my question is what are you two doing here? Are you some kind of paranormal investigators?"

Maggie shot the Doctor a look. Direct questions like this could be very awkward when you travelled with the Doctor. The Doctor smiled. "Not for a living, and we've never seen anything without a natural explanation. But in another way, yes, since we travel widely and tend to get caught up in extraordinary events. If you'd like our help, we'd be happy to provide it."

"Do we need help?" Heather asked. "What harm was really done here tonight?"

Phillip scoffed and leaned forward on the table. "Heather, tonight I saw what appeared to be ghosts, followed by an indoor shower of metal rain and purple lightning. Then I was involved in a scene from a terrifying science fiction movie where two guys in space suits were scrubbing down the room while we cowered around the corner. At the very least I want to know what happened because who knows what substances or radiation we were exposed to tonight?"

The Doctor grinned at Maggie. "It's nice I don't have to say everything, isn't it?"

Heather glared at the Doctor through angrily narrowed eyes. "Phil, the Doctor chatted me up for fifteen minutes before the ghosts showed up and never bothered to tell me there might be paranormal disturbances in my basement. They denied me vital, need-to-know information. So even though they hide things from me, you think I should trust them?"

"Yes, I do. They're like me. To steal a phrase from a legendary magician, even their lies are honest. I believe they'll help if they can."

Heather gave the Doctor and Maggie a searching look. "You don't know what a glowing endorsement that was."

"I believe I might," the Doctor said. "Anyone who would put me in the illustrious company of James Randi is flattering me indeed."

Maggie took another sip of her drink and shot a questioning look at Heather, who only gave a quick shrug. "Okie doke," Maggie said. "I guess I'm flattered too."

"Anyway," Phillip said, "since we're agreed it isn't a haunting, does anyone have any idea what it was?"

“Well, if what those two said in the tunnels can be believed, we do know a few things,” the Doctor said. “First, this is a recurring phenomenon, but it seems unpredictable somehow, either in place, time, or possibly both. Second, whoever is cleaning up after these events does not seem to have control over them. Third, they need specialized knowledge, equipment, and skilled staff, yet they are seemingly invisible to the population here. And finally, possibly most importantly, some of the people involved are citizens here.”

Heather looked stunned. “Are you saying there’s some sort of conspiracy at work?”

The Doctor shrugged. “That’s one explanation, but there are plenty of others that are less sinister. But the staff and equipment leave trails we can follow.”

“It’s getting late for me,” Phillip said.

Heather yawned. “You guys aren’t from around here, so you probably don’t know this, but they roll the sidewalks up at night in the summer. We’ll be better off picking this up again tomorrow.”

“Fine,” the Doctor said. “See you all here again bright and early.”

It felt odd to leave the TARDIS and walk around the building, pretending to have come from somewhere else – a hotel, Maggie supposed. In essence, the TARDIS was somewhere between a hotel and a camper van, though she would never mention that to the Doctor.

They met Phillip coming the other way. He looked very different in his street clothes. It turned out his hair was a mousey brown combed down across his forehead, and his khaki-coloured linen trousers and crisply-pressed salmon button-down shirt didn’t fit the melodramatic Gothic figure from the night before. The difference was so striking, Maggie couldn’t help but mention it, and Phillip laughed.

“I’m glad you think so,” he said as he held open the door of the Lion. “I’ve spent a long time refining Professor Palladius. I’m happy to hear he stands on his own.”

They found Heather giving orders to the Lion’s morning crew while filling up some containers. A few minutes later, the strategy session began in earnest.

“What’s the plan?” Maggie asked.

“The disturbance seems to have come from the campus,” the Doctor mused.

“Do either of you know someone who works at the university?” Maggie asked.

Maggie and Phillip exchanged a brief look before bursting into laughter.

“Sorry,” Phillip said, “it’s just that if you live in Mount Pleasant, you almost certainly work at the university. Heather is a professor of History during the school year, and my day job is in the Academic Affairs office.”

“Right, okay, makes sense,” Maggie said.

"I'd like to look into the origins of those tunnels," the Doctor said, "Heather, could you help with that?"

"Sure," she said. "There has to be something in the library stacks. The university never throws anything away."

"What are those tunnels for, anyway? I'm not sure I've seen anything like them. The room we were in was almost like a subway station without the tracks. It was the right size, but the tunnel was very small, but completely round. And why is everything tiled?"

"The tunnels have been there since World War II," Heather said. "Some research project—underground walkway or experimental steam tunnel. Depends who you talk to. Nobody seems to know. They run from the university out in a kind of radial pattern all over the town."

"Well, that's the past," Maggie said, "what about the present? Is there some way we can figure out who is in the tunnels cleaning up after these episodes?"

"I have a friend in the Office of Budget & Finance," Phillip said. "She can probably get us some leads on who has been using an unusual amount of resources lately, and then I can poke around a bit."

"Best not to go alone," Maggie said. "Want some company?"

"I'm not really a psychic, so I'd love to have someone watch my back," Phillip said.

"All right, then we split up and pursue our individual leads," the Doctor said, "but I hope I don't need to tell everyone to be careful. And we meet back here at sundown."

The Piedmont State University Main Library was built in the late 1960s, and the architecture was very much of its time. It looked like a massive pile of stone boxes, dotted with tiny windows and a main entrance that was a wide, rectangular series of glass doors fronted by a short limestone staircase.

The Doctor followed Heather up the stairs and through the glass doors, holding a gallon container of coffee in each hand while Heather balanced a box of pastries and a basket of cream, sugar and other sweeteners.

"Good morning, Doctor Dearborn," a cheerful young woman greeted the coffee-laden Heather and the Doctor, as they entered the University Archives in the lower level of the library. "I'm surprised anyone even remembered we're here on a Saturday."

"Hello, Emilie," she said, "my colleague and I, Doctor – uh—"

"John Smith," the Doctor said. "From the British Museum, pleased to meet you."

"We'll be poking around for a while, so we brought something for everyone in the office. Hope you're hungry."

Emilie's eyes lit up. "Gosh, thanks, we'd love some coffee, and if there are some Danish...?"

Heather gave her a knowing wink. "Cheese, apple and one of those pumpkins you like."

Emilie squeaked with delight.

As they rounded a corner, Heather muttered, "An hour from now, they'll assume we've already left. Building plans that predate the construction of the library will probably be a couple of floors down. This way."

In spite of its name, the Grill-It-Great Diner served an amazing breakfast, and Maggie honestly wished she had been in a better frame of mind to enjoy herself. As it was, her plate of waffles had disappeared in record time, partially due to their quality, but also due to the fact that the woman across from her refused to talk business until she had been fed.

Kate Turnbull's job title was 'Accounting and Financial Support Specialist,' but what that actually meant was she controlled the flow of money for Piedmont State University. If you wanted to know where money was going, she was the person who could find out. So if she said she wanted Phillip to buy her breakfast before she would consider whether or not she would do him a favour, Phillip had little choice but to pay up and be content.

On the way to the diner, Phillip had explained that there were two basic types of administrators at the university. There were job titles that sounded more academic or 'Ivy League,' like Phillip, who was an 'Associate Vice Provost' and then there were those who had job titles that sounded more corporate, such as Kate, who was an 'Accounting and Financial Support Specialist.'

The basic difference was that the second type were the ones who actually made the day-to-day activities of the university possible, while the first type made sure people actually cared about those activities.

The other difference was the class distinction at work between the administrators, such that they seemed to forget the corporate administrators even existed. Phillip was one of a few who sought friends on both sides of the divide.

Kate sipped her orange juice and eyed Phillip and Maggie critically. "Well now I know how badly you want my help," she said. "What do you need that's so urgent?"

"I can promise you, Kate, I wouldn't drag you out of bed on a Saturday morning for something that would deliberately waste your time," Phillip said.

Kate gave him a wry smile. "You should know better by now."

"We have to warn you in advance," Maggie interjected, "what you're about to hear may sound far-fetched, but I promise you we're on the level."

"Most of Phillip's stories seem far-fetched at first, but he usually has something real backing them up. All right, enough beating around the bush. What's going on?"

Phillip took a deep breath. "Last night there was a paranormal event at the Lion during my show. A real, genuine paranormal happening. People saw ghosts, including me. We think the university Physics department is involved and we need your help tracking the money trail."

Kate looked back and forth from Phillip to Maggie. "You two are serious?"

Phillip nodded.

"You know this sounds ridiculous, right?"

Maggie shrugged. "Could it hurt to check?"

"It could waste my time," Kate said.

"Kate, if I'm wasting your time, I promise you it is an accident. And if I'm right, someone is seriously misusing university property and resources."

Kate frowned. "Fine. I have to go in to work today anyway, but you owe me another meal. Maybe two."

"Here we go," Heather said as she reached a dusty wooden cabinet of long drawers. "These are plans for all kinds of architectural and civil engineering projects undertaken by the university starting in 1936. We'll start here and work our way up."

"Don't just look for tunnels," the Doctor reminded her. "Someone put that gate in your basement. Look for culverts, sewers, and anything else, especially strange things that seem to go on into the town."

It was several hours of mind-numbing work before anything turned up in their search, but only a few minutes before every blueprint and technical drawing looked the same to Heather's eyes.

Finally, the Doctor said, "Hello, what's this?"

Heather went over to the where the Doctor had two large blueprints side by side.

"Hopefully something better than nothing, which is what I've got."

"If it weren't for our situation, I wouldn't think much of it, but these two blueprints from 1937 are both listed as 'Roadway Improvements,' but they also include a new tunnel system beneath that looks very familiar."

Heather looked at the drawings, both detailed with the campus through which the roads would be rebuilt, but also a large section of road and tunnel that would continue beyond the campus, with no such detail of the surrounding area.

"Look at this, Doctor," she said, "empty space up here."

"I imagine there is a map in City Hall that corresponds to this one with a blank space where this area of the campus should be."

"I bet you're right."

The Doctor pointed to the corner of the drawing. "Here in the information box it says 'Client: WPA / ACE' on both of these blueprints. I know 'WPA' stands for Works Progress Administration, but 'ACE?'"

"Oh, God." Heather went pale. "Army Corps of Engineers. As in the Manhattan Project."

Piedmont State University was laid out in a large system of long streets angled sharply and terminating abruptly in cul-de-sacs and roundabouts. From the air it looked like a simplified circuit board. The Office of Budget & Finance was located on a roundabout on the east side of campus. It was a squat, three-story mid-century building of steel and glass that looked odd next to the limestone and brick of every other building surrounding it.

Kate waved her employee I.D. in front of the black plastic rectangle next to the door until there was a reassuring beep. "I don't know how you're expecting to find ghosts in the budget," she said.

"I'm not sure either, but I'm certain the answer is in there somewhere," Phillip said.

The thermostat was set extremely low, but the outside was so sweltering Maggie found it comfortable. Kate sat down and put her neon-pink-framed sunglasses to one side while she booted up her computer. Only now, seeing her in her natural environment, did Maggie study Kate's appearance. Kate was in her early thirties and had her hair dyed light pink. She wore a short-sleeved button-down shirt and blue jeans with what appeared to be saddle shoes.

The computer she was working on seemed to be just a thin plastic square. Maggie made a mental note to start asking the Doctor what year it was when they landed on Earth from now on.

"So," Kate said, "how much money are we talking about?"

"Quite a bit," Maggie said, "they have special machinery and use lots of power."

"Okay, that's a start, but we're going to need to get more specific. Remember, this is a university that specializes in research. The yearly budget for this place is more than a billion dollars."

"Yikes," Maggie said.

"They probably take a lot of government money and don't tell the school much about what they use it for, and they probably have a limited number of staff, because otherwise they couldn't keep this quiet," Phillip said.

"You're guessing now, right?" Kate asked.

"It's part of the job," Phillip said.

Kate typed for a few minutes, then frowned. "Just a second." She paged through several screens of text. She got to the bottom of a page and scoffed. "Well, now that's just...no."

"Found something, have you?" Phillip said.

Kate shook her head. "I'm just thinking there is no possible way something in the Physics Department called 'The Leapfrog Initiative' needs a ten-million-dollar infrastructure repair grant from the Department of the Interior to do maintenance on our particle accelerator."

"I bet the particle accelerator is underground on the east side of campus?" Maggie said.

Kate nodded.

Phillip smiled. "I think we have a winner. Thank you, Kate. Let's go, Maggie. I'll text Heather on the way."

The lower levels containing the architectural stacks were one of the quietest places in the library, which was saying something. The palpable, active, silence coiled throughout the building seemed to have its nest here. In a surprising twist, it was so brightly lit. Heather almost felt the need for sunglasses. Large L.E.D. panels blazed down on the stacks, obliterating the shadows, seeming to maintain the silence somehow.

It was a nearly forgotten level of the library. Students rarely came down here. In the early days of digitization, this level had been a kind of storage space for the first material to be uploaded. At the time the work had been time-consuming and tedious, and the librarians thought of it mostly as a way to save space in the library. So they moved what was necessary to make room for more popular materials, digitized those first, and then consigned them to the depths. In addition to blueprints and other architectural plans, the bottom two levels of the library also had the university's complete building, construction and repair records, faculty registries, and the collection of microfilm and microfiche. Consequently, nobody but maintenance had been down there in three months before the Doctor and Heather arrived.

The architectural stacks had the same endless rows as the rest of the library, but in place of the customary bookshelves were long filing cabinets full of blueprints occasionally separated by shelves of drawings, cyanotypes and technical prints rolled into tubes and neatly stacked. There were occasional open areas with large wooden tables where materials could be spread out and examined. Like the cabinets, the tables dated back to the construction of the library, so they were of Mid-Century design and featured attached extendable magnifiers and reading lamps the recently added L.E.D. ceiling had made redundant.

It took almost half an hour for the Doctor and Heather to find every blueprint listed 'Client: WPA / ACE' and photograph them, but a map of the tunnels under the university would almost certainly come in handy later. Then it was off to another corner of the stacks where Heather had spent the last half hour digging through old records of work projects from the late 1930s.

The Doctor had wandered off in search of some evidence of his own. As Heather flipped through the endless pages, occasionally she would see him flit across an aisle, sometimes holding a hefty volume or two beneath an arm as he hurried on to his next objective. Phillip trusted him, and Heather trusted Phillip, but the Doctor played things close to the chest, and it worried her.

An hour later, Heather was still at it. She shut the filing cabinet she had been paging through, her frustration almost making her slam it. The problem with their search was that during the Great Depression practically every piece of road work, sewer repair, bridge building, or any other kind of civic repair, replacement or construction was a federal project. She opened the next drawer and started over, and found another road work project file, with the same details as every other.

Despite her frustration, Heather never got discouraged. The life of a historian sometimes boils down to detective work, and she enjoyed that part of it. Uncovering the truth of history sometimes involved meticulous research. *Sometimes, she thought, you just have to check each and every possibility one by one. It has to be in here somewhere.*

She pulled out the next file and looked for anything thing unusual and found a railroad repair project. The next file was a new bridge across a nearby river. An interstate highway. *This is dumb. There has to be a better way.* She stared at the files in the drawer. They all looked the same. About the same size, about the same shape. She would never find out which of them was unique by looking at them this way. *I'm an idiot. I just need to look for the one that looks **nothing** like the other files!*

Heather flung open the drawers one after the other, barely looking at the contents before slamming them shut, before finally she opened one and crowed in triumph. She pulled out a file five times thicker than anything else in the drawers and flopped it open on top of the cabinet. In the glaring white light she flipped through the pages, knowing what she would find.

A grin bloomed on her face. "You beauty."

She shoved the file under her arm and dashed through the stacks in the direction she last saw the Doctor. She was just thinking that this was actually not a great plan for finding him when she rounded a corner and almost crashed into him, a dusty tome under his arm. He seemed unfazed by her surprise appearance. "Have you found something?"

"Yes, I finally did," she said, kneeling in the aisle to spread out the file on the floor between them. "Look at this." She spun the file around so he could follow along. "There are tons of these sorts of road repair projects in the files, but this one is enormous. In fact, it 'repairs' roads that were just built the year before. It has far more people than usual

working on it, more equipment, and some weird materials. Copper wire in huge quantities, ceramic tile with heavy amounts of lead mixed in ... the list goes on. What were you looking for?"

The Doctor grinned from ear to ear. "When I realized how qualified you were to look through these records, it occurred to me that I could probably corroborate what you would eventually dig up. And I believe I have." He held up the book in his hand. "I am guessing the file you have there is from 1937?"

"It is."

"I thought so. This faculty registry is from the same year." He opened the book to a page he had marked. "If you look here, you will see a long list of faculty for the Physics department."

"Is this unusual?"

"Not in itself," the Doctor said. "But if you check the 1936 registry, you will find only about a third of these names. And if you check the classes taught in the 1937-1938 school year, you will find most of these faculty are not listed as having taught classes."

"A dream come true for the faculty, I'm sure."

The Doctor ignored the joke. "And finally, if you look carefully at the list of names, you don't normally find a Colonel and a Lieutenant Colonel on the faculty of a university on the eve of a major global conflict."

"Doctor, what was going on here back then? What's going on now?"

"I'm not sure, Heather, but I suspect both of those questions have the same answer, and it's in the tunnels. There's an entrance below this level. Fancy a quick trip?"

None of the buildings on the cul-de-sac had an entrance to the tunnel system, so Phillip was forced to try further inside campus. It wasn't hard to find older buildings, but Phillip's I.D. opened many doors—but not all.

Door after door remained firmly locked. Phillip held his I.D. up to the sensor locking the door on an elaborate stone façade that held an advanced botany lab. The sensor buzzed irritably. "No luck," he said.

"We're going about this the wrong way," Maggie said, her exasperation finally boiling over. "We're trying every door, and that's just eating up time. What we need are older buildings near the centre of campus that wouldn't be locked on a Saturday. Where do you get food on a Saturday?"

"The student union," Phillip said.

The light from Heather's phone bounced off the glossy white tiles enough to almost make it daylight in the tunnel without her aiming the phone at all. "How do you get by without a phone?" she asked the Doctor.

"Believe it or not, I've never needed one."

"Does Maggie have one?"

The Doctor's features crinkled in genuine confusion. "I don't think so. No, you'd notice if she did. Big brick sticking out of her jacket pocket."

Heather set aside her confusion at this answer and pressed her point. "You have no social media and no email address either."

"No."

Heather shook her head. "It's like you're from another planet."

The Doctor chuckled. "Yes, it is, isn't it?"

Heather stopped walking with a horrified expression. "Oh, God, that was terrible, wasn't it? It was. I'm so sorry."

"Not at all," the Doctor said in a soothing voice. "You'll never know how accurate you were, Heather. Trust me, it's not the first time, and I have heard it meant in much nastier ways. Don't beat yourself up."

She nodded gratefully. "Still, sorry." They reached a junction in the tunnels. To either side a shorter tunnel connected with a similar tunnel to theirs moving out from the university at a slight angle. A few metres ahead, the tunnel ended. "Do you still want to check the other tunnels?"

The Henry McAllister Piedmont Student Union was originally opened in 1938, and was built out of the same local limestone as the rest of the original campus. It was a wide, three-story building with a central clock tower roughly modelled on Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Several additions were made over the years, including dining facilities and even a hotel.

The original structure still remained intact, however, and the sub-basement included the tunnel entrance Maggie had predicted. What she hadn't counted on for some reason, was that the gate would (obviously, in retrospect) be locked.

"No problem," Phillip said, cracking his knuckles.

"Do you know someone in maintenance?" Maggie asked.

"Aren't you sweet." From his wallet Phillip produced a credit card-sized metal wafer that snapped apart into several small hooks and blades of various lengths.

"Why do you carry thief's tools in your wallet?"

"Because occasionally, in the course of my normal work as a liar and a cheat, I must also get through locked doors or into locked boxes," Phillip said as he fiddled with the lock.

"How long will it take you to open it?"

"Not long, but longer than it takes on T.V."

Maggie watched as Phillip's hands deftly manipulated the lockpicks. "How often do you find yourself breaking and entering as part of being a magician?"

A wicked grin crawled across Phillip's face. "Not as often as I've made it sound," he said. Something inside the lock went *ping* and the door creaked on its hinges. "There we go. Not such a chore. He held the gate open and bowed gallantly. "Ladies first, of course."

The farther they went, the more Heather realized that the tunnels were not as much of a rabbit warren as they appeared. There was definitely a pattern: underground 'city blocks' that increased in length as they moved away from the campus.

"Is there some reason we're getting further from the source of these disturbances?" Heather asked.

"It seems like this all has to do with a particle accelerator or something like it," the Doctor said as he rounded a corner. "I'm looking for evidence that they were accelerating something bigger than just a particle."

"Such as?"

"I don't suppose you know anything about physics?"

"Well, not really, much to the shame of my parents. My parents were both physicists, so I know some basic things. I know even a particle takes an absurd amount of energy to accelerate."

"Which is definitely being used to create these phenomena."

"Fair enough, but why bother with that when we can get to the source of the problem?"

"I'd prefer a bit more certainty about the nature of the problem before confronting the people at the centre of all this, wouldn't you?"

"What do you expect to find all the way out here?"

The Doctor turned again. "We're almost to the end of the tunnel system. The cleaning crews have been quite thorough, so I imagine our best chance at finding evidence is to inspect the point of impact."

Later on, when she told the story of this evening to Phillip, it embarrassed Heather that she followed the Doctor through the tunnels for almost a full minute before the full import of what he had said hit her. "Wait, did you say 'impact?'"

"Are you sure we're going the right way?" Maggie asked.

“Broadly speaking,” Phillip replied, waving his phone’s flashlight around as he examined the tunnel walls. This tunnel seemed to only go in one direction, with none of the branching paths like those beneath the Lion. The tiles that lined the walls were more reflective as well and had a pearlescent sheen.

Maggie and Phillip walked on in silence for a few minutes more.

The tunnels seemed almost claustrophobic at first, but once Maggie’s eyes adjusted to the light from Phillip’s phone (which was a thin plastic rectangle, she noticed. Everything seemed to be made into that shape), she saw that there was far more room to move than first appeared. The tunnels were perfectly round, about five metres in diameter, and fully tiled. The square tiles, each about the size of her thumb, were laid with such skill that if she ran her hand along the side, it felt absolutely smooth.

Yet her sneakers still had a firm grip on the floor. It wasn’t slippery at all. This was a rare corridor, Maggie thought: perfectly safe to run, but instant death if she tried to go through on roller skates.

“So how do you read minds?” Maggie asked when she couldn’t take the quiet any longer.

Phillip gave a low, Mephistophelean chuckle. “You don’t actually expect an answer to that?”

“I suppose not. I was just making conversation.”

“Well, this tunnel is creepy and I guess I need some conversation too, so I’ll tell you a tiny bit. The truth is, you don’t read minds, that’s ridiculous.”

Maggie gave him her most sarcastic look of shock. “You don’t say.”

“What you actually do is usually more like ‘mind writing’ instead of mind reading. You don’t take an idea out of someone’s head as much as put an idea into it. Does that make sense?”

“Not really.”

“Well, look at it this way. I can’t possibly know what you’re thinking if I let you think whatever you want. So if I actually do know what you’re thinking, it’s pretty safe to assume I’ve made sure you were thinking something I have chosen for you to think about. See what I mean?”

“That’s a little scary.”

“Either that or I do what we call in the business a ‘steal’ – which is when I get the information from you by one means or another without you knowing.”

“Again, that sounds pretty sinister, and I have seen some pretty sinister stuff.”

“Which is why I make sure that everything is all in good sport. No dead relatives, no bank account numbers, no warnings of impending doom. It’s all just for fun.”

“Could you make somebody think something less fun if you wanted to?”

“I suppose it’s possible – within some very narrow limits. But I never would. I’m an entertainer and that’s it. I’m strictly ‘Your dog’s name is Titus’ and ‘Is this your card?’ That’s plenty for me.”

The tunnel suddenly widened into an enormous underground chamber. It was another hub area, like where Phillip put on his shows beneath the Lion, only this was the size of a large-scale rock concert venue. Across the space was another tunnel opening, and a pair of exits at right angles to the centre of the chamber. Fluorescent lights were placed at intervals around the room, giving just enough hazy illumination to enhance the space's size and emptiness.

"Well, this is new," Phillip said. "We must be under a hill."

"Did you know there was a room this big under your town?"

"No idea. This is very impressive, you know. Not just that it's here but so well maintained and kept secret for this long. You know, this part of the country can get earthquakes from time to time. Sometimes nasty ones."

Maggie looked at the ceiling and pondered how much cement and rock were between her and the surface. "Thanks for that, Phillip."

There was little doubt that the best course of action was to keep on going, but they noticed that the tunnels were now wider. The fluorescent lights did not line the tunnel, but a faint glow remained.

"I think it might behove us to walk a little faster," Phillip said.

"Why is that?"

"I'm feeling a hum coming up through the floor. I think there might be another one of these events coming, and I'm not comfortable being stuck down here when it happens."

Maggie thought of her earlier worries. "Good point, let's move."

"And here we are," the Doctor said as the end of the tunnel came into view.

Heather was surprised it wasn't further out, but the tunnels really didn't go much further than the centre of town. Fifty feet before the tunnel abruptly ended, the tiles on the walls and floor were shattered and pitted just before the tunnel yawned open to four times its normal width. At the end, the back wall's tiles were replaced by paint in a khaki colour. She deactivated her phone's flashlight because this terminus was well lit. Along the perimeter, someone had set up floodlights so not a single shadow was cast.

The Doctor stepped into the circle of light, peering at the ground, and occasionally running his hand along the floor, frustration fixed on his face.

"If you tell me what we're looking for, I'd be happy to help," Heather said.

"I'm afraid I'm finding exactly what I expected," the Doctor grumbled.

"Which is?"

"Nothing. Their cleaning crews are extremely thorough. Whatever happened to slacking off on the job? That's what I'd like to know."

"Let's pretend they had slacked off, what could we have found?"

“Last night at Phillip’s event, I thought I saw something large fly down the tunnel in this direction. I’d like to know what it was.”

“So you have no clue at all what it could have been?”

The Doctor walked up to the back wall of the tunnel and peered at it with a critical eye.

“Not really, no. But I do have an idea of about how big it was based on those impacts back there. Come look at this.”

Heather joined him at the back wall and noticed he was grinning from ear to ear again. “So what? It’s a wall.”

“I think this wall has been here since the tunnels were built. Since the 1930s.”

“I imagine so.”

“I just wonder what it’s made of.” The Doctor balled up his left fist and struck the wall like Heather used to play Whack-A-Mole at the arcade after Joey Crabtree stole the mallet from the machine when they were kids. Waves cascaded out from the point of impact across the entire wall and Heather realized that the wall was not solid at all but some kind of gel.

“What the hell is this?”

“I’m not sure what it’s made of, but it seems like it’s supposed to cushion the impact of a fast-moving projectile coming down the tunnel. I imagine we would find one of these at the end of every major tunnel in the system.”

“No, not what is the wall, what is going on here? In Mount Pleasant?”

“All of this has the feeling of some kind of repeated experiment.” The Doctor sighed. “Let’s go back and meet up with Maggie and Phillip at the Lion. Then we can come back here and camp out down the tunnel in that first side branch. We wait for another event to happen, and then inspect whatever is left before the cleaning crews get a chance to eliminate the evidence.”

“That could take forever, though.”

“I doubt it will take that long. Nevertheless, we need to see the scene untampered.” They crossed back along the ruined tiles when a tell-tale hum reverberated.

“Ummm, Doctor?”

“Yes, it appears we may not have time to meet up with Maggie and Phillip after all.”

A matronly spectral form emerged from the wall to Heather’s right. She regarded Heather with a combination of shock and contempt, adjusted her ghostly bonnet, and continued through the next wall. “We need to find that side tunnel quick, Doctor.”

If Maggie hadn’t been so worried for her own safety she would have laughed as ghosts leaped out of her way as she and Phillip barrelled along the tunnel, searching for some

way to escape the phenomenon. A high-pitched whine had joined the hum, now at a frequency and volume that shook Maggie's skeleton (reminding her of the trembling in the TARDIS that had landed them in Mount Pleasant in the first place), yet it was still easy to hear Phillip's voice. She assumed that at some point in her travels with the Doctor, all the strangeness would seem more routine, and she looked forward to that day.

"I think there's another large room ahead," Phillip said, now almost at a dead run. "If I'm correct, I'm going to break left, so follow me."

She was about to answer, but soon realized that was beside the point. He was right, there was definitely a room there—absolutely crowded with apparitions. Just ahead, Phillip dodged to the left into the larger room as purple lightning began to skitter across the ceiling.

Everything suddenly went dark as the light from Phillip's phone disappeared. *Everything's fine, just keep moving, make the turn and follow the light, you're only a second behind him.*

She turned the corner and still couldn't see the light, but she decided her only chance to find him was to keep moving. She reached out with her left hand until her fingertips touched the smooth tiles that lined the walls and took off at a run to catch up to Phillip as fast as she could. The most important thing, she thought, was to stay together.

She got up to what she thought was a pretty impressive sprint, and even was getting used to dashing through the spectral forms of the dead residents of Mount Pleasant when her feet connected with what felt like a sack of wet gravel and she barely managed to get her hands in front of her face before she hit the floor with alarming speed.

She was just thinking about staying there on the ground for a while and having a nice long think about what to do next when several bright lights came on and she realized the wet bag of cement she felt had been Phillip, thankfully knocked over. Floodlights surrounded an imposing steel door. "You okay?" she asked him.

Phillip groaned. "I tripped over something." They slowly climbed to their feet.

"Are you okay?"

"I will be, but I won't be running on this ankle for a few hours. I think my pride was injured more than anything else. Look at this." He pointed to the floor, where the lights cut a line of shadow across the tunnel. It was obvious with the light filling the tunnel. Someone had deliberately drilled eyebolts into the sides of the tunnel about a foot off the floor and stretched a thick steel wire across. There was an identical trap six feet down.

"Who would do this?" Maggie asked.

Behind the steel door, the ominous creaks of several locks disengaging announced the arrival of whoever had set the tripwires. The intensity of the lights cut by half and the apparitions, nearly forgotten in the glare, suddenly became distinctly visible again. The

hum increased as a lavender glow emanated from down the tunnel. Lightning skittered along the tiles.

The metal door opened and sterile fluorescent light spilled into the tunnel. Maggie saw a large, open room with cinderblock walls that had been painted a kind of pistachio green. On the far wall a simple wooden cross, made of rough-hewn logs, had been mounted and below it was the word 'BIBLE!' spelled out in construction paper obviously made by children. Between the far wall and the tunnel, seated around a large quilting frame, sat the St. Luke's Women's Guild. Mrs. Saalvechter stood in the doorway, an incredulous look on her face.

"Professor? What are you doing out there? Get in here this instant! And why are you wearing that ridiculous outfit?"

"How far down the tunnel do you think we need to be in order to be safe?" Heather asked.

"We should be fine here," the Doctor said, stopping them ten yards or so down the side passage. Ghosts continued to swirl around them. Ghosts wandered around them as if the tunnel were some sort of promenade. Several couples walked arm in arm, amiably chatting. Flashes of lavender light poured along the walls.

For the first time since she had met him, Heather finally had a moment to look at the Doctor. He was peering down the hallway, as if by looking intently enough at the combination of the ghosts, lightning, and tunnel together he might learn something that would bring the whole puzzle together in a satisfying way. For all she knew, maybe he could. He adjusted his toque and turned back to her. When he caught her looking, he gave her a questioning gaze.

Realizing she might never get another chance, she asked, "Who are you, Doctor, really?"

The Doctor sighed heavily. "I mean this sincerely and honestly, Heather. You'd never believe me if I told you. You'd be crazy to believe me, in fact. But here's the deeper truth: I am your friend and I am only here to help you. And so is Maggie."

Just as she was deciding whether to believe him, the iron rain started again. "You're sure this isn't dangerous?" she said.

"I'm reasonably sure, yes," the Doctor replied, "beyond the obvious trip hazards, of course." A new sound entered the din. A sound like an enormous hair dryer was rushing toward them. Heather noticed metal droplets blown down the tunnel toward the cushioned wall. An orange haze suffused the air. Heather began to get the uneasy feeling that all Midwesterners got in their stomachs when a tornado was coming.

"Not far enough!" the Doctor shouted over the chaos. "I was wrong. We have to get further down the tunnel! It's just a wall of flames coming this way. Run!"

Heather did not need to be told twice. They ran at full tilt down the corridor as the sound chased them and the orange light became brighter. The lightning continued to increase, to the point where she was now getting static electric shocks when her hands came too close to the walls.

The glow was bright enough that she could see another branching path ahead, but she knew they couldn't make that right turn before the source of the noise caught up to them. The air displacement propelled her along as she ran down the tunnel. She could see the shelter of the side branch, and there was nothing to do but run as if she could make it in time.

It was now bright as day in the tunnel and Heather was lifted off her feet by a powerful gust of wind. She began to tumble in the air. From behind her, the Doctor ran up the tunnel wall. As the wind carried her along, she absently noticed his toque had gone missing, probably blown away in the oncoming firestorm. Like an action hero, the Doctor dug his fingers along the corner of the tunnel with his right hand as he seized Heather's wrist with his left, and as the final gust of wind before the flames engulfed the tunnel lifted them, he used their momentum to swing them into the side tunnel just as an enormous ball of flame scoured the path they had come from.

Heather managed to untangle her limbs and lay flat on the floor after a few seconds. The tiles lining the tunnel a few feet a way were still *pink...pink* with heat.

The Doctor stood up, laughed, brushed his trousers off and offered her a hand. "See? Only here to help."

She decided not to mention her weight gave him the momentum to get into the tunnel as well, because she had decided this strange man was a friend after all. "Sorry I questioned you, but –" She looked around the tunnel and shrugged. "...It's been a weird day."

He laughed again. "For me too. And that really is saying something."

Heather pointed to the Doctor's bare head. "Sorry your hat got burned up."

The Doctor slapped his bare head in shock. "My toque? Incinerated? Never." He reached into his jacket pocket, produced his toque from within. "A trifle warm for hats down here, I thought. Come on. Let's go find our evidence, shall we?"

"I think we've earned it, Doctor."

The Women's Guild had ways of making you talk. They gave you coffee in polystyrene cups and shortbread biscuits and asked nicely until you felt guilty if you didn't tell them what they wanted to know. Maggie was largely immune to their attentions, being largely a stranger, a fellow woman, and a foreigner (for some reason this mattered to them), but Phillip received no quarter from Mrs. Saalvechter and her minions.

“Well of course we have tripwires, dear,” Mrs. Saalvechter said. “After all the vandalism last year?” The other ladies murmured agreement. “Now why were you poking around down here?”

Phillip shifted uncomfortably on a chair normally used by children during Sunday School. “As I said, after last night’s disturbance, we had reason to believe there might be some kind of government project causing these ghost happenings, so my friends and I are investigating.”

Mrs. Saalvechter placidly sipped her coffee. “But why would that matter, Professor?”

“Please, call me Phillip. I’m not sure I follow you, Mrs. Saalvechter.”

She gave an exasperated sigh. “If it was the government, or the University, or the machine, or my little dog Mrs. Fussbudget making the ghosts appear. What difference does it make to you or anyone else? Why investigate? Surely it can’t be that many tax dollars, and I can think of worse uses for them.”

“Well, ma’am,” Maggie spoke up, “the fact is, whatever is going on here to make these things happen isn’t just making ghosts appear. I came here with a friend who is convinced whatever is going on here is damaging the fabric of time in this town. Possibly the world.”

The Women’s Guild gave a collective worried titter. Mrs. Saalvechter finished her coffee. “Well, if it’s disturbing time, it probably is the government after all. They usually just waste it, but I wouldn’t put it past them to disturb it too. In which case, I reckon we’d better put a stop to it. Let me fetch my purse.”

As Mrs. Saalvechter rose and walked away, Phillip leaned over and whispered to Maggie, “I’m not sure which bothers me more: that you were serious about time being damaged, that she’s taking you seriously ... or that I am.”

The end of the tunnel was now more properly called the site of impact. Large blobs of molten metal were strewn about, some embedded into the walls, some flattened against the floor. The Doctor moved through them, intent on getting to the end.

The wide room had a completely different kind of debris field. It looked like some kind of metal box had exploded on its way to the end. At the opposite end, the wall of strange gel material was caved in several feet, but was already restoring itself to its former shape. Before long, it would be impossible to tell anything at all had happened to it.

“What happened here, Doctor?”

“I think an experiment failed,” he said, tossing aside bits of junk. “Catastrophically.”

As they approached the end of the tunnel, Heather saw one dinner-plate chunk of alloy with what looked like an American flag half burned off it on top of a small pile of

debris. Sorting through it, she saw there was more than just metal, there was cloth, a button...and ...

"Doctor," she gasped. "Look." She held up the thin metal chain with a metal wafer dangling on the end, stamped with the words "McKenzie, Daniel Pvt. 1st Class".

"As I feared," the Doctor said. "They were manned. I assume they were all manned."

"What are you talking about, Doctor?" Heather said.

"These appear to be primitive time travel experiments gone horribly wrong. Imagine if Yuri Gagarin had just been sealed in a pressurised can and shot into orbit. This is the time travel equivalent."

"Oh my God. Why would anyone try something like that? Who would volunteer for it?"

"I'm sure we'll be able to get those answers once we get ourselves captured by whoever is trying to cover this up."

Mrs. Saalvechter had a hard time preventing the rest of the Women's Guild from coming along, but in the end, her word was law—at least, until her term as president was up in eight months. Nevertheless, she was on the receiving end of a few disapproving stares as the metal door swung shut, leaving her alone with Maggie and Phillip. She set off at a brisk pace, taking turns confidently, as if she knew where she was going.

"It shouldn't be too dangerous up here," she said, "at least not after the first minute or two, but you should let me do the talking, at least at first. I know how to handle folks like this."

"What kind of folks are those?" Maggie asked.

"They think they're doing the right thing, just keep that in mind," she said in a worryingly vague tone.

"Mrs. Saalvechter, do you know what's going on down here?" Phillip said. "I only ask because we've been trying to find out and it's gotten increasingly dangerous as we've been going. I'm sure I speak for Maggie when I say we'd just like to know, that's all."

Mrs. Saalvechter chuckled. "Until an hour ago, I thought I knew. Now I wouldn't like to guess. Stick with me, son, and we'll find out together." She made an abrupt left turn, causing Phillip to practically skid around the corner to follow. Maggie turned the corner and found herself seized by several pairs of hands and shoved against a wall.

They were surrounded by people in military fatigues. Four of them had guns pointed at Maggie, Phillip and Mrs. Saalvechter.

Mrs. Saalvechter advised, "Put your hands up, makes them feel better."

"I've noticed that," Maggie admitted as she obeyed.

A tall, broad woman in fatigues with a face like a glacier stepped into the light before them. "By authority of the United States government you are being detained for interference in and possible sabotage of an operation relating to national security."

The soldiers took them to the beginning of the tunnel system, an enormous chamber supported by wide columns. As they entered, a short, steep ramp took them under a tubular structure circling the vast space. Several old-timey looking electrical generators attached at different places around the loop. In the centre was a structure the size of an office building, but instead of going up into the sky, this building went down into the earth, surrounded by an open space of about twenty feet for people to fall into. As they crossed the catwalk to this inverted building, Maggie looked down and saw, as in an office building, several random lights on in windows. A warm breeze blew up from below.

On the roof (floor?) of the building were more strangely antiquated machines, these looking more like they were from some Cold War era science fiction film. They looked ancient to Maggie, so she could only imagine how they would look to rectangle-computer-users like Phillip and Heather. Across the roof, tubular structures ran in straight lines, across the chasm in several directions to the openings. This was where the disturbances were coming from. Strangely, apart from the anachronistic sci-fi props and the bizarre setting, the building seemed almost normal, including the elevator house in the corner with roof access door.

Around the machinery swarmed military personnel and men in lab coats, many seemingly bickering amongst themselves, which was not the impression Maggie had gotten of the sleek and mercilessly efficient U.S. Army from the movies.

"There is no way to predict the next event," barked a lab coat, whose voice Maggie recognized as the man 'Mike' in the space suit last night. He was waving his tablet and yelling at a uniform, "Because it's all based on the relative interval of the original events! They didn't keep detailed enough records for us to predict that."

"Then what are these energy spikes?" the uniform retorted.

"All right, fine, if we had years to work, not hours, we could probably work it out, but unless they were doing these tests for decades, no, it's not possible."

"Gentlemen," the woman with the glacial face said in the kind of voice that stopped all conversation in earshot, "let's not argue in front of company. Has the cleaning detail been sent into the tunnel?"

One of the uniforms handed her a tablet. "Yes, ma'am, one minute after cessation of electrical activity."

"Very good, Lieutenant." She turned to face Maggie and Phillip. "Now, I'm a little paranoid, so I'm not going to believe you if you say no, but just in case you say yes: does the name 'Operation Leapfrog' ring a bell for either of you?"

"And just what have you gotten yourself involved with, Michael Branson Sanders?" Mrs. Saalvechter demanded.

Mike was lucky he had a rubberized case for his tablet, because the shock of hearing his full name caused him to drop it on the steel-toed boot of the soldier he had been arguing with. His eyes goggled as he stared at Mrs. Saalvechter. "Aunt Dottie?"

"Are you sure getting captured is the best idea?" Heather asked the Doctor as she struggled to match his determined stride.

"All right, perhaps 'captured' isn't the best word for it. That makes it sound like we'll be locked up. We are going to be taken into custody and questioned, but after that we will be recognized as valuable members of the team."

"Uh-huh," Heather said. "And how do we plan to accomplish this?"

The Doctor threw an incredulous glance over his shoulder. "Simple. We just walk in this direction until we find the clean-up crew."

"I was worried about the second part of the plan. The part where we're recognized as valuable members of the team. The first part of the plan is easy. There's no trick to getting ourselves taken into custody."

They turned a corner and saw two figures in space suits sweeping bits of iron into neat piles on the floor. They dropped their brooms and drew pistols at the Doctor and Heather. "Freeze!" they roared in unison.

"See what I mean?" Heather groaned.

"So we have one townie and a Canadian with expired ID," the glacier-faced woman, whose name was Major Windham, said, "and Dr. Sanders' Aunt Dottie, all snooping around because they saw ghosts last night. And that's it."

Mrs. Saalvechter's familial ties to one of Major Windham's group had not bought them much good will. Apparently, Mike was a bit of a thorn in her side.

Phillip put on his most persuasive smile as Mike scanned him with a rectangular instrument that beeped menacingly. "Major Windham, surely you don't think I would have been down here if we had any idea that you and your staff were as well?" Mike moved on to Maggie. "I promise we're not as crazy as we look."

Mike's device beeped angrily. "This one has definitely hinky readings."

Major Windham rolled her eyes. "I think you're going to have to be more specific, doctor."

"She's a time traveller."

Phillip laughed uproariously for almost a full minute before he realized nobody else found the joke funny. "What? Really?" He looked at Maggie, who smiled sheepishly and shrugged. "No," he said. She shrugged again.

Mike moved on to Mrs. Saalvechter, who gave him a stern frown. He shrugged and he said, "Sorry, Aunt Dottie." The device beeped again, differently, but still quite insistently. Mike's jaw dropped.

Major Windham's eyes narrowed. "Doctor Sanders? Anything you want to tell me?" when he didn't answer immediately, she turned to Mrs. Saalvechter. "How about you, Aunt Dottie?"

From the tunnels, the vehicle Maggie recognized as the tunnel-cleaning machine roared onto the roof. She recognized the Doctor and Heather in the back, under guard. They were hustled before the Major and a keen young soldier in a clean suit saluted. "Ma'am, we found these two snooping around the remains of Capsule 2."

Mike stepped forward and began scanning Heather as the Major scrutinized the new arrivals. "I see. Thank you, Specialist. I don't suppose either of *you* have excuses for interfering in my operation?"

"She's clean," Mike muttered before shuffling toward the Doctor.

"I wasn't aware I needed an excuse, but then again I also wasn't aware I was interfering in anything," Heather said, and Maggie was impressed with the annoyed tone she mustered in the face of the imposing military officer.

Mike's scanner went wild in her hand. "Here we go!" she crowed. "Hallelujah! Three cherries! Time travelling *extra-terrestrial life form!*"

Phillip laughed again. "Oh come on!" He looked around wildly. "Where's the camera?"

Major Windham rounded on him with a look that instantly silenced him. "You will be quiet, sir." She turned back to the Doctor. "Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

The Doctor smiled. "Yes, hallo, I'm called the Doctor. You seem to be having some difficulty. How may I help?"

The soldiers chuckled at this, but the Major was unmoved. "I have some friends in the international peacekeeping community."

"Oh, good. So do I."

"Dr. Thompson?" Major Windham barked, and a lab coat scampered up to her side. "I'd like you to examine this detainee, doctor."

"Yes, Major?"

"Just vitals, if you please."

"That's it, Major?"

"Now, Doctor Thompson."

"Yes, Major."

Thompson sidled up to the Doctor and smiled nervously as the Doctor offered his wrist. Thompson's face sank as he took the Doctor's pulse. He looked questioningly at the Major who smiled, and said, "Skip to the stethoscope, please, Doctor Thompson." Thompson dutifully listened to the patient's chest, a confused look on his face changing to a look of profound horror. He looked to the Doctor, then to the Major.

Thompson cleared his throat. "The patient is...um. Well, the patient is either both dying and two people at once, or, patient is...not human, ma'am."

"Thank you, Doctor. If you'd like, please ask Lieutenant Chavez for some of my special Scotch. You can tell him I said you can even have a triple. Might want to have a lie down after that."

Thompson skittered away, muttering thanks.

"One more question," Windham growled, "where are you from, Doctor?"

"A little place called Gallifrey," he replied airily. "I don't expect you'll have heard of it."

She extended a hand, which the Doctor took. "If my friends across the pond are right about you, this is a problem that you might be able to help with and I am a little out of my depth. I could use some advice. Off the books, you understand."

"I'd prefer it that way," the Doctor said, "but I need my team, of course."

"Lieutenant, they're with us now," Windham said, and the encircling soldiers relaxed, letting the group reassemble.

Phillip was still aghast. "Just like that?" he said.

"Would you like it to be more difficult?" Windham said, menacingly. "It can be arranged." She chuckled when he went pale and began to back away. "But no, not quite that easy. Just wait, there will be some heavy-duty documents to sign later. But for now, relax." She rounded on Mrs. Saalvechter. "Except you. I think you can fill in a lot of blanks for me, can't you. Are you a time traveller, Aunt Dottie?"

"No, ma'am," she replied. "I was just in the wrong place at the right time."

Out of the elevator house came four soldiers wearing World War II era American Army uniforms. Phillip goggled at them. "Are they time travellers too? Or just aliens?"

"Decoys," Windham said, "in case this stupid plan actually pans out."

"About that," Heather said. "Operation Leapfrog? We found a dog tag back there, Major. What's going on down here? Are you killing soldiers for some time travel experiment?"

"Sweet Mercy," Windham muttered, "is that what you think? No, miss, that is not what we're doing here. We are strictly a mop-up crew for the fools who conducted those experiments decades ago and botched them completely. Those guys are here just in case one of the test subjects survives and needs to be convinced what year it is now."

"Whoa," Maggie said. "What now?"

"I think I can fill in some of these blanks," the Doctor said. "Some of this is guess work, but please jump in if I get the facts wrong." Windham nodded her assent. "According to what Heather and I found in the library stacks, this all started in the 1930s, so I'm assuming this was all in the run-up to the Second World War. The United States in particular were keen to develop weapons that would end the war quickly – and in spectacular fashion."

"The Manhattan Project," Heather interjected.

"The atomic bomb is the project everyone remembers, because that's the one that worked. However, the U.S. government was spending tremendous amounts of money on all kinds of other projects that failed. Has anyone heard of the Philadelphia Experiment?"

"That cheesy movie with the lady from *RoboCop*?" Phillip said.

"That's the urban legend about the government trying to turn a ship invisible or teleport it or something, right?" Maggie said.

"That's the one," said the Doctor. "The usual story is that in a Philadelphia shipyard, the U.S. Navy tried to make a ship turn invisible, and it ended up teleporting to Norfolk, Virginia instead for a few minutes before returning. The crew went mad or turned to stone, or what have you."

"You mean that really happened?" Phillip asked. "Mind you, at this point, I'm ready to believe."

"The experiment took place," Windham confirmed, "but it was a failure. A complete failure. No invisibility, no teleportation. Two technicians were electrocuted and a lot of taxpayer money wasted. They turned the machines on and off a lot over the course of ten years, but nothing ever happened."

"So why let the legend persist?" Maggie asked.

"Well, I don't speak for the whole government," Windham said. "But I would guess there are two main reasons. First, because that urban legend where something happens but goes wrong is more impressive than the truth, and second, because once people believe the story, they'll never believe the truth."

"In any case," the Doctor continued, "this is another one of those projects. This one was intended not to end the war, but as a final safeguard against the Third Reich if the Allies should lose the war."

"How is that?" Phillip asked.

"By sending soldiers forward in time to assassinate Hitler in the future."

"That's crazy and stupid," Phillip blurted out.

"No, son, it was desperate," Mrs. Saalvechter said, her voice strong but quiet in the cavernous underground room. "You weren't there. If you had seen the Wall Street collapse, all the fields dry up and blow away, then watch as crazy men in uniforms gobbled up Europe. Then Pearl Harbour."

Phillip”s bluster had drained out of him. “I’m sorry, but in hindsight, you know –

She gave him a kindly smile. “Oh, I understand. And we all waved our flags and planted our gardens, but we didn’t know. We didn’t know we would win. Just remember that when you hear what they did. We were all very frightened.”

“She’s right, this was the plan that would go into effect if we lost the war.” Windham said. “It wasn’t pretty, but at the time, as a last-ditch effort, it seemed as possible as an atomic bomb. So they tried it, in a way expecting that it would fail.”

“Wait a minute,” Heather said, “they thought Hitler would live this long?”

“No, of course not,” the Doctor said. “They were building a time machine in the late 1930s. They have sent several soldiers forward in time and so far none of them have made it. Don’t you get it? Their calculations were bad. They were aiming for 1950 or so and far overshot the target. For a first attempt it wasn’t terrible, but the slightest deviation when you’re travelling in time and you end up centuries off. As it is, the vortex is being ripped open so raggedly that pieces of the past are wandering about and interacting with the present.”

“Ah, the ghosts,” Phillip said.

“The rips have been echoing through the town even before these events, which is why the old ladies of this town are so keen on séances. They have grown up seeing ghosts.” The Doctor took a long breath and looked around. “Honestly, as much as I disapprove of civilizations who aren’t ready for time travel dabbling in temporal displacement, I have to admit ... all this is impressive. I know that you all will have to keep this a secret, so please, be proud as a species that even though these things caused all these problems and took two lives in the process, you could still do this even before you had managed to put one of your people in orbit. Honestly, it’s amazing. But we have to put a stop to it. And,” the Doctor turned to Mrs. Saalvechter, “I need to know now how you were there.”

Mrs. Saalvechter sighed. “It was an accident, and in a way it was all my fault. Don’t you worry about me.”

“Ma’am, your memories are more than a century old, but your body is not. Before I put a stop to all this, I’d like to know what is going to happen to you if I do so.”

“It’s embarrassing.”

“Still.”

Mrs. Saalvechter rolled her eyes at the ceiling and sighed heavily. “Fine. I was supposed to meet a young man in the tunnels. They had just been built, mind, and they didn’t have gates on them yet. Everyone knew the government had built something down there, but nobody really understood what it was.”

“Is this relevant?” Major Windham asked.

“I’ll let you know in a moment,” the Doctor scolded her.

“The boy never came, but as I was sitting there, under the machinery, someone turned it on and it revved up. Someone noticed and tackled me, trying to throw me out of the way of whatever the machine was doing. Thing is, it was a year and a half later. That man who tackled me did so eighteen months after I had sat down waiting for Jed Parker to come and canoodle with me.”

“You leaped forward in time?” the Doctor asked.

“We both did. Mr. Saalvechter and I.” She smiled a bit at the fond memory. “And we’ve never really aged properly since. The engineers thought our particles had been accelerated and they tried to do all these other things. I thought you all had turned up to try it again. I came here to tell you to stop.”

“I’m afraid these are just the first mistakes, still happening.”

“Hell’s bells.”

“Now we’ve got to put an end to it.”

“We can’t do that, Doctor,” Windham said. “It’s already done. We have a list of the dead. All we can do is clean up and try not to get caught.”

She held up the list, and the Doctor quickly snatched it from her hand and sat on it.

“Well,” he said with a sly grin, “all *you* can do is clean up. Those of us who have not seen the list can do slightly more.”

“How is that?”

“The act of observation is a powerful thing,” the Doctor said. “We are stretching a point here, I admit, but once one observes an event – a list of the dead with names on it, say – that sets the event in time for that observer. It’s a bit like Schrödinger’s Cat. Once you have observed an event, it becomes solid forever. But if I haven’t seen it, if Maggie and Heather and Phillip haven’t seen it, we can go back in time and stop any further experiments.’

“How do you propose to do that?”

“Well, I have a time vehicle. What did you plan to do if one of the soldiers survived their trip to the future?”

“Acclimate them to the twenty-first Century and get them settled into new lives.”

“Good luck with all that,” Maggie said, “this plan is better.”

Barry Dearborn took another sip of his coffee, knowing his mug was not going to last another four hours, but working in these blasted tunnels meant going without. McKenzie had been shot out of the tube six hours ago, so like clockwork, Ellis came up from the barracks with his two technicians following along behind him.

“You ready for this, Ellis?” Dearborn asked. “You understand the risks?”

“Every day for the last year and half, Doc,” Ellis replied with his cockeyed grin. “Come on, is it so different getting killed here or in England or France or something?”

“I honestly don’t know, it might be.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence, Doc.”

Dearborn released the catch on the capsule that lowered it from the ceiling and the hatch opened. “All right, son,” he said. “Here’s hoping in 1950 there’s nothing for you to do but find some girl to settle down with.”

Ellis put one foot in the hatch and a breeze suddenly kicked up with a wheezing, groaning noise that echoed through the cavernous space. Dearborn turned and a kind of blue wooden box faded into view somehow. The door creaked open, and out stepped a Black man with a flat-topped cap and what looked like a long and loose green greatcoat, a youngish woman in trousers and a vest, tall man with an elaborate beard and a young woman who looked like a dead ringer for his daughter, both in army uniforms.

“We’re here to stop these experiments,” the woman said. “This is Major Carver and I’m Major General Heather Dearborn. Who’s in charge here?”

Barry Dearborn smiled. “I think you’re looking for me.”

The Black man all but bounded up the steps. “Wonderful,” he said in what sounded like an English accent, “I’m called the Doctor, and what you’re doing here is practically a miracle, but I think it could be directed in ways that might be more productive and a lot less dangerous for the test subjects. May I suggest some ideas for renewable energy? And not to spill the beans or anything, but can you keep a secret?” He gave a conspiratorial grin. “We’re from the future and...well, there’s really no reason for this sort of thing.” Barry opened his mouth to ask why, but the Doctor cut him off. “Can’t answer too many questions, I’m afraid, but as a consolation prize, would you like to meet your very lovely, very American great granddaughter?”

During a faux séance held by a stage magician beneath a coffee house, the Doctor and Maggie are dragged by a disturbance in the Vortex to make an emergency landing on the campus of Piedmont State University in the American Midwest. They discover a series of catacombs that has become the source of multiple hauntings.

With assistance from Phil (the magician) and Heather (the proprietor of the coffee house), the Doctor traces the source of the disturbances to a long-forgotten project from the 1940's that involved particle acceleration and manipulation of time. Those primitive experiments misfired all those decades ago and are having profound effects on the present day.

Despite attempts by the university and government agencies to cover up and nullify the effects of the disturbances taking place in the tunnels beneath campus, it is clear that things are spiraling out of control, and they are desperate enough to accept outside help of the kind only the Doctor can provide. Now, the Doctor, Maggie, and their new friends must save the lives of the volunteers who participated in that ill-conceived experiment before their sacrifice threatens not only the present day, but the future as well.

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

