



DOCTOR WHO
Re-incarnated

Smoke
Part 2

Alex Smith

DOCTOR WHO: RE-INCARNATED PRESENTS

Smoke

An original Doctor Who story

By Alex Smith

DOCTOR WHO: RE-INCARNATED

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Smoke

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Previously...

This story is the second in a two-part series. Readers may want to read part one, *The Blue Box*, before reading this story.

Tracy woke up abruptly, her eyes snapping open with a jolt. She felt consciousness spread down her arms and through her legs, and she became aware that she was sitting down. Her eyes slowly began to focus, and she got a clearer view of her surroundings.

She was sat in a cosy sitting room, with two plush armchairs and a wooden table. The furniture was low and smooth, the willowy pattern of the desk matching a swirling carpet, which felt deep and thick under her feet. The armchair opposite from her was like her own, a tasteful shade of pink with brass armrests. A steaming mug of tea had been left on the table. Looking up, she saw that the room had a small bookcase in one corner, with several well-thumbed titles from all genres and eras resting on its heavy shelves. Some titles were classics – Christie, Dickens, Tolkien – while others were more contemporary, and some were strange titles she'd never heard of. A few had strange, jagged scripts running along their sides instead of titles, and Tracy could make neither heads or tails of them. One book, a thickly bound leather piece titled *The Enigma Mystery*, looked particularly intriguing. She considered reaching over to pick it up, but was distracted by a noise overhead. She looked for the source of the noise, and noticed something she hadn't seen before; a rickety metal staircase at the corner of the room, spiralling upwards past the ceiling and down beneath the floor. Coming down the staircase from the higher level was a man, dressed in dark clothes. He hopped down into the low room, his own mug of tea in hand, and eased himself into the armchair across from her. He placed the mug down on the table, looked up, and smiled.

'You're awake, then,' he said.

Suddenly all of the memories from the past day blurred through Tracy's mind in a single stream. The police box, guard duty, the storage bay, the Doctor, and walking through the doors of the box into... 'Oh, *my head*,' she moaned, rubbing her temple to shake the dizziness that suddenly threatened to overwhelm her. That had been what caused her to black out; she had stepped inside the police box and found a huge room, easily fifty times larger than the outside. She rubbed her head again, and glanced up to see the man in dark clothes – the Doctor, of course – smiling sympathetically, pushing her cup of tea towards her.

'Drink up, you'll feel better,' he said warmly.

Still feeling a little woozy, she brought the mug to her lips and took a hesitant sip. To her surprise, she found a warm, relaxing feeling seeping swiftly through her body, banishing the confusion and dizziness from her system.

'...What did you put in this tea?'

He laughed, draining his own mug and placing it back on the low table. It must have been scalding hot, but he didn't seem to mind.

'I imagine you're still feeling quite confused,' he said, which was a bit of an understatement. She nodded; the pounding in her head had ceased, and the sudden movement didn't hurt as it would have done moments ago.

'It's time you did some explaining,' she said, with as much force as she could muster. He smirked. 'Right, well, this isn't a very good room for explaining. Come with me.'

He held out his hand, and she took it; she still felt a little queasy as she stood, but she could hold her own weight at least. He led her to the metal staircase, and began to ascend up the steps. She followed suit, and within moments they were walking up into a room that looked very familiar; it

was the massive cavern of a room, with the metal flooring and the cluttered console, and the tall, luminescent pillar at the center of it all. Tracy gasped.

'So... We're still inside the box then? All of this... It's all inside that blue box?'

The Doctor tapped across the floor and leaned against the console, crossing his arms.

'Well, let's just get one thing straight before we begin,' he said, 'It's not just a box. It's my ship. It's my home. It's my TARDIS.'

‘What the hell happened here?’ Steph asked exasperatedly. She was stood at the center of the Wells Museum storage bay, and in front of her was what she liked the call a bloody great mess. A huge, empty frame inside which a large panel of glass had once been held stood across from her, the glass that had once filled it glittering in a million pieces on the floor around them. Two caretakers were sweeping steadfastly at the mountain of broken glass, slowly clearing up the shattered remains. How on Earth had anyone managed to utterly disintegrate the entire panel?

‘We’re, um, we’re not quite sure,’ stuttered one of the night guards, who had rushed to the storage bay after the alarm had sounded. He had arrived to the exact same scene that they looked at now; a completely normal storage room, minus one police telephone box, with a pile of smashed glass and a door that had been knocked off its hinges. Steph eyed the door suspiciously, and nudged it with one foot.

‘What about this entrance, what happened to it?’

‘We’re, er, not entirely sure about that either,’ he stammered, proving himself an excellent help. ‘It hasn’t been knocked down, it’s way too far away from the frame. It’s like someone blew it up – except, erm, obviously it hasn’t been blown up because, well, it’s a door.’

Steph considered that mystery for a moment, and moved on. She walked over to the only other way into the storage bay, the heavy, sliding metal door.

‘So whoever took the police box left via this door?’ she asked.

‘That’s the only explanation, I think.’

She tilted her head. ‘But the door’s been locked up from the inside... So the person who took it might have had an accomplice who’s still in the building!’

‘It wasn’t me!’ the guard panicked immediately. She sighed, and sent him over to help the caretakers with the broken glass. The door was locked from inside. It didn’t make any sense. God, this was just what she needed. In charge of an impromptu crime scene, just as the home time bell rang.

‘I’ll tell you who’s taken it,’ she said, talking more to herself than anyone else in particular. ‘It was that Doctor nutter.’

Of course, that would explain it. He must have been more prepared than he had seemed; he had fashioned some method of escaping with the box in hand, found a way to bypass their less-than-perfect security systems, and made off with a semi-valuable piece of London heritage. Hadn’t she left dealing with him to Tracy? Typical of the guards to mess up, the one time something actually needed guarding. She would have to...

A thought struck her.

She turned around to the guards and caretakers assembled in the room with her. ‘Has anyone seen Tracy?’

‘Do you believe in aliens?’ the Doctor asked her.

‘What?’

'Extra-terrestrials, UFOs, little green men.' The Doctor smiled widely. 'Do you believe there are aliens out there?'

'Well, I've not really given it that much thought... Hang on,' Tracy interrupted her own sentence, her train of thought derailing itself. 'You aren't suggesting...?'

He nodded, raising his eyebrows at her.

'But that's ridiculous.'

'Is it?' he replied. He waved his arms about, gesturing at the humongous room around them. 'How else do you explain all of this then?'

'But aliens? That's just – wait, does that mean that *you're* an alien?'

'Possibly,' he smiled, winking.

'You aren't though! You haven't got... I don't know, tentacles. Four eyes and laser fingers.'

'You're right,' the Doctor nodded, mock serious. 'I can't be an alien.' He wiggled his hands. 'No laser fingers.'

'Oh, shut up,' she sighed, exasperated. She leaned back against a metal rail that jutted out of the console. There was a long, heavy pause as she considered what he had said.

'Why are you here? Are you invading?' she asked eventually. He looked startled.

'Why would I be invading?'

'Y'know. To steal our natural resources. Oil and stuff.'

He laughed. 'Natural resources?! The only natural resource more abundant on Earth than anywhere else in the universe is sheep. And unsurprisingly, there isn't much of a demand for sheep on the intergalactic market.'

'Then why are you here?' she asked, ignoring his babbling. He shrugged.

'Just having an adventure, I suppose. Knocking around, getting into trouble – the usual.'

'So you're just a wandering alien with a bigger on the inside box?'

'TARDIS,' he corrected her, smiling. 'TARDIS.'

Suddenly, a light on the console started to flash. The Doctor leaned over and pushed a switch, and a deep, resounding *boom* reverberated through the floor.

'Locked on and ready to roll,' he smiled. 'We've got to make a textbook landing, there's not much margin for error when you're materialising inside a building.'

Tracy opened her mouth to ask what he meant, but was interrupted when the whole room tilted sideways sickeningly. She tripped over her own feet, doubling over the console as gravity threw her forwards. The Doctor almost tumbled backwards, but managed to regain his balance by hooking one foot against the console's underside. A strange, almost unearthly groaning sound filled the room, and the thick luminescent pillar at the center began to shift and churn, bright lights flickering and illuminating the walls. The Doctor used his free foot to kick a lever on a panel into position, and the room jolted still as violently as it had first moved. Tracy was thrown down onto the metal floor, and the Doctor exhaled heavily, relieved.

'Sorry about that – I use the term textbook landing in its loosest form.'

He ran off to the doors, as if that was the end of the matter, and Tracy had no choice but to pull herself up and run after him.

'What do you mean by landing? It's a box!'

'TARDIS!' he cried back to her. 'And did you not hear me tell you it was my ship?'

He pushed through the doors, red scarf whistling behind him, and vanished. She stumbled after him, a little dizzy, and walked through the doors to find herself back in the museum.

Actually, no. That wasn't what happened. In fact, she walked through the doors to find herself somewhere completely different.

'We've moved,' she said, rather stupidly.

'So we have!' the Doctor replied cheerily. 'Now, I think it's about time we did some investigating.'

The room they had stepped into was a long, narrow corridor, steeped in thick smoke. The sharp corners of the walls were blurred by the heavy smog that permeated the air. Through the heavy cloud, Tracy could just make out a small, square podium, though whatever was stood on top of it was obscured from her view. Below her knees, the smoke was at its thickest, almost solid in its consistency as it curled sluggishly across the floor.

'We've moved,' she repeated. The Doctor had crouched down so that the heaviest smoke was level with him, but he turned back with a frown.

'Yes. I told you the TARDIS is a ship, didn't I?' he said. He went back to focusing on the smoke, waving his hands through it thoughtfully. 'No, no...' he murmured to himself. 'This definitely isn't supposed to be here...'

Tracy, meanwhile, began to slowly circle the box – the TARDIS, she corrected herself mentally. It looked just as it had when she had first spotted it on that street corner, but now she knew that it held an entire world inside of it. She patted each of the walls lightly, and found them to be made of wood. It seemed so ordinary, and yet so extraordinary. The strange itch she had felt at the back of her mind was still there, but now she understood it; it was the sense of something ever so slightly impossible, something unreal and yet completely real.

A shrill buzzing broke her concentration, and she looked back to the Doctor, who was holding the same slim, pencil-shaped tube she had seen him use in the museum.

'Sonic screwdriver,' he said, answering the question she had been about to ask. 'Like a space-age Swiss army knife.' He waved the tube, humming and glowing orange, around the smoke, focused on the modulating sound it made.

'So it's alien?'

'Yep.'

'And so are you.'

'I'm sensing that you're still hung up on the whole alien thing.'

'Sorry,' she crossed her arms. 'It's just – you don't look like an alien.'

'And you don't look like a museum guard, Tracy Blaid,' the Doctor smiled. Tracy faltered for a moment.

'It was supposed to just be a way of keeping myself going. While I tried to figure out what I wanted to do, you know?'

'And you never got round to the figuring out part.'

She shrugged. 'I'm not sure what I want to do with my life.'

The Doctor chuckled. 'I know how you feel. I've been in that position.'

'And what did you do?'

He paused for a moment. 'I don't know. I'm still in the middle of doing it.'

The sonic screwdriver upped its pitch to a higher, more irritating tone, and the Doctor wheeled round excitedly.

'Right, here's what we've got. This smoke isn't just your average common or garden smoke. It's composed of chemicals that aren't found naturally anywhere on Earth. What's more, it's slowly altering the surrounding air— this room's oxygen levels are dropping, very slowly. So this smoke is some sort of atmospheric converter, changing the air here to make it... What, exactly?'

He stood up.

'I might be able to trace whatever's generating this smoke, if you give me a minute. Ah...'

The podium became clearer as they both took a few steps towards it. Shattered glass lay in pieces on the floor around it, and stood on the podium was a small rock. About the size of a person's hand, it was split down the middle, cracked into two distinct halves that were barely holding together.

'This rock is manufacturing the smoke. Ooh. That's interesting.'

'What's interesting?'

'It isn't a rock at all. It's an egg. A rock shaped, rock-like, undeniably-similar-looking-to-a-rock egg. And it's producing smoke that's slowly replacing the breathable air here with something else. Which would suggest that whatever hatched from the egg needs the smoke to breathe. So the egg automatically alters the surrounding atmosphere to make sure the hatchling can survive once it's released. *Very interesting.*'

Tracy shook her head, very slowly. 'I think I understood about half of what you just said.'

The Doctor bent down to read a small, golden plaque which was embedded into the front of the podium. He mouthed the words as he read quickly.

'We've landed in the right place. Kensington laboratory.' He stood up again. 'Early this morning, I intercepted some sort of signal coming from this building. I'm guessing whatever hatched from this egg, sent up that signal.'

He was interrupted by a low, creaking noise, like the sound of an ancient door swinging on rusted hinges. At the opposite end of the corridor, the smoke began to swirl and churn, twisting itself together so that it seemed thicker and more tangible. Within moments, a figure emerged from the smoke; a dark, shadowy shape that grew darker, solid, with every step it took towards them. The Doctor took a step back, and Tracy instinctively followed suit. The figure stopped a few paces away, and tilted its head at them, as if curious.

'Who?' it said. Its voice was harsh and grating and coarse. It sounded like it desperately needed a drink. 'Who are you?'

The Doctor observed the new figure with interest. It was, broadly speaking, humanoid, but its limbs were long and spindly. Each of its fingers tapered to a sharp point.

'You are. Not human. Who are you?' asked the creature, in slow, rasping sentences.

'An answer for an answer,' the Doctor replied. 'I am the Doctor, a traveller, originally of Gallifrey. Who are you?'

The creature contemplated this. 'I am part. Part of the mind. The hivemind. Krafkan hivemind.'

'Hivemind?' The Doctor interrupted. 'So you can communicate telepathically then?'

'Yes.'

'In that case, this conversation might be easier-' he raised his fingers to his temples, and shut his eyes '*-if we talk like this.*'

Tracy jolted a little. She could still hear the Doctor just as clearly as before, but now there was a slight echo to his voice. His lips weren't moving, but she could still hear him, as if his words were appearing out of nowhere in her head.

'This form of communication is more convenient, agreed,' the shadowy figure said. Its voice was smoother now, softer, and as with the Doctor it seemed to be speaking directly to Tracy's mind. *'Right then,'* The Doctor thought. *'If you're part of a hivemind – the Krafkans hivemind, was it? – that means there are other Krafkans bobbing around somewhere.'*

'Correct. My family are waiting for me in Earth's orbit.'

The Doctor clapped his hands together. *'So that's who you were sending a signal to. My TARDIS picked it up; telepathic circuits, you see, must have picked up the resonant mental frequencies.'*

The Krafkans tilted its head to one side again. *'What is your purpose here, Doctor?'*

'Oh, I'm just having a look around, investigating, seeing what's what. How about you, Mr. Krafkans. What are you and your lot doing with Earth?'

'I cannot disclose that information.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Well,' he said, aloud. 'That leaves us at something of an impasse, conversation-wise.' He gave the Krafkans a friendly wave. 'Well, me and my friend Tracy here will just be off now, but it's been great having this little chat with you. Best of luck with your, er, endeavours.'

He nudged Tracy back down the corridor. He whispered to her, 'We should probably get back to the TARDIS now. I don't think he takes too kindly to strangers.'

'You. You cannot. Leave.'

'Oh, don't be like that,' said the Doctor, backing away. 'We only popped in to say hello-'

The Krafkans lunged forwards, raking its claws through the air. The Doctor dropped to the ground; Tracy followed suit, half a second behind, and the dark creature leapt over their heads and skidded to a halt behind them. It stood as they scrambled to their feet, between them and the TARDIS.

'You will. Interfere.'

'Probably,' the Doctor agreed. 'But that's no reason to be so violent.'

A hand with fingers like knives carved a deep gash into the wall next to the Doctor's head, and he fell backwards. Tracy turned to run, but she tripped. She careered to the floor, inhaling a mouthful of the foul smoke as she went. Gagging, she landed on her hands and knees, her lungs constricting in a tight coughing fit. The Doctor pulled himself up as the Krafkans advanced, while Tracy turned over to see what she had tripped on. It was a hazy shape strewn on the ground, about the same size as a human body. She froze; it *was* a human body.

'Tracy!' the Doctor yelled, grabbing her hand and trying to pull her to her feet. Her eyes were locked on the corpse of the man; amid all of the magical things she had seen today, here was something completely real, and completely horrifying.

Something dark flickered in front of her, and she glanced away from the corpse just as the Krafkans' claw swiped towards her face.

Out of nowhere, a sharp blast of icy cold air bowled into the Krafkan, sending it tumbling backwards, its outstretched claw falling just short of Tracy's throat. She shuddered as the cold air flew past her, and turned around to see their saviour as the Doctor pulled her upright.

'Quickly, before it gets back up!' said a woman's voice. The Doctor tugged on Tracy's arm, and then they were running down the corridor, scrambling to get away as the dark monster jumped to its feet behind them. A pair of double doors was pushed open and they rushed through them. A rattling cry echoed their footsteps as the Krafkan pursued them. Tracy could barely see through the thick smoke that had permeated every room. After a few more narrow corridors and sharp turns they stopped, and she leaned against a wall to catch her breath. She used the sleeve of her jacket to filter the air, trying to stop any of the clogging smoke from entering her lungs.

'You're hurt,' the Doctor said, addressing the woman who had rescued them. She was short and stout, with dark hair and wire rim spectacles. Her white coat was stained crimson, and her left arm hung limply at her side.

'It's nothing,' she brushed him off. She dropped the fire extinguisher she had been holding with her other hand – the cold blast of air, Tracy realised – and rested her head against the wall.

'I really don't think it is... But there's nothing we can do about it now,' the Doctor sighed. He lifted his hat to her. 'I'm the Doctor, by the way, and this is my friend Tracy. Thanks for the help back there, miss...?'

'Professor. Professor Deborah Garson, at your service,' she said, her breaths heavy. Tracy stood up, having caught her breath, and glanced anxiously down the corridor. The creature would find them eventually, and she needed to be ready to run again.

'I'm guessing you work here at Kensington labs, then,' the Doctor said. 'Can you tell me what happened?'

'I've no idea. I was just showing a visitor around, trying to get clearance on our latest project, and I stumbled across a room filled with...' she coughed. 'Corpses.'

Tracy started. 'There was a corpse back there,' she said. 'A dead body, I mean. Back where the TARDIS is.'

'They're everywhere,' Garson nodded slowly. 'It killed everyone in the building. Tried to kill me, too; I only survived by playing dead. Its aim must have been a little bit off when it attacked me.' She gestured to her wounded shoulder. The Doctor ran a hand across his chin, in deep thought.

'Your latest project, what was it?'

Garson looked startled. 'Why do you ask?'

'Development is complete,' the Doctor replied. 'That's what the Krafkan's message to its friends in orbit said, before all of this started. I'm wondering, development on what, exactly?'

'Well,' Garson said, running a hand distractedly through her hair, 'it's all top secret, highly confidential. But I don't suppose that really matters, now we're on the run from that monster, does it?'

The Doctor looked at her expectantly.

She opened her mouth to speak; 'We've been working on a-'

Bam. The door at the end of the corridor fell forwards on its hinges, and a dark, shadowy shape stepped into the room.

'Ah,' the Doctor said. 'We may have to start running again.'

The Krafkan sprang towards them, its long limbs exaggerating its strides into massive leaps as it covered the distance quickly; but they were already heading in the opposite direction, the three of them sprinting away from it.

'We're no good running around like this!' the Doctor cried as he slammed a door shut behind them, using the sonic screwdriver to clamp the electronic lock into place. 'We're like rats in a maze! Professor, where's the exit?'

'That's no good, I've tried. Somehow, the creature's managed to seal off the doors. All of the power's drained, and the manual override's been welded shut. There's no way out of the building.' A sharp claw stabbed through the locked door, whistling past the Doctor's ear. He tripped sideways as a thick cloud of smoke began to seep through the newly-made hole.

'Oh dear,' he said, shuffling away from the door. 'Alright then, we'll have to head back round to the TARDIS. Lead us back to the corridor you found us in!'

The smoke pouring in through the hole began to reform into a vaguely humanoid shape, and the Doctor pulled the two women away from the door and they carried on running through the lab. 'Anything to add, Tracy?' he asked, tapping her shoulder. She pulled her jacket sleeve away from her mouth long enough to cough two words.

'*Bloody* aliens,' she said. The Doctor laughed loudly, a genuine cry of exhilaration. She pulled the sleeve back to her mouth, coughing wildly. The heavy smoke was starting to get to her, and if the Doctor was right about the atmosphere being changed, it was only going to get heavier.

Professor Garson lead then through the twisting maze, the Krafkan not far behind. The smoke was now so heavy that visibility was almost zero, and they could barely see five meters ahead of them. More than once, Garson had pulled the Doctor sideways to stop him from careering down into a dead end. At one point, she tripped, sprawling to the floor, and the Doctor had heaved her up without missing a beat ('Heels?! Who wears heels in a laboratory?!').

'So, Doctor, Tracy!' said Professor Garson, as they found themselves in a wide, round room with a low ceiling, where the smoke was especially thick. 'Who are you two, exactly? How did you get into the lab?'

'We're intruders!' the Doctor shouted from somewhere behind them, lost from sight in the smog. 'Really meddlesome ones!'

'He's got this box,' Tracy said, running alongside the Professor. 'It's impossible. It's sort of... bigger on the inside than it is on the outside.'

They pushed through a set of double doors; the sound of the sonic screwdriver whirred behind them as the Doctor sealed the doors shut.

'That sounds unlikely.'

'It's true!' Tracy almost skidded into an unseen wall that loomed out of the smoke ahead of her, but Professor Garson pulled her aside and they sprinted into a room filled with overturned desks. Shattered glass crunched beneath their feet.

'And this box, I don't know how he works it, but it moves. It's like a ship, he says. When I stepped through those doors, I was in Wells Museum. Now I'm... Wherever here is.'

They paused for a moment, to catch their breaths.

'Really?' there was a twinkle in Garson's eye as she asked. Tracy nodded, aware of how ridiculous she sounded.

'Well, that's... That's quite something,' Garson panted, her breaths ragged. She patted her wounded shoulder and grimaced.

'Are you okay?' Tracy asked, concerned. The dark stain on her coat looked awfully sinister. 'It's a flesh wound,' Garson chuckled weakly. She looked across the lab they were in, thinking for a moment. 'I think we've lost it. For now, at least.' She straightened her back, and winced as the bone clicked. 'Right, come on – we need to get to that box of yours.'

'No, hang on.' Tracy held up her hand to stop Garson from moving on.

'What is it?' the Professor asked. Tracy looked around the room slowly, then turned back to Garson in despair.

'The Doctor.'

Realising what Tracy meant, Garson scanned the thick smoke of the lab, searching for the Doctor's silhouette. He wasn't there; somewhere along the line, they had lost him.

'So, Doctor, Tracy!' said Professor Garson from somewhere ahead of him, as they found themselves in a wide, round room with a low ceiling, where the smoke was especially thick. 'Who are you two, exactly? How did you get into the lab?'

'We're intruders!' the Doctor shouted. 'Really meddlesome ones!'

'He's got this box,' Tracy said from in front, running alongside the Professor. 'It's impossible. It's sort of... bigger on the inside than it is on the outside.'

Tracy and Garson pushed through a set of double doors, and their footsteps faded away as the Doctor locked the door they had run through with the sonic screwdriver. He felt bad abandoning them, but they would be fine; there was only one Krafkan in the lab, and it would chase after him if he fell behind the group, like a cheetah picking off the slowest gazelle. He was offering himself as bait so they could return to the TARDIS safely; and, of course, he had another agenda.

He spiralled down a passageway to his left, his mind racing and calculating. He didn't know what Kensington laboratories' latest project was; but the Krafkans clearly wanted to take advantage of it. If it hadn't been obvious before, then the sealed exit was the conclusive proof. If, as the Professor stated, the power had been drained, then the Krafkan in the lab must have accessed the computer systems somehow. It could have easily rendered the door inoperable manually, but instead it chose to do it via a more complex method. That suggested that the Krafkan had another, more serious motive for accessing the computer systems – such as, for example, taking control of some high-tech laboratory project.

The sonic screwdriver beeped excitedly, and he stopped in front of a small, inconspicuous door. He pushed inside, and found himself at the helm of a bank of computer monitors, each with an accompanying panel of switches and buttons mounted on panels beneath the screens. He had found the hub of computer activity in the building.

'Right, let's see what I can gleam out of you...' he muttered to himself, flexing his fingers and setting to work at the nearest keyboard. A stream of data instantly lit up on one of the monitors, and he began to point and click his way down the rabbit hole of folders and files. One particular document caught his eye, and he loaded it up. Immediately he was faced with a huge wall of text that would have discouraged all but the most eager of readers. His eyes flickered across the screen as he skimmed over the information. A frown slowly creased across his brow as he read, his eyebrows dipping slightly with each line.

'That can't be right...'

'Doctor.'

'Ah.' He turned around, away from the console, to see the smoke that filled the room congealing a few steps behind him, solidifying into a corporeal, humanoid form. The Krafkan stepped forward. 'Hello again,' he said. And then in his mind; *'Do you know, it's been absolutely ages since I met a species who could shift from one state of matter to another like that. Gas to solid, solid to gas, poof. It's quite incredible, it really is.'*

The Krafkan did not seem to register his words. Its head was tilted to one side; for the first time, the Doctor noted how the creature vaguely resembled a dog cocking one ear, as if listening to someone the Doctor couldn't hear. After a moment, it refocused, its blank, shallow eyes flicking to his.

'You have found the human computer interface.'

'Yep, sure have. Interesting stuff – long-form radio wave projection, incorporated into a satellite.'

'Brilliant. But why are the Krafkans interested in it?' He ran a hand across his chin. *'Why wait over thirty years to get your hands on something so mundane? I was expecting, ooh, I don't know, a missile guidance system, or an experimental new form of nuclear weaponry. But this? This is just an intergalactic megaphone. Hello, testing, one two one two, calling all aliens, that sort of thing.'*

The Krafkan was quiet for a few moments. The Doctor, somewhat bemused, wondered how this silent discussion would appear to an outsider.

'My brethren have told me not to speak of our mission to you.'

'Well, if the brethren told you to jump under a bus, would you? Actually, ignore that, you probably would – and I suspect you don't even know what a bus is.'

He tapped a few keys on the keyboard, not to achieve any specific effect, but just to give his hands something to do. He was terrible for fidgeting.

'Anyway, what's so special about your friends? All they've done is hang around, up in orbit as you say, sat in a spaceship. How many of them are there? It can't exactly be an invasion fleet, I would have noticed an army hovering over Earth since 1979.'

'We are few in number.'

'How few?'

'Four.'

The Doctor chuckled. 'Four?' he repeated aloud. *'You aren't really a force to be reckoned with, are you?'*

'We are just the scouts.'

'Scouts for what?'

The Krafkan paused again. *'My brethren have told me not to speak of our mission to you,'* it repeated.

'Fine, I'll figure it out myself. Though I can't say I can think of anything you lot would want with a broadcasting satellite – you've got a spaceship up there, after all! Why send a message somewhere when you can just fly there?'

'My brethren have told me not to speak of our mission to you.'

The Doctor sighed exasperatedly. 'Hive minds,' he muttered to himself. 'Not the best place for sparkling conversations.'

He turned back to the bank of computers, and began to scroll through a set of commands, very quickly reaching a timer. The screen displayed 23:14:57.

'Ahh, I see the satellite has a synchronisation delay. That must be slowing your plans a bit, waiting for that to finish off so you can get round to your mysterious mission. Almost a day left...'

He hit the enter key on the keyboard, and began to type up a code in a small prompt box that appeared on screen. 'I may not know what you're planning, Mr. Krafkan, but I am quite confident in my presumption that it isn't going to end well. So, I might as well shut down the satellite's activation procedures from here!' He cried the last part triumphantly, hitting the enter key again. Nothing happened.

'Erm.' He stopped for a second. 'I might as well shut down the satellite's activation procedures from here!' he pressed the enter key. The screen didn't change.

'From here! From. Here. From here.' He began tapping the button unremittingly, jabbing down on it so quickly it might have started to wear away under his fingers. After a few moments, he bowed his head, drummed his fingers on the monitor, and turned to the Krafkan, who had watched the entire, uninspiring performance with a blank glare.

'Right. Why isn't my quite frankly ingenious piece of override coding not shutting down the satellite?' The counter was still ticking down on the screen behind him.

'Control of the satellite has been transferred to my brethren.'

The Doctor rolled his eyes. *'Again with the brethren!'* He thought. *'Show some initiative, will you?'*

'I was informed that you might interfere with our systems. I activated a download uplink shortly before your arrival in this room and moved all controls previously assigned to this console to the ship in orbit, rendering the human interface ineffective.'

'I see.' The Doctor scratched his head. *'So you knew I was going to come hunting for the computer banks?'*

'It seemed your most likely course of action considering the information you had at your disposal.'

'So I'm the fish and this empty shell of a control console is bait.' He sighed resignedly, and spoke out loud. 'I'm in a trap, aren't I?'

'That. That is. Accurate.' The Krafkan replied, in its hoarse speaking voice.

'Well. That's annoying.' He pondered the situation for a second, and noticed that the Krafkan had not moved to attack him; instead it lingered by the doorway, blocking off his exit. *'So why am I not dead yet?'*

'Direct assault was considered inefficient, considering previous attempts. Indirect disposal has ultimately a higher success rate.'

'You're disposing of me indirectly? What are you going to do, bore me to death?'

'Oxygen levels in this building will drop to below consumable levels in approximately three hours. Smoke levels will become fatally toxic in four point five hours. You will perish in four point five one five hours.'

The Doctor grinned widely. 'My friends,' he said.

'Your associates may escape to your vehicle. They are of no consequence. They pose no threat to us.'

'No, that's not what I meant,' he said. He pointed over the Krafkan's shoulder. 'My friends.'

Then something very heavy struck the Krafkan over the back of the head with a resounding clang.

The Krafskan stumbled forwards as Tracy hefted a fire extinguisher down on its head, knocking it off balance and sending it crashing to the floor.

'Come on!' she coughed through a thick cloud of pungent smoke. The Doctor laughed exuberantly, hopping agilely across the room, over the slumped Krafskan's form and through the thin doorway.

The smoke creature quickly pulled itself to its feet, but the Doctor had already rushed away.

Professor Garson was at the other end of the corridor, beckoning them to hurry, and Tracy sprinted past with the Doctor in tow. The three of them ran as the Krafskan leapt after them, angry that its trap had been ruined.

'Another fire extinguisher?' he asked, chuckling. Tracy shrugged, but Garson turned around.

'They're all over the place. Literally, there's one in almost every corridor,' she said, a little irritably.

'I never thought I'd owe my life to health and safety!' he replied, bouncing off of a wall that appeared out of nowhere in the smoke. Garson laughed, but it turned into a cough mid-breath. The Doctor was painfully aware of how thick the smog was becoming, and he knew that Tracy and the Professor wouldn't be able to hold out much longer before the toxins in the air start to affect them.

'Professor, how far now until we're back at the TARDIS?'

'If we take a shortcut through one of the practical labs, we'll be back in the corridor where I found you,' she said. They stopped in front of a metal door, one of many that lined the sides of that particular room. Less than ten steps away, the Krafskan's dark form rounded a corner and pounced into view. There was no time to deliberate; the Doctor pushed the heavy door open, ushering Tracy and Garson very quickly through it. He buzzed the door shut with the sonic screwdriver, and heard a heavy bolt lock slide shut. It would buy them a little time, but the Krafskan was incredibly strong, and its claws could more than likely stab right through the metal.

The practical laboratory was less modern than the rest of the building, filled with old wooden worktops charred in places from experiments gone wrong.

'We're not really the sort of lab that specialises in practical experiments,' Garson said, as they hurried through the maze of desks. 'But we do like to get our hands dirty from time to time...' She smiled weakly, and the end of her sentence trailed off as she stumbled and fell to the floor.

'Professor?' Tracy turned back, dropping the fire extinguisher and running over to come to Garson's aid. The Doctor crouched down, and gave her a hand up. She had tripped over a bloodied corpse, wearing a lab coat speckled with red. He cradled her head in both hands, and peered into her eyes.

'Professor? Are you alright?'

'I – I'm fine.' She hadn't even noticed the body, and her eyes seemed slightly hazy; they flicked left and right intermittently, and she was blinking too quickly.

'Is she definitely okay?' Tracy asked. The Doctor looked over darkly.

'The wound to her shoulder, plus poisoning from the atmosphere conversion – her body's struggling to cope.' He threw the Professor's arm over his shoulder, and took her weight.

'Th-thank you, Doctor,' she mumbled. She had dropped her spectacles when she fell. Tracy picked them up and passed them to her.

'Right, we need to move quickly,' the Doctor said. 'Professor Garson? Lead us onwards.'

The Professor looked pale and clammy, but nonetheless she pointed them forwards, walking steadily with the Doctor's aid. She pointed them to one of several doors that lead away from the practical lab, and Tracy moved towards it.

'Try and open that one up, Tracy,' the Doctor said.

'Yeah, I got that,' Tracy rolled her eyes in response, but the slight cough that followed her words gave her away; the smoke was affecting her too. The Doctor's respiratory bypass system – an unusual aspect of Time Lord physiology that allowed him to go without oxygen for longer periods than normal – would keep him safe for a while, but soon even he would begin to weaken due to the toxic smog's effects.

'Ah!'

Tracy's cry alerted the Doctor, and he looked up to see a long, rakish arm sweeping the air where Tracy's head had been moments ago. It would have decapitated her, had she not dropped to the floor. Next to the arm, the rest of the Krafkan's body was still forming, smoke swirling like a hurricane as the figure solidified.

'But how-?' the Doctor was thrown for a second, but then he realised. The doors weren't airtight – the Krafkan had simply dissolved into gas and floated under the doorway into the lab.

'Tracy, the door! Now!' he shouted. From her position on the floor, she kicked harshly, slamming the door open. She rolled, ducking under the half-formed alien and out of the room. The Doctor pulled Garson along after him, with no time to spare for gentleness, and shoved her through the doorway; with a snarl of anger the Krafkan stabbed at the Doctor, who dived past it, the creature's claw just scratching his cheek. He winced, but the pain would be a lot worse if he stuck around. He used a wall as a springboard to propel himself out of the creature's path, and found to his delight that he was back in the corridor they had landed in, the TARDIS stood resolutely in place. Tracy was half-carrying, half-dragging Garson towards the box, and just as the Krafkan stepped through the door into the corridor, Tracy vanished inside the TARDIS, taking Garson with her. A rattling cry echoed down the room, and the creature lunged, running on all four of its spindly limbs like a prehistoric predator. The Doctor sprinted flat out down the corridor. Over a longer distance, there would have been no contest, but here he had the advantage of a head start and a narrow room. He hit the TARDIS doors just as the Krafkan's claw brushed his back, slamming the doors shut behind him and locking out the dark monster.

The familiar, comforting hum of the console room enveloped him. He prodded the cut on his cheek experimentally. He would be fine, it was barely a scratch. He turned his attention to Tracy and Garson; Tracy was leaning against the console, coughing heavily, while Garson was lying on the floor beside her, eyes closed. He rushed over to them, kneeling beside the Professor.

'I think she's just unconscious,' spluttered Tracy, between bouts of hacking coughs. The Doctor checked the pulse of the prone figure in front of him, and a wave of relief washed over him as he found it.

'You're right. We need to get her to a hospital, though... Are *you* okay?'

'I'm fine,' Tracy said. Her eyes looked hazy.

'You don't look fine.'

'I'm not going to faint again.'

'I didn't say you were,' the Doctor said reassuringly. He stood up.

'I am *not* going to faint again.'

'Okay...?'

Tracy's eyes were flickering. She tried to swallow, but started choking. After a few moments, with a groan of resignation, her knees gave way and she collapsed against the side of the console.

'I don't normally fall over this often,' she mumbled to the Doctor as he stepped in to catch her. Then her eyes rolled backwards and closed, and she was out cold.

High above them, high above Kensington Laboratories and the rest of the world, something dark waited, hovering above Earth like a bird of prey ready to dive. It was massive, the size of a building, though it resembled nothing of the sort. It was a thing of stone, a huge pillar of dark, jagged, earthy rock that jutted out in every direction. It was long, and thin, and though its shape was barely discernable it was clear that it tapered at one end to a single spike, a jagged knife of rock that protruded out of the front of the structure. It was filled with cracks and crevices, some barely visible, others tearing great rips in the hide of the stone. In places, it was obvious that great chunks of rock had crumbled away from the surface, damaged or worn down by an unknown force. It seemed ancient, and it most likely was.

Within the ship was a blanket of darkness. The ship had no lights, natural or otherwise, to illuminate its innards. Every room was filled with smoke; thick, noxious fumes that could choke a human's lungs in seconds. It weighed down on the walls of the ship, seeped into every corner. Not a single breath of fresh air contaminated the toxic smog that swirled in the craft's belly.

Each room in the ship was fundamentally the same. The walls were black, lumped, uneven, a reflection of the rocky surface of the exterior. Archaic technology lined every surface. Bulky dials turned left, then right, then turned full circle, or spun wildly. Weighty levers lay rusted, the thick grips covered in tears and scratches from overuse. Heavy metal panels were arranged pell-mell on low sections of the walls, and atop them were banks of clunky buttons that clicked on and off automatically. Wires of every kind trailed and snaked from place to place, everything from heavy twined cables to hair-thin strings of metallic fibre. Heavy pipes could be seen connected to the ceiling, pouring out great clouds of the thick smoke. They seemed to be refilling the ship, producing the foggy substance. Every moment would bring another chugging blast of fetid black smog. At seemingly random intervals, vents had been gouged into the walls; passages between the rooms, big enough only for a human of slight figure. The vents seemed to be the only way of moving through the ship, as there were no doors in any of the rooms. Thick ugly grates were sealed in place over the entrances to the vents, through which the omnipresent smoke seeped.

In one of the rooms, three Krafkans stood in silence. They were identical to their fellow on the planet's surface, or close enough. They shared the same dark, shadowy figures, thin limbs and spiked fingers, the same pale empty eyes and rough, uneven holes for mouths, like open sores. In front of them was a computer screen. Cracked in one corner, dusty, but still functional, and displayed upon it was all of the data required for the activation and control of the satellite. A counter timer flickered dimly on the old screen, displaying the numbers 22:58:16. There was still almost a full day remaining before they could use the satellite, but the Krafkans were nothing if not patient. They had waited more than thirty years for this technology to be developed. They could wait one more day.

As one, without outwardly acknowledging anything, they began to speak.

'What is happening?'

For a few moments, there was silence. Then, an incoherent roar of noise blossomed inside their heads, rippling around the corners of their minds.

'Contain yourself.'

The roaring stopped, and after a long pause they received a reply.

'The Doctor has escaped, as have his associates,' thought their fellow Krafkan, the scout on the planet's surface below.

'How is this possible?' They asked.

'His associates returned to aid him after the trap had been set.'

The three Krafkans paused. As one, they tilted their heads to one side.

'This information is contradictory. Why would they risk unnecessary danger to retrieve one being?'

'I am unsure,' their scout replied. *'I believe humans may prioritise individual survival over group survival. This may be why they returned to retrieve one being.'*

'That is an inefficient method of survival.'

The scout's reply was wordless (their telepathic language was not limited by the outdated, finite use of words); a vague feeling of agreement filled the minds of the three Krafkans.

'Very well,' they thought. *'We will take measures to prevent his interference. Stay in the human facility and await further orders. We will contact you when the signal has been broadcast.'*

'Understood.'

The scout faded from their minds until it was gone completely. The three members of the Krafkan hivemind remained still and silent, waiting in the dark.

The phone was ringing, and he couldn't find it. Anthony moved through the apartment gracefully, like a choreographed dancer, in search of his mobile. He was tall and slim, but not gangly. His hair was straw-coloured, with a tinge of gold to it. His eyes were pale blue. To call his smile contagious would have been a gross understatement – it was the global pandemic of smiles. Even now, alone at home, his mouth was curved upwards slightly, like the memory of something funny had just re-entered his head.

There it was! Barely visible, nestled at the back of the settee, on the verge of slipping down underneath the pillows. One day he'd realise the importance of keeping his mobile somewhere safe. But today, he thought triumphantly as he picked up the phone, was not that day.

'Anthony Blaid, speaking. To what do you owe the pleasure?'

The voice at the other end of the line sounded slightly strained. *'Anthony. Hi. My name's Steph, I work over at Wells Museum.'*

Anthony frowned, trying to put a face to the name. Blond curls and a sharp face flickered across his memory. *'Aren't you Tracy's boss?'*

'Yeah, that's me. Listen, have you seen Tracy recently?'

The question threw him a little. *'I had lunch with her today, why? Did she not turn up to her shift or something?'*

'No, no, she turned up to her shift just fine,' Steph said, exasperated. *'It's just – well...'*

'What's happened?' Anthony asked.

'There's been a robbery at the museum. Someone broke in and stole a police box.'

'A police box?'

'Long story. The point is, nobody's seen Tracy since the robbery, which was about half seven.'

Anthony held the phone away from his ear, and looked at the tiny digital time display in the corner.

It was past nine.

'So she's gone AWOL for a few hours. She does that all the time.'

'Does she usually disappear midway through her shift? I don't think so,' Steph snapped. Another voice spoke on her end of the line, and she paused for a few moments to speak to whoever it was. When she came back, she sounded a little calmer.

'Look Anthony, this is going to sound weird, but it's possible Tracy stole the police box.'

'What?!' he laughed incredulously. 'That's ridiculous! On about five different levels!'

'I'm just looking at the facts,' Steph said. 'The box was being kept in the storage bay, which has two entrances. The door that connects it to the rest of the museum is too small for the box to have fit through. The only other way out is the back entrance – that's this big, metal rail door we use to bring in large artefacts. That door can only be opened from the inside, and Tracy was in the storage bay when the alarms went off. It all points towards her being the culprit.'

Anthony exhaled slowly. 'No way. She wouldn't rob anything.'

Steph seemed to consider this for a moment's time. 'Well, there is another possibility... Stay calm, alright?'

Paradoxically, Anthony's pulse quickened as soon as he heard those words. 'What do you mean, stay calm?'

'Well... Tracy wasn't alone in the storage room when the box was taken,' Steph said. She spoke slowly, deliberating over each syllable. 'There was this guy in there with her, he called himself the Doctor.'

'And?'

'He came to the museum to get the police box back. He kept claiming it was his, demanding we return his property. I thought he was just an eccentric at the time...'

'Well,' Anthony thought about it for a second. 'That means he stole it, right? I mean, he had a motive if he thought the box was his.'

'Yes, but Tracy was in the room with him when it was taken. And now she's gone.'

Anthony mulled that over in his mind. Then it clicked.

'You aren't suggesting...?'

'The police are saying he might have abducted her. But like I said, it's only a possibility-'

Anthony collapsed on the settee. 'You think she's been abducted by a museum thief?'

Steph paused awkwardly. 'Maybe.'

Anthony stared at the ceiling. His good humour had faded away.

'Right. Um, should I try and call her?'

'I already have, and I got nothing.'

He absorbed that information silently.

'We'll let you know if we find out anything else.'

'Sure. Thanks, Steph.'

'No problem.'

The line clicked, and the phone was silent. Anthony tossed it back down on the settee (it was immediately swallowed up by the pillows) and laced his fingers around his head and processed the information slowly. Tracy. Police box. Doctor. Abducted. It swirled around sluggishly in his head.

'Where are you?' he murmured, and his words were swallowed by the silence.

She had fainted again. Damn.

Tracy woke up with a crick in her neck, resting her head against the TARDIS console. She had been left slumped against the cold metal. She looked around to see what had woken her, and saw the Doctor striding through the doors, shutting them behind him.

'Where've you been?' she mumbled, pulling herself to her feet.

'I've dropped Professor Garson off at the Royal Hope Hospital. She'll be fine; they'll have that wound to her shoulder cleaned up in no time, and a long rest in a breathable environment will clear her lungs out.'

'Good to see you're so thoughtful,' Tracy said. She took a deep breath, and found that her lungs felt ten times wider now that the smoke was no longer clogging them; she felt like a balloon inflating.

'And why aren't I in a hospital?'

The Doctor looked a little sheepish. 'I knew you'd be okay in here. The TARDIS is as safe as it gets, and besides, fainting in the console room is practically your occupation.'

'Oh, shut up,' she laughed, punching his arm lightly. He hopped backwards, rubbing the spot she had hit.

'Ow! Be careful, I bruise like a peach.'

They both giggled as the Doctor stepped forward, heaving a thick iron lever down on the console. A low hum swept through the room as he began to work the controls.

'No, but seriously, why am I still here? You could have just dropped me off...'

The Doctor looked up, and there was a shimmer of something strange in his eyes. A look that Tracy couldn't quite put her finger on. 'I don't know. I thought maybe...' He paused. 'I thought maybe you'd like to come with me.'

She raised an eyebrow. 'With you to where?'

'Up. To the Krafkan spaceship. That's where we're – I'm – going now. I'm going to find it and shut down the satellite controls before they complete their mission.'

'Satellite? You've lost me now.'

He waved a hand airily. 'Long story. The Krafkans in orbit above Earth are in control of a satellite that Kensington Labs launched a while ago. It has a newly-developed system for broadcasting radio waves into deep space integrated into it. I don't know what they want with it, but it can't be anything good. They've got just under a day before the controls sync up properly, and then they'll be able to fulfil whatever their mission is.'

She digested the information. 'Right. And you want me to come with you?'

'Well, if you wanted to...'

'Will it be dangerous?'

'Probably.'

The day's events flickered in front of her eyes. She thought of all the dead bodies at the lab, and how he had barely stopped to acknowledge them. She thought about how cavalier and reckless he was, and how much safer she would be if she left now and never thought about the strange man in a blue box ever again.

'I understand if you don't want to come. I'll just drop you off in London then...'

Yes, she thought.

'No,' she said. Her mouth was getting *really* good at disobeying her head. 'I'm coming with you.' He looked up, surprised. His mouth split in a wide grin, and the sparkle in his eyes intensified. She realised what it was that she saw in those eyes now; the Doctor was lonely.

'Are you sure...?'

'I've never been surer. Come on, we've got aliens to fight,' she said, rapping the console with her fist. He laughed incredulously and began to whirl around the console, hitting buttons and twisting dials into place.

'Alright then, Tracy Blaid, away we go!' he shouted, and with that the whole room jerked and began to shake. Tracy fell forwards, catching her arm on the console, but she had been expecting it this time and was able to keep her balance. The same surreal groan of noise she had heard last time fired up again, gradually gaining in volume until it became a thunderous roar of sound. With an almighty shudder, the TARDIS took off.

'Does it do this every time you fly it?' She asked him. He winked at her.

'Usually!'

Controls blipped and beeped, and a computer monitor embedded into the console glowed brightly.

'Okay, we're circling Earth's orbit... Aaaaaaand we've got a lock! There they are.'

Tracy looked at the screen the Doctor was gesturing to, and caught a glimpse of what looked like a massive shard of stone, drifting across the otherwise blank display.

'And that's what, their ship?'

'Yep!'

'It's bigger than yours.'

The Doctor gave her a look. 'On the *outside*, maybe.'

The display shifted, and the whole room jolted suddenly.

'Oh dear, hang on a tick – they've got some pretty advanced cloaking technology, but I can bypass that with this-' he whacked the console violently and something clicked into place '-...That's odd, for a ship so primitive to have such high-tech shielding... Still, we're almost there...'

The grating sound of the TARDIS engines intensified and the whole ship jerked again. The Doctor frowned, and tapped a few buttons on a small keyboard that jutted out of the console. A data reading flashed up on the computer screen and he peered intensely at it.

'That's odd. Tracy, what day is it?'

She was thrown by the question. 'What? Um. It's Saturday.'

'No, the date I mean, Full date, including the year.'

'Er... Nineteenth, I think. Nineteenth of January, twenty-twelve.'

'That's what I thought, but according to this, it's the twentieth. And it's around three in the morning.'

Tracy raised an eyebrow. 'Maybe your clock's a bit off?'

'Possibly. Or maybe we just hit a bump in the vortex, jumped a time track or something-'

The console room jolted, much more violently this time, knocking the Doctor off of his feet. When he pulled himself up, he found the digital clock on the monitor spinning forwards like mad, jumping ahead by hours in front of his eyes.

'Something's wrong,' he said. 'Time's accelerating around us!'

It was at that moment that something incredibly loud, almost deafening, erupted in both of their minds. Three voices speaking in unison, the volume of which floored the Doctor and Tracy.

'Doctor. We see you are attempting to interfere with our mission.'

The Doctor rubbed his temples with his fingers, trying to soothe the pain in his mind. *'Krafkans. Hello, we were just – just coming to see you, actually.'*

'You must not interfere.'

'That's what your scout said. And yet, here I am anyway!' As the Doctor thought that, he began to pull himself up off the floor, propping himself against the console. *'I'd congratulate you on hijacking the TARDIS' telepathic circuits to amplify your message, but I doubt hiveminds put much stock in personal achievements.'*

'We have taken steps to prevent your interference.'

'Oh? Really? That's not you accelerating time, is it?'

'We have trapped your ship inside an deceleration field. You are moving at a slower pace; therefore time appears to move faster.'

The Doctor stood fully, straightening his legs despite the mental burden of the voices. Tracy had hauled herself to her knees.

'But deceleration fields are way beyond you! With a ship like that, there's no way you've constructed that level of time-altering technology!'

'We possess this technology. Once the satellite controls are active, we will release you from the field.'

'I can't allow that,' the Doctor thought. *'What do you even need the satellite for anyway?'*

The Krafkan voices remained silent. The Doctor looked at the computer screen. The hours left until the satellite had completed its one-day rotation were dwindling away.

'Alright then,' he said out loud. *'You want to play with time? Well, bad luck, because you're messing with a Time Lord!'*

He grasped the handle of a wooden wheel inlaid on the console and began to spin it, simultaneously drumming out a complex rhythm on a set of keys.

'Tracy, press that button there! The red one!' he shouted. Tracy, barely standing upright, pushed down on the button and something deep within the console cracked, a shearing noise resounding about the room. With a mournful sigh of defeat, the TARDIS engines lapsed into silence, and everything was still.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. Then;

'Textbook landing,' Tracy said, and they both erupted into laughter.

'Right,' the Doctor chuckled once the laughs had subsided. *'Come on, we need to hurry. I've just broken us out of the deceleration field, but we've lost almost a full day. The satellite will be ready for activation in... Ah.'*

Tracy followed his gaze and noticed the timer on the screen; 00:15:28.

'Fifteen minutes,' the Doctor sighed. *'No time like the present.'*

He ran over to the doors of the TARDIS. *'Now, we've landed on board their ship. They'll know we've broken out of the field, and they'll defend the control system at any cost. We need to shut it down and, if at all possible, figure out why they're going through all this trouble for a radio broadcaster.'*

He pushed open the door to find himself facing utter blackness. He peered out into it for a few moments, before an idea struck him.

'Torches,' he said, passing one to Tracy out of his jacket pocket. She was confused for a minute – it was a heavy duty, industrial torch with a huge bulb, but he had kept two of them in his pockets without even a slight bulge. She filed the mysterious pockets under "Things I'll Ask About Later" and

flicked the on switch, yelping a little as the bright light filled up the room. The first thing she noticed was-

'For god's sake, it's more of that smoke,' she said, exasperatedly.

'Of course it is. They breathe this stuff, remember?' the Doctor stepped out of the TARDIS and into the dark, smoggy ship, his own torch beam flicking up and down the walls. 'Though on the plus side, it seems to be quite a low level amount of smoke. At a guess, I'd say they have to refill the atmosphere in here manually, and creating the deceleration field drained so much of their power that they had to decrease output levels of atmosphere converter to compensate.'

'Yeah, my thoughts exactly,' Tracy muttered dryly, making sure not to breathe in any of the smoke; she didn't want a repeat of last time. The Doctor found the edge of the room. The walls were made of roughly hewn rock, with thick cables running through and over them. He ran his hands across the wall.

'Any sign of an exit?' he asked her. She looked around for one, shining her torch, but the room appeared to be boxed off. Eventually, she alighted on something interesting.

'What's that over there?'

He followed her torch beam and approached something protruding from the wall. Closer inspection revealed it to be a metal grate, covering over some sort of ventilation shaft that through the wall. The Doctor peered into it.

'What do you think it's for?' Tracy asked.

'Well, if we consider that the Krafkans are equally comfortable as a gas instead of a solid...' He tapped the grate that covered the vent. 'I'd say that this is the exit. They must drift from room to room in gas form, via these vents.'

He started to examine the rough screws fixing the grate over the vent, but as he did so, a voice began to echo inside his head. A familiar feeling washed over him; they were back.

'Doctor. You have breached the deceleration field.'

'You don't say,' he thought cheerily. *'Didn't take me too long, either.'*

'From our perspective, you required almost a full day to escape.'

'Was it really that long? Ah well, time flies when you're having fun.'

The dank, empty sensations that filled the Doctor's head unnerved him. The Krafkans were cold and clinical in their thoughts.

'We are searching for you. You will be found. Leave this ship now.'

'You're searching for me manually? Why don't you use your internal scanners?'

The Krafkan thoughts bristled. *'We have no need for internal scanners.'*

The Doctor considered that for a moment. *'What, you don't have any? But that's ridiculous! How can you have... Oh. Ooooh. I see.'*

Tracy looked at him like he was mad. She could hear every word of the exchange, but she wasn't able to communicate telepathically, so she had no way of interrupting the conversation. The Doctor's face was scrunched up, in deep thought.

'Of course. It's obvious. You're scavengers, aren't you? Born scavengers, designed by nature to take what others have achieved and make it your own.'

The Krafkans didn't respond, but the Doctor pressed on.

'That's why you have the technology to create a deceleration field in seconds, why your ship's shields are so impressive, but you don't even have a simple set of internal scanners. That's why you have to pump atmospheric converter around the inside of your own ship – it isn't yours, is it? You stole it.'

From another gaseous life form, if these vents are anything to go by. Even when you hatch, your eggs produce smoke to change the air around you. You are taking the property of others and making it your own from the moment of your birth.'

'It is a most efficient method of survival.'

'But don't you have any ambition?' he asked them. 'Don't you have any desire to create something new, something to call your own?'

The Krafkans didn't respond. The Doctor sighed, but his train of thought was interrupted when Tracy jabbed his arm.

'Ow! What?!' he flinched back. She rolled her eyes.

'I've been trying to tell you, but you've been too busy having a mind-to-mind with Smokey.' She gestured to the ventilation shaft he had been investigating. 'Shine your torch beam down there.'

He did so, illuminating the thin passage. It was about the width of a small person, and quite narrow. He peered down it, and was surprised to find that he could see into the next room, though his view was obscured by a second grate at the other end. The room at the other end of the vent was just as gloomy and black as the one they stood in... Except...

'Is that a computer screen?' he asked, peering in closer. 'It is! And it says... Ooh, I see...'

Displayed on the screen, barely visible through the gaps in the grates, almost too far away to make out, flickered a faint digital display.

00:12:14.

'There it is!' the Doctor cried. 'There's the control panel! If we can get to there, we can disable their control over the satellite!'

'The TARDIS,' Tracy said immediately, turning back to the box, but the Doctor grabbed her hand.

'We can't risk getting caught in another deceleration field,' he said. 'In the time it would take us to break out of it, they would have gained control of the satellite. We need to find another way.'

'Well, hurry up with that,' Tracy said, her tone ominous. 'We've got eleven and a half minutes until whatever their mission is, succeeds!'

'I have an idea.'

Instantly he flew into action. The sonic screwdriver flew into his hand, and he focused it on the thick screws holding the grate on the wall in place. Almost immediately they fell loose and toppled to the floor, leaving the Doctor to pull the unfixed grate from the wall. It fell to the floor with a loud clanging sound.

'It's simple. The three Krafkans on board are out combing the ship for us. I can crawl through here and reach the controls, deactivate the satellite, and crawl back before they find us. Then we fly off to safety.'

He reached forward into the vent, pushing aside a bemused Tracy. After a few moments, he pulled back, his head now hatless.

'Erm. I don't fit,' he said, a little embarrassed. He sheepishly pulled his hat out of the vent, where it had fallen, and carefully rebalanced it on his head. 'Can't get past my shoulders.'

Tracy groaned. 'We've barely got ten minutes, you know!'

The Doctor eyes lit up. 'New idea! I may not be able to fit, but you could!'

'Woah, woah, hold up. Me?'

'You! It'd be a tight squeeze, but you can fit down this vent. Here-'

He passed her the sonic screwdriver.

'-use this to unscrew the grate at the other end. Come on, quickly, time is of the essence!'

'But – but...' She trailed off, as she couldn't think of any flaws in his argument. He stared at her insistently.

'Oh, *fine* then,' she harrumphed indignantly, pulling herself into the vent. It was narrow enough that her shoulders rubbed painfully against the rock sides, but she was just slim enough to fit. She held her torch hand ahead of her, illuminating the passage. Thankfully it wasn't too long, and it took maybe ten small steps to bring her to the other side. She was a little wary of using the sonic screwdriver, but all she had to do was point and click. The orange glow mingled with the white torchlight as the screwdriver buzzed, and the grate fell away, its support gone. It hit the ground noisily, and Tracy froze, worried that the Krafkans would come running back to the control room. They wouldn't expect her to be coming through the ventilation system, but a loud noise might alert them to her presence. Though for all she knew, they might not even have ears.

She dropped out of the vent into the control room. The omnipresent smoke was heavier here, and she suspected that it would only get thicker as time went on. Not that it mattered, as she and the Doctor would hopefully be long gone before the smoke started causing problems. She crossed the room to the dimly flickering light in one corner, and found herself staring close up at a huge data readout. A simple digital clock was slowly counting down.

00:10:01.

'Right. Simple as can be. Just point and click,' she repeated in whispers. She held the sonic screwdriver up to the screen, and pushed down the button.

'Where are you, Doctor of Gallifrey?'

'Here, there and everywhere,' he replied, as the Krafkan words flooded into his head. 'What's wrong? Can't find me?'

'It is only a matter of time. We will track you down. We will take your ship and we will integrate it into ours. With your level of technology, the hivemind will be assured to survive.'

'That's odd,' The Doctor thought. *'You talk about the hivemind as if you're working for the greater good – the hivemind is, after all, the collective consciousness of all Krafkans combined.'*

'Correct.'

'But there's only four of you. You aren't helping the hivemind at all.'

'Our mission is to aid the hivemind.'

The Doctor scratched his ear. He was really only buying time for Tracy, but he was intrigued by the Krafkan's true purpose. It had been baffling him for a while now, and he decided now was a good a time as any to look for answers.

'How is it? All you've done is steal a broadcasting satellite. There's not much you can do for the greater good of Krafkan-kind with that.'

'Our mission is to aid the hivemind,' the Krafkan voice repeated. The Doctor tapped against the rock wall of the ship absent-mindedly.

'If you wanted to aid the hivemind, you would have just gone home. Go back to your home world and aid your species there.'

'We cannot go home.'

'Why not?' he asked them. He started to feel like he was wasting his breath.

'We have taken everything our home has to offer us.'

'What do you – oh.' He frowned darkly. *'Let me guess. You plundered every single natural resource your planet gave to you, and then you left it, a barren husk of a living world.'*

'It was an efficient method of survival.'

'No it wasn't!' He slapped a fist into his hand angrily. *'You could have exercised just the teensiest bit of restraint and you would have been fine, but now look at you. Homeless. Where are the rest of the Krafkans, then? What happened to them when your planet had been broken?'*

'The hivemind separated,' the Krafkan voices seemed to be growing louder. It didn't mean anything, but the intensity of their words worried him. *'We each piloted our crafts to different corners of the universe, in search of a planet suitable for conversion.'*

'Suitable for...' The Doctor's eyes widened. *'You want to convert Earth's atmosphere?'*

'We currently do not have the resources for a full scale conversion. Once the mission is complete, we will be able to convert Earth's atmosphere and create a suitable new home world for the hivemind.'

'So that's your plan...' He leaned back against the wall. If they were able to do that, the results would be disastrous for Earth. Most of the planet's natural life would die, unable to cope with the toxic new atmosphere. *'They'll choke the Earth until there's nothing left...'* he thought, not to the Krafkans, just to himself. Then a thought struck him.

'But you only have one ship. You'd need an entire Krafkan fleet's worth of atmospheric converters to corrupt the whole planet.'

'And soon, we will have exactly that.'

The Doctor wasn't sure what to make of that. There was no way they could just conjure up a fleet of ships, especially not with a broadcasting satellite.

'How are you going to manage it?'

'We have no further need of this discussion. Goodbye, Doctor.'

Just like that, the Krafkan presence in his mind shut off, leaving him alone once again in the dark room, with only the TARDIS and a torch for company. He was confused; the Krafkans had been

speaking so freely of their plan. Why would they decide to cut him out at the last minute? He had a bad feeling about it.

From down the ventilation shaft, a high scream reached the Doctor's ears. He spun round, alarmed. 'Tracy?' he called. They had been distracting him. He had thought he was playing them for time, but they had been playing him. He didn't get a reply.

'Tracy?!'

The sonic screwdriver's buzzing was relentless, but progress was slow. She was starting to worry that the timer would reach zero and the controls would come online before the sonic had finishing shutting them down. The number had dwindled down to 00:08:18, and the whirring of the sonic showed no sign of stopping. She would have clambered back through the vent and told the Doctor his plan had failed, if not for the small progress bar filling up in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. It was past halfway, and if it stuck to its established pace, it would complete before time was up. The Krafkan's plan would be stopped, and then...

Then what? Would the Doctor just step back into his box and fly away again, off to have another adventure? Probably. But where would that leave her? She would just have to go back to her tiny apartment, back to her shift at the museum, back to the daily grind of life. Back to not knowing what she was going to do or how she was going to do it, back to living day by day without thinking of the future. Could she really go back to living such a mundane life, now that she knew about things like the TARDIS and alien spaceships?

Her thoughts were interrupted by a bleeping noise from the computer, as a black box popped up from one corner. She had no idea how what the Doctor had set the screwdriver to do, so she was unsure what the box was. A cool, feminine voice spoke from the console, startling Tracy.

'Telepathic message prepared for broadcast. Would you like to playback the message?'

She froze for a second, not sure what to do. After a brief period of deliberation, she decided it would do no harm and said, 'Yes. Um, play message, please.'

'Message playing now,' said the computerised voice. The black box expanded so it took up nearly the whole screen (leaving the timer still in view), and a voice that Tracy knew well began to speak.

'This message is for the hivemind. This message is for our brethren. We have found a suitable planet for conversion. Guide your ships towards this signal and converge upon planet Sol-3, known as 'Earth'. We will be reunited. The Krafkan hivemind will be whole once more.'

The message cut off, the black box shrank away, and Tracy was left with a feeling of worry and dread. She didn't know what conversion meant, but it couldn't be good. That must have been the message the Krafkans would broadcast via the satellite once it activated in (she checked the timer – 00:05:56) barely five minutes. The Krafkans wanted to bring their whole species in on Earth; she had to stop them.

'You.'

She screamed in shock as the guttural spoken voice of the Krafkan roared from beside her. She stumbled away, though somehow she managed to keep the sonic screwdriver trained on the control console, most likely out of instinct. The voice came from a vent in the wall, similar to the one she had crawled in through; there was still a grate fixed onto the front of this one, but through the gaps

she could see the smoke swirling and thickening. Slowly, the heavier cloud of smoke began to drift through the gaps, as the Krafskan entered the room.

'Tracy?!' the Doctor's voice echoed faintly, coming from the other side of the vent across the room.

'Doctor!' she called back, scared. 'There's one of them in here with me!'

'I'm sorry, I let them distract me,' he called. 'Just get out of there! Come back through the vent, come on!'

Tracy glanced at the thick smoke, noting that the Krafskan was delayed by the thin holes in the grate, so it was taking some time to enter the room. The she looked back to the computer screen; 00:05:23.

'I can't leave yet,' she shouted. 'The sonic still hasn't finished the shut down.' The progress bar at the bottom of the screen was almost full.

'The shut down isn't important, just don't let them get you!' the Doctor shouted.

'The shut down *is* important,' she called back. 'I've heard the signal they're broadcasting. They're going to bring the rest of the hivemind to Earth!'

'But how?! Oh-' the sound of him hitting himself hard against the head was amplified by the long vent. 'Stupid, stupid, stupid! They don't have navigation systems, but they can follow sound waves back to their source! They're going to ride the telepathic frequency right back to Earth! If that message plays, we'll have an army of Krafskans swarming the planet!'

'You are correct, Doctor.'

Tracy whirled around, and saw to her horror that a plume of smoke was pouring from a vent she hadn't seen before, located just below the ceiling. A long, clawed arm was already starting to take shape from inside the smoke. She began to back away, keeping the sonic trained on the computer screen. The progress bar was so nearly full...

The arm took a swipe at her, and she nearly dropped the sonic; she backed up against the far wall, her breathing ragged.

'Tracy? Tracy, what's happening? Get out of there, now!'

The whirring of the screwdriver was almost taunting her now, loud and shrill, and the Krafskans looked almost solid now, and one of them started to limp towards her-

'Override accepted.' The cool, feminine voice of the computer spoke. 'Activation aborted. Controls shutting down.' The computer screen went blank.

'NO!' the Krafskans screamed in unison, their thoughts like knives shearing into Tracy's head.

Immediately she bolted, diving into the ventilation shaft she had come down. The Krafskans roared in anger, fully formed, and hurtled across the room after her. She felt a breeze stir inside the shaft as they poured into the vent. She couldn't tell if they were clambering after her, or if they had reverted back to gas; she didn't look back to find out. She dropped the sonic in her hurry, and it rolled forwards towards the other end of the vent. It dropped, but a hand shot out of nowhere to catch it.

'Tracy? Tracy?'

'I'm fine!' she called to him. They were only a few steps away. His face appeared at the gap where the other grate should have been, and he smiled.

'What happened?'

'I did it! I turned off the computer!' she said. His face split into a wide grin.

'Brilliant! Now come on, let's get out of here!'

She tripped, falling onto her hands and knees. The Doctor was just over an arm's length away, but she could feel the Krafskans getting closer behind her. She didn't have the time to get back up.

Instead, she crawled, reaching out for the Doctor. He took her hand, and tried to heave her through the slim grate entry. The walls were bruising her shoulders, and for a second she slacked, exhausted. 'Come on! There's no time to stop!' the Doctor said. He took grip of her arm and pulled her onwards again.

Something grasped her leg.

'Doctor-' she started, but she was cut off when something behind her jerked her back. She slipped out of his grip as something pulled her back down the vent.

'Doctor!'

'Tracy?! No!' the Doctor tried to clamber into the vent after her, but he couldn't fit his shoulders through, no matter how he tried to squeeze past. He extended one arm as far as he could, their hands brushing. For a second, he had a grip on her fingertips, and he tried to hold on; but the Krafkans pulled her back once more, sharp claws cutting into her leg, and she slipped through the Doctor's fingers. The Doctor fell backwards, away from the vent, falling against the wall of the room, while Tracy screamed as they dragged her back towards their teeth and claws, to die.

'Tracy?! No!'

The Doctor fell back as Tracy slipped from his grip, the Krafkans pulling her back through the vent. He stumbled, his center of gravity off-balance, and fell back against a heavy pipe running up and across the wall. Immediately he hissed in pain and rolled away; the pipe was red hot.

'Tracy! Tracy!' he cried out, running back to the vent. He was terrified of what he might find there. He was mildly surprised to discover a very much alive Tracy, kicking out furiously with her free leg. The Krafkans had turned to smoke to pursue her, and had attempted to shift back to catch her. The Krafkan holding onto Tracy's leg was half-formed – its arm was solid, but from the elbow up it began to phase into a murkier, cloudier form, and the rest of its body was mostly just an indistinct gaseous cloud.

'What are you doing?!' he said. She looked up at him, fear and anxiety scarring her features.

'I'm stopping it from getting me, that's what I'm doing!' she snapped. He looked past her and realised that her frantic kicking out was stopping the Krafkans from becoming solid. She was disturbing their gas forms too much for them to be able to reassemble into solid bodies.

'I can't keep them like this for very long,' she said, wincing as the solid arm stabbed painfully into her leg. She tried to crawl forward, but she couldn't move. She was trapped. 'Just go, alright? We've saved the day, so go!'

'I'm not leaving you here!' he shouted. One of the Krafkans was slowly shifting into shape behind her, despite her kicking and fidgeting, its face becoming slowly more distinct. He turned back and forth desperately, looking for ideas, thinking, thinking, *thinking...*

The pipe.

He almost dived at it in his desperation. Rather than waste time fiddling with settings on the sonic, he gave the red hot pipe a sharp kick, and immediately recoiled in pain, hopping on one leg in agony. But the pipe had been dented by the blow; time and a lack of repair had left its toll on the metal, which was starting to rust. He gave it another kick and it broke away from the wall, its holdings disintegrating into nothing on impact. He wrestled with the pipe, using his jacket sleeves so he could handle it without getting burnt (though he still had to pass it from arm to arm to stop it from hurting him through the fabric). He swung it around so it was facing into the vent, where it came within view of a shocked Tracy.

'What are *you* doing?!' she shouted.

'I'm stopping it from getting you, that's what I'm doing!' the Doctor yelled sarcastically. He gave the pipe another hard kick, and a further dent appeared at the point of the blow.

'*Krafkans,*' he thought, his words quietly sinister. He was done messing around with them. '*You are beaten. Cut your losses and go home now, or I will destroy you.*'

'*Threats are not permissible, Doctor,*' the hivemind replied. They were angry, insatiably so. '*We will kill your friend for the ruination of our mission, and then we will kill you, and then we will regain control of the satellite and continue our mission.*'

'*This isn't a threat. This is a final warning.*' He slammed the pipe against the side of the shaft. Steam appeared to be leaking from a small, rusty hole in one side. '*Go. Now.*'

'*We refuse.*'

'*Then I'm sorry.*' He looked up and closed his eyes. 'Tracy, shield your face, now!'

Tracy reacted on instinct, burying her face in her jacket sleeve. Which was fortunate for her, because just at that moment the Doctor slammed the pipe against the vent's side again, and the whole thing burst wide open. Red hot steam, previously pumped through it to some other area of the ship, came jetting out like a pressurised can that had been set on fire. The hot steam filled the pipe in moments, mingling with the smoke and the Krafskan swarm. Tracy felt the hot air rush by, and immediately broke out in a sweat; she didn't know how hot it was, but she felt like she was being baked. The Krafskan's reaction, however, was somewhat more dramatic. They were screaming; actual, out loud screaming, their rattling cries amplified by the thin vent, echoing around her until her ears felt like shattering. Slowly, painfully slowly, the grip around her leg weakened. She tried to crawl forward, and found that she was unobstructed. With small steps forward, she reached the edge of the vent and stepped (or more, fell) out of it.

'What did you do?' she asked, dazed. She was covered in condensation as the rapidly cooling steam soaked her clothes. The Doctor looked tired, physically and mentally. He leaned back against the TARDIS, and watched as the last dregs of steam dribbled out of the pipe.

'I melted them,' he said. She looked up at him, shocked, and saw he wasn't joking.

'You *melted* them?'

'In mid-change, their defences are down; even a slight temperature change, if applied suddenly enough, could cause their genetic structure to weaken or collapse altogether. They were half solid, half gas; so I heated them up and the solid bits melted away to liquid, and the gas bits had no choice but to follow along with the genetic shift. I melted them.'

'Right.' She looked down the pipe, and saw a black, tarry liquid coating the bottom. She shuddered.

'So you killed them?'

'I didn't have a choice.'

'I'm not blaming you,' she said, softly. She considered patting him on the arm, but before she could do more than entertain the thought, he had clapped his hands together and jumped into action.

'So! Without that vital-looking heat supply coming through, I suspect the ship's engines will fail at the slightest provocation. I'm going to use the TARDIS to steer the ship out of Earth's orbit, then just let it drift until it deactivates itself, somewhere in the dredges of deep space. Let the Krafskan hivemind scavenge away elsewhere – and pray I don't run into them,' he added darkly. He skipped along into the TARDIS, and though there was a spring in his step, Tracy was certain that the death of the Krafskans would weigh heavily in his mind for a long time to come.

To call the apartment small would have been a generous understatement. It was a tiny space composed of three rooms. Each was badly lit, and had the slightly unkempt feel that lingered in even the most obsessively well maintained of apartments. The bedroom was barely wide enough for the bed; the wardrobe was wedged between the wall and the bedside, and had coat hangers spilling out of it, crumpled clothes strewn across the floor. The bathroom was the smallest room in the house, barely larger than a coffin – even with the toilet, sink and shower removed, it would have been smaller than two paces in every direction. The largest room in the house was an open space that fused kitchen and living room, with a couch situated in one corner next to a small, boxy TV, and a wooden worktop set against the other wall.

The apartment was also empty.

Anthony leaned forward against the kitchen worktop, his head in his hands. He hadn't gotten much sleep. He'd been searching for Tracy for the whole day; now it was the evening of the twentieth, and she had been missing for nearly twenty four hours. Whenever he called her mobile, he got a pre-recorded 'this number is not available' message. He had spoken to ten different friends, none of whom had the slightest idea where she was or where she could have gone. He had returned to her apartment more than once throughout the day, futilely hoping she would have miraculously returned home. But she wasn't there. The long winter night was already in full swing, and it was pitch black outside. He had considered going to the police, but they wouldn't be of any help; Tracy was an adult, they would say, and she was fully entitled to up and leave without a trace if she wanted to. The investigation into the museum robbery was moving slowly; there were more important crimes to solve, apparently, than the case of the missing police box. He sighed, and reached over to put the kettle on. The sound of boiling water was familiar and soothing. Alone and confused, Anthony sat in the dark apartment and made a cup of tea.

His mobile started ringing. He lifted his head up, and saw a number he'd been calling a lot since yesterday; Steph.

'Anthony? Where are you?'

'I'm over at Tracy's apartment,' he muttered. He was tired; he needed to put his head down and get a few hours of decent sleep.

'Oh. Any sign of...?' she trailed off, but Anthony knew what she meant.

'No. It looks like it always does. It's a skip,' he laughed weakly. 'I can't find anything out of the ordinary.'

'Right. Well... Would you mind coming down to the museum for a little while?'

Anthony glanced at the clock. It was almost eight; the museum had already closed.

'What for?'

'The police are looking for any information on Tracy they can get. They're talking to all of the staff, but they'd really appreciate it if you came down...'

'Is she still a suspect?'

Steph paused uneasily on the other end of the line. Anthony sighed.

'She's not a thief, Steph.'

'I know. But it's their job to look at every possible explanation and, well, this is one of them.'

'I'm not going to help them arrest my sister.'

'They aren't going to arrest her if she didn't steal it! You aren't thinking straight. Look, will you please just come on down? Answer a few questions, give them some information they can use. They aren't trying to frame her for anything. If she's in danger they'll be able to help keep her safe.'

Anthony deliberated for a minute, but he knew she was right. His tiredness was making him irritable.

'I'll be right down,' he sighed. He hung up the phone before Steph could reply, and put his head back down on the worktop. He was right on the verge of collapse. He raised his head just an inch, and caught sight of a photograph framed on the windowsill; him and Tracy, taken last year at a childhood friend's birthday party. She looked carefree, happy.

'I'll find you,' he said, sadly. 'Don't you worry. I'll find you.'

There was a white light hovering over her head, just out of reach. Professor Garson tried to get a better look at it, see what it was, but her eyes refused to focus and her arms refused to move. It took her a few moments to realise she was lying down, and for a second she felt her perspective tilt sickeningly. Waking up without realising you were asleep; it was like lifting your head out of a bucket of water.

'Ah, you're awake,' a voice said softly from her left. Garson shifted her head slightly to get a better look at the speaker, and saw a pretty young girl with a wide smile peering over her. She was dressed in pink scrubs. It was as Garson saw her outfit that the penny dropped. She was in a hospital.

'How did I get here?' she asked, her voice hoarse. The nurse shrugged.

'I don't know, I'm afraid. I'm just looking after you until one of the doctors can give you a proper look over. But I think I can say that you're making an excellent recovery.'

Garson felt for the wound in her shoulder, and found it was coated in bandages. Her throat felt sore, but much better than it had in the laboratory.

Hang on... The laboratory. Memories started to fade past her, and she caught glimpses of dark twisting corridors, a terrible creature chasing after her, and two strange friends who had pulled her to safety.

'There was this... This monster chasing me,' she said. The nurse smiled, and poured her a glass of water from a jug on her bedside table.

'You've been on painkillers for your shoulder. It's natural that you'll have had some vivid dreams.' Professor Garson nodded slowly, ingesting that information. Had it all been just a horrible dream?

Something else flickered through her mind – a name.

'I'm the Doctor, by the way-'

'Doctor,' Garson said. The nurse looked over to her.

'Are you feeling alright? Do you want me to fetch a doctor now?'

'No, I'm fine... I'm looking for a specific man. The Doctor, he was called, I think.'

She lay back and thought about her vivid dream, wondering whether or not it had even happened, while the nurse flipped through the sheets of paper on a clipboard.

'Well, we've got a lot of doctors on staff, surprisingly!' the nurse giggled to herself. 'What was the name of this doctor? Doctor who?'

They were stood on top of laboratory, looking out towards the streets and back roads of London that zigzagged like a huge maze across the city. Tracy stood with her hands in her pockets, chilly. The Doctor didn't look bothered by the cold. His red scarf was still loose around his neck, and his jacket didn't seem to be too warm, but he still showed no sign of the cold January air affecting him.

'There's still a Krafkan in here,' Tracy said, stamping her feet on the roof to emphasise her point (and also to keep her feet warm). The Doctor shrugged.

'UNIT will take care of it. Or Torchwood.' He looked across the London skyline pensively. 'I'm not planet Earth's only defense against extra-terrestrials, you know.'

She conceded the point, and wondered what UNIT or Torchwood meant. The Doctor wasn't being too forthcoming with information at the moment, and he remained silent, unwilling to elaborate. After a minute or so, she broke the silence again.

'So what now?'

'Same old, same old, I suppose,' he said, slowly. He tapped the TARDIS door with his foot. 'Back in my box, travelling the universe. Saving the day.'

'Alone?'

He looked over to her, his eyes wider than she ever remembered seeing them. He looked vulnerable. He looked lonely.

They both spoke at once.

'Will you come with me?'

'Can I come with you?'

The Doctor's eyebrows shot up. Tracy's mouth hung half-open.

'So... So I *can* come with you, then.'

'You really want to?'

'Of course! Why would I want to stay here-' she gestured across the city '-when I've seen up there?' she pointed upwards to the sky.

'You've seen how dangerous it can be. I said it would be dangerous before, but now you've seen it for yourself.' He pointed at the cuts on her leg. 'I've promised to keep people safe before, and sometimes I let them down. I can't promise you'll be safe with me, Tracy.'

'I don't care. I want to get away, and I want to get away with you,' she said. She smiled at him, and hopped over to the TARDIS. Before he could protest, she pushed him playfully backwards and he fell through the TARDIS doors.

'Come on, Doc! Adventure awaits!'

She ran in through the doors after him, and he stood with a sheepish sigh of 'Don't call me Doc...'

He pulled the doors in and headed over to the control console, where Tracy was leaning over a metal bar, waiting to go.

'Right, so here's something I don't get,' she rambled, while he began to move about the controls.

'Why do you speak English? If you're an alien, I mean. And why did the Krafkans speak English, come to that?' Her eyes widened. 'Is English the official language of the universe?!'

He laughed. 'Not quite, no. The TARDIS' telepathic circuits translate alien languages into a tongue you can understand, basically.'

'Cool,' Tracy grinned, tapping her hands on the console, eager to leave. The Doctor stopped in mid-step, and gave her a curious look.

'Actually, speaking of the telepathic circuits...' He looked up at the time rotor. 'I'm wondering why you were so drawn to the TARDIS when you first saw it.'

'Oh, it was just like this itchy feeling at the back of my head, whenever I looked at it. Like there was something not quite right about the whole thing.'

The Doctor contemplated that for a moment, then patted the TARDIS console gently. Then, he whispered, so quietly that not even Tracy could hear him over the hum of the technology within the ship.

'Thanks, old girl,' he said. 'Guess you knew I was feeling a little lonely.'

And while there was no external sign that the TARDIS had even registered what he had said, inside his mind the Doctor felt the slightest tug, as if the TARDIS' telepathic circuits were chuckling to themselves.

'Are we going or what?' Tracy laughed. The Doctor looked up, and smiled back. He pulled down a heavy iron lever and an unreal, unearthly grating noise, the sound of reality falling apart and then instantaneously sewing itself back together, fired up.

'Pick your destination, Tracy Blaid!' he shouted over the noise. 'Anywhere and everywhere, tell me where we're going first!'

She looked across, exhilarated and excited, but before she could reply he opened his mouth and added, as an afterthought,

'Oh, by the way, did I tell you? It's also a time machine!'

The look on her face was priceless, and the Doctor and Tracy laughed together as the TARDIS fell through the vortex and off into adventure.

Coming next month to
Doctor Who: Re-Incarnated...

Stars and Stripes

By Mark Lee

'Allow me to introduce the President of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln.'

It's time for Tracy's first proper adventure; America, with Abraham Lincoln at the helm. But is all as it seems within the walls of the White House? And with an invisible enemy on the loose, will the Doctor and Tracy be able to stop the Bazbalan plan?

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About The Author

Alex Smith lives in Merseyside, England. He spends most of his time procrastinating, unless he can think of something better to do. When he does eventually put pen to paper, he writes short stories, Doctor Who fanfiction, and bad poetry. He enjoys writing about himself in the third person.

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'They'll choke the Earth until there's nothing left...'

Life just got pretty exciting for Tracy Blaid. She's been swept out of the museum where she works, into an impossible blue box that's bigger on the inside, by a madman who calls himself the Doctor. But while she struggles to comprehend this impossible turn of events, a dark alien force has infiltrated Earth...



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