

DOCTOR · WHO

Cold Storage

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'Begin recording.

Polar Region Expedition Day 18. Scientist Zsarzl reporting. Until today, our team had discovered no sub-glacial reservoirs in the southern polar ice, but Commander Iссisiz informs me that his warriors' sonic probes may have detected regions of lower density dihydrogen-oxide in the ninth region. I have assembled my assistants so that we may examine this discovery personally. Commander Iссisiz has noted that as the low-density dihydrogen-oxide is entombed within several hundred meters of solid ice, he must bore through the glacier to achieve greater access. To this end, I have authorised the use of our sonic drills. My team and I are in transit to the tunnelling site; I will continue this report upon arrival.

Continuing Log. We arrived at our destination some time ago. The glacier thickness was much greater than estimated and it required the combined effort of several warriors to break through the ice. We succeeded in this effort a few moments ago and Commander Iссisiz is leading his troops into the artificial tunnel. My science team will follow now. To preserve power in the case of glacial collapse, I will record sparingly.

This is odd. Within the glacier there appears to be another tunnel already constructed, but the texture of the walls suggests that the ice was not so much drilled but... chewed, as if by a small animal's teeth. Several small animals. Commander Issisiz is hailing me.

We have made three very disturbing discoveries. First, our scans indicate a large underground cavern located at the end of this tunnel. Glacier dating indicates the cavern can only have formed in the last few solar cycles. Second, we have examined some of the material our earlier probes detected, but what we found was not any low-density dihydrogen-oxide I have ever witnessed; instead of a liquid body of a clear substance, it is a mass of large silver crystals studding the cavern's lower walls and floor. Our third discovery is the most disturbing: buried within each crystalline growth, we can see what appears to be an irregularly-shaped mass, almost like a worm... What is that sound?

The crystals are cracking! Splintering outwards! The worms inside, they are alive; they are creatures, silver creatures! They live! They are advancing towards us! Warriors, defend...

...They gnaw through the warriors' armour...

...behind you...

...Commander Issisiz...

...help...

...

The TARDIS materialised with a steady, groaning sound, the Ship's dark blue exterior enveloped by the surrounding indigo shadows. One of the front door panels opened and through this emerged Rose Tyler, dressed in dark blue jeans over white sneakers, and a light green short-sleeved t-shirt. The glacial air settled over her body, lifting goose bumps upon her skin. She immediately started to shiver, her teeth rattling in her skull.

'Oi! This is a d-d-deadly c-c-c-cold. I'll f-f-f-freeze f-f-for s-s-s-sure in here.'

'Here, darling,' said Captain Jack Harkness, who exited the TARDIS and handed her a grey parka with thick, yellow woollen lining; he had seen her shivering through the door while still inside the Console Room. He pulled on his own full-length grey jacket over his leather vest and blue shirt, while he rubbed his hands and blew air between his palms. 'I hope we're dressed enough to keep the chill off –it's cold enough to freeze ice!'

'Did somebody say it's cold?' came a strong, roving voice from behind them. 'I'd say it's bracingly refreshing.'

It was the Doctor, dressed only in his dark brown battered leather jacket, dark trousers and shoes, and a bright yellow jumper, a colour he had recently added into his rotation of hues. He shut the TARDIS' door behind him, and with a wide upturning grin, he locked it with his key.

'I think only you would say that,' Jack answered, 'and I know only you would walk around in freezing temperatures changing nothing but your jumper colour!'

'Hey, don't knock the yellow! It's a useful colour - keeps me nice and warm.'

'Well, then,' Rose interjected, 'while you're thinking sunny thoughts, would you mind letting us know where we are?'

'One of my favourite globes in the galaxy, and your next door neighbour: Mars, the red planet itself!'

'Mars?' Jack looked as if he were about break into song. 'I've always wanted to visit this rock! Oh, but when are we? Please tell me it's before the Martian Migration!'

'Martian Migration?'" Rose repeated. 'You mean there are real Martians? Actual little green men?'

'More like giant green lizards, Rose,' the Doctor replied. 'Humans call them Ice Warriors, and the funny thing is, in the Martian native language they pretty much call themselves that too. And yes, Captain, the Martians still live on Mars, at least they do right now, in the early 35th Century.'

'Hang on a minute,' Rose said, as she wandered over to sloping wall to her right. The Doctor followed Rose to the wall, leaving Jack standing in front of the TARDIS, examining his surroundings in rapt admiration with the aid of a palm torch he had pulled from his pocket. Rose reached out a hand to touch the wall, and said, 'This is ice. Proper ice. I thought Mars was all red and dusty, you know, no water.'

The Doctor reached Rose and stared at his reflection, cast back perfectly upon the dark smooth surface.

'No *liquid* water, you mean,' the Doctor replied. 'But ice, that's a different story. Why else would the natives be called 'Ice Warriors'? The smiled and raised his voice slightly, letting it echo off the vastly spaced surfaces surrounding them. 'And where on Mars can one find so much ice?'

'The poles!' Jack cried, hurried over to join his friends. 'We must be in some sort of ice cave at one of the poles. But which one? The North?'

'I hope so,' the Doctor said. 'I like Mars' North Pole; I went there once, it's got some beautiful Osirian Pyramids all over the place.'

'There are pyramids on Mars?' Rose said with considerable surprise.

'Another race, and another story,' the Doctor answered with a grin.

'Maybe so, but I don't see any pyramids here,' Jack said, casting his torch light around to get a better view of the cave. 'Maybe it's the South Pole.'

'Bother,' the Doctor said. 'I've never had much fun with South Poles.'

'Because lots of planets have a South Pole,' Rose said, smiling at the chance to share an in-joke with the Doctor.

'Of course,' he replied, looking at her as if she were missing the obvious. 'It's an established scientific fact!'

'So says you.'

Rose smiled and turned to follow Jack's torch light. Then she formed a puzzled frown and narrowed her eyes.

'But tell me, Doctor; is it another established scientific fact that Mars' South Pole has silver ice?'

'What? Where?' The Doctor seemingly genuinely surprised.

'Yeah. Jack, shine your torch back over here, just there.' Rose pointed to a large crystalline formation a few feet ahead of them, jutting up between where the wall met the floor.

'I'll do even better,' Jack said, as he slipped the torch from his palm and handed it to Rose. He then lit another, identical device in his other hand.

'Two's better than one, in more ways than one,' Jack said with a grin. 'I'll go check up ahead, see if there are any more like this one.'

'Light the way, sunshine,' the Doctor quipped.

'Very funny,' Jack replied, even as a smile creased his mouth.

Left alone, the Doctor and Rose crouched down to get a closer look at their discovery. The Doctor spoke first.

'I've visited this planet a lot of times and in lots of places; I've seen its ice up close, sometimes too close. I've never seen anything like this before. But one thing I'm sure of: Whatever this stuff is, it isn't ice.'

'Then what is it?' Rose asked, just as Jack returned.

'Hey, guys! There are a whole bunch of these silver crystals along this tunnel, all over the floor and a little ways up the ice walls. None on the ceiling though. Come and take a look.'

'Illuminate us, Captain!' the Doctor cried, unable to resist the metaphor. He stood and glanced down at Rose. 'Come on then.'

'Just a moment,' she answered. 'I think there's something inside this thing. Here.' She handed the Doctor the palm torch and peered closely through the silver formation. 'Yeah, there's something in there all right.' She breathed upon the crystal, her breath fogging its surface. 'Funny, it almost looks like some sort of metal...'

Something within released a high-pitched screech. The palm lights in both the Doctor and Jack's hands shattered, dousing its light. Then the crystal exploded. In the darkness, the Doctor saw a small object launch forward and seize hold of Rose's face, covering her eyes, nose, and mouth. Rose cried out, the sound muffled by whatever gripped her face. The Doctor and Jack leapt forward and grabbed hold of Rose's shoulders, but the thing gripping her screeched again and an arc of cobalt blue electricity lanced out from its body, flinging them backwards to crash into another ice wall several feet away. In the momentary flash of the energy, the Doctor saw that whatever had hold of Rose was also silver. Then a low whine warbled from the creature and Rose's body fell limp and fell forward, before being dragged into the crystal itself. The Doctor leapt up and raced forward, too late. Rose was gone. The Doctor stuck his head into the space left behind where the crystal had been, and saw there was a hollow shaft beyond and leading downwards. The Doctor spun around to Jack.

'It's dragged her down into the glacier! We've gotta get after...'

A loud rumbling rose from the within the shaft, which promptly collapsed as huge chunks of ice filled its space and barred any entry.

'Right! That's got my full attention!'

With a look of pure determination upon his face, the Doctor reached into his jacket pocket and produced his Sonic Screwdriver, just before a huge clamp-like hand gripped his own. The Doctor looked over, and then up. Far up. A gigantic

silhouette loomed over him, its outline bearing a resemblance to a large turtle. Or a lizard. A deep, raspy voice hissed from out of the darkness.

‘No, human. You have our full attention now. Lights!’

Several lamps surged into brilliance, each gripped in by two-fingered dark green claws belonging to massively tall green creatures clad in matching stream-lined shell-like armour. Each being wore upon their head a sharply studded green helmet which rose to a sharp point at the top. Two large, sloping trapezoid visors were embedded in the helmets, masking the eyes beneath with a blood-red gaze. The mouths of the creatures –a thin slit of green lips surrounding by scaly skin of the same shade- twitched with anticipation of action. One of them held Jack securely by his shoulders with its clamps. Then the creature who held the Doctor spoke again.

‘This area is threat zone to the biosphere. You are here without authorisation; therefore you are also a threat. Now you are under the jurisdiction of Martian Law! And the Warriors of Mars do not treat threats lightly.’

The Doctor and Jack watched as the creatures –the Ice Warriors- lifted their arms in unison as each levelled the sonic cannons embedded in their armour straight at them.

‘Wait! Stay your cannons!’

Another voice, lighter and less raspy than the Warrior holding the Doctor, echoed in the cavern. The Ice Warriors held still and turned their heads in the direction of the voice. A figure, much shorter than the other Martians, yet still tall and possessed of regal carriage and grace, strode forward from the darkness and stood before the lead Warrior who had spoken to the Doctor. This new arrival was dressed in similar colours as the Warriors, but his body was much leaner and his armour was smooth with patterns of sharp symbols etched at the chest. Around his shoulders, a dark green cloak dusted with ice flecks swirled magnificently. An equally smooth, domed helmet with large red visors for eyes covered this Martian’s head. Hissing slowly, he addressed the larger Warrior.

'You act without thought and consideration, Commander Abaxzis. You have these humans within your power, you suspect them of being the reason why we are here, then why not question them to discover if they are? There is no honour in arbitrary destruction of life.'

'My...apologies, Lord Sstral. Perhaps I was too keen in my assessments.'

'Yeah, perhaps,' Jack retorted, wriggling against his captor. The Doctor shot him a scathing look and Jack dipped his head. 'I'll just let this play out,' he muttered to himself.

'Very good, Commander,' Sstral replied, acting as if Jack had not spoken. He then faced the Doctor.

'You have this one chance to speak in your defence, human. Use it wisely.'

'No worries there – wisdom's my strong point. But really quick, have you ever been interested in becoming an Ambassador?'

If not for the visor covering his eyes, the Doctor would have been certain Sstral had blinked.

'I value diplomacy as a virtue, yes. But I am warrior in calling and spirit.'

'Right, just checking. Anyway, I'm the Doctor; the other guy's my assistant, Jack Harkness.'

Jack cleared his throat and, seeing the Warrior had released his grip on him, took a careful step forward.

'Uh, aren't you forgetting something? A certain rank, maybe?'

'Come on, Jack, why trouble the Martians with titles and ranks sixteen centuries after their time? Simple names are enough.'

'They are sufficient, Doctor, Jack Harkness. Now explain why you are here.'

'I think for the same reason you're all here.' The Doctor pointed to the collapsed remains of the silver crystal. 'Something broke through that crystal and attacked my friend. A nasty thing: small, metal, and vicious to the core.'

Sstral turned to Abaxzis.

'Can you confirm this, Commander?'

'Not completely, my Lord. But I admit these two were in great distress when we found them, and seemed very intent to examine the remains of that crystal formation, just as we have been.'

'What do you mean, 'just as you have been?'' Jack asked, striding forward to join the Doctor. 'Please, you have to believe us! We're not your enemies, and we're just trying to save our friend. If you just trust us, we might be able to work together and find out what's going on.'

'Well done, Jack,' the Doctor beamed. Jack glanced at the Time Lord and smiled.

'I've been learning from the best,' he said with a wink. The Doctor then stepped forward and stared deep into Sstral's eyes.

'Think about it, Lord Sstral. What's your diplomacy tell you?'

Sstral dipped his head for a moment, his breath hissing deep. Then he lifted his head and stood high.

'My diplomacy tells me, Doctor, that someone truly seeking to save his friends would seek assistance even from his captors. I will trust you. Do not betray that trust.'

'You've got my word. So, what's been happening here?'

'Some days ago, a scientific expedition in search of fresh sources of liquid dihydrogen oxide detected a previously unknown glacier in our southern polar region.'

'What's dihydrogen oxide, Doctor?' Jack whispered as Sstral spoke.

'Water, Jack, what else,' the Doctor whispered back. 'It's rare on Mars. Now pay attention!'

'The expedition's lead scientist, Zsarzl, relayed a video transmission of their journey to our Capital City. They located the glacier, detected the dihydrogen-

oxide buried deep beneath the ice, and tunnelled within to tap the resource. What they discovered was something unexpected.'

'What did they find?' the Doctor asked, the hairs on the back of his neck beginning to tingle.

'I will show you. This is the last transmission of Scientist Zsaral.'

Sstral reached into a compartment grafted into the side of his hip armour. He retrieved a small, oblong-shaped translucent strip, which, with a press of his claw, shimmered with light to reveal the un-helmeted face of a Martian, already speaking...

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Sstral pressed the strip once more, and its light faded. He addressed the Doctor.

'Do you have any idea what these creatures are?'

The Doctor set his jaw and steeled his eyes.

'Yeah, and I hope I'm wrong!' He turned to Jack. 'You said you found more of those crystals on the walls and floor?'

'Yeah, a whole bunch. If we follow this tunnel we'll find them quick.'

The Doctor faced Sstral and patted his shoulder armour.

'You heard the man. Come on!'

The Doctor led the way along the tunnel, the lights from the Warriors lamps splashing copies of his shadow along the ice around him. Within moments, he found another silver mass, nearly tripping over the crystal which cankered the floor. The Doctor crouched down and gazed into the mass; just beneath the surface was a shape, curled and motionless in chilled darkness. The Doctor stood and asked one of the Warriors to direct its lamp light down the tunnel; several more crystalline growths glistened in the illumination.

'They seem to grow in number the deeper we go down this tunnel; Rose must have found one of the most furthest out. And your scientist Zsarzl said there's a cavern beneath us?'

'Correct. Given the apparent speed of its formation, the space was may have been carved by whatever formed the tunnel, a mere few solar cycles before the expedition's arrival. But I do not understand how that could be possible.'

The Doctor frowned and pointed the Sonic Screwdriver at the crystal.

'Let's find out. Keep your lights here; I want to see whatever comes out of this clearly.'

He pressed a button on the device, which emitted a low whine. The silver surface of the crystal began to fog. Then, just as with Rose, a high-pitched squeal erupted from within the crystal, which shattered from within. A small, silver shape launched like a geyser into the air, shrieking as it rushed towards the Doctor, who caught in his hand.

'Lights! Get the lights on me now!

The nearest Ice Warriors approached. Their lights revealed what he held: a thick silver metal worm with red eyes, and tiny gnashing teeth which the Doctor struggled to keep from his flesh. Its sharp segmented tail contracted and extended with quick, mechanical thrusts, as if desperate to free itself from the Doctor's grip. All the while, the creature was screaming, like an angry child ripped from sleep. The Doctor stared at the monster in his hand and his eyes went wide and wild.

'It's a Cybermat! It's a proper Cybermat!'

The Cybermat flailed in his hand and he nearly lost his grip. Then it began to shower his flesh with electric flame. The Time Lord grit his teeth and sweat beaded upon his brow as he tried to hold the Cybermat steady and subdue with the Screwdriver, but it was slipping from his hand...until Commander Abaxis rushed forward and clamped his thick claw upon the metal surface of the beast.

'I can hold it for longer, Doctor. Now do what you must!'

Panting, the Doctor pointed the tip of the screwdriver between the Cybermat's red eyes and toggled a control, and immediately the metal worm shuddered, and with a final piercing cry, went limp in Abaxis' grip, its electrical

defences halted. With a sigh, the Doctor pocketed the Screwdriver and smiled up at the Commander.

‘Always trust an Ice Warrior to have a strong grip.’

The Doctor then took the Cybermat from Abaxis and began to examine its underbelly as Jack and Sstral hurried forward. Jack spoke first, his speech tense and genuinely scared.

‘Alright, what on any world just happened? And what is that thing?’

‘Like I said, it’s a Cybermat. It was hibernating in the crystal. It must be some sort of chemical medium friendly to their systems, keeping them healthy until they wake up. They must have been put here to watch out for any intruders.’

‘Such as the scientific expedition,’ Sstral hissed.

‘And like Rose,’ Jack muttered, his face full of disgust and worry.

‘Yeah,’ the Doctor muttered, his own emotions inscrutable. ‘I think it was the heat from her breath that did it. But we’ve gotta find her right now – this situation’s just gone from worst to catastrophic! We’ve gotta get to that chamber!’

Lord Sstral stared at the dormant machine in the Doctor’s hand and hissed in agreement.

‘Very well. It is clear something alien has infested our world. Perhaps we will find what we all seek in the cavern. Let us seek it out.’

Sstral motioned to his troops, and as he, the Doctor and Jack walked forward, they began to follow. Suddenly, the Doctor stopped in his tracks. Jack and Sstral halted at his sides.

‘What’s going on?’ Jack asked.

‘Quiet,’ the Doctor whispered. He stared hard down the corridor. ‘There,’ he said.

Jack and Sstral looked ahead. About six meters ahead of them, blocking their path, stood seven figures, cloaked in inky shadow. Each was very slender, incredibly tall –perhaps more than the Warriors- and smooth-skinned. Strange, thin tubes—like half-squares- were attached on both sides of the creatures’ heads, like an

eerie parody of the ear. Then, in unison, two blood-red trapezoid-shaped eyes flared bright on each figure's head, revealing a hideous, sharply-lined and almost featureless silver face, with cold mouths fixed in the mould of a frown. One of the creatures lifted its arm, pointed to the Doctor's party, and spoke in a deep, metallic voice.

'You belong to us. You shall be like us.'

Jack leaned close to the Doctor and whispered,

'What are they?'

The Doctor, his jaw firm and his eyes narrowed, made his answer.

'Cybermen. The owners of our little pet. And they don't take prisoners.'

To be continued...