



THE MISSHAPEN PLANET

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**DEDICATED TO THE MEMORIES OF
WILLIAM HARTNELL AND PETER BUTTERWORTH**

SOMEWHERE AT A CERTAIN LOCATION IN SPACE AND TIME A NERVOUS VOICE QUESTIONED.

‘Look if it’s a specimen you need then take what’s in this black bag! It’s got some of the best material in the universe! I can install it right now.’

Somewhere at the same location in space and time a cold voice answered.

‘Discard the bag. We will not yield in our decision.’

The nervous voice sighed and its owner dropped the black bag, which rolled out of sight.

‘Are you so determined to bring him along? I mean, he always scares me whenever he shows up. He’ll make you rue the day you made me make the call.’

‘Send the signal or face our blades.’

The nervous voice quavered but gave a deflated consent. A button pressed. A signal surged, a signal meant for only one listener in all of space and time...

THE SILENT SIGNAL

THERE WAS NO TIME OUT THERE, AND YET TIME WAS EVERYTHING AND EVERYWHERE.

There were all types of time: slow as molasses, or fast as a hummingbird chasing a hurricane. The flights of time raced or crawled in all directions: forward, backward, sideways, even looped. In all its fixed courses time was fluid and complete, but there were some gaps in which to manoeuvre, to explore, to hide, or simply to wander aimlessly.

Between splits of seconds and snapshots of eternity, a shining box of blue riddled with echoes of history and seeped in foreshadows of possibility twisted across the unwritten tablets of time. Inside the blue box, there was a hidden dimension of bright lights and secret rooms where three beings resided, their impossible coexistence derived from three intrinsically distinct points of existence. Often the lives of these three travellers were chaotic and frightening, with some terrors bleeding together forming chilling nightmares; but they were always thrilling. At the moment the new danger began, two of the beings were standing in the hidden interior's control chamber, a vast room of white, rounded walls and clean light.

One being was older than the other – infinitely so. It was he who stood before the primary device controlling the box’s flight. The old man, who called himself the Doctor, wore clothing which proclaimed his aged, elegant appearance and ancient heart: mirror-polished black shoes topped with grey spats; crème-hued tartan trousers etched with black, thin-lined checks; a silver waistcoat over a crisp, white shirt with a winged collar under-circled by a black silk cravat; and a sharp-edged, pristine, black frock coat. On the ring finger of the Doctor’s right hand there was a large, royal-blue stone almost alive with midnight radiance. At the top of his head a full, back-curling mane of thick, white hair framed the old man’s sharp-boned, chocolate-eyed, rigid-skinned face, a chiselled visage of unwavering character and confidence.

And yet, for all that boundless self-security, troubled clouds darkened the old man’s face as he stared fixatedly at the white console device. His piercing eyes narrowed and his bony fingers clutched his mouth and chin. It was a stance the Doctor adopted during many different emotional states; but most particularly when he was either happily excited or strongly incensed. He was currently undecided on his resultant mood, but his interest was unquestionable.

The Doctor leaned forward and peered hard at what was attracting his full attention. Then he finally spoke.

‘This is peculiar, quite peculiar.’

The Doctor stepped back from the TARDIS console and pointed his ringed finger towards a domed bulb protruding from one of the control panels. Quick, flashing mauve light from the bulb threw the old man’s dark shadow against the white, roundelled wall behind him. The Doctor’s sharp eyes narrowed with interest and he half-turned to his left.

‘Tell me what you make of that, my dear boy.’

The ‘dear boy’ – in fact a grown man who disliked being called a boy as much as the Doctor abhorred being addressed as ‘Doc’ – was Steven Taylor, a space pilot from Earth’s twenty-third century, and one of the old man’s two travelling companions currently aboard the TARDIS.

‘What am I supposed to make of it? I see nothing wrong; it’s just a flashing light, Doctor.’

‘Of course it’s a flashing light, young man! But it’s also a very special sort of bulb, a detector, and one that’s detecting certain signals.’

‘What kind of signals?’

‘Why, signals of distress, of course!’

‘Distress? But what’s so peculiar about a call for help?’

The Doctor raised his eyebrows and patted Steven’s shoulder.

‘Nothing! The peculiarity is that the light is flashing! The device only activates under conditions. Now if I can only remember what they are...’

Steven watched as the Doctor bent over the hexagonal control device and began adjusting its instruments. He had been on board the TARDIS long enough to recognise the old man’s pattern of activity: he was curious, and when the Doctor was curious he always went exploring. And that always brings trouble.

Thunderous sounds of pounding hooves trampling the wails of the dead and dying rumbled in Steven’s mind. As if to brush the unwanted memories from his mind – like removing the stale stick of cobwebs – Steven ran a hand through his thick, waving dark hair and peered at the illuminated instrument.

‘We’re in for another run-around, aren’t we, Doctor?’

The Doctor lifted his white-haired head and glanced at his friend, a bright twinkle in his dark eyes.

‘Come now, Steven, if adventure lies on the edge of our horizons then why not reach out and catch it, hmmm?’

‘Maybe because every time we chase after adventure it seems trouble’s about to catch us.’

‘Oh, nonsense, nonsense! We’re much too quick to catch!’

Steven heaved a weary but accepting shrug as the Doctor returned his attention to tracking the distress signal.

A few minutes later Dorothea Chaplet – Dodo to her friends -, a young, dark mop-headed girl from 1965 London, skipped into the control chamber. She was the Doctor’s other companion. She wore a horizontal-striped light- and dark-blue long-sleeved shirt, a plaid light- grey and lavender knee-length skirt, and zig-zag-patterned lime-green stockings underscored with ruby-red slippers. The small, skinny teenager smiled a wide, lop-sided grin and threw open her arms.

‘What do you think, Steven? Do I look ready to break out of Kansas and follow the yellow brick road in style?’

Steven, who wore a simple, era-generic button-down salmon shirt tucked into black trousers and dark suede shoes, privately thought his friend held the oddest sense of style he had ever seen; but he chose not to be so brusque in his reply.

‘Kansas doesn’t have any yellow-bricked roads in my time, Dodo.’

Dodo heaved a surprised giggle; once more she had forgotten that Steven came from her future and a place with little need for fantasy. Oh well, the Doctor can be my wizard any day. Let’s see what he thinks of the outfit.

‘Well, Doctor? What do you think of the clothes?’

The Doctor, still bent over the console, stiffened.

‘This is terrible! Absolutely intolerable!’ Dodo clamped her hands on her hips.

‘Oi! I think they’re fab; but if that’s how you feel...’

The Doctor glanced at his affronted companion.

‘What? Oh, no, no, dear child, your ensemble is merely mildly eccentric. But this-’
the Doctor jabbed his ring-looped finger at the blinking instrument, which had piqued his curiosity – ‘this is unacceptable!’

‘What’s making you so riled, Doctor?’ Steven asked. He had rarely seen the old man so agitated. The Doctor pointed a stabbing glare towards him.

‘The distress call, Steven! I now know why the signal made the instrument brighten – the call is not simply being broadcast across space, but through time as well!’

‘Through time? Wait. Could it be... them?’

The Doctor quickly waved his hand in curt dismissal and then placed it gently over Steven’s shoulder.

‘I think I can safely assure you we should be spared their horror on this occasion. Nevertheless, we must root out the source of this transmission and silence it at once!’

‘But if this is a call for help,’ Dodo interjected, ‘then why treat it like a threat?’ She was very curious over her friends’ unspoken concern.

‘Because, my dear child, once someone begins listening to the sounds of time there are often grave consequences. So now we must make sure whoever is seeking help has not done themselves more harm than good!’

The Doctor leaned across the console and swept his hand over the engine lever. The complex crystal lattice within the central column flashed and the casing rose and fell in time to the throb of the ship's powerful engines as the TARDIS slipped into the currents of time. Some time – or whatever approximated time in the TARDIS – passed and the columnar time rotor in the centre of the console slowed to a halt. The Doctor, who had been checking the Ship's Fault Locator with Steven and Dodo's help, hurried over to the console and scanned its instruments.

'Wonderful! We've arrived. Well, it seems the TARDIS is not so uncontrollable after all, hmm?'

'Maybe,' Steven quipped, 'if it has something to follow.'

'Oh, shush, my boy! I'm making consistent navigational progress. Now, let's see where we are. Dodo, my child, please be so kind as to open the scanner.'

'Opening quick, Doctor,' Dodo said with a smile. She felt a small surge of anticipatory pride as she realised the Doctor trusted her to operate his machine, if only a small part. She pulled the switch and the scanner's dark screen blinked and an image brightened to life. Dodo's eyes widened with wonder. She had ever seen anything like it, not in all her journeys with the Doctor.

'Oh, Steven, just look at it! It's... it's absolutely beautiful! It's really fab!'

And it was, thought Steven, on both counts. He crossed his burly arms over his chest and studied the sight the scanner revealed: a massive emerald planet streaked with sparkling bands of silver, cyan and violet.

'It's definitely one of the most colourful looking planets I've ever seen.'

The Doctor adjusted the scanner's view and off in the inky, star-flecked darkness of space a bright blue star came into view. Steven peered at the stellar body.

‘With a star like that I wonder what conditions are like on the planet?’

‘Ah, an apt question.’ the Doctor said, his voice softening as he gripped his chin with his thumb and forefinger. ‘For a star to appear so blue it must be quite young, and quite hot: something on the order of 30,000 degrees Celsius.’

‘Wow! I bet it’s boiling the planet then!’ Dodo exclaimed.

‘Not necessarily, my dear. The star is also a notably greater distance from this planet than the one giving light and life to your precious Earth. So, even with such a powerfully radiant star as this blue representative, that sheer distance should mean the planet’s surface temperature is roughly comparable to that of your home.’

The Doctor gripped his lapels and peered hard at the rotating ruby planet.

‘Still, I’m sure I’ve seen this planet before and I wonder if I’m neglecting something important about it.’

‘Something important?’ Steven echoed. ‘You mean something historical? When are we anyway?’

‘Long before your twenty-third century, my boy, and yours as well, Dodo.’

‘How can you so sure?’ the teenager inquired. ‘Why the past but the not present or the future?’

‘Oh, by the stars, my sweet child. I have plotted their course for so long I remember where they’ve travelled and where they must yet go. Besides, I recognise the lights of your time too well: I once spent quite some time there.’

‘Home, sweet home, then. I wonder if anyone’s caught a glimpse of this place yet.’

‘Oh, I doubt it, very much so. The telescopes of your era were historically impressive but far too primitive to penetrate this deep into space. Earth’s keenest observers won’t

discover this region of the cosmos until the earliest years of the twenty-first century, and even then they won't understand a fraction of the wonders opening before their eyes.'

A buzz from the console attracted the Doctor's attention. He nodded.

'Ah, but the TARDIS appears to have seen our next destination: somewhere along the planet's equatorial axis.'

'So are we going to land?' Dodo asked.

The Doctor glanced over at Dodo and grinned.

'Of course we are! To have come this far without satisfying our curiosity would be most distressing!'

The old man tugged the motivator lever and the TARDIS descended. Steven and Dodo had just turned away to leave the Doctor to his piloting when the old man moaned and slumped over the console. Steven hurried over to the old man's aid.

'Are you all right? Dodo, pull a chair over to him.'

'N-no! No, thank you, Steven. I appreciate your concern but it's quite unnecessary. I must have stumbled against the corner of the console, that's all. But I assure you, all is now perfectly well. Now I must fetch my cloak.'

The Doctor straightened and smoothed his long, silver hair and the front of his black frock coat. He seemed to mumble softly to himself.

'I must keep the TARDIS close in case of crisis.'

The old man stepped over to the large oak chair placed along one wall in the room. Over the chair was draped his black felt cloak. This he lifted from the seat and threw around his shoulders. For a moment Dodo thought even that exertion made the Doctor pale slightly. The Doctor blinked once and shook his head, as if to rouse himself. He then turned to his companions.

‘Well, we’ve landed safely and the environmental monitors confirm my theory: the planet is perfectly safe to explore. Now, come along!’

The Doctor pressed the door control and the large double interior doors swung open with a strong, buzzing drone. The trio crossed the Ship’s threshold and emerged into a vast, multi-levelled metal chamber of imposing size. Dodo shivered in the chilly, sterile air while Steven gazed about their foreboding surroundings. All of the surfaces were a uniform black, even the support columns and girders, which jutted and extended from the walls and footpaths in obtuse and strange circular patterns. The Doctor leaned in close to one of the girders and studied its construction.

‘This metal,’ he mumbled to himself, ‘I’m sure I’ve seen the likes of it before. But where?’

Thin panel strips along the walls behind them generated a harsh, white light. The light rays poured over the floors, the overhead, and the walls of the enclosure. The only discrepancy in the oppressive black-white dichotomy was the dark-blue exterior of the TARDIS, which had landed on a platform about midway between the highest and lowest levels of the chamber. The Doctor stepped forward to the edge of the platform and gazed out across the massive expanse. He then pointed and swung his cane in a wide arc.

‘You see, my friends? Off in the distance this entire cavern tapers to fine points at both ends.’ Dodo and Steven watched the Doctor’s tracking cane to follow his observation. The Doctor continued his lecture. ‘Now, you’ve both seen a number of alien crafts in your travels with me. Let’s see what you make of this one, hmmm?’

Steven was the first to hazard a guess.

‘Well, I’ve been a pilot long enough to recognise a basic aircraft shape when I see one, but this one has some odd construction choices. These girders for instance,’ – Steven

gestured towards the thick, black support beams lining the wall section directly behind them - 'they're much too thick and probably too heavy for conventional aerial transit.'

'Then maybe this is a submarine,' Dodo opined. 'I've seen a few films and programs on the War on the telly and in the cinema, and this really looks like the inside of one of those.'

The Doctor rested his thumb upon his chin once more and pondered.

'Yes, yes, I'm inclined to agree with both of you. What we have here is a large ship designed for flight but at the same time is best suited for an underwater environment. Hmm - perhaps birds and fish have learned to love one another.'

'What do you mean, Doctor?' Steven asked.

'Oh, proverbs, my boy, proverbs! Don't they have such things in your century? Of course...it may be one of my own.'

The Doctor heaved a quick sigh and suddenly froze. His eyes widened and his head tilted back, as if he were sniffing the air although the interior of the vessel carried no detectable scent. Then the old man spoke.

'I hear something. Do you hear it as well?'

'What are we supposed to be hearing?' asked Dodo, who marvelled at the Doctor's keen ears. The old man gave a prompt response.

'Some kind of scratching - no - tapping. Something is tapping the wall behind us!'

'You mean someone's trapped in the wall of the ship?' Steven's muscles had already tensed; he was ready for action.

'Maybe, Steven, but I rather prefer the notion that someone may be trapped behind the wall, perhaps...'

The Doctor paused, then hurried forward and began feeling along the dark material of the wall with the tips of his fingers. He looked back to his companions.

‘Don’t just stand there gazing, you two! There must be a locking mechanism here along this wall; help me to find it!’

Dodo and Steven looked at each other and then joined the Doctor’s search. After a few moments Dodo crouched close to the ground to feel for locking switches, just as Steven discovered what he thought the Doctor was hoping to find: a small rod with a circle affixed to one end, poking out of the wall.

He called out his find to the Doctor, who told him to try and operate the control. Steven studied the rod and guessed the attached circle held an important function. He gave it a quick turn and heard a sharp click. There was a deep throbbing drone and a panel in the wall pulled inwards slightly and then slowly slid upwards. Once the slab had risen high enough, the Doctor strode into the shadows beyond, his companions close behind. They found themselves within a small alcove void of any furniture, decoration, or light source. Dodo looked around and shrugged her shoulders.

‘It looks like an empty room to me, Doctor. Are you sure you heard something?’

‘Of course I am, child. I can still hear it now -’

Something caught the Doctor’s eye. He paused and looked down. In the centre of the room lying upon the floor was a small, thin hexagonal, dull grey metal object no larger than a saucepan. The Doctor stood near and knelt over the object to inspect it.

‘Very curious. I believe this is the device which sent the distress signal the TARDIS detected. But why leave it in here?’

He picked up the machine and held it close before his face to study its every detail. Then the Doctor noticed a small grill affixed to the device's top surface, from which the sound of tapping emitted, a sound keyed to a frequency only his ears could detect...

Still clutching the object, The Doctor scrambled to his feet, wincing as his knees creaked.

'Out, both of you! It's a trap!'

Before any could move the alcove door slid to the ground as fast and sharp as a guillotine. Darkness consumed the cell. Immediately afterwards a second panel along the opposite wall slid upwards to admit a blinding patch of light. Inside the light a figure approached, its outline blurred in the brilliance. The being stood within the doorway: it was a tall, thin humanoid encased entirely in a featureless black one-piece jumpsuit. The gloves covering its hands and feet were webbed. In the harsh levels of light the Doctor gazed upon the creature and his mind scintillated with the knowledge that he had seen its kind before. His thoughts raced to place the memory. And then he saw the creature's face: it was a sharp-angled mask shaped like a dark skull stripped of all flesh. Two large concave carvings were its empty eyes. A pair of large hooped horns was its ears. A foot-long stick with a large ring attached to its end sprouting from the forehead was the alien mark, which rooted the Doctor's memory and named the creature's race.

'The Voord!'

'Who?' Dodo asked. Her voice was half-fearful, half-amazed at the Voord's elegantly imposing appearance. While Steven took a slow step away from his friends, the Doctor answered Dodo's question.

'Voord, my child. They are an amphibious warrior race from the planet Marinus, or at least that's where I first encountered them some time ago. On that occasion I thwarted

them from conquering that planet and they've since taken to the stars to build a new base to settle and restore their forces. I should have recognised this craft as one of their stellar submersibles!

'But what do they want with us now?'

'This is something we must know at once.'

The Doctor stood firm and brandished his cane towards the Voord.

'You, sir! Are you a Voord speaker?' The Voord in the doorway stood still and said nothing. The Doctor drew himself up with indignation. 'I have asked you a question and I require an answer!'

The Voord entered the cell. Just then Steven pounced to tackle the alien but the being's lean body revealed stunning speed as it turned upon him and in that split instant the ringed stick upon the Voord's head flared a deep red. A harsh, humming vibration crackled the air. Steven clamped his hands to the sides of his head and howled in pain as his knees buckled and his body crashed to the ground like a boxer broken with a single, shattering blow. There he writhed and twisted under the merciless, relentless assault. Dodo lunged forward to push the Voord back but the Doctor's hand shot to her shoulder and held her firm.

'No, child! This won't be settled with brazen force.' The old man addressed the Voord with imperious dignity.

'Stop! There's no need for further violence. We shan't attack you again.'

The Voord's head-stalk dulled in colour and ceased to vibrate. Steven relaxed and panted weakly. While he turned slowly to balance upon his elbow, Dodo glanced at the Doctor, who (keeping his eyes fixed upon their captor) nodded and released her shoulder.

Dodo then bent down to help her friend to his feet. The young man swayed unsteadily and held his head in his hands. No sooner had Steven stood did the Voord speak.

‘You are all summoned to attend our advisor.’

‘Advisor? Who is this person?’

‘His name is unimportant; he has summoned you.’

‘A moment. You say your advisor has summoned us; is he the one who devised this audible snare?’ The Doctor pointed to the beacon affixed to the ground. The Voord said nothing and the Doctor smiled sharply.

‘Your silence gives away far more than a complete confession, Voord. Your advisor must be the one who designed this device to make sounds only my ears can hear and sent the signal that drew my attention to this world. I know I am right, and I demand to know the truth!’

The Voord turned towards the doorway, extended its arm and drew it back quickly. Then three more Voord, identical in appearance in every detail, passed through the doorway and swarmed around the travellers. Each Voord carried a long-bladed knife in each hand. The tips of the blades were poised near the Doctor, Steven and Dodo’s throats. With the threat of death obviously positioned, the first Voord spoke again.

‘Our advisor will see you now.’

Contained, but not cowed, the Doctor held his head in high defiance.

‘Very well, if you must perform such a macabre ceremony. Take us to your advisor.’

The Speaker Voord lifted a hand and the others withdrew a pace. Their sharpened blades still gleamed in their hands. The Speaker Voord then pointed towards the space through which it had come – it was clear the company was to pass through the opening. Followed closely by Steven and Dodo, the Doctor threw back his head with imperious

dignity and marched through the aperture, even as he cursed himself for falling into the Voord trap and not knowing at all who or what awaited him next...

THE UNTRUSTWORTHY ADVISOR

THE VOORD CONTINGENT KENNELLED THE DOCTOR, STEVEN, AND DODO AS THEY led them through a series of close-quartered, dimly-lit metal corridors. As they marched, Steven occasionally rubbed his head. Dodo watched him with concern.

‘Are you feeling any better?’ she whispered.

‘I think so,’ Steven responded. His voice was a little slow and tired. ‘I wonder what that Voord used to attack me.’

‘Telepathy, Steven,’ the Doctor answered without taking his eyes from the Voord walking in front of him. ‘The Voord are capable of verbal speech but their natural method of communication is through the mind. To that end, they have also developed potent mental offensives, channelled through their forehead antennae. Hmm – one could say they had a practical design in mind!’

The Speaker Voord halted and the captives stopped themselves from walking into its backside. The Doctor peered over the Voord’s shoulder: they had reached the end of the corridor and come to a sealed doorway. Facing this doorway, the Voord spoke.

‘This is our advisor’s laboratory. Do not move until the doorway opens completely.’

The alien turned a small control to the door panel – a small rod with an attached circle identical in shape to the prison door control Steven had discovered earlier – and the thick, black metal panel slowly slid upwards. Beyond the doorway there was a bright light and the Doctor thought he heard a familiar sound: a soft, warbling hum. Once the door was fully open the Speaker Voord stood aside and beckoned the captive trio to cross the threshold. The Doctor glanced back to his friends and smiled.

‘Come along, you two; best not keep the advisor waiting.’

With Steven and Dodo close behind the Doctor led the way through the portal. Upon entry in the space beyond he stood still in surprise. Steven and Dodo joined him a moment later. They looked about their surroundings in wonder and Dodo exclaimed:

‘It’s the TARDIS!’

So very true, the Doctor mused as he gazed upon dimensionally transcendental chamber with its white, roundelled walls. But not quite right.

‘Are you so certain, my dear?’ The Doctor pointed his cane at the console unit in the centre of the room. Dodo followed his direction and noticed the device was raised upon a high platform several centimetres from ground level. Dodo blinked as she realised the differences. She turned to Steven.

‘Oi! It isn’t the same!’

‘Yes, you’re right,’ said Steven. He took a step nearer the raised device and rubbed his chin. ‘It almost looks like...oh, no.’

Steven closed his eyes and sighed, as if he were preparing himself for something imminent. Dodo knew she was missing something both her friends knew.

‘What’s going on, Doctor? If this isn’t our Ship, whose is it?’

‘Who indeed?’

The Doctor paused as he heard a sound: a low, muffled grunt of annoyance, like the petulant moan of frustrated child. The Doctor smiled at his companions and put a silencing finger to his lips. Then, he slowly approached the console and circled around the platform to its far side. Kneeling at the edge of the platform with his head and hands buried deep within an opened section of the console's base was a small, stocky-built man wearing a dark skull cap and a black, hooded habit with a thin, white rope tied at the waist. The habited man was mumbling something about 'sub-tier spare parts.'

The Doctor stood behind the crouched man, extended his cane, and prodded him in the rear. The habited man yelped, jumped, and banged his head on the console base's inner housing. Upon impact, the skull-cap shook free from the man's head and fell to the ground. Dodo quickly stooped and picked up the cap. Then, rubbing his crown, the man scrambled backwards and to his feet to reveal his head of dark hair and a heavy, pugnacious face. At the sight of the Doctor the man's small, close-set bright-blue eyes beamed and his square head almost seemed to stretch sideways with a broad, cheerful smile.

'Doctor? Doctor! And my dear friend Steven! Oh my goodness, how blessed it is to see familiar and friendly faces here in this place!'

The Doctor set his face into a mask of annoyed recognition.

'Familiar I may be, sir, but friendly I refuse to admit.'

Dodo was surprised at the Doctor's icy reception of the stranger, but when she turned to Steven she was struck by the similarly unwelcome expression on his face, as if he were witnessing the arrival of an unexpected and unwanted relative at a family reunion. Whatever the source of her friends' discontent, there was a history here only she failed to grasp and she needed to know it.

'Ok, put me in the loop,' she spoke to everyone. 'Who's the priest?'

‘Monk, my dear,’ the Doctor corrected. ‘And that is exactly who he is. That is how you like to call yourself these days, I believe?’

The Monk chuckled.

‘I’m glad you take the trouble to remember me so well.’

‘I am never glad to think of you at all, except when I’m forced to tolerate you.’

The Monk’s mouth fell into a petulant frown.

‘Oh, Doctor, can’t we forget any past misunderstandings?’

‘Misunderstandings?!’ Steven stepped forward, his face and eyes hard as stone. ‘The last time you came looking for revenge you locked us out of the TARDIS and almost sold us out to Mavic Chen!’

‘Oh, oh, my friend’ – the Monk raised placating hands – ‘it was all just a joke, a simple practical joke all done in good fun!’

‘If that was joke it was entirely lacking in humour,’ the Doctor spat.

‘Well...it was all such a long time ago. Best to put it all behind us. I have, I can assure you – life is far too important to waste on such petty trifles. Besides, despite those villains and their plans – which threatened my life just as much as yours, I might add – I did you no lasting harm. You’re here now, aren’t you?’

‘Maybe, but it wasn’t that long ago for us. I certainly haven’t forgotten!’

‘No? Well, it certainly feels like an eternity for me,’ the Monk mumbled, but then he glanced at Dodo and brightened. ‘Which reminds me, where are my manners?’ He turned to her and warmly held one of her hands while his other plucked his cap from her fingers and replaced it upon his head.

‘Greetings, my daughter. It’s a pleasure. I assume you’re the Doctor’s most recent addition to his TARDIS?’

Dodo smiled at the Monk's cordial introduction. He seemed such a kindly person; she really failed to grasp why the Doctor and Steven were so unhappy to see him.

'Yes, I am. I'm Dorothea, Dorothea Chaplet. But my friends call me Dodo.'

'Oh, now that's such a rare name! I hope I may call you Dodo?'

'Sure, why not? Nice to meet you, too. Are you really a monk?'

'I find the lifestyle agreeable and the attire comfortable, so, yes, I suppose that's the best way to address me. I am a committed monk!'

'Committed?' the Doctor scoffed. 'Your only commitment is to meddling in the matters of time! Moreover, you rather enjoy yourself.'

The Monk scowled and shook his head.

'Now, Doctor, just because my TARDIS is a more advanced model -'

'Wait a sec,' Dodo exclaimed, 'how is it you have a TARDIS?'

'Unfortunately I have an answer to that question,' the Doctor said. His mouth grimaced as he admitted the fact. 'The Monk and I share the home planet, although there our association ends.'

The Monk blinked and Dodo thought she saw genuine sadness in his eyes.

'I thought we might have once been social, Doctor.'

'Thankfully I've never thought the same. But now, more to the point: What are you doing here and how are you the advisor to the Voord? As I recall your Ship was lacking a directional control unit after our previous encounter.'

'Yes, and a sneaky bit of thievery that was! I mean, really, such vandalism was absolutely uncalled for! If you wanted to go somewhere so badly, all you had to do was ask me for the circuit. You've no idea how long I slaved to design a replacement!'

'Not long enough,' Steven sneered. 'Now answer the Doctor's question!'

‘All right, all right! Such a prickly pear you are, young man. The answer is simple: after the Doctor stole my directional unit I was forced to replicate the circuit. Finding myself a bit short on proper supplies, I remembered my days as a scientific consultant to Yartek -’

‘Yartek? Who’s that?’ Dodo interrupted. The Doctor testily replied:

‘Oh, just the Voord leader I opposed on Marinus, child.’ The Doctor stood nose-to-nose with the Monk.

‘So, you’ve shared secret information with more than just the peoples of Earth. You’ve kept not only primitive but dangerous company. Furthermore you somehow considered the Voord as good candidates to help you restore your TARDIS’s navigation, hmmm?’

‘Oh, hardly, Doctor. The Voord are mariners only in this dimension.’

The Monk raised a knowing finger and wiggled it before the Doctor’s nose. Then he turned to the doorway where the Speaker Voord still stood.

‘Oh, my dear fellow! You’re still standing there. I hope you’ve come to deliver something special?’

‘We are deploying the device upon the surface,’ the Speaker Voord droned. ‘We must descend immediately.’

‘We have to go down there? Oh, all right. Well, Doctor, since we must relocate I suggest we use the lift just down the corridor you came through. We can ride together! You will come, won’t you?’

‘If I am to be your prisoner I must remind you my friends are of no concern to you and must be treated fairly!’

‘Oh-ho-ho, Doctor, please, be easy! Your friends are my friends – although whether young Steven accepts that I’m not so sure – but I’ll never allow any harm come to him or the delightful Dodo.’

‘And yet you ally yourself with such aggressors as the Voord.’

‘Ah, yes, well, shall we discuss the particulars during our transit? It’ll put your mind at ease.’

The Doctor set his face and assumed an air of impregnable dignity as he marched forward through the Voord phalanx and out of the Monk’s Console Room. The Monk himself glanced at Steven and Dodo and threw them a quick farewell wave before he turned to follow his fellow time-traveller. As soon as the Monk exited the Voord guard marched from the Console Room and the double-doorway slid shut. Left alone, Steven turned to Dodo.

‘We’ve got to find a way out of this room. Help me find the door control on the console.’

The two friends scoured the white machine surfaces for several minutes in search of the mechanism, but to no success. Dodo pushed back from the console and clamped her hands upon her hips.

‘Ah, it’s no good, Steven! I don’t think I’d recognise the switch even in our TARDIS.’

‘Blast it, you’re right. This Mark Four model has more differences to the Doctor’s machine than I expected. We’ll never find it this way.’

‘Well, we can’t just stand here. We’ve got to help the Doctor fast.’

'I know that! I just can't figure out where we go from here.' Steven sat upon the console platform and rubbed his temples. Then he lifted his head. A light of possibility shone in his eye.

'Unless...'

'Unless what?'

Steven stood and gestured that Dodo should follow him. They crossed to the far side of the room. Whereas in the Doctor's TARDIS there would have been a white, roundelled wall, here there was a large opening leading into a small alcove filled with many trinkets, treasures, and trophies pilfered from thousands of far-flung planets native to countless eras and areas of creation. Steven turned to Dodo to explain his motivation.

'The last time I was here, my friend Vicki and I found this room. I guess it's the Monk's memorabilia collection. But I was sure I glimpsed a matter transmitter somewhere around this mess.'

'Matter transmitter? You mean something like what Captain Z-Ro used?'

Steven threw the teenager a puzzled look, but decided not to waste time questioning her references.

'If you say so. But there's a lot more stuff in here now than there was then, and it looks like the Monk's jumbled it all together. We've got a long search ahead of us...'

* * *

The ride in the lift had lasted a few minutes, during which time the Monk had made several attempts to engage the Doctor in free conversation; but whether it was the looming presence of the Voord guards in close quarters or the Doctor's sudden aversion to loquacity, the flow

of words had quickly dried to an uneasy silence. To the Monk's relief the awkward pause had barely started to weigh heavy when the lift's downward drop slowed to a halt and the dark metal door slid open. Through the breach a plume of humid air poured into the compartment. There was a scent of warm cinnamon in the wind. The Monk sniffed the air and smiled.

'My goodness, that smell takes me back. Almost feels like home. Do you remember, Doctor?'

'I have very few good memories of my beginnings anymore, but why should I share them with you as if this were an afternoon stroll? I'm your prisoner, after all!'

Even as he spoke, the Voord guards had already begun nudging the Doctor forward. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed one guard place a directing hand upon the Monk's shoulder as well. The Doctor filed the intriguing observation for near-future reference as the two time wanderers exited the lift and emerged at the edge of a meter-wide metal platform, which jutted out several inches from the outer hull of the Voord craft and then downward at a forty-five degree angle into the scorched earth of the planet.

The Doctor stepped to edge of the platform, poked his cane into the smoking, trampled mud and stared out upon the new world before him. It was a quiet, empty world devoid of active life; nevertheless to his eyes he was a witness to an ever-widening expanse of beauty and untamed wonder: Rose-ridged mist levitated over deep-cut rills overflowing with sapphire liquid winding shining wrinkles through a dew-glistened purple soil plain from whose fertility sprouted groves of vermillion-leaved trees running as far as the icy-capped golden mountain horizon nestled beneath the chartreuse bubble of a moist sky fogged with silver clouds. The Doctor breathed deep the new air hovering about him; it was night-cooled

and seeded with the sweet perfume of budding flowers. The scent was familiar; the sights were a memory...

Before the Doctor could place the recollection the Speaker Voord close behind them raised its knife.

‘Remain silent and exit the vessel. Monk, we have deployed the device ten marinnacs ahead of our current position. You will both move towards the location now.’

‘That means it’s only about a few hundred meters north of us, Doctor,’ the Monk whispered, hoping to be act as a useful translator. ‘I know how much you like to think of things in human terms.’

‘Thank you, but I am aware of some extraterrestrial units of measurement,’ the old man retorted. He and the Monk then walked down the platform and onto the surface.

After a few steps the Doctor glanced over his shoulder to see how close his Voord captors were in step behind him. He also caught a glimpse for the first time of the outer shape of their ship: it was an advanced, interstellar variation of the airboats the Voord had employed when he had thwarted their invasion of the water planet Kandalinga. The Doctor’s memory drifted back to that period, not long after the tragic deaths of Katarina and Sara. He had been alone – why? Of course, I left Steven in the TARDIS so he could show that other young fellow around the Ship. They rather got themselves lost for a while. What was that young man’s name? Oliver. Yes, Oliver Harper, another friend long since gone, and how much longer until I lose them all?

A shaft of chilly air rustled through the Doctor’s hair; it dragged his memory back to his present concern. The Doctor realised that although his tussle with the Voord at Kandalinga had been relatively recent for him, the amount of engineering advancement

needed to yield the Voord's current level metallurgical prowess equalled at the least several millennia of history, a history of unrepentant aggression.

'Daleks,' the Doctor muttered.

'Daleks?! Where?' exclaimed the Monk with a yelp of fear. He spun around and swung his head from side to side like a crash-destined deer. The Doctor chuckled darkly at the display.

'Have no fear, my childish friend; the Daleks are not here. I can sense that much. No, what I mean is they're much like the Daleks, these Voord. Even when they're expelled from their home world, out amongst other races or simply wandering the cosmos, the way of the Voord is the custom of violence and hostility.' The Doctor shot a blazing look of concept at the Monk. 'And you are aiding them!'

'Doctor, you misunderstand! I'm as much a prisoner as you are!' As if noticing this for the first time, the Monk stepped closer to the Doctor as they marched and began to whisper.

'You know how I said I decided to visit Marinus to find the spare parts I needed to repair my directional unit?'

'Yes, and I'm frankly surprised you found these rascallions on Marinus at all, considering how the Conscience so effectively expelled them from that planet.'

'Well, I never actually made it to Marinus, Doctor. Thanks to your horrid vandalism I could only coax a clear directional vector from my TARDIS by homing onto similar technology, like the machinery I'd...well...bequeathed my associates.'

'Ah, so I thought. You not only meddle in established history but in the technological development of other species!'

‘Oh, really, please let me tell my story! I like telling stories.’ The Monk pouted for a moment before continuing.

‘Anyway, I managed to make a technological signal connection, but lo and behold, I found myself not on Marinus but that imposing spaceship! The Voord had taken to wandering the stars and carried everything they valued with them, including my spare parts! I’d hoped a simple transaction of new materials from my trophies would complete my intent, but my former associates weren’t exactly gracious company. Still, after some careful negotiations, I managed to inform them of my great need and they -’

‘I think I can carry the narrative from here. You pleaded with the Voord to release the spare parts you desired but they refused. However, I can clearly imagine a cunning race would never waste such a desperate and willing asset so quickly, and therefore they bargained with you, didn’t they?’

The Monk bowed a sheepish head, looking for a moment like a true penitent confessing his sins.

‘To regain my complete freedom in time and space, I’m forced to perform a very special service.’

The Doctor came forward and brought his hawkish face profile to the Monk’s.

‘And just what are the terms of this service? What are you really doing here?’

The Monk furrowed his brow and pulled back. Then he glanced back at the advancing Voord guard. The Monk turned back to the Doctor. He half-shrugged and raised a pointed finger.

‘You’ll find your answer just over that ridge, Doctor.’

The Doctor walked forward a few paces to an edge of soil, which sloped downwards a few meters into a shallow depression – perhaps the remains of a dried riverbed. At the

bottom of the bed was a large machine approximately the shape and colour of a ball barring studded with many panels, knobs and pipes, and possessing a volume of about fifteen cubic meters. Lights flashed upon the sphere's surface and a slow, thicker illumination shifted through and upon its hull. A lumbering, heavy droning vibrated in time to the machine's inner light. Upon witnessing the device, the Doctor's eyes widened in imperious horror. He rounded upon the Monk.

'Is that...is that -'

The old man spun away and with surprising agility leapt from the ridge and sprang down the river side into the small ravine. The Monk called after him. The Doctor raced up to the machine and stopped mere inches from its hull. With careful movements, as if not to disturb a sleeping predator, the Doctor reached out his hands and brushed his fingertips along the machine's metal plating. The harmony of the instruments was unmistakable; it was exactly what he feared, and his fears were the worst he could have imagined.

The Doctor nudged back from the sphere and turned to face the Monk, who was still standing upon the ridge and now flanked close by the half-dozen Voord soldiers. The Doctor shook with rage and pointed his cane to the Monk like a furious wizard cursing a failed novice.

'You feckless rule! You ceddling mretin! This is a Shaper! This is from our home!'

'Doctor, please, this wasn't my idea!' The Monk raised his hands. He seemed truly pleading.

'Not to let it enter possession of the Voord, perhaps, but you took it from our world nonetheless, and neglected it to these barbarians!'

The Doctor seethed in anger and for a moment he was grateful Dodo and Steven were locked away in the Monk's TARDIS; for he had no wish to show them the depths of

his fury. But furious he was, and for good reason. The Shaper devices were an ancient and dangerous tool from a bygone era of his people, used during a time when his ancestors sought not only to colonise the cosmos but reform select worlds into more suitable environments for their presence. In the legends of home there were many stories of countless worlds whose time progression had been twisted and tampered and accelerated towards a new structural existence.

Not all the worlds had been without inhabitants. So many native creatures were lost to the cold and merciless faux-celestial hands. In time reforms had been enacted and the Shapers' use outlawed. Surviving models were relegated to museums, simulations, and non-existence. None had been allowed for individual use, but what were such rules to a careless interloper such as the Monk, or worse, to bloodthirsty warriors such as the Voord? The Doctor shook his head in cold dismay and addressed the Monk once more, but with no more hints of time-travelled cordiality.

'Explain yourself, Monk. I will know this scheme of yours.'

It was the Speaker Voord who answered.

'It is simple, Doctor. In our advisor's absence, we long ago learned of the multitude of powerful secrets locked within the tools he left behind. After the Arbitans expelled us from Marinus we sought to unlock those secrets and reclaim our world, but we lacked the knowledge necessary to achieve this. Our fortunes improved when the Monk returned to us in need of our courtesy. And imagine our delight when we discovered that you, the architect of our wandering, and the Monk are of the same species.'

The Monk interjected.

'I've rarely met a people so gripped in hatred of one person, Doctor. They really could rival the Daleks in their obsession against you.'

The Doctor tucked his thumbs into his lapels and threw back his head in defiance.

‘And so you saw fit to aid the Voord’s vendetta by luring me here. Am I now to believe there truly is honour among thieves, hmm?’

The Monk looked about at the blank, black-masked faces surrounding him. He suddenly felt like a lone man nestled between unfeeling gargoyles perched upon the edge of creation and ready to swoop down and consume it. Was the Doctor perhaps right for once? Had he been unwise in aiding these creatures?

‘Well...it only seemed fair, Doctor. I’ve experienced your heavy-handed morality first-hand, you know. You’ve always been so inflexible. I thought you needed a good wrist-slap, if only to humble you a bit.’

‘Of course, first revenge on Tigus and with the Mavic Chen and the Daleks and now forced repentance with the Voord. How pious of you!’

‘Doctor, you’re not blameless, you know! You took away the Voord’s world, made them homeless and lost. No one should endure such shame, and so I promised I’d make sure you helped them get their planet back.’

‘By helping them re-conquer and subjugate Marinus with this infernal machine? Never!’

‘No, Doctor, no! You’ve got our plan all wrong! The Voord are tired of wandering, weary of navigating the stars in endless solitude. They merely wish to find an empty world absent of life, have us operate the Shaper, and make their own version of Marinus. That way everybody’s happy!’

The Doctor narrowed his eyes in suspicion: the ‘plan’ seemed too simple, too benign. He needed more information.

‘Acceleration of a planet’s local time curve is one activity, tailoring that world to another’s specifications is a rather more complex procedure, and infinitely more dangerous: Exposure to the compressed matter/time would cause any lifeform to conform to the newly forming energy field. What if the Voord turned into Marinusians? Hmm?’

‘I’ve thought of that already, so I’ve altered this Shaper to operate with an organic platform.’

‘An organic platform? What kind of gobbledygook is that?’

‘Oh, it’s so simple. Here!’

The Monk pulled a small black box from his tunic and pressed a button. The Shaper beeped and a thin seam appeared upon its metal surface. Bright, white light lanced through the exterior crack. Two metal segments then pulled inwards and then apart to reveal an upright, hollow cylinder at the centre of the machine. Cables of sizes, textures, thickness, and colours connected the cylinder to the interior of the Shaper. The Monk gesticulated towards the machine’s interior.

‘I can now control the time crunch to form a specific planetary meme through the insertion of a sample of that world’s native organic material: specifically, a living host organism. The Speaker Voord has kindly volunteered to form the Marinus template.’

The Doctor directed his glare to the masked leader. A sardonic smile slashed across his face.

‘I should take care with your matter template, Speaker Voord. These Shapers are temperamental at times. It may read you wrong and reconstruct you as a true Marinusian. Hmmm! You might all end up looking like Arbitan. You’d hardly like that outcome, I’m sure, to become literally your most hated enemy!’

The Speaker Voord stiffened and then spoke in a cold, coarse rasp.

‘The long deceased Arbitan is no longer our most hated enemy, Doctor. You are. And your living husk will serve us at last.’

For the first time the Voord, who had until that moment been standing stone-still, began to move. As one they stepped from the earthen ledge and descended into the drained riverbed. They were advancing upon the Doctor. The Monk scrambled after them.

‘You’ve gone and done it now, Doctor. I warned you your haughtiness would catch you one day.’

The Doctor brandished his cane and tried to route the Voord approach but the creatures moved with incredible speed. They brandished their knives. Their cranial antennae started to glow red, waiting to burst forth raw energy. The Doctor swung his cane from side to side to swat away the aliens but they were too many. One of the Voord caught the old man’s cane and wrenched the implement from his hand. The Doctor stumbled forward. Another Voord grabbed his shoulder and neck. Yet another lunged forward and encircled its arms about the Doctor’s torso. The old man struggled, thrashed, writhed to break free but the Voord horde swarmed over him. They drew their daggers. The blades poised to strike his chest and neck...

THE INFERNAL MACHINE

THE MONK SHOUTED IN HORROR.

‘Stop! Please, stop! I brought the Doctor to you so he could help you. You need him alive!’

The Monk’s pleas were falling unheeded. But then, moments before the daggers could pierce and slit the Doctor’s flesh the Speaker Voord cried out.

‘Stay! The Monk is correct. The Doctor must live. Our success depends upon this.’

The remaining Voord obeyed and withdrew their weapons; but they kept close to their prisoner. The Doctor staggered forward and fell to his hands and knees, panting and wheezing. The Doctor groaned and lamented the indignity of his predicament. How horrific, that one such as I should be brought down to the mud so easily. But why so easily? There was once a time I could best a dozen Roman centurions. But now...such weakness I feel, have felt ever since that intrigue with the Toymaker. I hope the fatigue passes...I hope...I...

Vision blurred. Darkness filled it. Hearing softened. Silence deafened it. Body fell. Something lifted it...

The Doctor snapped back to consciousness. He could feel hands grabbing hold under his arms and lifting him to his feet. The Doctor coughed weakly and opened his eyes to see the Monk cradling and supporting him. True concern sharpened his eyes as he studied the old man's face. The Speaker Voord stood behind the two men.

'There will be no further delays. Compel the Doctor to assist us now.'

The Monk turned to his ally and cast him a dark frown.

'Hush now, you impatient fiend! Something's wrong with him!'

'The Doctor's comfort is beneath our concern.'

'At least let me see if he's well enough to be of any use!'

Without waiting for the Speaker Voord's agreement, the Monk returned his attention to the Doctor. He spoke softly, almost caringly to the weakened man.

'Doctor, are you all right? You look...you look so ill. It's so unlike you.'

When the Doctor replied his voice was slow and thick.

'What do you know of me, really? Nothing! Nothing that's truly sincere.'

'But if you're hurt, or sick, I certainly care about that.'

'Oh, so you're now an intrepid healer? Shall you inquire after my spiritual welfare next?' The Doctor's voice was quickening, gaining strength. 'No, my health is none of your concern, Monk. Besides, why should it bother you if your allies attack me?'

'Oh, my old friend, you may be incorrigible, you may be absolutely infuriating, but I don't want you hurt and I certainly don't want you dead. I just hoped bringing you here might have taught you a little sense. Really, I wish you nothing worse.'

The Doctor rubbed his temples and eased himself from the Monk's supporting hold.

'You can facilitate my belief in your sincerity by telling me exactly how the Voord expect my help.'

‘It’s nothing alarming, Doctor: all you need to do is help the Voord prepare the machine to re-create Marinus and then help me operate the Shaper when all is ready! It really is that simple.’

The Doctor steadied himself with his cane and glared at the Monk.

‘And I am secure in the assumption that if I refuse my assistance the Voord will eliminate me?’

It was the Speaker Voord who answered.

‘Fail to help us, Doctor, and both you and our increasingly useless advisor will pay that ultimate price. Consider if both your lives are enough motivation to serve us.’

The Monk grinned sadly and shrugged his shoulders.

‘They may be allies but they’re certainly not very friendly. I’d take their intentions seriously if I were you.’

The Doctor scowled and swept the dust from his lapels.

‘Very well, I shall help you, Monk. Just don’t expect me to whistle while I work!’

‘How about this?’ Dodo asked, pointing to a large, silver box. Steven shook his head.

‘No, that’s some sort of radiation detector.’

‘And this?’ Dodo lifted one of two thick-handled black objects shaped nearly like a grotesque four-leaf clover. Steven wearily waved away the discovery.

‘No, those are just anti-gravity clamps.’

‘I’ve no idea what that means but I’ll take your word for it. Oh, look at this!’ The teenager grabbed a stout black rocket from a crate resting upon a high table. Steven caught her movement and with a cry of terror hurried to grab her arm.

‘Careful, you silly girl! Don’t you know what this is?’

‘Of course I don’t, you pigheaded boy!’ The ‘silly’ remark had wounded Steven deeper than he had intended and he quickly softened his tone.

‘Well, since there’s no harm done I can tell you this is a small neutron bomb. One wrong twist of this and we’d both be atoms.’

Dodo paled and mouthed a stunned ‘wow.’

‘Best to be careful then -’

‘Wait a moment!’ Steven said. His eyes were bright and alert. He crouched down beneath the table and pushed the radiation detector to one side. Behind that device was a translucent white disk about a foot in diameter around and an inch thick. A tight-woven mesh covered the disk, like a sort of external macro-circuitry. Steven lifted the disk in the air with a joyful laugh.

‘This is it, Dodo! This is our escape ticket.’

‘So this is the transmat? It’s a lot simpler than I thought it would be.’

‘Well, most things are; it’s easier to use if it is. There’s just one problem, though.’

‘What’s that?’

‘We need an energy source to power the disk.’

‘I thought you said this would be simple,’ Dodo whined.

‘The transmat is simple to use; but it requires a good amount of power.’

‘Doesn’t it come with batteries?’

‘This isn’t a torch, Dodo. But I suppose in a way you’re right; usually these things come with a mounted power unit...’ Steven tailed off as he looked out of the Monk’s trophy room and back to his control chamber.

‘Of course! Dodo, we can use the Monk’s TARDIS to power the transmat!’

‘Really? Wait, you’re right! It must take a lot of energy to move these things through space and time.’

‘Exactly! If my engineering classes were right, a trip through time would be more than enough power. And look! We’ve got a good stroke of luck!’

Steven pointed to the base of the Monk’s console where he had been working when the Voord had brought them to the Ship. The removed panel still lay upon the platform; the inner machinery of the console’s base was exposed. Shifting patterns of multi-coloured light rays poured from the breached base.

‘See? If we can link the transmat to a power conduit inside that machine’s base we’ll be able to draw some energy from this ship and transfer it into the disk. We can be out of here in no time!’

‘So our trap will be our escape, too! Fab!’ Dodo giggled. Steven could not resist a smile, but quickly focused back to their prime task.

‘All we need now is something to connect the two, some type of cable or wire...’

‘Hey, will this work?’ Dodo had spied a long, thin, turquoise-blue-coated cable stuffed a small box. Thick iron-grey adjustable clamps jutted from both ends of the cable. She took the line from the box and held it before Steven. He smiled and nodded.

‘Come on, we’d better move fast if we want to help the Doctor.’

With disk and cable in hand, the two friends hurried back to the control chamber.

Inside the Shaper, the Doctor and the Monk knelt around the base of the matter receptor alcove. They had been toiling within the machine for the past several minutes. In perfect, poised conjunction (except for the moments when the Monk would stop to glance at his notebook to remember his own Shaper operation instructions), the two men adjusted,

prodded, and shifted delicate instruments into a complex and marvellous technological tapestry. For the Doctor, it was a surreal and oddly nostalgic experience: Working on technology birthed, developed, and deployed from his home world, a place, apart from his TARDIS, he had never expected any reminders. For his part, the Monk was simply grateful the Doctor was working with him and not sabotaging his well-intentioned projects.

Despite his earlier disavowal to enjoy himself during his joint venture with the Monk, the Doctor had begun whistling; and after several minutes of amused listening, the Monk had joined him. The Doctor had soon noticed the impromptu duet and in a huff gone silent. The Monk, rebuffed with the Doctor's musical rejection, had likewise ceased musical activity. For several moments both had worked in silence until the Monk, blissfully engaged in technical adjustments, had begun whistling again. Without any apparent recollection of why he had stopped humming in the first place, the Doctor soon had joined the Monk's manufactured music.

They were both carrying a converging melody when the Shaper's central array chimed and the intricate mechanism produced its own hum. The Doctor leaned back.

'Well, I think it's time to make our final pronouncements: Matter converter?' the Doctor asked.

'Functional,' the Monk answered, and then asked: 'Gravitational compensator?'

'Operational,' the Doctor replied. He sniffed a darkly satisfied hum and stepped out of the Shaper chamber.

'There! It's finished. I can't say I approve of this machine's presence, Monk, but I must at least congratulate your engineering skill: you left me little to correct.'

The Monk scowled and exited the Shaper alcove. No sooner had his feet touched the ground had the Speaker Voord quickly advanced to loom over him.

‘The Shaper device, are you certain it is fully prepared?’

The Monk cringed at the close-quarters with the Voord and stammered a reply.

‘Oh, my! Oh, yes...yes, of course! The Doctor and I make a fine team it seems; but I can assure you this machine is now complete and ready for work. Of course...’ the Monk hesitated. The Speaker Voord loomed closer.

‘You have a concern? Share it.’ The Doctor shared it.

‘I think the detail my technically under-experienced associate wishes to omit is that the Shaper device may be operational but it still must be calibrated to fit your desired template. Now, since our friend the Monk has so ingeniously altered this device to operate from an host organic matter sample and the only host matter from Marinus available to us are you Voord, then it seems we have no options to proceed; unless of course you have a willing volunteer -’

The Speaker Voord’s blank masked face turned sharply from the Doctor. The Speaker Voord motioned towards one of its kind. Without a word the soldier Voord marched forward, entered the Shaper chamber, and stood within the matter receptor. A deep, throbbing began to pulse from within the Shaper; mounting silver light streamed from the depths of the matter alcove, shrouding the dark-encased soldier Voord. The Doctor rushed forward to stop the soldier but the Speaker held him back by the shoulders. Struggling to free himself, the old man cried out:

‘You precipitous fool! The machine is set to automatic reaction! With the inside chamber exposed we’ll be caught up in the mass conversion!’

Even as the Doctor, the Monk, and the Voord hurried to retreat, the light burst free and scorched the air.

* * *

It had taken Steven only a few moments to carry the transmat disk into the Monk's console chamber and place the device at the far end of the console's platform. As he turned his attention from the disk to the console, Dodo spoke.

'Steven, even if you get this transmat thing running, how do we know where we'll end up after we use it?'

'If this disk is like most others I've used, once we get power into it we'll be able to access its direction and range controls – they're usually built into the pad itself. I'm more worried about if the transmat can even get us out of the Monk's TARDIS. But we've got to try.'

Steven got to work on the connector cable Dodo had found. He hoped to find the most likely power receiver point on the disk's surface. After a few minutes' search, he felt he had found it. Moments later, one end of the tension cable was clamped to a ridged section of the edge of the clear-white disc. Then Steven turned and lay prone upon on his elbows and knees before the open section of the Monk's console base. He held the other end of the cable tight in his hand, ready to affix the second metal clamp to a suitable power source. Steven searched inside the base, and searched some more. There was the problem.

'Dodo? Do you – oh, where are you?' Steven twisted slightly and saw his friend sitting on the edge of the platform engrossed in a small paperback notebook with well-worn and fully scribbled pages. He recognised the scraggly volume as the Monk's journal, which Vicki had discovered during their first encounter with him in 1066 England. Dodo looked up from her reading.

'Oh, Steven. This stuff is really weird! It says here the Monk advised the Beatles to break up the band in 1970. That's just five years ahead of when I left Earth. He's lying, isn't he?'

‘How should I know? I never listen to prehistoric tribal music.’

‘Prehistoric?!’

Steven sighed and shook his head. Somehow he kept forgetting the sheer differences between the times he and Dodo came from. Nevertheless, time was something they both needed to use, and quickly.

‘Look,’ he said, ‘we’ve got more important things to worry about. Do you know anything about electronics?’

Dodo turned around and matched Steven’s position before the opened console base.

‘I once took apart my aunt’s telly for fun, although she didn’t laugh after. But I thought you were the fighter pilot – don’t you boys know all about machines?’

‘You’d think so, but whatever this stuff is I’ve never seen the like. I haven’t the faintest idea what the components are for!’

‘Well, didn’t you say the Doctor had done some damage to this TARDIS the last time you met the Monk? And the Monk was working on these controls when we got here. Maybe the best idea is just choosing something that looks like it’s working, no matter what it does.’

‘That’s probably the best we can hope for. So...something in an unknown alien machine that looks like it’s working...’

Steven peered deep inside the console base for the likeliest candidate. His eyes caught upon a long, tight-wound coil of what looked to be clear plastic. Within the plastic particles of smoky light twisted and drifted, some briskly, others leisurely. It was as good a working part as any.

‘Well, here’s to blind luck.’

Steven attached the clamp to the coil. The plastic component flashed; the clamp glared red-hot, white-hot, sightless-hot. A searing flood of pink and blue-white sparks belched from the base. Dodo jumped from the platform's edge. Steven rolled out the blaze's path. Smoke blinded the room.

For ten seconds the purifying light blazing from the Shaper's interior mounted in power, increased in intensity, peaked in brilliance and then abruptly winked out. The air was sterile without temperature; the night-sky was hollow to the sparkling stars sprinkled high above. All was silent and stilled. Then, with great caution, the Doctor and the Monk, followed immediately by the Speaker Voord, emerged from behind the top of the ridge where they had taken refuge a fraction-second before the Shaper had activated.

'My word. That was a fantastic display. Is it over?' the Monk quietly queried. He pressed his hands before his lips in quiet awe.

'We must descend and investigate,' the Speaker Voord said. 'I will know if the soldier's matter donation was successful.'

'Matter donation?' the Doctor cried. 'You make it sound as if that poor fellow has made a charitable service! Look!'

The Doctor stabbed the air with cane towards the open Shaper. From within the machine, sharp curls of acrid smoke billowed from the matter receptor: they were the only remains of the soldier Voord. The Speaker Voord said:

'We honour our brother's sacrifice, and see that it was fulfilled. Observe!'

The Speaker Voord gestured towards the ravine in which his force had placed the Shaper: the previously barren soil was now submerged beneath a shallow layer of bubbling, sunfire-yellow liquid. Both the Doctor and the Monk recognised the fluid for what it was.

‘Acid!’ they cried at once. The Doctor glared at the Monk, whose face beamed with pride.

‘It works! My alterations worked! The Shaper is functional!’

The Doctor huffed a grudging acknowledgement of the fact.

‘So, there are some reluctant congratulations in order, hmm? It seems your machine is clearly capable of planetary reorganisation. The topsoil in this area has been partially converted into Marinusian sea-acid!’

The Monk descended into the ravine, knelt at the edge of the new liquid pool and spread his arms over the bristling acid in vibrant jubilation.

‘Ha, ha! My design works! The Shaper can re-create new worlds!’

The Doctor followed after the Monk into the acidised ravine and planted his cane at the edge of the shallow river.

‘I hope you realise the potential consequences of your actions here, Monk.’

‘Consequences? They’re simple: I’ve given my friends the means to re-make their world and in return they shall provide me with the materials I need to regain true freedom in time and space!’

The Monk stood and turned about and jumped slightly when he saw the Speaker Voord standing right behind him. The remaining Voord stood in close ranks immediately behind their speaker. Too ebullient with joyful pride to care about the sinister quality of his allies, the Monk spoke warmly to them.

‘Well, now, my friends, I think we’ve come to the end of our bargain. With the Doctor’s help I’ve demonstrated the successful capabilities of my device, and provided your race with the means to recreate Marinus here. Now if you will kindly return to me my other circuits I’ll be happily on my way.’

The Speaker Voord held out its hand before the Monk.

‘Our bargain is still incomplete.’

‘Incomplete? How do you mean incomplete? Oh, wait...you can’t mean you expect me to reform this entire planet into Marinus, can you? That’s not part of our bargain. That’s not fair!’

‘I don’t think fair is part of the Voord’s vocabulary, is it?’ said the Doctor, addressing the Speaker Voord. The old man tucked one thumb into a lapel and stared hard at the blank-masked alien.

‘Nevertheless, I must concur with my associate, but upon entirely different grounds. You yourself just now witnessed the amount of Voord matter required by the Shaper to transform a few square feet of this planet into a copy of Marinus. Even you will therefore realise the sheer volume of matter needed to restructure this entire world!’

Even behind his mask, the Speaker Voord’s expression was unmoved.

‘We have all the matter we need to achieve our purpose.’

‘Have you, indeed?’ the Doctor retorted. ‘I think not. Why else would I have agreed to help you, hmm? I knew from first glance at the Monk’s extra machinations to the Shaper that the power requirements required to complete your foolish design would require the sacrifice of your entire race. Is that you really want then, to destroy yourselves only to leave behind an empty, surrogate Marinus?’

‘You mistake our genius, Doctor, as always. We have no intention of destroying ourselves to achieve our destiny; for the host matter we require is only that of one person.’

The Doctor let his arm fall to his side and clenched his fist. He could feel his hair curling.

‘And who is this one person?’

When the Speaker Voord answered its smile spoke through its mask.

‘You.’

In a mass the Voord horde rushed the Doctor, their head stalks burning red.

Dodo coughed and sputtered against the soupy smoke flowing free from the Monk’s console. The vapours were everywhere. With vigorous swipes of her arms she tried to drive away the smoke from before her, but the thick, cloying mists overpowered her. She fell to her knees. Her eyes streamed hot tears. She smelled fire, heard flames crackling. There was a sound, a strange wailing howl. It echoed all around and through her. Then the room began to shudder, to shake, to spin, faster and faster and faster until with one final thrust Dodo felt the life thrown out of her.

Once again the Doctor had tried to struggle but this time the Voord had used the combined energies of their psychic antennae to brutalise his aged body into submission. The attack had taken many agonising minutes before the Voord had overpowered him sufficiently to batter the Doctor almost unconscious, at which point they had carried his beaten body over the acid patina towards the Shaper. Now the Voord were loading the Doctor into the Shaper’s matter receptor and all the while the Monk was screaming at them in furious terror.

‘No! NO! Stop, please stop! What are you doing? The Doctor can’t possibly help you, not this way! You never said you wanted him to help you this way!’

The Monk barrelled into the Voord mass and managed to dislodge a few from their grip on the Doctor before the Speaker Voord grabbed his habit from behind and with savage energy threw the little man in a heap of dark fabric and pale limbs. Dazed and

frightened the Monk tried to gather himself but the Speaker Voord was already towering over his sprawled form. The alien spoke, its voice hot and harsh.

‘Know this, child: were you of no use to us I would eviscerate you where you lay, body and mind. But we still need you to operate the machine and enslave the Doctor’s matter to our cause. Only then, when our new world is complete, will we deign to restore to you the machinery you so desperately begged us.’

Sprawled upon the acidised soil, the Monk was almost weeping in shocked horror.

‘But...but you’ll make me kill the Doctor. I never wanted that. Even when I wanted my revenge against his bullying, I never, ever wanted that! Please, don’t make me do it.’

To anyone else the Monk’s pitiful display, like that of a stricken child, may have moved them to feel some compassion. But the Speaker Voord was solid and steadfast.

‘Do as you are commanded, or you shall die and we shall find a way to operate the Shaper ourselves.’

‘But none of this makes any sense! I thought you wanted to re-make Marinus, to go back home. The Doctor’s not from your world; he can’t make it for you!’

For one chilling moment, the Speaker Voord threw back its head and bellowed with laughter. Then he spoke the truth.

‘You fool. We don’t want to re-create our home world. We want to copy yours.’

The Monk’s jaw dropped and he felt his blood slow cold as he realised the full weight of his terrible mistake. And then he realised the Voord would certainly kill him if he failed to make their wish a reality. He looked up upon the stricken, senseless body of the Doctor lying upright and listless in the Shaper’s matter receptor and knew what was about to happen. Cursing himself, the Monk rose to his feet, thoughtlessly straightened his skull-cap, and approached the Shaper. Like a macabre honour guard, the Voord parted to let him pass.

The Monk laid his hands upon the machine controls and looked up at the Doctor's pale, blood-drained face. There was no choice but one.

'Forgive me, old friend,' the Monk murmured. He turned a black dial and with a heavy gnashing of metal teeth and sharpened gears the Shaper's solid metal shell sealed shut, flooding the Doctor with solid shadows. The door locked. The machine turned. The engine pumped. The heat raged. The pressure rose. Time revolved. An energy inferno engulfed the Doctor...

THE MISSHAPEN PLANET

THE DOCTOR TORE OPEN HIS EYES. ALL HIS SENSES ACTIVATED. HOT. BRIGHT. SHARP. Sour. Loud. Complex. Strange. His focus fixed fast upon the thundering cocoon of raw energy spiralling inwards towards him. Survivalist thoughts dissipated the pain clouding his mind. I have only seconds to act; but what can I possibly use to deflect this energy? There's nothing...wait. The Doctor patted the folds of his cloak. There in one of the pockets he felt a small metal shape, a hexagon. Of course! The Monk's time signal beacon; I forgot I'd put it in my cloak. It has a temporal component. But will it counteract the time wave? I must try!

His hand dipped into the fabric pocket, clutched the hexagon tightly and tugged it free. He studied the metal shape in his hand and felt for the control mechanisms. There was no time to make exact calculations, only brilliant guesses. The time-acceleration field spun ever closer; its light warmed his senses. He was almost cocooned, a restless insect in a premature chrysalis. Only one marginal chance. Release!

The Doctor activated the time beacon. He heard its silent sibilance echo in his sensitive ears as he held the device before the spinning time-energy. The Doctor watched in fixated hope. In a silent slap the two time fields collided, interacted, divided. Then, to his

delight, a small hole of darkness opened within the energy cocoon – the dissonance of the two time signatures! The energy breach widened, spread larger; he saw the Shaper’s metal shell...Now!

The old man re-pocketed the beacon and with a gathered surge of strength pushed out of the matter receptor to leap through the breached cocoon just as it enveloped the inner chamber. There was no time to relax; he had purchased himself only a few extra moments. The Doctor hurried to the Shaper’s inner shell and brushed his fingers over the smooth metal – I must find the manual release – There, beneath that graviton! The Doctor pursed his lips and blew a light blast of air upon the spot. The trigger twitched and sprang the locking mechanism. The shell’s inner seam cracked open and slid wide and the old man jumped from the Shaper and out onto solid, slightly acidic soil. Directly at his side he heard an exclamation of surprise. It was the Monk.

‘Doctor?! How -?’

‘I shall explain forthwith, Monk, but at the moment we have more pressing concerns. This machine is about – back!’

The Doctor grabbed the Monk and pulled him by the habit at the exact same moment the Speaker Voord swung down its gleaming blade. The Monk cried out as the stroke’s sharp path missed his nose by millimetres. With nothing to strike but empty air the Speaker Voord fell forward, slipped in the mud and crashed to the ground. Its knife bounced loose upon impact; the Doctor kicked the weapon away from the Voord’s reach. The alien pushed back from the soil and stood ramrod straight. Rage thundered through its darkened mask.

‘How have you escaped your death, Doctor?’

‘I couldn’t possibly tell you, Voord! It would spoil the mystery!’

‘You shall mock our race no more, old one, but you will form the template of our new world!’

‘Your world? Or rather mine? I heard your revelation to the Monk. As long as I live you shall never touch the secrets of time.’

The Speaker Voord shifted its opaque glare upon the Monk.

‘Then we shall use the Monk to fuel our quest!’

The Monk chuckled harshly and shook his head.

‘Oh, no, my horned friend, dying for another’s madness is never my way!’

The Speaker Voord hissed hot fury.

‘Then you will both die for the Voord where you stand, and then perhaps your carcasses will suffice!’

The Speaker Voord’s antennae began to vibrate. The miniature black appendage glowed deep red, then flashed dark arcs of energy building to a massive discharge; the Doctor glanced down, saw his walking stick discarded upon the ground – it was just within reach. He lunged forward, kicked the cane up to his hand and swung the stick to strike the antenna just as the energy surged. The antennae exploded like a tiny supernovae. The Speaker Voord howled in agony and sank to its knees and then fell backwards upon the earth. Its limbs flailed and swung in haphazard swipes. The Monk hurried to the Doctor’s side and gave him a happy pat on the shoulder.

‘Well done, Doctor! I never knew you had it in you.’

The Doctor angrily shrugged off the Monk’s hand.

‘I most certainly I wish I hadn’t. Violence is abhorrence to my nature.’

‘Yes, it is rather traumatic, even when necessary. But is the Voord dead?’

‘No, merely stunned. Nevertheless, without its head stalk this Voord is senseless now and no longer a true threat.’

‘Then at last we’re safe.’

‘From him, perhaps so. But what of his colleagues, I wonder?’

The Doctor and the Monk gazed up at the ravine’s upper ridge, where the other Voord stood watching them. All of their head stalks were surging with electricity, like a series of hyperactive generators. Then, to both men’s surprise, each Voord’s head appendage detonated and the aliens collapsed in a heap of writhing bodies. The Doctor clenched his fist in understanding.

‘Of course, I should have realised! The Voord are telepathic; and the Speaker directed the thought energy of the other soldiers.’

The Monk’s face rose with a bright smile as he followed the Doctor’s lead.

‘Yes, and when his stalk blew it sent a massive feedback through their telepathic network! All the Voord here and on the ship must have been affected – we’re saved!’

‘True, but now who will give you your coveted spare parts? The Voord are very stealthy.’

The Monk’s face fell at this new realisation.

‘Oh, bother! There’s always something to spoil the victory.’

Suddenly a high-pitched metallic squeal shattered the air. The Doctor and the Monk turned towards the sound. The Shaper was quivering and glowing with golden light. Thick arcs of dark energy flowed over the metal shell. Fiery smoke and silver-bright liquid poured from the machine’s aperture. The Monk gaped in horror and the damaged machine.

‘Doctor, I think now is good time to learn exactly how you made your escape.’

'I used your beacon's time signal to interfere with the Shaper's time acceleration curvature and opened a passage in the cocoon. But why is it still damaging the Shaper; I have the beacon safe in my cloak!'

The Monk clasped his hands together and squeezed his fingers.

'Oh, no! No, no, no! I'm sorry, but I should have said: this Shaper has a fault in its core system.'

'What sort of fault?' The Doctor's tone made it clear there was no room for prevarication.

'Simply...once it starts to can't stop, at least if there's no organic material present in the receptor.'

The Doctor gritted his teeth and brandished the head of cane towards the Monk's face. The faux-clergyman winced, expecting a fierce beating, but felt only a sharp pat on his shoulder.

'I should give you a good knocking for this, but I don't think you'd gain any sense. Now, come along!'

'But where can we go?'

'To the TARDIS, of course!'

The Monk sighed in relief.

'Of course, your ship. We can escape with ease.'

'No! Not mine, yours! We shall fetch my young friends and then together you and I will stop this catastrophe from happening!'

'But, Doctor, what catastrophe? If the Shaper consumes this planet what's the worry? Aside from a few disabled Voord there's no one here.'

‘Yes, but you said it yourself: if this Shaper can’t stop its reconstructive tendencies then imagine how far it will go before it’s satisfied!’

The Monk blinked and nodded.

‘Lead the way, confident physician!’

The Doctor tilted back his head and flashed a broad grin.

‘Follow me, unverified spiritualist!’

Smirking with irony, both the Doctor and the Monk clambered out of the ravine and away from the quaking Shaper. The ground was beginning to dry and crack beneath their feet. Then the rumbling started. The Monk looked back at the ravine: it had widened and deepened by a thousand feet within under a minute. A spheroid of brilliant off-white light shimmered and spun within the crater like a frenzied, crashed star splitting the planet wide open. The Monk remembered the Earth tale of Lot’s wife he had learned in 1066 and tore his gaze away. He needed to take his mind from the fear chilling his bones. He called out to the surprisingly spry Doctor hurrying at his side.

‘Doctor, if only they could see us now.’

The Doctor huffed a grim reply:

‘I sincerely hope not.’

All at once there was a marvellous tremor and the ground sank like draining water as the two men stumbled and dropped towards the dust. Moments later there was another tremor, and then another, each stronger than before. The Doctor was pitched forward by the shaking and rolled onto his back. Powered earth clogged his nose and mouth; he coughed roughly; his breath was shallow. His head lolled from side to side; he thought he saw through patches of dark clouds the shimmering pathways of stars streaking across the boiling sky. Then he felt hands grabbing his coat. A voice called his name. It was the Monk.

‘Come on, Doctor, come on! This planet is spinning out of time – we’ve got to keep moving or we’ll be blown to the winds!’

Winds. Dust. Death. The Doctor thought of Kembel, of Sara’s dried bones pulverised premature and scattered across the surface of forgotten memory. He saw himself in the dust, wasting away to the storm moment by moment, his eternity stretched to oblivion; he saw the edge of the darkness there; a new face approached through the unknown. No! Not yet. Not here. I must rise! He rose. The Doctor pushed himself up with his cane and staggered forward. The Monk hurried by his side. They journeyed onwards against the quakes and the storms. Time deformed around them. Dry dust patchworked the Doctor and the Monk’s clothing and peppered their faces. They inched forward against heavy winds and stinging rain. Something heavy rumbled overhead. The Monk’s head snap upwards: tearing frighteningly low in the sky was a solid mass of black clouds ridged with green streaks of lightning, like a dry deluge vomited from a parched sky – the fall was almost upon them!

The Doctor grabbed the Monk’s shoulder. Through the powdered gloom the old man pointed. Through slit-thin eyes the Monk followed the gesture and saw the cause: the Voord ship! The earth tremors and made the craft settle into the ground somewhat but the open exit hatch was still above ground. With the end goal in sight the two men made a last push against the torrent and passed through the hatch. Inside, the Monk gasped the clean air and leaned back against one wide wall girder for support. The Doctor, pale and shivering, smacked one hand against the opposite wall and leaned feebly against the dark metal hull. The Monk took one last deep breath and stood straight.

‘Well, Doctor, we should get moving. If we’re not inside my TARDIS soon the acceleration will tear us apart.’

‘Yes...yes...you’re quite correct. I just...need a...moment to...recover.’

‘Doctor, you’re looking faint again. You don’t think you’re going to -’

‘Absolutely not!’ the Doctor shouted, almost bellowed. He pushed clear of the wall and strode down the corridor towards the lift. The Monk watched him charge ahead with a solemn shake of his head.

‘Oh, dear. I hope when my time comes I show a little more dignity than that!’

The Monk hurried after. The two men continued their flight through the corridor and reached the lift, but the doors would not open. The Monk fished a silver oval from his habit and waved it over the lift doors. The machine chimed once and the Monk read the readings through its soft, liquid surface.

‘Oh, poxes! The Shaper’s energy is already affecting this vessel’s power systems. We’ll have to make the rest of the way on foot – there’s an emergency ladder just down the corridor to our left; it should access every level. Are you up to climbing in your condition, Doctor?’

But the Doctor was already hurrying towards the indicated corridor. The Monk rolled his eyes and sighed before chasing after his one-time friend. They quickly reached the ladder and began climbing its metal rungs. The Doctor looked up the vertical length of the ladder: it ran for what seemed a physical eternity. Well, if I walk in eternity then I might as well climb it as well!

They climbed, rung by rung. Minutes passed. Every few dozen meters there was a small distance between rungs for space to allow an access crawlspace onto a new deck. The Monk had set his power-detection device to alert him when his TARDIS was near. He knew it would be a long climb until the right deck. Through the vessel’s hull the stormy rush of

winds whistled high and hard; time itself was whipping at the craft's metal frame. The sound was worse than silence; the Monk covered it with his voice.

'If it's any consolation to you, Doctor, I tried to offer the Voord other organic materials to power the Shaper, if only to persuade them not to involve you in their plan.'

'Such an interesting admission, Monk. Are you implying you were aware of their true objectives all along?'

'No! No, most assuredly not. I simply knew if you got involved then everything would become terribly difficult.'

'Hmm! indeed. I like to consider myself the proverbial scanner thrown into the workings of villainy. But more to the point: what exactly was this other organic material you offered the Voord?'

'What? Oh, nothing specific, although I suppose the term 'organic' is too simple in this case-'

Suddenly, much sooner than expected, the Monk's power detector began to hum beneath his habit. The Monk retrieved the oval machine and checked its indicator. A sly smile wedged across his face. The Monk threw a furtive upward glance at the Doctor; the old man had already passed the deck departure junction. If he moved quickly he could depart unnoticed. The Monk made a quick decision and slipped into the crawlspace. Above him, oblivious to the detour, the Doctor climbed.

It was all very quiet in the room. The once white illumination was dim and unsteady. Heavy smoke spiced the air. Every few moments the control hexagon emitted a slurred buzzing accompanied by small, sharp electric sparks across the few intact instrument panels.

Lying unconscious upon the ground, Dodo slowly stirred and ceased her brow in pain. There was a small, purpling bump across her forehead where her head had glanced against the console platform as she had fallen. Dodo opened her eyes; they stung from the smoky haze.

‘Steven?’ Her words were hoarse and weak. She had to get up and find her friend. Dodo tried to stand but her senses dulled and her sighted blurred. Ok, I need to get up slowly.

She pushed herself upright and leaned her back against the platform. Dodo rubbed her bruised head and breathed deep. Aside from the slight soreness of her forehead nothing really hurt her, nothing seemed broken. But where was Steven? Wait. There was a sound behind her, small and scraping. A body moving?

‘Steven? Is that you? Are you hurt?’

Dodo turned about and, still kneeling, leaned forward against the platform to peer across the darkened room. Through the web-like miasma of warm, curling smoke, she saw a figure: it was dark and lean; the head was large.

‘Steven?’ Dodo whispered. Without a word the figure darted forward, its hands outstretched to her throat.

‘Monk? Monk?!’

The Doctor had been climbing for a few minutes before he realised he had not heard the Monk beneath him during that time period. He looked down; of the Monk there was no sign. How could I have missed him for so long? My awareness is weakening. The Doctor grimaced and continued his climb. After a few moments as he neared another deck departure point, he shouted again:

‘Monk! Where are you?’

A head stuck out of the junction aperture.

‘Hello, Doctor!’

The Monk leaned his head and shoulders out of the opening. His face smiled down upon his former friend. The Doctor, startled by the sudden re-appearance, sputtered:

‘Where did you go? What are you doing up there? How did you get there?’

‘Oh, so many questions! I found a working lift a few decks below us. I’ve been checking each deck until I could find you. Now come along, we can ride the rest of the way.’

The Monk motioned to the Doctor to follow and the old man, grumbling his discontent, climbed into the junction and crawled through its length until he came to an exit onto a normal travel corridor. As promised, just a few feet down the corridor were the open doors of a moderately-lit lift. The Monk had been honest, for once. Still, I wonder what made him go searching.

They entered the lift and its doors jerked closed behind them. The Monk programmed the correct deck into the interface and the compartment lurched unsteadily upwards; there was barely enough power to move them. A few very unpleasant moments later the incredibly driven Doctor, following close after the Monk, exited the lift and rushed to the camouflaged entrance of the Monk’s TARDIS. Impatient to enter, the old man, his taut facial skin stretched thin over the sharp skull bones beneath, curtly motioned to his associate to open the doorway. The Monk fumbled in the folds of his habit and drew out the key just before the Doctor’s patience corroded.

The key unbolted the lock and the doorway retracted. The two men entered the darkened interior chamber. Although curious about his Ship’s lack of illumination, the Monk sighed in relief at the familiar sight of his machine.

‘There, Doctor, you see? We’ve made it to safety.’

‘Always overestimating your self-security, Monk.’

In silhouette, the Doctor pointed towards the console. The Monk turned and looked. There was someone standing upon the platform – no, something –

‘Lights, normal level!’ the Monk cried, feeling intense self-gratitude for perfecting his craft’s voice-control, an elation that deflated as the lights augmented and revealed the intruder: a Voord soldier, its body-suit charred, mottled and smoking. From behind it clutched with one hand the throat of the Doctor’s young companion, Dodo. The soldier’s other hand had positioned its rusted blade over one of the teenager’s fear-filled eyes. The Doctor stepped forward and stood tall before the threatening creature.

‘Voord! You will release the girl immediately!’

The Voord made no movement, no made no acknowledging sign. Of course, thought the Monk, this Voord must be senseless like the rest. The Monk tried to edge his way close to the console but the Voord reacted to his movement and shifted its body slightly in his direction. Through the side of his clenched teeth the Monk hissed to the Doctor:

‘I thought you said without the Speaker all the soldiers were senseless!’

‘Obviously your TARDIS shielded its mind from the mental feedback. But more to the point: how did this Voord get inside your Ship?’

‘I’ve no idea! I’d ask him but I don’t think speaking is his specialty!’

The Doctor turned back to the Voord and addressed it in his most imperious tone.

‘You are defeated and alone. You have no companions and no directive. You will stand down and depart peacefully from this place. Do you understand? I will have your answer!’

The Voord tightened its grip on the blade handle. Its arm pulled away slight. The blade plummeted towards the eye – Dodo screamed – a hand slammed down on the Voord’s shoulder and spun it around. It was Steven, face black with soot and face hard with protective rage. He balled one fist and crunched a punch square in the alien’s face. The Voord staggered back from the blow. Its knife dropped. Dodo launched free and ran falling into the Doctor’s welcoming arms. Steven shook his hand in pain but balled the fingers to strike again. The Voord charged him and wrapped his arms around his torso. The alien’s lunge knocked both off the platform. They crashed to the floor half a foot below. The two tangled bodies struggled upon the ground. Steven pulled up with his back muscles. He swung his arms high over his head and bashed the bases of his palms against the Voord’s hoops. The alien convulsed and clutched the sides of its head. One of its feet shot out and caught Steven across his jaw. Steven yelped and slid backwards several inches. The Voord rolled onto its elbows and knees. It looked up and saw its knife nestled at the base of the Monk’s console. It crawled forward and began to mount the platform. On his back, Steven saw the alien’s intended target. He stretched his leg and kicked at the alien’s ankles. The Voord lost its footing, stumbled forward – its arm shot out to grab the console. An electric flash of bright blue light rose from the console and saturated the room. The energy covered the Voord, sank into its body-covering and disappeared beneath. Then the Voord immolated. The negative-blue balled flames ignited from underneath its rubber exo-skin and burst through the covering like the mushroom clouds of dozens of miniature atomic bombs. Then, as soon as they had appeared the multiplicity of infernos snuffed out as the TARDIS’s disturbed equilibrium reasserted and the ravaged alien fell back-first upon the console platform, twisted, stretched, stiffened, died. Not a single curl of smoke escaped the quiet, covered corpse.

Everyone – the Doctor with Dodo still in his arms, the Monk by their side, and Steven slowly rising to his feet at the opposite edge of the platform – approached the fallen Voord. Steven spoke first. He sounded subdued and shocked.

‘I’d fallen and hit my head – blacked out. When I came to I saw the Voord about to kill Dodo and I...I didn’t mean to kill it.’

‘It’s perfectly all right, my boy,’ the Doctor interjected with an unusual dose of kindness. ‘You did what any friend would do to save another. Besides, you weren’t to know the console was so lethally charged with energy.’

‘Yes,’ the Monk said as he leaned close to the console without touching its surface. ‘But that needs explaining. What have you two rascals been doing to my TARDIS?!’

It was Dodo who answered.

‘We were trying to get out of here to go and help the Doctor!’

‘Do you really think I would have hurt him, my dear child?’

‘Well, maybe not you, but those Voord...’ Dodo’s voice trailed off. She had been so close to death. The Doctor stroked her dark mop and addressed Steven.

‘Young man, I see what I believe to be a transmat pad connected to the Monk’s console. Am I correct in assuming it was your intent to use that device to make your escape?’

‘Yes, Doctor. I couldn’t find a power source for the disc so I thought I’d use the console. It was already open at the base.’ The Monk’s eyes rounded with worry and he knelt before the breached base to examine its interior. Steven continued his recounting. ‘I connected the two with a cable Dodo found and everything went dark and the room started to shake. Then I fell and blacked out.’

‘And that’s when it came, Doctor!’ said Dodo, her fears somewhat abated. ‘I saw the Voord through the smoke -’

‘Hmm! Hmm-Hmm!’ The Doctor clenched his fist and smiled. Discovery lit his countenance.

‘That must be how that soldier got into this Ship! Outside the Voord have a machine the Monk gave them, a device that can re-shape entire planets. One of them entered the machine to activate its systems. We thought that soldier had been destroyed but I think you must have connected the transmat disc at that exact same moment and the two energy fields briefly interacted to shift the Voord here. Did you notice, Monk, how the creature’s suit was already charred from exposure to the Shaper? It must have made transition only just in time!’

The Monk, still head-buried inside the base, made no reply except for a huff of pained worry: many of his TARDIS’s circuits had been scorched by the transmat. The Doctor seemed not to notice the Monk’s activity and continued addressing his companions.

‘But thanks to this momentary frightful encounter I think this Voord has given us an answer to our problem.’

‘What problem, Doctor? Did something bad happen out there?’ asked Dodo.

A terrible screeching of metal cut through the control chamber. Steven and Dodo looked about, startled at the sound. Then the room lurched and shuddered, almost throwing the three friends onto the floor. The Doctor grabbed the console’s nearest edge and glared at the Monk, who cowered beneath his console in frozen-faced fear.

‘I rather think something bad is happening right here!’

The Doctor turned to the damaged console at his side and found its scanner switch. The control appeared functional and with a turn of the Doctor’s finger the Monk’s scanner activated. Dodo and Steven struggled against the shaking and gathered near their friend to see what the scanner revealed. They watched in horror.

On the screen was chaos realised. Waves of blistering energy fractured and twisted the planet's surface. Colossal monoliths of solid land rose high and shattered into raging tornadoes of clumpy dust, mountains burst open and vomited thick plumes of scarlet lava and valleys collapsed into bottomless trenches spewing noxious gaseous clouds and ferocious jets of flame. Electrified black clouds roared through the devastation, clogging and cloying to the splintered surface. Their winds and stinging rain sliced through solid rocks and exposed molten tectonic plates. And hovering in the air at the eye of the unnatural storm was the blinding orb of the Shaper. Just beyond the dimensional plane of the spreading devastation, the Doctor pointed to the scanner.

'That terrible object there, my friends, is the cause of this devastation. The Voord tried to use this device to make this planet their new home, but it's all failed.

'How long do we have?' Dodo asked.

'Not long, I'm afraid, which is why we must put it right, and most quickly. And you must help us, Monk!'

The Monk's head bobbed up from beneath the console.

'You actually want my help?'

'Want, no. Require under the circumstances, yes.'

The Monk stood and spread his arms with a helpless shrug.

'I really don't see how we can help ourselves either way.'

'Nonsense. There's an obvious solution to our difficulty: You say the Shaper must feed upon organic material in order to deactivate, and we have the dead Voord available to assist us. All we must do is put its body inside the Shaper. Once that's consumed the machine will shut down.'

The Monk's jaw dropped. He dismounted the console platform just as another powerful jolt struck, and, just barely keeping his footing upon landing, he stood with outstretched arms before the Doctor.

'Doctor, I think your lifestyle has made you numb to peril and calamity! We can't possibly make a return journey to the Shaper and survive.'

'I'm not suggesting we carry this Voord on our backs like a sack of potatoes! We can use the transmat disc – it's how the Voord got here after all!'

'But the time distortion! It'll interfere with the transmat's range; reduce it to a fraction of its capability. To do what you're asking would mean landing my TARDIS directly over the Shaper, and after the damage you and your friends have done to the Ship I can't possibly manage that!'

'Can't, or won't?' Steven demanded. He approached the Monk and loomed over him. The little cleric wriggled away from the burly pilot and shook his head.

'I'm sorry, but really I am powerless to help. You should just leave this place, Doctor. You'll all be much safer.'

'You already know full-well I can't and won't do that!'

The Monk shrugged and sat on his console platform.

'Then I don't know what more we can do.' He paused and dipped his head. His hands came together, as if in prayer. The Doctor frowned and turned away. His fingers nestled beneath his chin and over his mouth.

'I shall use my TARDIS.'

Steven walked over to the old man's side.

'Do you think there's a chance, Doctor? Will our TARDIS be able to make the journey?'

‘It must do so, my dear boy. There’s no other way open to us.’

The Doctor turned back to the Monk.

‘I’ll require you to turn over the transmat. I think it’s the least you can contribute to this enterprise.’

‘Oh, gladly, my friend, gladly. I’m always willing to assist the unwary well-doers of the cosmos, especially you. I’ll just need a moment to disconnect the disc from my console. Steven, my friend, you’ll need the Voord’s body; would you kindly pick it up?’

Steven glared his distrust at the Monk but said nothing as he walked to the platform and removed the Voord’s carcass. As he hefted the body over his shoulders, the Monk climbed onto the platform and began disconnecting the transmat from the console. The Doctor moved forward to watch the procedure. The old man leaned far over the console; his cloak fell wide and covered much of the panels over which he stood. As the Monk worked, the Doctor smiled darkly. A few moments passed and the transmat was free; the Monk stood with the large white disc in balanced across his arms.

‘May we never say the clergy don’t offer alms to the poor and needy. I hope this gift benefits you, Doctor.’

The Monk extended the disc to the Doctor; Dodo offered to carry the device and took it in her arms. Another earth-jolt shook the TARDIS so hard Dodo felt her teeth chatter. The Monk raced around the console and switched the door control. The large double doors whirred and swung open. Thin wafts of smoke and the twanging sounds of twisting metals from the dying Voord invader penetrated the room. The Monk walked to the Doctor’s side and held out his hand.

‘Well, this looks to be our next goodbye. I wonder if we can finalise this parting for once on friendly terms?’

‘Perhaps, if only you agree to cease your meddling ways once and for all.’

‘Oh-ho-ho-ho, we both know that’s one term we define differently, Doctor.’

‘Then, Monk,’ the Doctor said, patting the Monk’s shoulder – much like a parent to a wayward child – ‘I shall ever hope you mend your way before we meet again. Goodbye!’

The Monk laughed, if a little reluctantly, and walked with the Doctor to the exit and waved him goodbye. Steven, carrying the body, refused to offer his hand in parting as he passed, but nodded the little man a half-courteous farewell. Last to leave was Dodo. As she stood in the doorway, she turned back and smiled.

‘Goodbye, then, Monk. It was nice to meet you. I hope we might have a better go next time around.’

The Monk smiled – genuine and warm – and tickled Dodo’s chin with his thumb.

‘Thank you, my dear child. Now, go along quick and help make sure the Doctor doesn’t hurt himself!’

Dodo flashed a final smile and departed through the doors. The Monk returned to the console and closed the passageway. Then he reached to the adjacent panel and re-activated the scanner to watch the Doctor, Dodo and Steven navigate their way through the disintegrating corridors of the collapsing Voord craft. Even though he was safe and alone in his own ship, the Monk remained still as long as the Doctor was in sight. On the screen, the old man and his friends turned a corner and disappeared.

The Monk heaved a grateful sigh and turned off the image. Then he reached into the folds of his habit and scooped out a large, white paper bag. The Monk mounted the platform and poured the contents of the bag upon the top of the central column: several odd-shaped pieces of white plastic laced with thin and thick lines of gold, silver, platinum and copper. The Monk eyed the objects with glee and rubbed his hands together before

operating the main controls and setting his TARDIS to random flight through space-time. Glad to be rid finally of the Voord, the Monk muttered to himself:

‘Oh, I’m so sorry, Doctor, for my slight deception, but when my power detector discovered where the Voord had hidden my spare parts, well, how could I neglect my freedom?’

The Monk took two of the circuits and knelt before the opened section of the control’s base.

‘Still, I really hope you succeed in whatever you plan on doing, even after your bullying. Now which way does that piece go?’

‘Dodo, watch out!’

Steven pushed his friend out of the way of a falling metal girder; she leapt out of the way just in time and somehow kept the transmat secure in her arms; he nearly dropped the Voord carcass as his shoulder struck a side wall; the metal buckled under his weight. There was a terrifying metallurgical howl as an entire section of the corridor behind them collapsed. Dodo coughed and wiped her skirt and shirt free of dust.

‘We can’t go back that way now.’

‘I wouldn’t want to anyway,’ Steven said. He sounded tense and worried. He called out to the Doctor, who was scouting the corridor sections several yards ahead.

‘Doctor, this ship is coming apart around us. We’ve got to find the TARDIS.’

‘I know that, my dear boy! I know it must be near – yes! Yes, I see it! It’s just up ahead. Hurry, you two, hurry!’

The old man ploughed forward, heedless of the huge metal chunks and ceramic debris blitzing the air and pelting the ground all around him. With Dodo and Steven mere

feet behind him, the Doctor almost crashed into the TARDIS's Police Box doors, the door key already clenched in his hand. He thrust the key sharp into the lock and twisted the grooves a quarter-turn. The blue wood slats released and swung open; the old man exhaled relief and swung his arm towards his friends over and over, bidding them to enter. Dodo went first with Steven only a step behind. The Doctor entered last and slammed the doors behind him. Inside the Ship he was ablaze with energy.

'Now, Steven, place the Voord directly before the console. Dodo, please give me the transmat!' he ordered. While Steven complied the Doctor took the disc and set it upon his marble pedestal. With his fingers he pried free the disc's back panel and began scrounging through its thick tapestry of spaghetti-thin wires and lubricated tubes. Dodo's jaw dropped at the apparent vandalism.

'Oi! Don't we need that thing?'

'Certainly not, Dodo. This transmat is a defective model; I could see that from the beginning. How else could it cause such havoc to the Monk's Ship?'

'Then why take it?' Steven asked, coming up to join them.

'Because it has a vital part I can salvage to integrate into my TARDIS and temporarily improve its navigational ability, the disc's compass.'

'But couldn't you have asked the Monk for some spare parts?' Dodo said. Steven replied:

'We tried that before, Dodo. At least, the Doctor took something from the Monk's TARDIS last time we saw him in Ancient Egypt, but the circuits nearly burnt out this TARDIS: they're really not compatible.'

The Doctor huffed a breath of annoyance.

‘Yes, that wretched Mark Four construction; the upgrades are quite inefficient -
Hmm! Yes, here it is. I have it!’

He dug his fingers deep into the centre of the disembowelled disc and tugged loose with a jerk of his hand a small, ruby-coloured dome ridged around its diameter with small, domed forest-green lights and marked at its apex with a single, midnight-blue button. With the compass in hand, the Doctor hurried over to the console. He knelt at the base and pried loose one of its coverings when another shockwave slammed against the Ship. Steven felt his feet launch from the floor. He shot out his arms, caught the edge of the console. Dodo grabbed the pedestal but the marble column spun and toppled over - it was falling on top of her-; Dodo flung herself out of the way just in time. The solid marble struck the floor. The Doctor clutched the control base to keep from sliding along the smooth, white ground. I must make the connection! He buried his hand deep into the under-column, scoured for the right cable - there!

The Doctor pulled a thin cable loose from its connection and tugged the line outside; live energy poured from the broken connection. He raised the transmat compass to the torn, leaking wire. The flowing energy touched the dome’s central blue jewel. The jewel brightened, its ridge lights filled with light and flashed in alternating patterns. The wire break closed over the blue jewel and the free energy ceased to flow. The Doctor wiped his brow and placed the compass inside the base. Then he stood and began manipulating switches and pulling levers just as another, far more devastating quake rocked the TARDIS. The Ship began to tilt, farther, then farther –

‘Now!’

The Doctor pulled the main switch and the central column surged upwards, dropped downwards, rose again. The TARDIS was in flight. The Doctor stepped back from the console and gripped his lapels.

‘Excellent. Excellent! We’ve achieved local transference. And just in time as well: I think that last episode was the destruction of the Voord ship. It can only be worse on the planet’s surface by now.’

‘So is it over?’ Steven asked. But even as he half-crawled his very sore body over to Dodo to help her stand, he could feel something was different; something was new.

‘Doctor,’ he said, ‘this doesn’t feel right. Are we travelling?’

‘In a way, my boy, in a very particular way. Watch. I’m going to open the doors.’

‘But you’ve said we should never do that while we’re moving!’ Dodo exclaimed. The Doctor smiled.

‘Only when moving through time, my child. Observe.’

The old man operated the door controls and the white, roundelled double doors swung open. The Ship’s motion, a slight steady shifting, remained constant and smooth. At the Doctor’s beckoning, Steven and Dodo walked to the edge of the doors and looked outside. Dark clouds flew past. Thunder rumbled in the distance. They looked down. Dodo cried out and pointed. Not far below and rushing past at speed was the broken, twisted surface of the planet. The planet was moving past – no, not the planet, the TARDIS. The TARDIS was flying.

Chuckling, the Doctor joined Dodo and Steven in the Ship’s doorway.

‘I see you understand the difference of this flight now, my friends?’

‘Yes, but...how? How did you do it?’ Dodo asked, her eyes fixed upon the rocky, molten ground rolling beneath her.

‘My dear Dodo if the TARDIS is capable of traversing the expanse of time surely it is also capable of simple flight. The only reason I don’t attempt this mode of travel more often is because of the Ship’s unreliable sense of direction.’

‘So that’s why you installed the transmat’s compass,’ Steven surmised. ‘With its directional system you can plot a course towards this device you mentioned.’

‘Precisely! I knew your piloting experience would see the way eventually. Now I think we’re going the right way, and much smoother than I expected -’

The TARDIS shuddered and dropped towards the surface, then quickly rose up but higher than it had been before. Then their course began to drift to the left, to the right-

‘No! The compass is failing. The TARDIS’s power is overwhelming it! Steven, you must pilot the Ship!’

The Doctor hurried back to the console. Steven followed close behind, more than a little surprised.

‘You need me as the pilot?’

‘Yes, of course! Aren’t you willing?’

‘Well... I am. It’s just you’ve never let me operate the controls before.’

‘True, and don’t expect this opportunity to come again! Now, I need you to guide us to the Shaper and hold the TARDIS steady while I lower the Voord carcass into that terrible machine. Only then will its appetite be satisfied.’

‘But, Doctor, if all you need is to place the body in this machine then I can do that while you pilot the TARDIS.’

‘Oh, have faith in yourself, Steven Taylor! We’ve been through enough together that I know I have faith in you! Besides, I’m the only one who can withstand the time distortion the Shaper is generating. Now, pay attention! Here are the relevant controls.’

Steven had no idea how the Doctor had managed it so quickly (for the young man had never noticed these controls before) but the old man had somehow installed into the console an entire flight control apparatus. While the Doctor explained to Steven the TARDIS's manual flight systems Dodo remained in the doorway. She gazed out upon the vast panoramic expanse of the world beneath her. Even deformed and twisted by savage time energies, the sight was beautiful, breathtaking, so much more than anything she remembered back at home. Dodo thought of home: of cold rain and climbing trees; of her dead parents and her uncaring aunt; of the alien she had found one day; an alien in the shape of an old, dead man. The alien who had frightened her so much, but had later saved her life. Oh, Joseph, if only I could thank you now. Thanks to you I ran away that day and found the TARDIS. I found this wonderful life with the Doctor and Steven. I hope it never ends.

A bright light shone in Dodo's eyes. She shielded her brow with her hands and peered off towards the horizon. There she saw it: the bright light ball affixed above the horizon, like a small sun burning a hole in the sky. The ball's energy radiated out to ever-widening concentric circles of multi-hued fire; the colours ran and mingled like melting sherbet. Thick rays of solid light lanced from the miniature sun, driving away the black and chartreuse clouds of charged moisture. Webs of lightning arched across the skyline, raced towards the TARDIS - the sight was almost overpowering. Dodo sat down and drank in the moment. Then, finding her voice, she called over her shoulder.

'It's almost here, Steven!'

'Thanks! Tell me if it's straight ahead.'

'Yes, wait! Almost, just a little to the right. Good...down a little bit. Too much...up a little more...got it!'

‘Perfect, thanks.’ Steven replied. ‘This is unbelievable. I feel like an ancient mariner behind his creaky wheel.’

He was standing in front of the console panel opposite from the doorway. After a quick tutorial from the Doctor on how to steer the flying TARDIS, Steven felt his hands gradually growing accustomed to the ebb and flow of the machine’s aerial movement. Every few moments he adjusted the array of handles, gauges, and throttles, all of which controlled the TARDIS’s attitude, pitch, altitude, vectors, and every other element vital to the craft’s flight.

Steven input a small course change into the Ship’s directional interface and then looked over the rise and fall of the central column and out of the open doorway. Framed in the open doorway around Dodo’s seated figure was the shining fireball of the approaching Shaper. The light from the machine threw Dodo’s shadow long and dark behind her. Like his teenaged friend, Steven marvelled at the incredible image before him. It’s like we’re flying straight into the sun! A sharp beeping sound rose from the console; Steven glanced down at the proximity detector the Doctor had shown him.

‘Doctor, we’ll reach the target in about a minute!’

The Doctor, who had occupied the last few moments by loading the dead Voord into an old-Earth-style wheelchair, glanced up and peered out the doors towards the unyielding storm of the Shaper’s false dawn. The terrible sight recalled an ancient Earth weather proverb to his mind:

Red sky in morning, sailors take warning.

‘Well done!’ The Doctor stood and turned to watch the scanner. On the screen was the glowing Shaper, its size slowly increasing. The old man pointed to the image and spoke.

‘Now, Steven, you must execute our course very carefully; and when we come to within one hundred meters set the TARDIS doors directly level with the Shaper and then begin the final approach. Dodo, please make some room; we shall guide Steven together.’

The Doctor crossed the room and joined Dodo at the doorway.

‘Remember, my boy, check the scanner every few moments to verify our directions. We need to come to a stationary hold at no less than one foot from the machine!’

‘OK! We’re at three hundred meters...’

‘Good luck, Steven!’ Dodo cried. The Shaper’s flares warmed her face.

‘Two hundred meters...’

‘Steady, Steven, steady,’ the Doctor warned. He felt time bulging toward the open doorway.

‘One hundred meters! Adjusting altitude.’

Steven flicked two switches and pulled down a black-handled, double-columned lever. The TARDIS dropped towards. Steven glanced at the scanner and imagined the flaming ball’s horizontal line of symmetry. He heard the Doctor’s voice.

‘Descend an additional ten meters...make one second correction to starboard... ascend one meter more... there! We’ve made it! Steven, lock this position!’

Steven slapped his palm against upon a large, red button. There was a heavy, metallic clank deep within, even beneath, the console and the Ship’s shifting halted. The TARDIS was still. The Doctor wasted no time.

‘Now, both of you, hide behind the console: it will protect you from the time turbulence. Dodo, my dear, hurry! The next few moments will be quite perilous.’

Dodo hesitated for a moment. She wanted to help her friend, but she relented; but not before leaning close and throwing her arms around the Doctor. The old man returned the quick embrace.

‘You are so much like her,’ he whispered. ‘I was right to find you. Now, run along!’

The Doctor extracted himself and began to push the Voord in the wheelchair towards the threshold. Dodo turned and took a quick step towards the console before the ground sloped downwards and she crashed face-first to the ground. Steven pitched forward onto the console; he grabbed the central column for support. The Doctor crashed to the floor as did the wheelchair. The Voord body slid from the seat; its chest smacked against the width-edge of one of the doors; there it sagged like a broken puppet. Dodo slid backwards, like a falling lift; the control room filled her vision, shrank smaller, smaller – she reached out, caught one of the doors. She held tight. She heard the Doctor.

‘Hold still, Dodo! Keep your eyes inside!’

Fuelled by the obedience of adrenaline, Dodo clamped both hands onto the wide side edge of the door. I won’t look outside. I won’t look outside. She heard something move outside.

Leaning against the other door, the Doctor wanted answers.

‘Steven, what’s happening over there?’

‘I’ll check!’

Steven’s hands hovered over the controls; his eyes scrutinised every reading. The coordinates were set and constant.

‘This doesn’t make any sense! We’re right where we should be; the navigation hasn’t failed.’

‘Then what’s gone wrong?’

Dodo screamed. The Doctor twisted around, looked outside, stood in horror, saw the large, formless black mass flapping and massing and churning beneath the TARDIS, heard the snapping claws and horned heads wriggling and writhing and screeching, smelt the putrid waft of scorched flesh and dripping bile and acidic liquids, felt the howling pounding of violence and fury radiating from the beast – no, beasts. Can it be? The TARDIS shook and tipped further downwards. A web of thick, flesh-dripping tendrils were extending from the dark mass and latching onto the TARDIS' Police Box exterior; they were dropping to the planet. Then the TARDIS began to tremble, shake, rattle, quake. The Ship was tearing itself apart. Dodo cried out.

'Doctor, what's going on?'

'It's the Shaper! It's merging with the TARDIS's time-field. It'll make the Shaper's destructive energy expand at an exponential rate.'

Heedless of the creature mere feet from him, the Doctor stuck his head out of the open doorway. The planet below was burning. The old man craned his neck upwards to gaze into the sky. The clouds had cleared; the blue-white sun was expanding, darkening to blood. There was no more time. The Doctor pushed back inside the chamber and shouted.

'Dodo, take shelter behind your door! Steven, when I give the word place us directly above the sphere. Then get behind the console and don't move until I say so!'

'But, Doctor-'

'Oh, do as I say, young man!'

Steven clenched his jaw but made no more arguments. The Doctor looked over at Dodo: she was secure behind the door. The Doctor inhaled, reached down, and hefted the Voord body from across the other exit door. The Doctor exhaled.

'Now!'

Steven executed the navigation. The TARDIS jolted against the clinging dark mass but rose higher, higher, shifted sideways, sideways – the Shaper’s brightness centred below the doorway; the darkness above the light screamed out its murder. The Doctor lunged forward and flung the Voord body out into the air; the Doctor fell behind the body; the body struck the darkness; the darkness released the TARDIS and dropped towards the light; the light touched the darkness; the light cancelled the darkness; the brightness bleached all sight; all sounds fled to silence; all time bled out into eternity.

The explosion shattered everything.

The TARDIS flung upwards, pushed backwards, spun round and round, faster, faster, tumbled over and over, twisted into a blur. Dodo fell against the wall, into the roundels; Steven crashed to the floor, pressed against the ground. The Ship was out of control, racing upwards, blossoming fire streaming from its outer blue box. Steven tried to reach the controls; the motion forces paralysed his arm, an impossible weight to overcome – there was a movement. Steven’s sunken eyes shifted to the right; he saw the source: it was the Doctor, standing over the console, his hands flying over the machine, pulling the main switch, the central column rose...

And everything stopped. The control chamber was quiet and peaceful; the only sound was the constant, soft and familiar background hum. The Doctor, standing over the console and smiling smartly, chuckled to himself. He gazed about and saw both Dodo and Steven, sprawled and dazed upon the chamber floor.

‘Well now, you two, get yourselves up. The danger is safely past us.’

Steven groaned and pulled himself up from the ground. He grabbed one corner off the console and, grimacing, stood upon his feet. He took a moment to breathe and then

walked over to Dodo's dazed body. He helped her to stand and, reached down to upright the mahogany chair, sat her in the seat. Only then Steven asked:

'Did it work, Doctor?'

'Oh, yes, my boy, it worked. Of course it did! We succeeded in our endeavour.'

'But what happened?' Dodo questioned as she rubbed her temples with both hands.

'Just what I intended, my dear child: I ejected the Voord carcass into the Shaper and upon contact with the machine's energy barrier it consumed the organic matter. Once done, the machine shut down, just as the Monk had foolishly programmed it to do.'

'And that alien creature that grabbed the TARDIS? What was it?' Steven sounded so tired, and weary, the Doctor thought. So young and to have seen so much horror...

'It was the Voord.'

'That was the Voord?'

'Yes, I'm afraid so. All of them, in fact. I think what attacked us was an amalgamation of the Voord who held the Monk and I captive on the planet's surface. The Shaper's time acceleration must have mutated their bodies almost beyond recognition; but I could still hear their thoughts in my mind, their intense hatred towards us. Such a terrible waste of life.'

'What about the planet?' Dodo asked. 'Is anything left?'

'Why don't we see?' the Doctor replied. 'I managed to launch the TARDIS into orbit around the planet; otherwise we'd almost never find our way back.'

The old man operated the scanner control and the view screen brightened. Dodo gasped at what she saw. The once graceful, emerald sphere was now a massive, ruby oval streaked with turgid bands of gold, mustard and magenta. Sparkling trails of dusty, rust-

coloured matter leached from the planet's scorched atmosphere and spiralled towards the gluttonous fires of the nearby, bloated, blood-red sun. Steven said:

'The planet has changed, and the sun is much closer.'

'Yes,' the Doctor said. His voice was soft and sombre. 'The Shaper not only savaged the planet but its time wave affected its nearest star, aging both prematurely. With the star now so much older and larger, the planet's orbit has shifted. It's falling into the sun; and the gravity surge is stretching it out of shape.'

'It's so sad,' Dodo said. 'It was so beautiful, so...clean and young.'

'Yes, my dear, but in a different way the planet is still beautiful. And now that I think, it's far more important to your people than ever before.'

'What do you mean?' asked Steven.

'Why, I've remembered what this planet is: Conellipsus, the Misshapen Planet!'

'That's Conellipsus?!' Steven cried. Dodo looked at her friend with surprise: it was clear he understood the Doctor's meaning. She gave her friends a puzzled stare until the Doctor explained.

'The Misshapen Planet, or WASP-12b as it will be first known, will be one of mankind's most important historical discoveries. Earth's astronomers will discover it in the year 2008 and by 2010 they will observe its star consuming it. The novel discovery of a star eating its own world will inspire humanity to advance its research into deep-space exploration. Within a few hundred years Earth ships will leave the solar system to reach of those worlds, and Conellipsus will be the first one they visit. So, you see, out of a little tragedy comes great advancement.'

'Did you know this would happen: That our actions here would create the Misshapen Planet?' Steven asked with a tinge of suspicion in his words.

The Doctor recognised the source of his companion's mistrust, his wariness – weariness, even - borne of meeting so many people throughout their travels – good, unforgettable lives worth remembering - whose terrible deaths time had already bound fast into the pages of history, epitaphs the Doctor had dutifully refused to erase. The Doctor stared at Steven and wondered what he was thinking. Anne. He looked upon Dodo and remembered her first, breathless arrival to the TARDIS. Choice. He gazed upon the Misshapen Planet and pondered its formation. Purpose.

‘Knowing and not knowing the particulars of history is often not so simple in our lives, my friend. But knowing we have participated in that history to oppose evil – that is the greatest knowledge. And today we played our part well.’

‘And that machine, Doctor? Where is it now?’ Dodo asked.

‘I have no real idea, Dodo. But I'm sure we'll never find it now. Most likely it was flung out into space by the explosion we experienced.’

‘But what if someone finds it? Won't this happen all over again?’

‘Oh, have no worry. Short of an instructional manual no one could possibly understand how to control it. No, I'm quite convinced everything about this trying affair is now well and truly over.’

‘But what about the Monk?’ Steven said. ‘Do you think we'll see him again?’

‘Oh, who can say, Steven? It's a vast cosmos and he has many opportunities to continue his meddling.’

‘But wasn't his TARDIS damaged, something about the steering?’ Dodo interjected.

The Doctor nodded once.

‘Yes, his directional unit. He tried to keep it from me but I strongly suspect the Monk took a brief detour on our way back to the Voord invader to find the parts necessary to repair that circuit.’

‘So he’s free to trouble us again with his stupid revenge plots,’ Steven muttered as he placed his hands on his hips. The Doctor’s eyes twinkled.

‘Perhaps, my boy. But I should think three humiliations ought to be enough deterrent even for the Monk. And I have certain assurances he won’t cross our paths anytime soon.’

‘You’ve done something again, haven’t you?’ Steven folded his arms and smiled. The Doctor smirked.

‘You’re catching on to my methods, my boy! But yes, when our friend the Monk was handing us his transmat I took the liberty of mishandling his console. I am confident he’ll soon discover he has a new ship-wide difficulty to confront. Yes, we keep heaping upon him trials but such is the price of cosmic immaturity.’

‘It’s almost too bad,’ Dodo commented, gazing up at the Doctor with a half-frown. ‘I thought he was a nice person to know. He almost reminded me of you.’

For a moment the Doctor seemed genuinely affronted.

‘Oh, nonsense, my child, nonsense! I’m much more agreeable, and well-travelled. And I don’t need a Mark Four unit to get me anywhere or meddle in history to make my mark!’

The Doctor stood straight over the TARDIS console. He clutched his coat lapels and gazed upon the machine with pride. Then he sighed and tucked his head towards his chest: he was ready for new action.

‘Now, my friends, if you’ll excuse me, I must see to removing that compass from the console, although I may wish keep the unit, plus I may wish to integrate the Monk’s – well, my – temporal beacon into the Ship’s directional systems. Yes, with these vital new components as part of the TARDIS I think we can be safe in expecting that we may soon finally know just exactly where we are going.

‘The past, the present, or the future?’ Dodo asked.

‘Any, my child, and all. But wherever we roam the choice is ours to make. So we shall make the best choice. Soon we shall see. Yes, soon we shall see! Hmm! Hmm-hmm! Now, run along!’

As Steven and Dodo journeyed into the TARDIS for some much-needed rest and relaxation, the Doctor chuckled as he considered the possibilities before him.

The Monk chuckled as he made the final connection for his new directional unit. He replaced the base cover and stood to operate the Ship’s controls. At long last his TARDIS was fully operational and ready to travel. But he preferred a confirmation.

‘Now, I’ll need a place to land. I know! I’ll try the planet of ice! It’ll be much more fitting that way if I set the coordinates for that world this time.’

The Monk clasped his together in expectant triumph and set the coordinates. The central column rose and fell, and then after a few moments dropped still. He had arrived. The Monk savoured his expectations. Skipping with glee, the Monk opened the chamber doors and exited onto a bleak, snowy landscape of petrified ice and fast-driven snow.

‘Success!’ He raised his arms over his head and shouted to the frigid winds.
‘SUCCESS!’

The cold winds blasted and rushed. Snow tumbled everywhere. The Monk burred.

‘This place is as inhospitably cold as ever. Best time to go, I think. But where to next, I wonder?’

The Monk turned around and re-entered his Ship (disguised as part of a wind-carved ice cavern) and stopped in shock. Instead of the control chamber he found himself in the middle of a circular corridor. The Monk circumvented the space but nothing but the same white, roundelled walls.

‘This...this is nowhere near where I should be. Something must be wrong with the architectural configuration.’ He spotted a nearby door with a small handle and a single, dark roundel near the top. He hurried to the door and opened it, but found himself inside another corridor, this time a long, straight space, which extended in both directions to dead ends. Again, there was only one door visible. The Monk opened that door: another corridor, this time a closed triangle. There was another door: a square corridor. Another: a pentagon. Another: a hexagon. Another, and another, and another, and on, and on, and on. Sick and dizzy, the Monk clutched his hair and sputtered.

‘The cold couldn’t have caused this! But what...the Doctor! He’s done it again! Somehow he’s corrupted the architectural control circuit! Now I’m trapped in my own TARDIS!’

The Monk shook his fists in the air and shouted to the roundelled ceiling.

‘Doctor, I will pay you back for this one day! I promise you!’

The Monk pouted and sat on the floor, glumly staring at the white door before him.

Off in the wilderness of eternity, the Doctor’s TARDIS, rickety but functional, spun free amongst the endless, starry host of time and space towards the infinite possibilities of endless adventures.

Elsenhire and Elsenhen...

‘Deedrun, this is Maxilla. I’m down in the cargo bay. You know that sphere we just brought onboard? I’ve looked inside and I’m telling you, the technology I found...it’s like nothing we’ve ever seen.’

‘Can you figure how to work it?’

‘Normally, I wouldn’t even guess how, but as luck has it, someone left an instruction manual inside. The handwriting’s terrible but I’m sure this will help. Looks like there’s some kind of inner chamber installed here with some residue traces inside...they look organic. The instructions say this machine runs on organic material and can re-form entire worlds!’

‘A matter transformer machine powered by flesh...this is something new. Is there anything else inside?’

‘I can check. There’s another handwritten list with the names of planets and their coordinates, fourteen in all... some place called Marinus is the last.’

‘Why don’t we go visit them? It could make for some interesting terra-forming development. We’ve got plenty of organic samples on board and there’s nothing else going on.’

'I'm always game for a new experimental adventure. Wait a moment, there's something else...a black bag.'

'A black bag? What's inside? Be careful, Maxilla!'

'Oh, don't wrap your arms; no one knows or cares about us, anyway: we're only junior-grade research scientists, for now at least. Still, there is something heavy inside...what... You're not going to believe this, Deedrun. There's a head in here, covered in white cloth – no, the cloth is its skin! It's got some kind of a square, cybernetic headset attached.'

'A cybernetic head inside a world shaper's organic receptor? We may want to save that item for last...'

THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTOR

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