



**THE RENEGADE DOCTOR
ADVENTURES**

1.1

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

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DOCTOR WHO

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Birth of a Renegade

by Jacob Piva and Coleman Dekker

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The Toymaker originally created by Brian Hayles. The Corsair created by Neil Gaiman.

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INTRODUCTION

I must have been eleven years old when I first got introduced to the fantastical world of Doctor Who. Now, within my small group of friends, it's a little bit of a debate over who introduced who to the show (I say it was my friend Reggie who got me into the show, yet he denies that) My introduction to the Doctor and his adventures was with the Eleventh Doctor, played by Matt Smith, in the first episode of Series 7, *Asylum of the Daleks*. I also got introduced to his two companions, Amy and Rory Pond, to whom I had gotten slightly attached. Not long after that, I got my friend Coleman into the show by showing off the Daleks.

As we have grown up, we've talked on several occasions, at great lengths sometimes, about various aspects of the show. We even pitched story ideas when we were younger, but none came to fruition until about a few months ago. At the time, Coleman was working on some Doctor Who ideas. He had asked me and a couple of others what we thought. I liked his concepts and considered returning to writing stories based on the show.

The initial idea Coleman had for his stories was adventures that are more mature in tone. These were adventures that most likely would've never been made on the actual show. Thus, he called it *The Forbidden Adventures*. With time, though, the idea has evolved into something bigger than it was, becoming a sort of rebirth of the main timeline. So, *Doctor Who: The Rebirth Universe* was born.

Doctor Who: The Rebirth Universe takes place within an alternate timeline of the show, our timeline, in which the tone of stories will, at times, be more mature and will feature concepts and ideas the show hasn't tackled. Aliens, monsters, and villains from all forms of media (books, television, audio, etc.) can pop up along with originals.

We're making this series because we have been fans of this show for several years and hopefully will continue for years. Coleman and I are super excited to be working on this series. Like all stories, each one has to begin somewhere. So why not start where it all began for the Doctor's adventures? Before he stole a TARDIS and ran away from his home planet. Before saving worlds from the Daleks, the Cybermen, and other creatures threatening the universe's existence, he called himself 'The Doctor.' It's time to introduce our timeline's first incarnation, the Renegade Doctor.

Jacob Piva
September 2021

DOCTOR WHO

Have you ever thought what it's like to be wanderers in the Fourth Dimension? Have you? To be exiles?

William Hartnell
An Unearthly Child, Episode One
November 23, 1963

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PART 1
THE BEGINNING

PROLOGUE
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Incredible. All those stars that sit in the night sky, each having the potential for civilizations like our own. There are billions of wondrous potential adventures in the universe, all just waiting for someone to explore every one of their incredible mysteries. Can you imagine it?

“I agree, my friend. The possibilities are exciting,” Koschei said. “A whole universe to wander through at our leisure. It would be a nice escape from this life we live now.”

A young man with gorgeous flowing brown hair tilted his head away from the sky and looked at his friend. “Indeed. All that untold knowledge and how we could help people beyond our world. I think about it every day.”

Koschei sighed. “It’s a shame our society enacted the non-interference policy.”

“It truly is, Koschei.” Theta sat up and laid his head on his friend’s shoulder.

A slight breeze blew through the air as Theta and Koschei continued to sit on a hill of red grass, and trees with silver leaves dotted the grassy landscape—some flowers of varying colors sprawled across the expansive rolling hills. In the distance, a large domed structure sat in and around the snow-capped mountains of Solace and Solitude. A medium-sized moon sat above the planet’s orange sky among the stars. Theta softly plucked a gold-colored flower from the grass and placed it in Koschei’s black hair.

“What if you and I were exploring the universe together?” asked Theta.

Taken by surprise, Koschei asked. “You wish for me to be your traveling partner one day?”

Theta looked up at Koschei with his crystal blue eyes and chuckled. “No one else but you, my friend.”

Koschei paused for a few moments before answering. “Well then, I accept your proposal. Besides, being stuck with you in space sounds like a fun time.”

“Then it is settled. Theta and Koschei, wanderers in the fourth dimension till the end of time.”

Theta smiled, resting his head in Koschei’s lap as they both continued to look up at the bright stars that twinkled in the night sky over Gallifrey.

“Yes, till the end of time.”

Theta’s eyes opened as he sat up, waking up in a white room with nothing besides a piece of the wall sticking out as the bed. He rubbed the back of his neck due to discomfort from a small pillow. Along some sidewalls, rounded and rectangular wall lights brighten the room. Thoughts and other memories swirled through his head as he sat there, his feet over the side, touching the white floor.

Theta sighed. “So this is where my urge for adventure has gotten me: a cell. Alone.”

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He pondered for a couple more minutes, wondering what would happen to him. “I much prefer exile, but knowing the High Council, they may force a few regenerations or outright execute me. I wish I could have helped them, but I could do nothing. They were doomed the moment we stepped inside that evil place.”

Theta lowered his head, disappointed in himself and his actions. The door to his cell opened. Two chancellery guards in scarlet red uniforms with helmets entered. White striping, copper-colored elbow pads, boots, and a white cape accented their outfits. Both of the guards carried small stasers.

“Theta Sigma, you are to be brought before the High Council and the Lord President to answer for your crimes against the Laws of Time. Now on your feet!”

Two chancellery guards entered a dimly lit vaulted chamber through two heavy doors, each holding one arm of Theta. They brought him to an illuminated small railed area containing one swivel chair.

“Be seated, Theta Sigma. Your prosecutors will be here shortly,” one of the guards said.

“I am aware of what awaits me, gentlemen. There is no need to—”

A second guard quickly raised his voice in a harsh tone. “Quiet! You will only speak when asked! Now sit and be silent.”

Theta spoke under his breath. “Well, how polite of you.” He sat in the swivel chair as the lights in the chamber became brighter, fully illuminating the rest of the room.

To Theta’s left were tiered rows of seats, like those in lecture halls. In those seats sat the High Council of Time Lords members with their different colored ornate high-collared robes. Only the front row of seats was empty. In front was another small railed area with a podium. Across from Theta stood a railed area similar to his, where a Time Lord served as a prosecutor. There were other Time Lords who stood on several layered jade walkways that made up the arched ceiling.

A door at the far end of the room swung open, and a tall, imperious-looking man entered, flanked by officials of the Court and guards. He wore an elaborate white headdress with gold trims, pale cream-colored robes, a white cap, and a golden sash signifying his office.

The Court officials filed into the front row, and the Lord President took his place at the podium.

Lord President Rullsilon looked over at the prosecution. “I call upon the prosecution to open the case on Theta Sigma.”

He bowed his head and began with his opening address. “By order of the High Council, this is an impartial inquiry into the accused person, who will be known for these proceedings as Theta Sigma. He is charged and guilty of conduct unbecoming of a Time Lord. The charges include theft of a Type-18 time travel capsule and using said capsule to illegally venture off-world, resulting in the deaths of two Academy peers, Rallon and Millennia.”

Theta lowered his head slightly, ashamed. He began to sweat slightly.

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Rullsilon imperiously gazed over towards Theta. “You have heard the charges. Do you have anything to say before the inquiry proceeds?”

“Yes, I am guilty of stealing and venturing off-world, but I assure you all that it was not in my intentions for things to transpire as they did. Nothing in the files foretold the Crystal Guardian’s true nature, only that it was simply a vague legend. We merely sought to discover if *it* was real.”

The Lord President then spoke. “It doesn’t matter how you intended this day to play out, nor the information in the archived files. Your decision has resulted in the deaths of two excellent Academy students. You must and will receive a sentence befitting your crime.” He then turned his attention toward the prosecutor. “The inquiry may proceed.”

The prosecutor bowed his head. “Your Excellency, I am not proposing to waste the time of the Court by dwelling in extraneous detail upon the accused’s activities. Instead, I intend to recall one instance of the epistopic interface of the spectrum. This example of the criminal behavior of the accused is in the Matrix, the repository of all Time Lord knowledge.”

The Matrix. The telepathic database contains all the knowledge and experiences of Time Lords who have exhausted their reincarnation cycles and passed on. It is the most valuable repository of information in the cosmos, accessible only to the Time Lords. The disadvantage from Theta’s point of view was that everything he had said, done, and felt was recorded in the Matrix and available for recall.

“I propose to start with the accused’s involvement in the theft of a time travel capsule to make a restricted venture to the Celestial Toyroom, a pocket dimension in the universe.”

A giant visi-screen appeared on the wall behind the rows of Time Lords. Moving like puppets, they all swung their chairs around to face it. Theta, the prosecutor, and the Lord President swiveled their chairs for a clearer view.

The screen showed three people quickly entering a white control room. Theta remembered the moment and the events leading up to his trial all too well.

Well, he thought to himself. So it begins.

CHAPTER ONE

THE IMMORTAL'S PLAYROOM

Theta and two other fellows, Time Lord Academy students Rallon and Millennia, hurriedly ran to a hexagonal control console in the center of the room. The sound of alarms loudly yelled outside the doors that led into the room.

“Perhaps we could have asked nicely for it?” Rallon asked.

Theta worked on one of the control panels on the console. “Yes, we could have, but then we would be apprehended, and our little trip would be cut short. Now, my friends, let’s see if this old marvel still has some kick in her.”

In a rush, he flicked a switch, closing the outside door. Then, he dashed to flip a couple more switches, pressed some buttons, and finally reached for a small lever, pulling it downwards. Suddenly, the ship produced a grinding and whirring sound like scraping against a wire.

“Ah-ha! I’ve done it!” Theta said excitedly. “We’re dematerializing.”

“Wonderful! Let’s get this adventure going, boys!” said Millennia.

Alarms loudly blared throughout a museum as a large metal cylinder started to disappear and reappear from its platform. In front of the exhibit, a small table with an exhibit plaque read, *‘Type-18 Generation Time Travel Capsule’*.

Now in flight, the ship settled and produced a low humming sound. Six pillar-like structures stood out of the walls, each corresponding to a different corner of the control console and fitted with lights. Around the console on the floor, six round lights in a hexagon shape were on the floor. Decorative white circles covered some of the walls. At the back of the room sat four large databases. A large screen took up one wall inside the console room, and on it, a rust-colored planet with brown lakes and gray clouds started to move away.

Theta fiddled with a couple more buttons and checked gauges. “We’re in flight.”

“Phew, thank goodness. I was afraid this hunk of junk was a useless relic for a moment, but leave it to Theta to find us a way out of sticky situations. Excellent work, my friend,” Rallon said as he patted his friend on the shoulder.

Millennia walked over to Rallon, putting her hand in his. “And now, for the first time, we can experience the universe beyond our world. Is it not exciting, darling?”

Rallon smiled. “Of course, my dear. It is about time we see something other than a classroom for once.”

“And what better way to begin than by discovering the truth behind the mythical Crystal Guardian?” remarked Theta.

“Could you reiterate what exactly *it* is?” Rallon asked.

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"From what I gathered from Time Lord records, they spoke of a being beyond our comprehension that sleeps in something called The Celestial Toyroom. However, the files described it merely as a vague legend. Nothing more, nothing less."

"Celestial Toyroom? So, is it the domain of a toymaker for children? Perhaps I could ask him to make a wonderful gift for my Rallon," said Millennia playfully.

"Unfortunately, I cannot confirm or deny that theory since all the files stated a name, where it resided, and that it was a legend."

"I am happy to be going on an adventure, Theta. But why does something that may not even be real pique your curiosity?" asked Rallon.

"Because legends and myths, my friend, are some of the universe's greatest mysteries. If no one knows if it is real, then what joy would it be to prove its existence?"

Millennia looked into Rallon's emerald green eyes. "He has a point, dear. Think about it. Just the three of us discovering a legend together." She caressed her hand over his dark-skinned cheek, brushing some dark brown hair adorning his head away. Rallon brushed a hand through her short Aegean blue hair and looked into her matching eyes.

Rallon thought to himself for a moment. "Would I rather search for a being that resides in a toy room that may not be real or continue listening to Mortimus complain about how dull the Academy is?" He then spoke aloud. "Very well, where do we start, Theta?"

Instead of answering, he flipped the switch to open the doors and walked toward them. Standing in the doorway, he was greeted by the only planet he had ever known, slowly drifting away and joining the billions of dots in the darkness of space. His dream of traveling through the universe became tangible the further Gallifrey faded from his view. At long last, it was all his to explore. Every world, every civilization, and every culture is in the palm of his hands, holding millions of secrets, waiting for him to discover them.

He then slowly slid his hand across the ship's doors and smiled. "That is for us to discover, Rallon."

The time capsule suddenly began to make its grinding sound as if it were dematerializing again.

"Is it dematerializing again? Did you enter in any coordinates, Theta?" asked Rallon, a little confused.

Theta, rushing over to the console, flipped the switch to shut the door and checked all the gauges. "No, I did no such thing. I only turned the machine on!"

"What's happening, Theta?" Millennia shouted fearfully.

"The ship is acting independently as if something has taken control." He rushed to flip some levers, but nothing worked. "It's no use. Nothing is working!"

Suddenly, the ship stopped, and everything settled as if it had materialized elsewhere. The only sound heard now was a low hum.

"What just happened?" asked Rallon, confused.

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“It appears the ship was just plucked from space and placed somewhere I cannot describe. No readings are coming up on the console. It’s as if we are somewhere but nowhere simultaneously.”

“Are you sure it isn’t because the ship is faulty?”

“As far as I am aware, there are no faults in the machinery.”

Millennia interjected. “If the ship is in good condition, why would it dematerialize? Can something pull a capsule from space like that?”

Theta scratched his head. “Let me see if I can get us back into flight.” He pulled a lever to initiate the dematerialization process. The ship made a slow whirring sound but then stopped. “Come on, why won’t you work?” He banged his fist against the console, trying to get it to work, but to no avail. “It’s like we’re being held in place by something.”

“By what?” asked Millennia.

“I don’t know, Millennia. The ship has no idea where we are since I can’t get a single damn reading out of it. Something is suppressing our traveling capabilities. None of this adds up.”

A steady knocking came from outside the capsule’s doors in four increments.

“Someone or something is knocking outside. Should we open the doors?” Rallon asked.

“We don’t know who is out there or even what. Let me check the screen to see if anything comes up.” Theta turned the screen on, but all it showed was pitch black, nothing but complete darkness like the empty void of space.

Agitated, Theta yelled. “Damn thing, show me where we are!”

“Maybe we could just ask whoever is knocking,” thought Millennia.

“We don’t even know if it is an actual person out there. It could be dangerous out there for all we know.”

The knocking persisted for a couple more minutes until a soft female voice spoke from outside, slightly muffled. “It is safe to come out, friends. The Toymaker means you no harm.”

“The Toymaker? As in the Crystal Guardian?” Rallon asked confusingly.

“Oh, my god, we’ve landed in the Celestial Toyroom! Let’s open the door,” said Millennia excitedly.

“Something doesn’t feel right about this,” Theta said in a worried tone.

“Come on, Theta, we have found what we are looking for now. That could be him knocking for all we know,” said Rallon.

Theta stood there momentarily, thinking before he reluctantly flipped the switch to open the doors. When the doors opened, a female clown with red hair stood. Her red lips grinned to reveal her white teeth. A little startled, Rallon stepped back, and Millennia gasped as she clutched onto Rallon.

“I am sorry if I just startled you, folks. I seek only to entertain.” She squeaked in a high-pitched voice. “I’m Clara, the Crystal Guardian’s entertainer, although he prefers Toymaker.”

“Was he the one who pulled us from space?” Theta asked the strange clown warily.

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“Oh, yes, indeed. He was ecstatic that three young Time Lords were searching for his toy room. He had not received any guests in quite a long time.”

“How did he know we were Time Lords?” asked Millennia.

“Oh, he has been watching Gallifrey as he does with all other planets in the universe, waiting for the right ones to come and entertain him.”

“He seeks entertainment, you say?” Rallon said.

Clara chuckled. “His favorite form of amusement is games. He cherishes them more than this toy room.”

“That’s surprising,” said Theta, still wary but curious.

“He must keep himself from getting bored,” Rallon said as he shrugged.

Clara turned her head and stared into the black void behind her.

Theta raised an eyebrow. “What is it?”

“Please follow me. The Toymaker awaits.” Clara exited the ship. With some reluctance and excitement, Rallon and Millennia followed behind, making Theta last to follow his friends into the unknown.

When the trio exited, they saw an endlessly moving black-and-white pattern covering both the walls and the floor, with the room having a spherical shape. Across from them, a hinged door sticks out with a more brownish color on the wall, and a second clown stands in front of it.

Theta scoffed. “It appears this place does not exactly live up to its name. How underwhelming.”

Clara turned and gave Theta a slight scowl. “Patience, he is just through this door, Time Lord.”

“What’s with the attitude, Theta? She’s quite nice to us,” said Rallon.

“Something seems strange about all of this, making me feel quite uneasy.”

“Well, you are strange yourself, Theta. I’m surprised you don’t feel right at home,” quipped Millennia.

Theta chuckled slightly. “Very funny.”

Clara skipped happily over to the second clown, greeting him. “Our guests have arrived, Joey. Let’s give them a show they won’t forget.”

Joey waved at the trio positively. He then pulled out an old-fashioned motor horn and honked it several times. Millennia and Rallon laughed while Theta just raised an eyebrow.

“What is that device?” asked Theta.

Joey put his head down as if saddened by the lack of laughter from Theta. Clara put her hands on his shoulders and attempted to cheer him up. “Oh, don’t let his sour attitude ruin the fun, Joey. If we can’t entertain him, perhaps the Toymaker can put a smile on that face.”

Joey honked his horn in response and opened a door behind him, revealing a second room with thousands of dolls hanging on either side of the walls that make it up. A small table with a black-and-white checkered board sat at the room's far end. The two clowns stepped inside, and

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the Time Lords slowly followed behind them. Millennia and Rallon gasped in wonder while Theta remained speechless.

“Behold the Toymaker’s collection!” said Clara with bravado.

“Look at all these dolls. They are so detailed, darling,” said Millennia.

“Clara, by any chance, could we keep a few of these?” asked Rallon curiously.

“Why, of course, but first, you must complete one simple favor.”

Theta raised an eyebrow again, curious about what favors the clown wanted. “And what might that be?”

“Have you ever played a little game called chess?”

“Of course I have. Our people invented the game.”

“Wonderful, it’s one of my personal favorites. One must play through a simple match with the Toymaker. If you win, any toy chosen becomes yours.”

“And if we lose?”

Clara grinned a little and played coy. “I think it would be fun if you found out for yourself. Now, who wants to play first?”

Joey walked behind Rallon and politely patted him on the shoulder while he honked his motor horn excitedly.

Clara clapped with joy. “Excellent choice, Joey! Rallon, correct?”

“Yes, that’s my name,” said Rallon as he walked over to the small table with the chessboard.

“Please, come sit down.”

“No, Rallon, wait. Something’s not right.”

“What? It’s just a board game.”

Theta exclaimed. “We don’t know what they will do if you lose, Rallon. Don’t you see how she played coy just now?”

“They are probably just teasing us, Theta. Besides, what could a Toymaker possibly do that’s so bad?”

“What is troubling you so badly, Theta?” Millennia asked, concerned with her friend.

Fed up, Theta exclaimed. “I am beginning to feel it was a mistake seeking this realm. It reeks of unspeakable danger to me.”

Clara whispered into Joey’s left ear. “There’s always a party crasher.” He put his right hand up to his face as if he was giggling.

“We are leaving this now,” Theta said as he quickly got a hold of his friends and started to dash for the door. The wooden door suddenly slammed shut, and before Theta could utter his grievances, he slowly began to vanish.

“Theta!” yelled Rallon.

Theta tried to speak, but no sound came out as he disappeared into thin air.

Millennia clung to Rallon in fear. “What is happening, Rallon?”

Loud mechanical footsteps thumped in the background. Rallon and Millennia turned around frantically and saw the clowns were no more. A strange life-sized toy robot stepped out

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from the darkness and stood before the chess table—an oval shape extended from the top of its domino-shaped head. A red dot served as its nose, with white and yellow rings outlining its eyes. Its mouth looked almost like a VHS slot, and the light bounced off its silver metallic body, making it shine and glisten. A television screen on the chest turned on with a bunch of loud static covering the screen until a video feed popped up. It showed two young individuals sitting in one of the halls of the Academy, reading together.

“Wait, is that us?” Rallon said to himself as he stared at the screen.

The two students on the screen shared a small, tender kiss.

“That was sometime after when you and I met. We were studying the history of the war with the Great Vampires. It was when we first kissed that I will never forget.”

“A treasured moment it is indeed for the two of us, my love. Never before had I experienced such a strong feeling for someone like you.”

An ominous-sounding voice boomed from the robot. “Ah, the Great Vampires. Bad sports they are, never like to play by the rules.”

“Did it just speak?” asked Millennia.

“Yes, I did, young Time Lords. I am the Celestial Toymaker.”

“You’re a robot?” Rallon asked with a surprised tone.

“Oh no, this is merely a temporary vessel, although I have already chosen a much more fitting form for this game,” he said ominously.

Millennia looked around the room, searching for the missing clowns. “Where are Clara and Joey?”

“They are merely my playthings, and so are every one of these dolls you see before you. Soon, you both will join my collection, too.”

“What? Playthings?” exclaimed Rallon.

“Don’t worry, Rallon; I have a more special role in mind for you.”

A flash of blinding light emanated from the television screen, causing Millennia to close her eyes. She heard Rallon let out an ear-piercing scream, which caused her to panic.

“Rallon! Leave him alone!” she yelled.

When she could see again, she saw a tall, imposing man wearing a dragon-patterned black robe encrusted with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls. The robe’s collar had silver, blue, and red colors. He also wore a round black hat with gold thread around the rim.

“Ah, what a perfect fit. Don’t worry, Rallon. Your body is in well-capable hands,” he said, grinning evilly and turning his attention back toward Millennia. “Now, my dear Millennia, let the games begin if you please.” He stared menacingly with his deep-set, glittering eyes into hers, seeing the fear she had.

“What have you done with Rallon!?”

“I am afraid Rallon isn’t quite himself anymore.”

“No...” She didn’t want to believe it to be true.

“Oh yes, you’re catching on quickly. Rallon’s body is now mine.”

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Millennia quivered in terror as if she was living through a nightmare. “Let him go!” she exclaimed.

“It is pointless. I’ve absorbed all of Rallon into my conscience. Your lover no longer exists, now unless you wish to condemn you and your friend’s lives, I suggest you play my game.”

Millennia slowly approached the chess table. “Theta and I go free if I win?”

“Of course, all you have to do is play. I’m ready when you are.”

She reluctantly sat in the opposite chair across from the Toymaker, still horrified. The Toymaker cackled and steadily tapped the chessboard. “Now, make your first move, Millennia.”

Theta awoke on a cold wooden floor, with a lit fireplace in front of him and an old rocking chair against the wall. A dusty fan spun slowly on the rundown ceiling, and wooden splinters stuck out from the floorboards. What sounded strange static blared from another room, but he couldn’t quite pinpoint where. He sat up quickly and observed his new surroundings.

“Was that a dream? No, it couldn’t have been. It felt all too real. Then where the hell am I now?” He thought to himself for a moment. “Have I been warped to some random world? Wait, no, I must still be in the Toyroom.”

He suddenly remembered his two friends. “Rallon, Millennia, where could you be?”

A loud crash came from the next room, causing Theta to jump slightly. Tiny, rapid footsteps scurried across the floor in the other room. He slowly moved around a corner, peeking into the next room. In the room, an old television emitted static sounds. Various slumped-over dolls and stuffed toys sat in front as if watching a show. A wooden shelf sat on the floor with a couple of marionettes, each one on top of the other.

He was slightly urged to shut the television off, but the oddly specific toys’ positions made him cautious. It’s almost as if they were waiting for him to touch it. He couldn’t shake the feeling, but the urge to shut it off kept nagging.

Looking down at his feet, Theta saw a small porcelain doll of a young boy lying on the ground. He picked it up slowly, and the toy remained stiff like a lifeless husk. Theta looked at the television, searching for a button or switch. At that instant, he noticed a large gray button on the bottom right corner. Taking one more look at the toy in his hand, he aimed and threw it. The doll flung across the room, landing straight into the screen, shattering into pieces and releasing a loud electrical sound. The porcelain doll vaporized till it turned an entirely blackish color.

Theta cringed slightly. “Perhaps that wasn’t my best throw.”

He curiously looked around the house and noticed what appeared to be a front door a couple of steps away from him. He could hear what sounded like playful laughter coming from outside.

He cried out. “Millennia? Is that you?”

He suddenly heard crying coming from the television room. Turning slowly, he noticed it was coming from the doll he threw into the television; it was crying, almost like a living person.

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The other toys in the room began to move slightly; some even appeared to be trying to stand up. One of the larger dolls placed its hand on its head and twisted it around, facing Theta.

“Look at what you did to my boy,” the doll retorted.

Theta spoke to himself. “This is a nightmare.”

All of the toys marched toward Theta, and he quickly bolted for the door. The door wouldn’t budge, but he then noticed it had a few lock switches keeping it closed. Quickly, he turned each lock and opened the door as a white teddy bear lunged for his leg. Theta desperately tried to kick the toy off. As he stepped outside, he began to violently yank the bear as it psychotically laughed until it ripped apart with white stuffing blowing everywhere. The teddy bear let out one last faint whimper, becoming lifeless once again in his hands.

Theta sat down, taking a breather. But something was wrong. The room he was in now looked identical to the one he exited. Except now, it seemed he had shrunk to the size of a toy like the ones he fled. Across the room, he noticed a woman with familiar blue hair dancing with a man he did not recognize.

“Oh, you are too charming, Rallon,” said Millennia cheerfully.

Theta slowly started walking over to them. “Millennia? That is not Rallon. Who is that man?”

“Oh, Theta, you made it!” she said excitedly. “Now we can all play a nice game together.”

He quickly rushed over to her and grabbed her hand. “This is no time for games! We need to escape from this nightmarish hellscape!”

“On the contrary,” said the mysterious man politely. Before he finished, his face almost shifted into Rallon. “There’s always time for games.”

Theta panicked and looked at Millennia’s hand, which had seemingly changed to wood, and now he was holding the hand of a doll look-alike. Theta dropped to the floor in fear as the mysterious man stretched into the ceiling and vanished. A violent rumbling erupted around him, and the roof came off like a building block. Thin strings shot out from above, wrapping around his arms and legs. They quickly pulled him up until he saw a giant figure dressed in a dragon-patterned black robe, a round black hat with gold thread, and a sadistic grin on his face.

“Welcome to my house of fun, little Time Lord.”

Fearfully, Theta spoke to the colossal being. “I presume you’re the one known as the Toymaker?”

He laughed. “In the flesh, well, not my own, of course. I hope your time here has been most entertaining.”

“If by entertainment you mean the psychological torture I just endured, then yes, I am quite ecstatic,” Theta said sarcastically.

The Toymaker picked up Theta, pulling him closer to his face. “My, what a mouth you have. You’re much more fun than your blue-haired friend was.”

Theta’s face turned to horror. “*Was*? What have you done to Millennia?”

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The Toymaker laughed and stuck out his left hand, opening it to reveal a marionette doll with Aegean blue hair and two painted blue dots for eyes.

“Her fate is sealed. She now belongs to my ever-growing collection of playmates.”

He flipped his hand upside down, his fingers grasping a wooden crossbar while the marionette dangled from strings. The doll began moving forward as if walking in thin air and approached Theta. Putting both of its wooden hands on his shoulders, she whispered into one of his ears.

“It is hopeless. Give in; stay with us. The fun will last forever.”

“Millennia, what have I done? It’s all my fault. I brought you here. It should be me in your place.”

The doll slightly twitched as if trying to speak, but it could barely utter whatever was in its mind. It began to snifle uncontrollably until Theta noticed two streams of paint leaking from the painted eyes. After a few seconds of mental pain, it spoke once more.

“It wasn’t your fault, Theta,” she said painfully.

“Let her go. Please!”

She began to scream in unfathomable pain as the strings pulled her back to the Toymaker’s palm. He closed his hand slowly, and she was gone. Theta screamed out with a combination of rage and agony. He struggled to break free of the strings that bound him, hoping to get his hands on the omnipotent being before him. It did not matter to Theta how powerful or colossal he appeared. Anger took over his mind. He could only think about it, inflicting his pain on its source.

The Toymaker laughed menacingly at the Time Lord’s feeble attempts to free himself. There was nothing he could do against his power. Theta was helpless.

“She made her move, and she lost. And you are no doubt curious about Rallon’s whereabouts. Don’t worry. He is serving a higher purpose. His body and all of his interesting memories belong to me.”

Theta looked straight into the god-like being’s eyes with an intimidating scowl.

“You will pay for this.”

“I’ve existed for millennia, long before this universe came to be, and I will surely exist long after your little life has ended. Your verbal threats are useless in my domain, but I will allow you to release your anger.”

The Toymaker shrunk to regular size while the strings lowered Theta onto the pitch-black floor. He immediately charged forward and screamed furiously. The Toymaker stood with his hands crossed. Theta threw a punch, and he seemingly passed through him, falling to the floor. He tried to repeat this several times, his rage taking over, while the Toymaker stroked his chin with an amused smile.

“I must say this rage of yours is quite entertaining. Now, are you finished?”

“I will be when I knock that hat off your head.”

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Theta threw another punch, this time making contact, but shockingly, the Toymaker remained unfazed. This time, Theta found himself writhing in pain, holding on to his throwing arm.

“You have quite the spirit, and to my surprise, you passed my little test in the dollhouse.”

Theta looked at the entity, confused. “What test?”

“After searching your friends’ memories, he regarded you as a genius. I wanted to test if you were as clever as he claimed.”

“What? Do geniuses strike your fancy?”

“Oh, I crave to one day find an adversary with an intelligent mind like yours, but there’s just one issue.”

“Yes, I’m afraid I do not intend to play your hellish childish games.”

The Toymaker chuckled. “You are still very young. To play with you now, you would not be at your fullest potential. So, just this once, I will allow you to leave so your intellect can mature. When I determine you have acquired the proper skills, I will draw you here once more, and the game shall truly begin.”

“Never! There will be no games between us. Now release my companions!”

Theta noticed the round cylinder time capsule beginning to materialize around him as he locked eyes with the Toyroom god, realizing he had no choice.

“I will be watching over you with great intrigue; try not to disappoint me when you return,” the Toymaker said with an evil grin.

Suddenly, as the ship finished materializing around him and with him back inside, he quickly bolted for the doors, refusing to leave his friends behind.

“Release them!”

The doors slammed shut. Theta desperately pounded on them as the ship started to depart, pleading for their release. An ominous laugh echoed and boomed throughout the ship’s interior, fading away as it returned to space. Theta placed his head against the cold metal doors and fell to his knees, tears rolling down his face. The only sound that filled the console room now was the low hum of the ship’s engines. No more the voices of his friends Rallon and Millennia.

Theta slowly stood and walked toward the console, pondering everything that had transpired.

“Please... don’t go. You two didn’t deserve this. It was supposed to be an adventure.” He sobbed and placed his hands on his face. “This cannot be happening. What possessed me to take them on this journey? They wouldn’t have gotten captured by that horror if we never came.”

He paused and remembered when they hijacked the time capsule, placing Rallon’s statement about getting them out of sticky situations.

“It’s all my fault. I have failed you both.” After a moment, he slowly and reluctantly fiddled with the ship’s console to initialize a return trip to his home planet of Gallifrey.

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The Toymaker walked ominously toward his infinite wall of dolls, proudly stroking Millennia's hair. He took the crossbar she was attached to and hung it on two wooden hooks extending prominently from an open space in the collection. After neatly fixing her hair and clothing, the Toymaker adjusted his hat as a robot approached him from behind. Its chest screen displayed Theta just as he set the capsule for travel.

Through the screen, he could see the Time Lord pull the switch that activated the capsule doors. Theta stepped outside slowly, rubbing the tears from his eyes. Several chancellery guards surrounded him, and he answered with a swift surrender. One guard approached and put both of his hands behind his back.

The Toymaker laughed as Theta got carted off by the guards. "Soon, I shall finally have more than a toy. A perpetual opponent to play endless games with, dueling until the end of existence, the mind of a genius against my own! I hope you live up to my expectations, Time Lord."

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CHAPTER TWO

TIME LORD, NO MORE

The High Council intently observed the memories displayed on the screen while Theta stood in shame. The sweat on his forehead grew, and the skin on his face turned an embarrassed red. He could barely watch as Millennia uttered her last words before vanishing in the Toymaker's hand. A tear snuck down his sweaty face, and he began to break down but struggled desperately to hold it in. The pain of knowing his lust for adventure got two of his friends killed, and he was about to pay the price for it. But his conversation with the Toymaker made him wonder if he was better off with whatever punishment the Council cooked up for him rather than being forced to return to that dark dimension again.

Rullsilon raised his hand, and the screen ceased to display anything. The Lord President looked upon the prosecution and nodded, permitting him to speak.

"Members of the High Council of Gallifrey, you have witnessed the questionable actions of the accused. Deliver your verdict."

The Time Lords looked at each other, nodding in agreement before each began making their decisions.

"Guilty," the Council chanted.

Theta took a deep breath and forced himself to make eye contact with the Lord President; his intimidating scowl sent a shiver down the young student's spine.

"Theta Sigma, you have heard the verdict. Do you have any final words before your fate is decided?"

"I do not deny the consequences of my choices on this day. Rest assured, it will haunt me for the rest of my days. Do with me however you see fit. The pain I've caused is punishment enough," he declared.

"Your Excellency, I propose the accused get sentenced to five hundred years in the records area and traffic control. It would be a shame to dispose of a gifted mind like his."

Rullsilon quickly dismissed the idea. "No. A mind with the will to break every sacred rule we have set forth is a mind that doesn't belong in this society. But I do agree with the accused. We shall allow him to think about his actions. Theta Sigma, you are now exiled from the Capitol city, and you shall spend the rest of your regeneration cycle in exile among the Drylands alone. Everything you have achieved will no longer exist in our records along with Rallon and Millennia."

The prosecutor interjected. "But your Excellency—"

"Do you wish to join him?"

The prosecution bows their head in shame, breaking eye contact.

"I didn't think so." Rullsilon turned his attention back to Theta. "See to it that the accused is taken straight to the Drylands, and do please leave the robes. We will make sure a proper Time Lord puts them to use."

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The guards grabbed Theta's shoulders and shoved him through the doors. The High Council and other Time Lords began to exit the chamber slowly. At the same time, Rullsilon stood and said to himself proudly.

"One less stain on Time Lord history."

The Capitol loomed behind Theta as he walked away. A whistling wind blew through his hair and along the rolling landscape of the Drylands, a desert region with a seemingly endless ocean of sand and rock. A dried-up river bed led the way through the barren sea, and the wind began to pick up, kicking sand into the air. Theta lifted his arm to shield his eyes from debris as he began to sweat from the rising heat. With his breaths quickening, Theta knew he needed to find shelter before the elements took their toll. The wind strengthened as the planet's two suns began to set, leaving behind a darkened world. Sand beetles scurried in many directions, each burrowing down into the sand as he pressed onward.

After a several-hour journey, the Gallifreyan reached the top of a hill where, in the distance, he could see an old, small barn standing in the center of a flat valley. Small pockets of water lay scattered around, with patches of red grass surrounding them. Theta let out a sigh of relief upon seeing the structure.

He quickly ran to the barn, splashing through water and jumping over old branches. As he approached the building, it became evident that the years and elements hadn't been too kind. The wooden planks making up the walls were worn, and straw-like material covered the arched roof. Theta noticed some small carvings on the front door, so he squatted to get a better look. The carvings depicted a small child sitting on a cliff's edge while pointing toward the stars in the night sky. Other carvings depicted large Tyrannosaur-like creatures battling one another. Another showed the same child sitting atop a grass-covered hill with several flowers and trees scattered around. He gently slid his hand across the door and smiled slightly.

This barn is where it all started, where his dream of exploring the stars was born. It sheltered him in times of fear, and his actions led the young adventurer back to his childhood haven. Theta turned his head toward the stars in the sky, each glimmering elegantly. He bittersweetly smiled; seeing the stars brought a brief glimpse of happiness. However, his guilt quickly overshadowed it. A tear snaked down the disgraced Gallifreyan's cheek before he slowly creaked open the carved-up door to the old barn.

A mixture of dirt and sand made up the floor, with hay strewn about the place. Old tires and bits of rusted machinery sit, having gathered dust through the ages. They sat there. At one end of the barn, a ladder led up to a platform that housed a small bed with a wooden frame. A box sat beside the bed, acting as a table. Long pieces of wood came down from an arch in the ceiling, touching the platform, similar to jail cell bars but not quite. Moonlight shone through the wood that made up the walls and an arched window, slightly illuminating the inside. Theta slowly walked toward the ladder at the end of the barn and climbed up it, the old structure creaking

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under the weight of his boots. His eyes wandered around, observing every object inside, each one bringing back childhood memories he had long forgotten. A memory flashed through his mind as he looked down at the bed and closed his eyes.

When he was merely a child, there were many nights when Theta would run to this barn to cry. There was one such night where a man and woman had entered.

“Why does he have to sleep out here?” the man said, with a sound of confusion in his voice.

“He doesn’t want the others to hear him crying,” responded the woman.

“Why does he have to cry all the time?”

“You know why.”

The man spoke assertively. “There’ll be no crying in the army.” But the woman hushed him quickly as they ascended to the platform where Theta lay.

Sounding slightly annoyed, the man spoke. “Don’t pretend you’re not awake. We’re not idiots.”

Unlike the man, the woman was much more sympathetic and soothing in her voice. “Come and sleep in the house. You don’t have to be alone. You’re welcome in the house with the other boys if you can hear me. I’ll leave the door on the latch. Come in any time.”

They walked away from the bed the way they came, still talking. “He can’t just run away crying all the time if he wants to join the army.”

“He doesn’t want to join the army. I keep telling you.”

“Well, he’s not going to the Academy, is he, that boy? He’ll never make a Time Lord,” said the man adamantly.

Theta opened his eyes, but he could still hear their voices as they faded, almost as if they were standing beside him.

“Why does he always come to this place?” the man had said.

“I don’t know. It’s where he always hides when there’s trouble.” Trouble indeed, he thought to himself. The words ‘he’ll never make a Time Lord’ replayed through his head on repeat, like a vinyl record in a record player.

“Perhaps he was right,” said Theta, sighing.

Strange ear-piercing rat-like shrieks came from outside, startling Theta briefly. He curiously but cautiously stepped toward the arched window and peered out into the night.

A predatory Pig-rat chased after a bunch of sand beetles around one of the ponds outside. The creature had wrinkly pink skin with protruding round ears from the sides of its head. A large patch of black fur extended from its back, and a long, scaly textured tail extended from its rear, dragging across the sand. It had a long jaw with no lips, revealing layers of serrated teeth, and a large, flat, cylindrical snout. The animal itself was about the size of a wild boar. The moonlight caused its eyes to give off a frightening red glow. The sand beetles scattered as the animal

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snapped its jaws at the insects. Among the panicking beetles, the predator noticed a sand beetle about the size of a human head trying to dig into the sand. The Pig-rat locked its sights and lunged through the air, swiping the beetle from the sand with its claws, knocking it onto its back. The beetle flopped around, stridulating its mouthparts, giving a squeaking sound. The Pig-rat crept up to its unfortunate victim, picking up the insect with its forepaws and swiftly crunched down on its head with its long jaws.

Theta cringed as the Pig-rat tore into the insect, shivering and deciding to climb into the old bed. He got under the covers as loud crunching and pig-like snorting echoed outside. The sound started to fade as the creature scurried off.

He continued to ponder the words from his memory as he lay in bed and sighed. "Maybe I was never meant to be a Time Lord. I never did belong in their society. Perhaps my life was meant to be among the stars, but my lust for adventure has killed Rallon and Millennia. Was it worth it? This is where my childhood dream got me exiled to a desert wasteland, and everything I accomplished was erased from all records. I am nobody, a nameless piece of scum living in a barn. I am a Time Lord no more...."

After some time, he closed his eyes, drifting off to sleep as the night wind blew against the walls and the barn's roof.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE LOST CHILD

Just outside and around the columns of the Capitol dome, a massive shanty town filled to the brim with silo and rectangular-shaped buildings surrounding the domed city above. A young woman walked alone down the slums of Low Town, steam oozing from sewer openings; poor and sickly people lay in pathetic groups on every corner. Some begged for food, and others for currency. Salespeople stood behind wooden shops, shouting effortlessly into the streets, pitching people items like fancy clothing or exotic pets and food. Several people brawled all over the slums, most likely drunk from visits to the local bars and taverns. The young woman heard several voices in her head, some sounding vengeful and others more painful. She placed her hands to her head as the collective thoughts of those around her grew louder and angrier, falling to her knees briefly.

“Leave me alone!” she screamed suddenly.

The slum went quiet momentarily as all eyes turned to the strange woman. She stood up with an embarrassed look and pulled her gray hood over her head to hide her shame. Continuing, she walked towards a small establishment named ‘The Golden Grockle,’ scrawled across a sign hanging over the front door. She took a deep breath and slowly opened the old tavern doors.

Soft music played from a small stage in the back of the tavern. A Shobogan played a Gallifreyan harp, dragging his fingers smoothly across the massive strings, creating a gentle tune that filled the air. The instrument had a colorful red shine, with light reflecting off its metal. A bar sat near the entrance with bizarre cocktails and other drinks. Around the tavern were several tables with Time Lord rejects. Shobogans all sat at each table, drinking to their heart’s content and listening to the peaceful tunes. Some sat in corners of the tavern, completely unconscious from deep intoxication, and others began to jump and dance in a drunken mania. The young woman walked toward the bar, where an older Shobogan bartender stood, pouring drinks for eager patrons. He noticed her familiar cloak and waved his hand, calling her over.

“Ah, Lady Arkytior, how have you been?” he asked cheerfully.

Arkytior removed her hood, revealing her short black hair, and answered sarcastically.

“Just dandy, old friend.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Would you like a seat, ma’am?”

“Yes, please, very much so.”

“Coming right up!” The bartender whistled to a lone chair in the corner of the room.

“Hey, get over here and seat this young lady on the double!”

The wooden chair suddenly sprang to life and scuttled across the floor like a spider, halting behind Arkytior and allowing her to sit. She sat at the bar, and the bartender noticed something bothering her.

“What is troubling you?” asked the bartender.

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“The voices.”

“I take it that’s what the commotion outside was. Have you spoken to anyone about it besides me?”

“Everyone believes me to be mad, possibly an effect of the Untempered Schism.”

“Keep your chin up. You will find a way, Arktyior. You are strong. Would a drink help soothe your frustration in any way? Have it on the house.”

“Perhaps one will do. Anything special today?”

“Two brand new flavors. We have Gargantosaur Punch; fair warning, as it has quite the kick. Those fools in the corner thought they could handle more than one, and we have our limited Timeless Renegade liquor shot. Not quite as strong on the alcohol, but it has quite the special flavor.”

“I’ll take the renegade shot, please.”

“As you wish, ma’am.”

He began to collect the ingredients to make the beverage. Arktyior looked down at the chair and gently petted its left armrest. It vibrated slightly in response. “I remember when I used to play with a chair like you, a good friend of mine.”

The chair’s armrest detached slightly and curved to look at her as if it were curious. “Ah, you wish to hear more? Well, it was before I got taken away.”

The bartender handed Arktyior the shot, the ice swirling around in the glass. “Before I stared into the Untempered Schism.”

A young Arktyior ran through a beautiful garden, giggling joyfully and hiding behind a tall tree with purple, translucent leaves. She peeked slightly around the corner, with one hand placed over her mouth as she tried to contain laughter while a persistent tapping sound quickly crept closer. She slid to the ground with both hands covering her mouth as a wooden chair jumped from around the tree playfully, startling her. She sat up and began to giggle again.

“How are you so good at this game? Was it my giggling again?” The chair shook up and down as if it was giggling. “Well, it’s just so hard to contain my joy when I’m having so much fun.”

A sad look washed over her face for a moment as she sighed. “I wish my father wasn’t so busy, though.”

She began walking around the garden, the chair following her. It caringly nudged her right hip, and she reached down to pet it as she recalled her early life. “If only I could have met my mother. I don’t remember her face. All my father tells me is that she died on the day I was born from the Loom. I remind him of her every day, and sometimes, it feels as if he actively avoids me. Most of the time, I get groomed by the rest of the family, and I never have time to have fun. Just duty.”

The chair playfully tapped its legs to cheer up the young girl. “But at least I have you to keep my spirits up,” she said, smiling.

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The chair began to dance around the garden, tempting Arkytior to chase it. “Looks like I’m it. I’ll give you a head start.”

They ran into the thick, colorful plant life covering the extensive garden. She took a deep breath before sprinting after the chair.

She shouted in excitement. “Here I come!” The cheerful child sprang into action, running through the garden. Roses with panther-like patterns and sharp barbs that protruded from the center along with pollen stems grew in various clusters, and their petals moved as if having some form of sentience. Vines grew along the concrete paths and swiftly retreated into the soil as Arkytior approached them. Birds chirped and flew overhead, singing their sweet songs. She encountered a large pond with giant gray lily pads drifting through it. Small fish with goldfish-like scales and four eyes patrolled the pond, swallowing any flying insects that landed on the water. Sitting at the water’s edge, she gazed around the garden, wondering where her chair went.

After some time, rustling came from the bushes, and she crept over with a delighted grin. She whispered to herself. “Look who slipped up this time.”

Arkytior jumped through the leaves and playfully shouted, trying to startle her friend. But to her shock, two imposing Time Lord figures stared back at her with their cold, unblinking stares. The little girl felt frightened by these strange men, her face becoming pale as sweat trickled down.

She tried to speak but could barely utter any words. “Who are you? And what are you doing in my father’s garden?”

Like emotionless machines, they marched forward with the same cold expression in their dark black robes. They reached for Arkytior as she attempted to run, but one grabbed her shoulder. The chair sprang from the leaves, trying to save its friend. It violently jabbed its wooden leg into one of the Time Lord’s feet, and for one moment, they groaned loudly. The girl got dropped to the ground as the Time Lords tried to restrain the furniture piece, gesturing with its legs and encouraging Arkytior to flee. Her eyes began to water as she slightly reached her hand out. The chair grew more violent, throwing one of the Time Lords to the ground while the other held on desperately like a bull rider.

She fled into the foliage, weeping intensely and crying for her father. “Father, help us!”

The garden seemed endless as she ran and ran, the sounds of the chair holding off the Time Lords echoing behind her. After several seconds of sprinting, the exit to the garden sat before her. Clear glass met the walls with bright gold metal holding them in place with dark copper door knobs to open and close the doors. She frantically swung them open and ran into a long hallway.

A large spiral staircase went downward and up above a beautiful glass ceiling. Small ships flew by in the orange sky as the sunlight slowly dimmed. Arkytior ran down the spiral staircase, and the house grew darker as she approached the bottom floor. The elegant colors of the walls became smothered by the darkness. Almost gasping for air, she stepped off the staircase to

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breathe. Just a few steps away stood her father, Rullsilon, chatting with another black-robed Time Lord. He noticed his frightened child and ran to her.

“Arkytior, what is the matter?”

She hugged him tightly. “These men came after me in the garden. My chair held them back so I could run away. They tried to grab me, Father. I was so scared.”

“Oh my dear, they were not going to harm you. They would take you before the Untempered Schism for your initiation into the Time Lord Academy.”

“Why?” she asked.

“All Gallifreyans must stare into the Schism once they turn eight. I did too when I was your age,” said Rullsilon calmly.

“What was it like?”

“It was the most glorious sight I ever beheld. It inspired me to become Lord President and honor the great legacy of Rassilon. You will take my place one day, but first, you must go with these gentlemen. I will see you soon after.”

The other two blacked-robed Time Lords descended the staircase, placing their hands on Arkytior’s shoulders.

She frantically looked around, panicking slightly. “Wait, where is my chair? What did you do?”

Rullsilon nodded to the two men, and they began to escort Arkytior from the household. She screamed and cried furiously, demanding to know what had happened to her friend. The doors shut behind them, her screams echoing from outside. Rullsilon closed his eyes momentarily, trying to hide his compassion for his daughter. Seeing her terrified ate away at his soul, but letting out even a tear in front of a subordinate would diminish his reputation. The other Time Lord became curious.

“Is something amiss, your Excellency?”

“I have high hopes for this child; the thought of another disappointment in the family line irks me. I will only tolerate the strongest individuals to carry on the legacy of Rassilon. My daughter is no exception to this.”

“What will you have us do if she disappoints?”

“I will decide my daughter’s fate if she fails. It is your job to decide if she is worthy of the future title of Lord President. Tell me you understand.”

“Yes, your Excellency.” He bowed respectfully and exited through the doors. Rullsilon put his hand over his face and sighed briefly. He reached into a small gap in his robe and pulled out an old picture. A woman with the same eye color as Arkytior but with long black hair stood in the photo smiling. In the background, a small fire sat as snow-capped mountains loomed in the distance. He gazed at the photograph, letting out a tear that dripped onto the picture.

“She reminds me of you every day, my love. I always thought my only purpose was to serve my ancestor until I met you... then fate took you away and left me with Arkytior.”

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He began to sob slightly. “My destiny becomes more blurred by the day, and I have no one to guide me. I don’t know how long I can keep up this act before I break, my love. Words cannot describe how I long to stare into those star-like eyes again.”

He looked out a window and saw Arkytior being taken away. “There is nothing I can do now. Her test has come. At last. Whatever happens, fate shall decide.”

Hours later, on the outskirts of the Capitol, the sky was shrouded in darkness over the sandy landscape. Clouds blocked any stars from sight, and thunder roared through the night. Alone stood a big circular ring covered in silver and gold. Four metal stands with bowls surrounded the object, their flames crackling. A slight breeze created an eerie whistle as a single Time Lord wearing red robes with a large copper collar slowly paced behind a terrified young girl. She wore a black and white robe, shivering with immense fear. Two more Time Lords stood before the Untempered Schism, honorably bowing their heads to Arkytior, who walked past them. She stopped before stepping on a concrete plaque, the Seal of Rassilon, a strange infinity symbol, but turned right. She stared down at the seal, afraid to stare into the ring. Sweat began to run down her face, and the muscles in her arms began to tense up as fear consumed her every thought. One of the Time Lords approached and respectfully touched her shoulder.

“Look,” said the Time Lord in a monotone, calming voice.

Arkytior slowly began to look up until her eyes locked onto a neverending blue vortex in the center of the ring. Her pupils widened almost as if she became entranced by the Time Vortex. She was staring into eternity yet couldn’t look away; a great sense of horror grabbed her mind. Her instincts told her to scream, but her eyes continued to stare onward. She began to hear screams in her mind that escalated until a strange sound of gunfire drowned out the screams. Arkytior shivered, fighting to turn her head away from the Vortex. The black hole in the center suddenly seemed to get larger, darkening out the blue until a single, much brighter blue glow began emanating. It shone brighter until a dark silhouette took shape. Screaming in terror, she fell to the ground. The Time Lords backed away as Arkytior thrashed around.

“Get away! Monsters!”

She looked up at the confused Time Lords but couldn’t see their faces, just that ominous bright blue shine. Arkytior swung her hands at the lights, screaming violently at them to escape. They reached out to her, but all she could hear was distorted laughter. She pushed one of the Time Lords and ran off into the desert. As she ran and ran for what seemed like miles, lightning spread across the darkened sky, signaling the arrival of an oncoming storm. She noticed a dark cave and ran inside. Droplets of water dripped, causing echoes throughout the formation. Still panting, Arkytior slid to the floor, wrapped her arms around her knees to hide her face, and began to cry.

The rain continued to fall from the skies, and a flash of lightning revealed an elderly Shobogan man trying to make his way through the storm. He could faintly hear the young girl crying in the cave and curiously approached the cave. He wore an old, torn-up, thin brown coat,

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the hood barely intact, and used a wooden cane to help himself walk. Oblivious to the stranger, she continued to cry onto her knees as he slowly entered the cave.

“Are you lost, child?” asked the old man. Arkytior, now startled, began to crawl away. “It’s ok. I mean you no harm, little one.”

“Please stay away. Monsters are everywhere.”

“I am no monster. There is nothing to be afraid of.”

He pulled back his hood, revealing his face; a long gray beard grew and stretched from his chin, and one of his eyes was dead. He put both of his hands in the air. Arkytior didn’t see the blue lights, only the face of a man well past his prime.

She suddenly heard his voice, but strangely, his mouth was not moving. *Why is she out here all alone?*

“I ran from the Untempered Schism. That’s where I saw the monsters.” She spoke out loud, slightly startling the man.

“What?”

“You asked why I am out here alone, did you not?”

“I... yes. So you came from the Capitol of Time Lords.”

“Yes, my name is Arkytior. Who are you?”

“Sadax, I’m from a village just over the hill. So I take it you were deemed unfit to be a Time Lord and exiled?”

“What? I was nothing; I just ran until I wound up here. My father told me the Vortex was inspiring. It’s what made him want to be Lord President.”

“He didn’t tell you the whole truth. Some are inspired, but many are driven mad by what they see, or others, like you, are so scared that they flee. Most who do flee never become Time Lords.”

“Father... lied to me,” said Arkytior in disbelief as she began to cry. “He just wanted me gone; he knew I would run.” She sobbed even harder. “I can never go back.”

A saddened look came over Sadax’s face, and a tear also ran down his face.

“What?” asked Arkytior.

“Your father is heartless. It reminds me of someone I lost long ago.”

“Really?” She wiped her tears away.

“Yes, I had a daughter many years ago. She was kind, always making everyone smile in the darkest times. One day, she met a man in the slums but never told me his name or who he was. Months later, she bears this faceless man’s child and dies giving birth. *He* then comes and takes the child. Not a word, just a cold and heartless look as my daughter gives her last breath. I never saw the child or him again.”

“I’m... so sorry.”

“It’s alright, little one. Tell you what, Arkytior, you can stay with me in the village. But in the meantime, I will remain with you until this storm passes.”

“Thank you.”

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Arkytior finished her shot and wiped away the few drops from her lips. The chair's arms creaked, offering comfort to its guest. She petted its left arm.

She remarked. "That's very kind of you. I appreciate it."

"How was the drink, miss?" asked the bartender.

"It had quite the taste, my friend. I do hope it sticks around."

"Well, color me shocked you're the first to like this. Nice to see someone appreciate my more unique works of art."

Arkytior giggled. "Only the Golden Grockle provides such quality around here. It's my pleasure to be a customer."

"Would you like another?"

"No, thank you. I think it's time I head home. I don't want to worry, Sadax."

"I see. Tell the old man I send my regards."

"I promise. Thank you both." The chair happily tapped its legs, letting Arkytior stand up before it scurried off to seat another guest. She waved to the bartender before leaving the Grockle.

As she exited the tavern, she noticed a small crowd gathering around a young man. He jumped up and down in anger, his voice enraged. Arkytior looked toward the setting sun. She knew it was getting late, but her curiosity was getting the better of her. She stepped closer to the crowd to see the commotion.

"For too long, we have suffered in these miserable slums while the Timeys hide away in their sacred Capitol! They scold us! They mock us, and they choose not to help us! Well, I say it's time we tear down their entire foundation and hang Lord President Rullsilon in the center of this town! Who is with me?" hollered the rioter.

The crowd cheered as other townsfolk closed their shops, and children fled home.

"Take up arms! Today, the Capitol will fall! Down with the Timeys!"

The rioters began to grab pitchforks and sticks, setting some ablaze. Some Time Lord officers wandering the slums started chattering into their communication discs. They quickly rushed over, trying to disperse the rioters.

"Cease and return to your homes! Violators will get punished," said a guard captain.

A Molotov cocktail came flying from the crowd, hitting one of the officers. A small burst of flames spewed across their clothing, but they were unscathed, thanks to the new advanced law enforcement uniforms. The officers drew their stasers in response.

"This is your last chance. Return to your homes, or there will be consequences," yelled the Chancellery Guard Captain.

Realizing that carnage would ensue, Arkytior quickly fled as the rioters charged the officers. She covered her ears to drown out the excessive staser fire and screams that followed. Some staser bolts missed their targets, causing small explosions that burned buildings. Some rioters knocked officers to the ground violently, kicking and punching them. Others got hopelessly gunned down like fish in a barrel. A loud siren began to blare all across Low Town.

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Two Class 1 Skytanks swiftly descended upon the skirmish, firing their front anti-armor quantum plasma blasters on the unrelenting rioters.

Panting, Arkytior turned into a dark alleyway as more officers rushed onwards. Bricks got thrown from the building tops, hitting some officers. As she snuck down the alley, sewer fumes oozed upwards, and inebriated bums too drunk to care lay on the ground. Some stuck their drinks up to her and laughed, but she kept moving, quietly determined to escape this death trap. Around the corner, an officer and a high-ranking captain stood, blocking an exit from the Lower Len.

The Captain angrily barked orders. "I want this place locked down! No one leaves! Any instigators are to be detained, shot if necessary!"

Arkytior barely poked her head out, and she began thinking of how to get by the officers. She first thought throwing something would suffice, but they would easily spot where it came from, and she would get caught if she tried to sprint by. Voices began to swirl through her head as she began to worry.

"No, not now, please," she said to herself. She clenched her head, hoping for it to stop.

This wouldn't have happened if I was Captain!

Rullsilon is going to skin me for this.

Looking back, wondering if she had heard their thoughts, she noticed the lower-ranking officer gave an annoyed scowl at the Captain with his back turned. The Captain also had a profound look of embarrassment on his face. An idea clicked in her head; she could turn the officers on each other. But how, she wondered. All her options were void. How could she possibly accomplish such a feat without being caught or, worse yet, killed?

"Oh, you stupid idiots, get out of the way!" she thought.

Suddenly the lower officer began to cock his head around as if startled.

"Whose there? Show yourself!"

"There's no one here. Get a hold of yourself."

Arkytior was taken aback. She didn't say a single word, yet the officer heard every word. Quickly, she thought of something else. *I can't wait to get my promotion so I don't have to be stuck with this useless grunt any longer.* She projected this thought onto the officer's mind. He looked toward the Captain in disbelief and anger. He was being mocked by the superior he despised.

"How dare you! It's your poor control over this forsaken slum that caused this mess!"

"What? I didn't say a word, you stupid grunt. Fall in line!" ordered the Captain.

"I refuse. You are relieved of duty!"

"Stand down!"

The lower officer tackled the Captain to the ground. He quickly pulled a pair of energy handcuffs from his uniform and tried to arrest his commanding officer. He threw a powerful punch, which knocked the guard back, and kicked out the officer's legs, throwing him into a chokehold. Arkytior hurriedly snuck by the brawling guards.

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She ran as far as she could from Low Town, fire and smoke seen from a distance and more Skytanks descending upon the slums, unleashing their blasters. Stopping momentarily, she looked back toward the ravaged town, feeling great sadness for those caught in the bloodbath as screams erupted from the flames. She wanted to help everyone; all the suffering ate away at her, but she knew she had to move on.

An hour later, the skies darkened, allowing the stars to shine through. A slight whistling breeze blew sand across the desert. Arkytior hustled up a large sandhill as the smoke from Low Town rose into the night sky, and explosions boomed faintly in the distance. Almost out of breath, she sat on the large hill to rest momentarily, pondering about *the voices*.

“All these years, I never would have thought that this condition could be more than a simple frustration. It appears to be far more complex than I possibly imagined. But why am I the only Gallifreyan to experience this? Why me?”

Loud shrieks reverberated across the landscape. Startled, Arkytior quickly scrambled to her feet. Her questions had to wait. Sadax once told her never, under any circumstances, to roam the desert alone at night because that’s when Pig-rats are most active. Although she had never encountered one of them personally, she knew it would be trouble if she got swarmed by the mischief of the ferocious creatures.

The young woman ran as fast as her legs let her, hoping to find a safe hiding place. She could not make it home safely, so she would have to wait until morning.

A few feet away from Arkytior, in a small pit, skeletons lay about, some belonging to large animals and others of lost Gallifreyans. Pig-rats gnawed on the bones like savage wolves, keeping their ever-growing teeth in check. Infants squealed for food, though they were completely harmless compared to the adults, and their teeth were barely visible.

In the heart of the mischief, two larger males began to square off, unlike their female counterparts, who sported a much darker black coating that covered their entire bodies. Two vicious, sharp tusks grew from the sides of their jaws.

The leader of the mischief puffed up its hair and hissed, trying to intimidate the rival male, but the rival stood up its two hind legs, letting out a shriek. Knowing there was no avoiding this conflict, the two males briefly tapped their tusks against each other before initiating an intense pushing match. The males tried to knock each other off their feet, emitting loud shrieks. The rival male was much younger, which gave it a much better footing than the older male. They tumbled through a large rib cage, shattering it and causing a sharp piece of bone to pierce the older male. It began to desperately slash with its tusks and claws until the rival gave a forceful swing, creating a massive gash across its face, ending the fight brutally. The Pig-rat then pinned the leader to the ground, forcing it to concede. The females slowly submitted to their new alpha. The defeated male pulled the bone from its leg with its mouth, limping away. Its right eye got cut, and blood streams poured out of its leg. It licked its wounds and let out painful whimpers. From the top of the pit, juvenile Pig-rats spectated the brawl. They began to squeal

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excitedly as the former leader collapsed from severe blood loss, jumping and kicking sand in the air. The new leader turned its head toward the juveniles and gave a commanding chirp to the rowdy bunch. They began to stampede downward into the pit. Some are so consumed with blood lust that they trip over themselves. Viciously, they swarmed the fallen male, super sharp teeth and claws tearing it to pieces as the juveniles feasted. Another lagged at the top of the pit, observing the carnage, waiting to scavenge the leftovers. But a scent caught its attention: the smell of prey. It turned to see a Gallifreyan woman fleeing in the distance, which triggered a predatory response. The predator gave chase, hoping to earn a free meal all to itself.

Loud shrieks came from behind Arkytior. She frantically picked up the pace with the Pig-rat hot on her tail. She noticed massive patches of desert boulders and hid behind one, placing her hands on her mouth and holding her breath. The predator crept around the boulders, sniffing the ground with its large nostrils, and grunted. Arkytior began to wonder if she would even survive the night. Suddenly, a man came from the corner, crouched with a finger to his mouth. He put his hands out, telling Arkytior to stay put.

She began to hear his thoughts. *If my memory is correct, there should be a mud pit in this area somewhere and hopefully a sizable predator.*

The stranger crept around the rocks and whistled to get the Pig-rats' attention. It hopped from corner to corner, looking for the sound's source. He continued silently moving through the rocks until he came across a single lake bed filled with soggy mud so thick it was a death trap to anything that stepped in it. Noticing a pair of horns sticking out from the sludge, he whistled some more, drawing the Pig-rat closer. The man then stood out in the open, able to be seen. The ferocious Pig-rat slowly came around the corner, sniffing the ground before locking eyes with him. It hissed as drool oozed from its mouth, liquifying the sand underneath.

"Come on, with an appearance like that, you must be dying for a midnight treat. I'm right here, flesh and all; come and get me, you pest!" yelled the stranger. The Pig-rat moved closer as he clenched his fists and readied his feet to jump. "Looks like someone needs encouragement."

He spat at the Pig-rat, agitating the wild animal and causing it to leap forward. The stranger quickly sidestepped, causing the creature to fall into the muddy lake.

In a panicked state, the animal tried to break free. However, it quickly stopped, looking around as it sensed danger. Three large serpent heads swiftly rose from the mud, grabbing hold of the Pig-rat. The panicked predator shrieked while the horns rose, revealing a fourth head. It was a Mud Hydra, an apex predator that roamed the deserts of Gallifrey. Brown sludge-covered scales encapsulated the body with a light yellow underbelly on each head. Beautiful yet intimidating orange slit eyes adorned each head. The fourth head sported two bony horns at the top of each eye. It struck the Pig-rat, delivering a deadly dose of venom. The Pig-rat tried biting the hydra to break free, but it was too late. The fast-acting toxin coursed through its veins while the other three heads let go of the dying animal, drawing its last breath. Their forked tongues

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sniffed their prey. Biting down on the dead Pig-rat, it lifted it out of the thick mud and swallowed it whole. The stranger quickly ran away while it was distracted.

“Well, that settles that issue, thanks to nature.”

Arkytior looked around the corner of her boulder, wondering where the stranger had gone. A few moments later, he reappeared. While up close, she got a better look at him. A light brown scarf wrapped around his neck underneath a scruffy beard. He wore robe-like clothes with Gallifreyan patterns along the bottom and brown arm gloves with his fingers exposed.

“Now, why in the world are you traveling all night yourself? Predators are frequent at this time. It’s like you wanted to be dinner.”

“I know. I just went into Low Town to see a friend, and then a crowd caught my curiosity, but with my luck, it turned into a bloody riot that caused a major lockdown on the slums. I’m just trying to get home to my village, and *that thing* decided to chase me.”

“Well, what village do you live in then? Come on, spit it out.”

“The Shobogan village is a few walks away. Why are you so rude, sir?”

He started to walk away. “It’s best you head home, ma’am. It’s dangerous.”

“Wait. Can I stay with you for the night?”

“No, I... don’t work well with others. You don’t want anything to do with me.”

She begged slightly. “Please, sir, I won’t trouble you. Just one night. I swear it.”

The stranger pulled down his eyelids slightly in frustration. “Fine,” he spoke reluctantly.

“Thank you so much. What is your name?”

“I’m nobody.” He continued walking through the desert as the stars shone in the sky, Arkytior following behind.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAD MAN IN THE BARN

Arkytior followed the stranger through the desert for a few hours. Generally, it was a quiet journey; the stranger barely spoke, let alone made eye contact with her. Bird-like whistles echoed through the night, and insects chirped. The wind was calm and soothing. The two travelers climbed over a sandy hill, which revealed an old barn surrounded by dried-up pockets of water. The barn appeared almost dilapidated, with various planks of wood broken off, creating holes in the foundation and several patches of straw falling out of place. A waterwheel stood quietly in a small dry pocket closest to the barn with a track going from the wheel to the back of the structure. Without water, it all sat quiet and lifeless. They both walked down to the small building.

“Is this where we are staying?”

“Yes, this is my home, or what I consider home.”

“You live alone?”

“Fortunately, yes.”

“Fortunately? It must be terrifying to live out here all alone. How are you fortunate?”

“Enough with the questions, please,” said the stranger as he approached a wooden door.

“Now, let’s get inside unless you want the predators to get us, hmm?”

“Sorry for asking,” said Arkytior, slightly sassily.

The stranger held his breath as if he was about to blow, exhaling and calmly opening the door.

Inside the barn, a large-scale concoction of meshed-together machinery sat in the back, wires strewn all over the walls and floor. A small workbench-like station also sat at the back of the barn. Wooden planks barely held it all together. Most of the metal was rusted, which led to a glass container with a strange stick-like object. The device had a basic silver cylindrical design with a glass tip resembling a flashlight. A massive wooden bucket full of water sat near the door. A broken ladder led up to a landing with an old bed and a brown blanket.

“Oh my, what a mess,” said Arkytior.

“All right, if you pick apart everything, please sleep outside. You young children are so ungrateful.”

“Excuse me, but I am not a child! I am over 90 years old! If you’re going to continue being rude, why did you save me anyway?”

“Because...” The stranger paused. He remembered something uttered to him long ago, *‘It’s not your fault, Theta.’* He finally spoke again. “I saw someone in danger, and I acted, simple as that.”

“But what’s with the attitude then? You did a good deed.”

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"I'm not exactly suited for conversation. Being alone for five hundred years or more does that to the mind."

"I see. Could you at least tell me your name?"

The stranger sighed. "Theta Sigma. That's what I got called back at the Academy."

"The Time Lord Academy? I never made it."

He raised an eyebrow. "Were you expelled?"

"No, I ran from the Untempered Schism."

Theta's face began to brighten a little, showing compassion. He also remembers running from the Schism, but curiosity piqued his interest.

"I kept running. I saw these monsters with single glowing blue eyes. I was so frightened that I ran as far as I could. My father told me it would inspire me, but he lied. I never went back."

"My father told me something similar. I was such a frightful young child," He paused momentarily. "What is your name?"

"Arkytior."

"Ah, fancy for Rose. Your parents must be quite sophisticated."

"My father gave me the name. I never knew my mother. Rullsilon told me she died before I was born from the Loom."

A shocked expression came over his face. "Rullsilon..."

"What's the matter?" she asked, confused.

He quickly decided to change subjects. "We can talk about it another time. Come, let me show you something I've been working on."

He showed her the strange device held in the glass center of the machinery. Carefully, he twisted the glass and lifted it while the machine air inside hissed. Theta cackled with excitement.

"This is my very own sonic screwdriver. Well, a prototype, at least."

"A sonic screwdriver?"

"Yes, my dear. It's a standard tool used by Time Lords. However, I've made one myself and have been making some modifications of my own."

"What does it do?"

"First of all, let's see if it works."

Theta opened a small drawer on the workbench, pulling out a pair of old goggles, almost like a welder's pair. He began to dance slightly excitedly, rubbing his hands together. Anxiously, he grabbed the screwdriver from its display and pressed a button, causing the device to emit a strange sonic sound while the tip lit up brightly. Theta grinned, then presented it to Arkytior.

"Here, I will let you test it, my dear."

"Well, uh, thank you. What do I do with it?"

"One moment."

Theta climbed the ladder and pulled a small safe from under the old bed. He sat it down on his workbench. It had a black coloring and an ugly, rusted number lock.

"Press the button and simply point it at the safe."

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Arkytior slowly pointed the device at the safe and cautiously pressed the button. The sonic sound emitted while the numbers began to turn on the lock. The light on the screwdriver shone brightly, and the sound grew louder.

“It’s going to explode!” yelled Theta.

She quickly dropped the screwdriver in fear. It hit the floor as she and Theta ducked for cover behind a small table. The device burst into a small pocket of flames that died out as quickly as they appeared. Small metal parts flew in every direction, creating more holes in the old wooden walls; some pieces stuck into the wood without going through. They both peered over the table.

“I’m so sorry, Theta,” said Arkytior, not wanting him to be upset.

“It’s not your fault. It seems my months of work have been for nothing.”

He slowly walked toward the screwdriver that once was, hands down and a frown on his face. Theta kicked anything left across the room, sitting down and putting his hands over his face.

“Another failure as pointless as my dreams.”

Trying to console him, she walked over. “What do you dream of?”

“It’s been so long, but I used to dream of traveling the stars and discovering the universe and its secrets. But a failed man like myself is not worthy of such a feat. I belong here.”

All she felt was sadness. Before, all she saw was a cranky and strange desert-dwelling man, but underneath the frustration, he was just as lonely and sad as she was. Arkytior had the Shobogans, but they needed to be more adventurous. She began to hear his thoughts; she listened to a jumble of thoughts and emotions, but one memory stood out as if being relived. It sounded like children playing and laughing to their hearts’ content. However, one voice drowned it out, *‘I miss them all. I am alone, but I deserve this fate.’* She realized he was thinking of his long-lost childhood friends and wondered what she could do to ease the situation.

She compassionately patted his shoulder. “It’s ok. I’m here for you. You’re not alone.”

“I’m just a misguided madman in a desert wasteland. Why would you stand by my side?”

“Because I know what it’s like to be alone. You saved my life. I owe it to you.”

Theta smiled slightly as a loud rumbling erupted from a coffin-like box beside his workbench.

“Oh, shut it! I’m not in the mood for your stew,” Theta said.

“What was that?”

“Just a blasted box that I need to ensure stays out of the wrong hands.”

The trunk grumbled again. He finally gave in reluctantly. “Oh, fine, what’s the matter? Is all of the sadness getting to you, too?”

“You speak... box?”

“Oh, no, I don’t know what it’s saying. It just grumbles with nothing special behind it. I like to socialize with a non-existent friend. Again, I’ve been alone for quite some time.” He laughed.

“Have you ever opened it?”

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“Oh, heavens no! I keep my promises. I was told to keep it closed and safe at all times.”

“I see. Who gave it to you?”

“A Gallifreyan buccaneer gave it to me.”

CHAPTER FIVE

A GALLIFREYAN BUCCANEER

In the vast and deep emptiness of space, a large vessel, which resembled a pirate ship, sailed onwards. The sails pushed forward as if swept up by wind. At the helm stood a woman with dark brown skin and scarlet hair. Her coat was viridian green, and her tan leather and dark-cherry-colored velvet clothes were patched and battered. She wore a tricorn hat with plumes of hyacinth blue, which her parrot companion helped donate to her after its last molt. She is The Corsair, an adventurous renegade Time Lord who is one of the good ones.

“A fine day among the stars, isn’t it?” the Corsair said.

“I fail to see the difference. Every day among the stars is all the same. Just quiet.”

The Corsair chuckled. “Always unimpressed as per usual.”

The Corsair spun the wheel, causing the ship to take a sharp turn, startling the parrot. She laughed hysterically.

“How is that for a difference?”

“Very amusing,” said the parrot sarcastically. “Perhaps I should get behind the wheel and show you how it feels.”

She chuckled some more. “Now, you know, that’s never going to happen, my friend.”

“Just you wait, Corsair.”

Suddenly, one of the stars started to move toward the ship, catching the parrot’s attention. “Wait, is that star coming this way?”

The Corsair put a hand above her eyes, helping her see easier. “My word, it appears to be a shooting star.”

The parrot squinted its eyes. “It’s getting smaller.”

“Ah, that is no star. We’re in for some mail.”

The object revealed itself to be a Gallifreyan Hypercube, a communication device able to store the thoughts and speech of Time Lords. The cube swiftly flew around the massive masts of the ship and finally landed on the wooden deck. Excitedly, the Corsair ran down a set of stairs while the parrot followed.

“I wonder who sent us this message. There’s no telling how far through time and space it could’ve traveled to reach us.”

A voice played out from the Hypercube. *“Please, this may be my final recording. The Hand Of Omega must get delivered to Theta Sigma before he departs Gallifrey, and you are the only one I trust with this job, Corsair. Remember, try talking to it. The encoded funds are attached to this message. Good luck.”*

She tapped the cube with her finger, causing it to display six million in Gallifreyan currency. “Well, I’ll be damned.”

The parrot became worried. “The Hand Of Omega?! That’s one of the most dangerous long-lost artifacts in the known universe, and whoever this cube belongs to wants us to deliver it

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to some random Time Lord with no explanation? The pay may be nice, but this job is concerning.”

“Theta is one of my old friends. I remember that he may have changed his name, but he’s still the same Time Lord. He’s a good man. He was lost before he left Gallifrey, but his hearts are in the right place. I trust he won’t use the Hand Of Omega for nefarious purposes.”

“But why give a superweapon to a good man?”

“Perhaps to hide it from the universe so it doesn’t end up in the wrong hands. Either that or the employer trusting him to use it for good in a crisis. The future’s always uncertain.”

“I guess that makes sense, but I still would have preferred a definitive answer from our employer.”

The Corsair adjusted the ship’s heading. “A job’s a job, my friend. Here we go!”

A grinding materializing sound broke through the silence as the Corsair and her parrot companion arrived in a massive lightless cellar in the City Obsidian.

“Give me light, *Esperanza*,” said the Corsair. In a flash, the piratical sloop of the ship became illuminated by tiny lights that twinkled and shone and danced across the deck. “There we go, much better.”

She stepped down from her ship with the parrot on her left shoulder. All around, weapons and other goods sat in sealed cases, from advanced swords to powerful rocket launchers.

“My, my, it seems we landed in a weapons cellar, my friend.”

“It would be best to grab something from here. You’re going to need it.”

“No, I am hoping to complete this job without any casualties. We are here to retrieve the box; if things become too complicated, we will use the box as a last resort.”

“If you say so. Let’s hope we don’t trigger any alarms.”

“Indeed.”

Moments later, after a long walk through the Imperial Edifice, searching through every room, the duo finally came across what they were looking for a large set of volcanic glass stairs leading upwards for a very long way. The Corsair huffed as she ascended the stairs while her parrot pruned its feathers. After ten minutes, they reached the topmost floor, which housed bare walls and a few windows.

“There’s nothing here,” said the parrot annoyingly. “We came up all this way for nothing.”

However, as her eyes scanned the room, she noticed an electronic lock attached to the far wall. “An electric lock, that’s odd,” she thought. “Unless there’s a room behind here. Do me a favor and keep an eye out, will you?”

“Sure thing, I guess.” The parrot fluttered over to the lip of a window as she pulled out a small metal box from her coat. She placed it on the wall, and it entered several combinations, going through cosmic cheat code after cosmic cheat code. A loud engine-like sound came from outside, and the parrot began to panic.

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“Boss, we got company coming!”

She quickly ran to the parrot’s side and saw several troopships descending from the stars.

“Look at the mess you’ve caused! You’ve set off an alarm in a forbidden city on a planet that’s off-limits, and that’s the local security arriving to make our lives miserable,” said the parrot as it squawked frantically. “Let’s get back to the *Esperanza*. Now!”

“We’re not leaving yet, my feathered friend. The Hand of Omega will not steal itself, will it?”

“I know our employer has paid you, but this is not worth it.”

The silver box blinked and beeped, informing them that a combination worked. Simultaneously, the far wall faded from existence, revealing a dim room on the other side of it, containing what appeared to be a large leather steamer trunk.

The parrot flew and landed on the trunk while the Corsair ran in. “This is it, my dear friend. The Hand of Omega. A very important stellar manipulator. This little beauty can turn a star inside out.”

“Okay, great, now can we get out of here?” asked the parrot.

“Yes. Back to the *Esperanza*!” She tugged at one of the trunk’s handle-like protuberances with all her strength. Yet, it was to no avail. The leather trunk didn’t move at all.

“I’m not sure how we’re going to carry that down several miles of stairs,” said the parrot, unimpressed yet still worried. “Also, when I say ‘we’ here, I’m referring to ‘you’ because I can’t carry anything with these wings of mine.”

At that moment, loud booms came from outside as hundreds of transporters, each filled with scores of soldiers, blasted toward them.

The parrot became even more worried than it already was. “Maybe we should, y’know, leave the Hand here. This is not worth getting dead over.”

She struggled, pulling on the box, wanting to move it. She wouldn’t make any move to leave as she stood and stared at the heavy box. She kicked it hard and hurt her foot.

“You are not helping me here,” she said to the box, annoyed.

“I will advise you here with a sensible course of action. Those soldiers will be here in a couple of minutes. Let’s run and get out of here!”

Then, she remembered something her employer told her in the message. *Remember, try talking to it.* Outside the room, a window shattered. Someone was firing at them.

“Um. Would you mind very much following me back to my ship?” She asked for the box. Yet, it did not move and still lay heavily on the floor. “Please?” She added as politely as she could muster.

Suddenly, the box rose an inch, wobbled slightly, then levitated steadily into the air, remaining there, unsupported, four feet above the ground.

The parrot fluttered off the trunk and started circling the room. “What now?”

She smiled at her bird companion. “Now, we run!”

She ran as her parrot flew ahead of her. Looking back, she saw the box hanging in the air, unmoving. “Oy!”

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The coffin-like box swayed in the air as if trying to make its mind up, and then it followed smoothly.

Above them, on the tower roof, loud thumps and crashes echoed, intensely shaking the building. They had arrived...

Quickly as she could, the Corsair ran down the glass-like stairs, though it was more of a controlled plummet. It most likely wasn't the most intelligent way for her to descend; she could slip and fall, leading to a broken neck and a possible regeneration.

She stopped to catch her breath at one of the landings on the stairs while her parrot circled above, and the trunk waited obediently. A window shattered below, and she heard shouted orders and many heavy-booted figures running up toward them. They were both cornered!

A voice shouted from above. "Drop your weapons now, or we'll have no choice but to shoot!" To get the point across, someone shot at her. But she didn't have any weapons, not in the traditional sense. Swiftly, she grabbed one of the handles and pulled herself up onto the trunk. It gently bobbed in the air like a rowing boat.

She remembered exactly where she had left her ship, trying to recall the hallways and staircases they had taken to get to the tower.

"Get under my coat! Now!" said the Corsair as she called to her parrot. It dropped onto her shoulder and quickly hid, its blue and yellow head peering from her collar.

"Let's go home," she said to the box and added, "Please?"

Cautiously, the leather trunk moved through the air, picking up speed excitedly, causing the Corsair's hearts to pound out of her chest. She felt the adrenaline course through her veins.

The same couldn't be said about her parrot companion, though. "This is possibly the worst idea I think you've ever had!"

The soldiers opened fire, blaster fire flying past the Corsair. One blast barely missed her face, burning through some of her hair.

"Give me one of your feathers."

"What? Why?"

"Just do it!"

The parrot quickly plucked a feather from its body and handed it to the Corsair.

"What are you doing?!"

"I'm going to use the box!"

The Corsair knocked on the box and spoke with it again. "Could you possibly supercharge this with a blinding light, please?"

The box shook and cracked open as energy oozed from within and swirled around the feather. It shone a bright yellow like the sun. The Corsair looked back toward the soldiers and aimed the feather before throwing it. She and her parrot shielded their eyes as the feather exploded, releasing a large burst of light that blinded the soldiers. They dropped their weapons and writhed in pain.

She laughed. "Yes!"

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“Did we die?”

“No, my friend. I just made one of your feathers useful with the Hand of Omega. Now, let’s get out of here before they regain sight.”

“Please, let’s do so,” said the parrot as it looked around. Suddenly, it noticed that the Hand of Omega was on a collision course with the floor at the bottom of the volcanic glass stairs. The trunk did not appear to be stopping or slowing down soon. The parrot closed its eyes again while the Corsair braced herself. But, right as they were about to impact, the heavy glass paving stones that made up the floor shimmered and dissolved.

“You are full of surprises,” said the Corsair to the Hand of Omega.

While the box could not speak, she felt smugness waft over her. The roof reformed above them.

They had reached the lightless cellar in the center of the deserted city — abandoned and forgotten amid a dry and barren desert. She softly slipped off the trunk onto the cellar floor, walking forward while the box followed. Her parrot edged carefully out of her coat, happy to be out of harm’s way for the time being. The *Esperanza* wasn’t too far.

“Now that’s what I’d call a job well done!”

“If by job well done you mean almost getting us killed, then yes, by all means, job well done.”

After some time, a curious question ran through the parrot’s head. “How did the Hand of Omega get to the City Obsidian in the first place? It’s the last place you’d expect to find a long-lost Time Lord stellar manipulator. In a hidden room in an abandoned city.”

The Corsair thought to herself for a moment. “Good point. Probably, I’ll need to hide it there a few hundred years ago. We’ll need to first steal it from Omega, Rassilon, and that Tecteun fellow. *That* will be interesting. However, they haven’t met me in this body before. Might give me a perfect element of surprise.”

Far above them in the building, something boomed, crashed, and reverberated. It sounded like the soldiers were making their way down. Reaching her Type 60 ship, she strode up onto the gangplank.

The trunk followed her onto the deck. “Right, you settle down over there, and we’ll be casting off momentarily.” The box settled down onto the deck as if it had no weight.

The Corsair walked up some stairs back to the helm, gripping the wheel, feeling her *Esperanza* growl happily. “Did you miss me, my dear?”

The winds of space and time filled her sails and billowed outward. Lights flickered over the deck and mast like manic fireflies. She began to grind and moan as she dematerialized.

Only moments later, a transporter crashed into the cellar with several soldiers who looked around in puzzlement and confusion, seeing nothing out of the ordinary. She was gone.

Theta Sigma lay in bed, fast asleep. It was a quiet and dark night on Gallifrey sometime before he met Arkytior. He heard a loud grinding noise coming from outside, startling him.

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“In the name of Rassilon, can I not get some rest without a noisy night!” He angrily kicked off his blanket, climbed the ladder from a platform, and stormed toward the door. He threw it open with fury.

Exiting his barn, he saw a massive pirate ship out front. The Corsair climbed down from the *Esperanza*, and her parrot sat on her shoulder.

“Theta, how long has it been, my friend?”

“Who are you exactly?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, new incarnation. Maybe this will clear things up.” She revealed an Ouroboros tattoo that marked her back right wrist.

“Corsair? Did you come out here to visit me? Well, how thoughtful.”

“Moreso a delivery than a visit, Theta.”

The Corsair whistled, and the Hand Of Omega floated off the ship, sitting in front of Theta.

“What did you bring me?”

“You’re not gonna believe this, but I got personally hired to steal the Hand Of Omega and deliver it to you.”

“The Hand Of Omega, you say? Any particular reason?”

“None was given, just a hefty paycheck and instructions to deliver it to you. I trust you will keep it safe.”

“I always feared what would happen if it wound up in the wrong hands. I will watch over the weapon.”

“Well then, my job is done. Take care, Theta.”

“No, wait, please stay for a few moments.”

“My time is short, Theta,” said the Corsair anxiously.

“Please, I have not spoken to anyone in years.”

Her parrot interjected. “Come on, boss. After what we went through just now, a few moments won’t kill you.”

She finally gave in to the pressure. “All right, a few moments.”

“I see you have a new friend,” Theta said, noticing the parrot.

“Ah, yes, my companion. He’s quite a fun bird,” she said. “I see the house renovation is coming along nicely.”

The water wheel spun slowly, picking up water from one of the small water beds.

“Yes, I’m working on a project, but being alone and alone in this desert is hard. A fair punishment after what happened, if I say so myself.”

“Oh, Theta, you must not be so hard on yourself. We all make mistakes. Trust me. You’re gonna rattle the stars one day; it will all be at your fingertips. But first, you must learn to move on. I understand how hard it is, but you can never move forward if you’re caught sulking in the past for the rest of your life.”

Theta remained silent with a frown on his face. The Corsair felt compassionate and hugged her old friend. He slowly hugged back.

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“Remember that time in the Academy when you got me out of trouble?”

Theta chuckled slightly. “Which time? There were many.”

“All of them, that is what a good friend does and not only a good friend. You are a good man deep down, Theta. Always remember that.”

Some tears ran down his face. “I will. I promise.”

“Good. Now I must be going. I’ve got some other important things to steal.”

“Keep your chin up, lad,” said the parrot.

Theta smiled. “Good luck and safe travels, old friend.”

“And same to you, Theta.”

The Corsair climbed aboard the *Esperanza*, setting sail for the stars. Theta looked down at the box.

“I’ve heard the stories about you back at the Academy. You don’t seem like a sun-destroying weapon.”

Theta peeked inside the box briefly. Whatever was inside briefly startled him, and the trunk began to emit a loud rumbling sound. He quickly shut it.

“Well, never mind. I won’t make that stupid decision again.” Pig-rats shrieked in the distance.

“Let’s get you inside. Come now, up, up.”

The box rumbled as if it sighed and floated into the barn as Theta curiously followed it indoors.

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PART 2
RUN RUN REBEL

CHAPTER SIX

THE RITUAL OF AZATHOTH

The dawn sunlight shone through the wood of the barn, waking Theta. He yawned while stretching his arms, his eyes lazily scanning the barn. Below, he saw Arkytior still sleeping under a straw blanket with her head resting on an old pillow. She snored slightly. Theta got out of bed and walked around the barn, picking up pieces of his broken sonic screwdriver. The commotion woke Arkytior up as he attempted to reassemble the device. He picked up a standard type of screwdriver and pulled some small nails from a drawer on his workbench. Out of curiosity, she walked over to him.

“Sleep well?” she asked.

“Just dandy, now, if only I could get this darn screwdriver to work once I rebuild it.”

“Hey, I know someone in my village who smuggles lots of high-tech stuff from the Capitol. Perhaps I could bring you back what you need?”

“W-what?! You would do that?” asked Theta excitedly.

“You saved my life. I must be able to repay you somehow.”

Theta rapidly but happily shook Arkytior’s hand. “Thank you! Thank you!”

“Of course.” She laughed.

“Say, would you like to help me assemble the device?”

“That sounds fun, but I thought you only wanted me to stay just that one night?”

“Yes, well, I’m trying to move on from my past mistakes, which require new friendships,” Theta hesitates.

Arkytior smiled. “It’s nice to see you had a change of heart.”

“Indeed... when do you wish to depart?” asked Theta awkwardly.

“I should leave now. Sadax must be worried sick.”

“Sadax. The name sounds familiar.”

“He’s my village chief, and he raised me.”

“Ah, I see, so you have not seen your father since you ran from the Schism?”

She gave Theta a stern and adamant look. “No, and I don’t want to again.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to stir up bad memories.”

All of a sudden, an idea sprang into her head. “Come with me, Theta. I think Sadax would love to meet you.”

“Oh, I—”

She headed straight for the barn’s door. “Come on then.”

“Alright, I’ll come along with you,” said Theta, still awkward as ever.

They marched across the sandy desert landscape of the Drylands. Not too far away from their view, a large village stood out. Small campfires released streams of smoke into the air, and

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children played in the sand, creating bizarre sandcastles and chasing sand beetles as some adults looked over them. As Arkytior and Theta approached, one of the children shouted.

“It’s Arkytior! She has returned!” The young Shobogans ran to greet Arkytior.

“We heard what happened at Low Town. We have all been worried sick, especially Chief Sadax. Where have you been?” one child asked curiously.

She crouched down to their height with a smile on her face. “I ran into a scary Pig-rat. That’s why I never made it home last night. However, this gentleman saved my life,” said Arkytior, referring to Theta.

The kids began to observe him curiously.

“Who are you?” asked one of the children.

“Theta.”

“Nice name, stranger. Thank you for saving Lady Arkytior. This village wouldn’t be the same without her.”

“You’re very welcome, young one,” said Theta, smiling.

The children smiled. “Come, we will take you to Sadax.”

“Where is he now?” asked Arkytior.

“He’s meeting with another stranger who came by earlier. He’s a spooky fellow.”

Theta raised an eyebrow. “Spooky?”

“Yeah, he just has this aura to him.”

“Take us to him,” said Arkytior.

“But what about the parts?”

“We can get them afterward. I want to introduce you to Sadax first,” she said adamantly.

“Oh, fine.”

The children guided the two through the village. Some Shobogans slept in tents, and others sat outside bathing in the desert sunlight. Many looked fixedly and curiously at Theta as they walked by while trying to avoid direct eye contact. Chatter came from a large tent, presumably the chief’s tent, as they approached. The children all dispersed except for a little boy.

“They are in there, Arkytior,” whispered the boy, shaking in fear and pointing toward the tent.

“Thank you. Run along now,” said Arkytior calmly. At that instant, the little boy ran away quickly.

Theta thought to himself. “What could have all these children spooked?”

Arkytior pulled aside the flaps leading into the tent and immediately froze as she walked in. She recognized a man speaking with Sadax. He started the riots in Low Town, which she escaped. Theta entered soon after, but instead of fear, hatred and anger washed over him.

“Arkytior, my goodness. You’re safe!” exclaimed Sadax happily. He rushed over to her, hugging her tightly. The rioter gave a cold and unblinking gaze toward Theta. They locked eyes.

“Well, look who it is. How long has it been since we last saw each other, Theta?”

“You mean the last time you stabbed me in the back? I’d say maybe not long enough.”

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“Oh, come now, don’t be like that. What about all the fond memories we had together? Rocking out with the Gallifrey Academy Hot Five, skipping classes and hiding from Borusa within the alleys of the Capitol, sitting out under the stars together—”

“*That* man I thought I knew,” Theta paused momentarily, holding back tears. “The man I loved died a long time ago.”

“My, what a confession all these years later. I am sad to see how far you have fallen. Nothing but a nobody in a hopeless world.”

“Who are you, and how do you know this man?” asked Sadax.

“Firstly, I’m tired of answering that question. Secondly, I saved Rose last night; you’re welcome; *that* man, mind you, is my former friend Koschei from my days in the Academy. His presence here is a stroke of bad luck for all. He destroys everything he comes across.”

“Oh please, the name Koschei is long dead. Call me... The Master.” he said. He then looked toward Arkytior.

“Ah, and you must be the delightful Arkytior. You two are friends, yes? Well, allow me to extend my hand in friendship to you, darling.”

Arkytior remained silent, still clinging onto Sadax.

“What’s wrong? Are you frightened by my presence? Fear not, child. Have this.”

He handed her a red crystal from one of his pockets. It had a jagged crack along its left side. He gently placed it in her right hand.

“Now, as we had discussed, what do you want with my village?” asked Sadax.

“I seek men and women willing to help me overthrow the corrupt Lord President known as Rullsilon. Descendant of the Great Rassilon.”

“Why involve us?”

“Because you Shobogans have a clear historic rivalry against the Capitol’s inhabitants. Surely, you would enjoy seeing them fall.”

“Yes, I disdain the Timeys, but we are a peaceful village. I will not risk the lives of my people for your battles. I would rather trust the words of the man who saved Arkytior, so please leave,” said Sadax.

“But I assure you—”

But Sadax didn’t want to hear any more of it. “No, I don’t want any part of it. Leave now before I remove you myself.”

“Very well,” The Master pulled a hood over his head and shrugged his shoulders slightly. “Be seeing you, Theta, and you as well, Rose. I have a class to teach.”

Theta gave a scolding look as the man he once knew swiftly exited the tent.

“You knew that man?” asked Arkytior.

“Once upon a time, yes.”

Sadax interjected. “I humbly thank you, Theta, for bringing Arkytior home to me. Where were you last night, child?”

“I got caught up in a riot that Master fellow started, and when I escaped the chaos, I got pursued by a Pig-rat. But Theta saved my life.”

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“Thank Azathoth that he did. I also want to thank you for warning me about him,” said Sadax as he gave Theta a firm handshake.

“You’re welcome.”

“Say, you’re that man who lives in the old barn, right?”

“Indeed I am.”

“I’ve always been curious about you, but you seemed like someone who wanted to be left alone. Is there anything we can do to repay you? We don’t have many credits.”

“Oh, there is no need for credits. Akrytior told me you have someone who smuggles technology from the Capitol. I would like to see his stock.”

“Timey tech? What are you using it for?”

“Building a sonic screwdriver from scratch, yet I lack the required parts.”

“Ah, a Timey’s most trusted tool,” Sadax thought momentarily. “Very well. We shall take you to him. Come, my child. Let’s show your new friend around the village.”

Both bright suns began their descent, signaling the arrival of nightfall. Sadax enthusiastically introduced Theta to several villagers while Arkytior followed closely behind. Villagers curiously gazed toward the stranger as he struggled with eye contact, beginning to rub the back of his neck in an anti-social demeanor. It felt like so long ago when he remembered being around this many people. Time has not been too kind to him. Akrytior smiled and waved back to her fellow friends and neighbors. The trio then approached a raggedy-looking tent; the fabric was full of holes, and piles of metal junk laid about inside and out of the tent. It was more of a mini junkyard than a living space. They were only outside for a minute until a loud crash came from inside.

“Ah, it sounds like Tink is having some fun,” said Sadax.

“Tink?” asked Theta, surprised yet confused by the name.

“Yes, he is our smuggler you seek. Hardly ever comes out unless he goes out to pick up shipments from his anonymous suppliers at the Capitol.”

“And he keeps all of this to himself?”

“Mostly. We occasionally ask for parts to create farming equipment and such. Even though I don’t know the full extent of his collection, I’d be quite surprised if he didn’t have what you need.”

“Well then, I guess I’ll have to take a look for myself. You two can wait out here.”

Theta gently moved aside some torn fabric and stepped inside as Sadax and Arkytior waited outside. An older man in a dirty gray under-wrapped shirt rummaged around a gigantic mass of tech and metal. He mumbled unintelligibly with a sense of intrigue, digging out a staser weapon from the junk, intently observing every corner of the device before pulling out a black sonic screwdriver. The sonic emitted a strange whirring noise as he scanned the staser. Some small bolts on the weapon began to shake until they popped loose. Tink then placed the staser on the dirt floor, carefully removing each bolt and allowing him to disassemble it into its intricate

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pieces. He detached the metal plating, revealing its power source and advanced technological components.

“What a fine piece of engineering you are,” said Tink, speaking to the weapon.

“Afternoon, sir,” said Theta, interrupting his work.

“You’re a new face. Sadax is normally the only one who bothers to visit. What brings a stranger like you to my... uh, private utopia, for lack of a better term?” asked Tink, slightly waving his sonic screwdriver.

“Well, I require special components.”

“What exactly are you building? Farming tools, weapons, fancy glasses?”

“Actually, funny enough, what I’m seeking to put together is in your hand.”

Tink looked at his screwdriver. “Ah, a sonic screwdriver, one of many a Time Lord’s prized creations. Are you looking to break into your mother’s safe, steal some classified information, or disarm attackers? This beauty is the perfect multi-purpose tool.”

“You sure have quite the fascination with technology.”

“Well, of course, where would anyone be without it? Do you think the Sontarans are one of the most feared warriors in the universe only due to their battle tactics? They most likely wouldn’t stand a chance without tech.”

Lost for words, Theta didn’t know what to say. Only one sound exited his mouth.

“Um—”

“Exactly! Now, let’s get you what you need.”

Tink stroked his gray beard, thinking of where to look. He began to sift through a section of junk full of smaller bits and bobs with precision.

“Forgot to ask, how come you came out here to all places to seek these parts?”

“After I saved Arkytior from a Pig-rat, she recommended you. Considering you supposedly grow your collection by smuggling from the Capitol.”

“Indeed, I don’t know the gentleman’s name, but he seemed different from the rest of the Timeys. He genuinely gave me the impression that he cared for the less fortunate outside the Capitol. Quite bizarre for a Timey if you ask me.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“Many years ago, I went to pick up an old chameleon circuit from him, but when he gave it to me, he said it would be the last time we met.”

“Did he explain why?” asked Theta, intrigued.

“I don’t know. Something about his brother going missing and getting into huge trouble with the Lord President trying to find his answers. He killed a Lord Burner over it, too.”

“I’ve had my fair share of trouble with the Lord President, and it’s safe to say most are never heard from again.”

“Agreed. Now, let’s see if I have a Sonic crystal here somewhere. I have a casing. It’s a little rusted, so you may need to replace some of the platings if you wish,” said Tink, handing the casing to Theta.

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He curiously inspected the old casing. The tip of the case featured a thin four-piece light blue-colored set of glass bulbs with a dark blue metal center holding it together. A centerpiece with a silver interface with small buttons sat in the center of the device with golden rings on either side. Rust covered most of the screwdriver, and the colors barely shined through.

“What model is this?”

“As far as I know, it’s experimental. It supposedly has several different modes, but I have not bothered to test it myself. That is something for you to discover. Aha! Here’s one!”

Tink pulled a clear glass case with a strong metal top and bottom from a small box. A beautiful ruby red crystal floated in the center, held in place by little steady volts of electricity.

Theta’s eyes lit up happily. “This most certainly will do once I make my modifications. I’ll gladly take this.”

“Well, that settles that. I’ll grab these last few things, and you can be on your way.”

“Just out of curiosity, my good sir, how did you acquire your screwdriver?”

“Oh, this?” Tink stroked his thumb across the black and red screwdriver, sighing. “I inherited it from my old man. It was a gift for graduating from the Academy.”

“Wait, why are you out here if you graduated from the Academy? Weren’t you banished?”

“No, I chose it. All the talk of a life of duty and politics didn’t interest me. That’s when I discovered my passion for technology, not our own but tech from across the universe. I wanted to travel across the stars and discover all the amazing things that each species created to their benefit. That’s how I get most of my treasures: by visiting other worlds and taking whatever discarded scraps I find. Although, I must say I have a soft spot for one particular primitive species.”

“And what would they be called?”

“Humans. They are practically just like us, minus twin hearts and regeneration. They’re not super advanced like us, either. They may as well be using sticks and rocks compared to other species. But they have this determination that fascinates me. For sure, they stumble, but every time something gets thrown their way, despite their technological inferiority, they always manage to find a way to push through it. In human terms, you could say they are the true underdogs of the universe. They truly are an inspiring species.”

“Fascinating. What’s the name of their planet?”

“They call their home Earth. Let me give you something along with that.” Tink searched a small box again and pulled out a small shard-like device. “Take it. It contains the coordinates to their homeworld should you ever want to visit.”

“Why, thank you. Perhaps I shall once I acquire a TARDIS.”

“You never received one?”

“I was banished before I got the chance. I flew one before, but that’s all.”

“Banished?”

“I made a horrible mistake that cost my friends their lives, and I paid the price. It has haunted me ever since. I once dreamed of traveling the stars simply for the joy of discovering all

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of its mysteries. After what had happened to my friends, a question had come to my mind. Does good ever truly prevail in a universe full of evil and injustice? Perhaps I will find my answer once I leave this world behind.”

“I hope you do. Could I get your name?”

“My name’s Theta Sigma.”

“Well, I hope we cross paths again, traveler.” At that moment, they shook hands.

“I hope so as well,” said Theta with a smile.

“Remember, Theta. Never stop following your dreams.”

“I’m thankful you’re safe, but I hope you realize how lucky you are to be alive. Not everyone gets a random savior every day,” said Sadax with a grateful yet concerned tone.

“Yes, I understand. It’s my fault for being out that late,” said Arkytior, slightly annoyed.

“Your fault? You said you got caught in a riot.”

“I couldn’t help myself. I just got curious about what was happening. It was a stupid decision.”

She was upset, and Sadax knew this. So, to comfort her, he wrapped his arms around her, keeping her in his warm embrace. “It’s ok, child. We all make mistakes. You’re home safe. That’s all that matters to me.”

“The voices helped me escape, so that’s a first.”

“They helped?”

“Yes, it’s like I could project my thoughts onto others. Like I could control it for once.”

“It seems there is more to these voices than what appears on the surface. We will discover their roots in time,” he paused momentarily and pulled her closer. “Finding you was one of the universe’s greatest gifts.”

Arkytior smiled, hugging Sadax closely. Theta then exited the junk tent with a smile running across his face. In his arms, he carried several components along with the screwdriver casing. Arkytior and Sadax broke their hug.

“Ah, Theta, Tink had everything you need?” asked Sadax.

“More than enough. I just made myself a new friend in the process. Now, I must be off to complete my long overdue project. Besides, the night is coming.”

“I hope it works out for you, Theta,” said Arkytior with a saddened tone.

“Indeed, and I must thank you again for bringing Arkytior home. This village welcomes you with open arms anytime.”

“Why, thank you both very much for your time and help. It will not be forgotten.”

Theta nodded his head and walked past the pair. Arkytior waved with a slight false smile. He looked back and suddenly felt like he had missed Arkytior. He wasn’t willing to admit it, but she had rubbed off on him.

“Why the sad look, Arkytior?”

“There’s just something strange about that man. It’s like an adventure waiting to happen. Can’t say I won’t miss him.”

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Suddenly, she noticed Theta had turned around, heading back towards them.

“Arkytior, I’ve just had a thought!”

“You have?”

“Well, um, if Sadax approves, perhaps you could return to the barn and help me assemble my screwdriver?”

“W-what me?”

“Yes, of course. I would be delighted to have some assistance.”

“I—I—”

“It’s all right, child. You may go if you wish. I trust him.”

She became excited. “Really?”

“Yes, you’re a grown woman. No sense in stopping you from having fun, but please stay safe.”

“Of course, Sadax.”

“Well, that was a lot easier than expected. Come, Arkytior. Let’s make haste to my barn. We have a fun night ahead.”

Theta pushed open the front door of his barn as Arkytior followed close behind. He smiled joyfully and could hardly contain the urge to almost dance in happiness. After several hundred years of living in a harsh desert, his dream of exploring the stars slowly became a reality. But one thought knocked at the back of Theta’s brain. How could he tell his new acquaintance? Would she even want to travel as he does? Better yet, would Sadax even allow it? Despite this, the outcast’s excitement didn’t dull one bit. Quickly, he placed the components on his workbench and scattered them.

“Alrighty, we have an old but fixable casing, a sonic crystal, and a few premium Gallifreyan steel bolts,” Theta said. He picked up one of the other components and showed it to her. “Let’s not forget this important circuitry, too.”

“How can I help?”

“Take these gloves. You can hold the casing in place while I laser it open. Then we can proceed from there.”

Theta grabbed a set of special brown gloves and slipped them on. He then grabbed an old laser torch and flipped it on.

However, a quick thought entered his mind as he was about to start. “Oh, shame on me. I almost forgot about pulling out the schematic device. I’m so excited.”

He quickly reached for his workbench drawers again and pulled out a small circular device, powering it on. It floated over the screwdriver casing, and a hollow blue light scanned the old tool.

“A schematics device?” asked Arkytior, confused.

“Yes, it shows exactly what is missing inside and where it is safe to cut open without damaging anything.”

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"I've been meaning to ask. What's so important about this screwdriver? Do you need it to fix something else in here? Whatever it is, I am glad to lend a hand."

"Oh dear, how can I explain this without overloading your mind... I plan to steal a TARDIS from the Capitol. I need this screwdriver to bypass security measures littered about the place."

"Steal from the Capitol? Why in the world would you do that?"

"To finally take to the stars, for good."

Her shock turned to disappointment in that instant. "Oh... I see."

"Something wrong?"

The schematic device beeped and then projected a blue hologram of the casing. A green circle near the center indicated where it was safe to cut open with the laser torch.

"You are a strange man, Theta, probably the strangest man I have ever met. There's this feeling I get whenever I'm near you. It's like a feeling of adventure. A feeling of a dream come true. In all honesty, I will miss this brief time we are sharing when you depart on your journey."

"I greatly appreciate that, but I must say something before we begin."

"What?"

"You can come with me if you'd like. I could use a companion on my travels."

"That's a very generous offer, Theta, considering we have only known each other for a day."

"Well, that's true." He laughed. "But I sense something special about you as well. You're a young woman living a dull life of simplicity and duty. I think that deep down inside, you dream... no! You *hunger* for the chance of a lifetime. To go on adventures that no one else could. You're looking for a purpose in life."

She remained silent. She didn't know how to answer. Of course, she knew he was right.

"I'll give you time to think it over. Now, let's get started!"

Arkytior held the casing firmly as Theta began to cut into the metal. He then removed a small piece, revealing circuitry and a dead crystal. She handed him the new circuit board as he carefully detached the old ones. Then, he cleaned off the rust with a special mode on the laser torch, burning it all away. Arkytior opened a small container and held the newer crystal as the rust cleared to reveal a beautiful blue coloring.

"You do the honors, my dear."

Theta removed the dead crystal, allowing Arkytior to make her move. She took a deep breath and placed the device's new heart inside. It shined as if given new life, and then the device briefly let out a bizarre yet iconic whirring sound. Theta grabbed Arkytior and cheered happily.

"Ha ha! We've done it!" exclaimed Theta.

"Indeed we have! Now, let's see what it can do, shall we?" exclaimed Arkytior happily.

As night had fallen, many Shobogans in the village fell into a deep slumber, awaiting the next day. Sadax, however, wandered about his tent and sipped on a cup of water as his people slept. The older man sat on his bed before noticing an old photo on the edge of one of the pillows. It

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was of a young baby smiling. Sadax began to recall memories he had shared with his daughter. From her birth, when she took her first steps, to the moments when she went about the village, uplifting everyone's spirits when food and water were low. Even the time when she revealed she had conceived her child, the very conception that brought about her tragic death. He began to tear up heavily, knowing he may never see his granddaughter again due to the man who took her away. But despite this, the memories with Arkytior began to lighten his mood. She had brought back a certain kind of joy to Sadax's life, which he thought he would never feel again: the fulfillment of having a child. It's one of the greatest feelings any being could experience, and he treasured every moment with Arkytior. He rested his head on the warm pillows and began to sleep before a cold grasp quickly covered his mouth. Sadax flung his hands around and felt a strong force hit his right cheek, dazing him.

"Greetings again, Chief Sadax. I'm not so sorry we had to meet under such circumstances, but you and your village will perform a special task for me. A little something you people call the Ritual of Azathoth."

Sadax yelled with his mouth covered as the figure stared into his eyes and uttered only one sentence. "You will obey me!"

Sadax stopped struggling and rose from the bed in a zombie-like state. "Yes, Master, I obey your every command."

"Good." The Master laughed maniacally. "Now, I've done the liberty of enchanting everyone in this loathsome cesspool. And I assume you know how to enact this ritual? Or will I have to kill you and find someone else? Either way is good for me."

"The ritual allows one man and one alone to be granted one wish by the Sleeping Chaos with the cost of the flesh of another."

"Well, it looks like the 'flesh of another part' is out of the way with all of you." He laughed again.

"And yes, I know how to enact the ritual. As you command, Master."

The Master clapped. "Well then, chop chop!"

The Master and Sadax stepped outside, surrounded by several entranced villagers, including children. They stared with all gazing and unblinking eyes.

"Fellow followers of the Sleeping Chaos, we are called upon to summon our Mistress from the dark depths of the universe by invoking the Ritual of Azathoth! To the central fire!"

The villagers marched toward the center of the village and assembled a circle around a large fire pit. The Master and Sadax approached the center flame inside the circle of villagers before they all joined hands in a multi-layered fashion.

"Oh Sleeping Chaos, Supreme Creator Of All Things, heed our call! Grant our Master one wish at the cost of one's flesh! Rise from your slumber! Heed our call and grace us with your almighty presence. Oh, chaos bringer!" Sadax chanted.

He pulled a small knife from his pocket and reached for the Master's hand.

"What are you doing?" asked the Master in confusion and annoyance.

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“One drop of blood, and The Sleeping Chaos will come in glory. One drop into the flame and chaos shall be born.”

Sadax slit the Master’s hand, causing blood to flow from his palm. He slowly walked toward the fire and raised his hand over the top of the massive flame as the stream of blood fell into it. The flickering flames began to twirl like a twister, turning into a darkish purple color before a big gas-like cloud erupted into the sky. It created a terrifying dark mass, blocking all the stars and creating an extraordinary shadow over the land. The Master could hardly see anything. Like polar lights, a purple hue suddenly flowed through the clouds in a steady stream. He saw a face forming with several eyes and a large gaping black hole-like mouth with several smaller mouths strewn about its shape. It was an amorphous blight of nethermost confusion that seemed to curse and bubble. Its eyes all centered on the Master. A tentacle shot down, plucking him from the crowd like an ant.

“What mortal dares rouse me from my slumber!” said Azathoth in a low and intense guttural voice.

“It is I. The Master. I call upon you to grant me a wish of my choosing, oh Azathoth!”

“What be this wish, mortal?”

“To bring chaos upon the Time Lords. So that I may become ruler of this planet and subject my will upon all!”

“And who have you chosen as your sacrifice for this oh-so-hefty task? Lest I feast upon your bones!”

The Master callously pointed his thumb without batting an eye. “Why them, of course, your greatness.”

The god growled almost as if it was thinking. It then spoke again. “Very well, I shall bring upon a storm so great it will bring chaos and destruction to all caught in its wake so that you may become ruler of Gallifrey.”

It lowered the Master back to the ground. Gigantic tentacles covered in a deathly fog erupted from Azathoth and slithered across the sky, creating a colossal storm cloud. Purple lightning struck the ground, making glass as the storm cloud slowly headed toward the elegant Capitol of the Time Lords. The Master cackled gleefully.

The Master chuckled some more. “At last, my time has come! No longer will I be a nameless nobody, as well as second-rate to the insignificant Theta Sigma. Soon, all shall hear my name and kneel before The Master!”

He looked toward the villagers, cleared his throat, and clapped his hands with an evil smirk. One by one, each villager began to kneel like mindless henchmen, drunk with power. The Master uncontrollably cackled as Azathoth’s storm darkened the skies, leaving a chaotic trail of destruction in its wake.

Theta stood behind the same old safe from earlier in front of Arkytior. He patted the safe encouragingly as Arkytior nervously pointed the device toward it.

“Come, Arkytior, just one push of a button. It must work!”

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“Alright, here goes nothing.” Arkytior took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

She pressed the center button on the screwdriver. The device began to emit its whirring sound. The safe lock turned in several directions, almost like a ghost was opening it. The safe cranked until a loud click sprang it open. Theta jumped with excitement.

He laughed happily. “It works!”

“It did?” Arkytior opened her eyes, surprised.

“What’s in this old garbage heap anyway?” asked Theta as he searched the safe.

He saw a small mirror, a pair of glasses, and a strange jar of liquid with a squirt top. He pulled out the squirt bottle and accidentally pressed the top too hard, releasing a strong, sweet perfume smell. As a result, Theta sneezed and coughed.

“That smell is horrid! It must be my mother’s safe.”

Arkytior giggled as Theta collected his thoughts.

“Exotic perfume from some silly luxury planet.” He reminisced a little. “my mother always loved fashion.”

“I think it smells great. Your mother had great taste.”

“Very funny. Keep up the great sarcasm. It’ll get you places, kid.”

“No, I was being serious.”

“Oh, never mind my rambling. Well, let’s get some rest. We have done some great work tonight. We can ask Sadax if he will allow you to travel with me tomorrow.”

“Sounds like a good plan.”

They shook hands, and she handed him the sonic screwdriver. Out of fun, he pressed the button, emitting a whirring sound.

“Mhm, music to my delicate ears!”

A loud thunderous booming sound startled Arkytior and Theta, shaking the barn.

“What was that? A storm?” asked Arkytior, frightened.

“Sure sounds like it. We don’t get storms very often. It would be nice to finally get some rain out here.”

Arkytior peeped through a hole in the barn, noticing giant tentacles creating a growing cloud heading towards them. Purple lighting struck the ground several times, creating glass structures.

“Um, that does not look like a normal storm, Theta. Since when did they have giant tentacles?”

“What are you talking about?” Theta walked over and peered through the hole, his eyes widening. “That’s not a storm. Something worse from the looks of it.”

She began to worry and panic. “It’s directly over my village! They are in danger!”

“Arkytior, wait! We can’t just run through whatever that is. We will never make it in time. There has to be another way.”

Theta couldn’t think of anything until he noticed the strange trunk the Corsair gave him. He ran over to the box.

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“Listen, buddy. We have had a lot of nice chats with each other. Now, I need you to do me a favor.”

The box vibrated in response.

“Could you possibly make something that could teleport us to her village, just anything?” The box vibrated as if it was grumpy. “Oh, come on! I’ve kept you company all these years! Could you at least fly us there?”

The box softly vibrated and began to levitate off the ground.

“Get ready, Arkytior! Now climb on.” He held out his hand to her as he climbed on the top of the leather steamer trunk. She took hold, climbing on too. It began to levitate higher before he realized what it was about to do.

“Wait, what was I thinking!”

The trunk shot straight through the ceiling, leaving a considerable gap in the barn.

“No! Not my barn!”

Arkytior screamed, her scream a mixture of excitement and worry as they flew straight toward the ominous storm.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LORD AND HIS LAPDOG

An hour before, deep below the House of Rassilon, a dark room sat quietly before Lord President Rullsilon gently opened its doors. He entered a combination on a glass pad attached to the left side of the entrance. While he did this, a persistent bubbling sound echoed. Slowly, the room's lights began to power up. These ranged from small lights lined across the floor with a beautiful blue hue making a clear path to strange gigantic test tubes that began illuminating with a golden coloring. Fluids bubbled at the top with bio-mechanical cords attached to little embryos in the center. They floated with grace in the tubes. Bubbles drifted from the bottom and popped once they reached the surface. The Lord President approached a large console with a crescent moon-shaped interface that nearly encircled him. He swiped through several alien codings until he finally pressed a golden digital button that caused an interface to speak.

"Loom status at one hundred percent. Embryos are healthy and stable, with an expected emergence date of eight to ten months."

"Excellent."

He noticed a much further developed embryo. Practically, almost a fully developed infant. Rullsilon gracefully stepped around the interface and approached the loom before gently touching the glass.

"What about this one? R-135."

"Emergence expected in 1 month," said the interface.

"I hope there are no complications with this experiment of yours," said a voice in the darkness.

"No, Oracle, everything is going perfectly, as I promised. There will be no failure this time."

An older man stepped out from the darkness, wearing a black robe, and walked with a golden cane. The outlines of his skull were noticeable through his skin, signifying he was near the end of his life, quite possibly on his final incarnation. His condition is so poor that he requires a respirator around his mouth to help him breathe fluently. The oracle limped toward Rullsilon. The cane made a loud tapping sound each time it touched the ground.

"I hope you realize how lucky you are that I allowed this next line to be cloned directly from your DNA. Especially after you invited that *cursed* womb-born into our house."

"Yes, I am aware, grandfather. Arkytior was an unfortunate accident that haunts my conscience to this day. Lust is a terrible curse. I was young and foolish."

"Oh, but even then, you have done so much for this family, let alone our entire species. Hence why, against my better judgment, I didn't have you prosecuted for violating my father Rassilon's most sacred decree. Do you remember what that was?"

"Only the Loom-born shall inherit the Legacy of Rassilon, once and for all time."

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“Good, you have not forgotten. But I must ask, what was so special about *that* womb-born?”

“Perhaps her joyful spirit corrupted my mind, made me soft. Maybe she reminded me of the person I foolishly fell in love with long ago. Despite that, it brought great joy to me even with how wrong it was, and if you want me to be honest, Grandfather, I still miss my daughter.” Rullsilon said in a sad tone.

“Her kindness has infected your mind. You would do well to kill off those feelings as quickly as possible unless you feel I should have your nephew take the seat of Lord President,” said the Oracle doubtfully.

“No, Oracle. I will not fail this family again. I will not fail Rassilon,” said Rullsilon affirmingly.

“Very well, but take heed, grandson. This will be your last chance.”

A telecom speaker sounded off, interrupting their conversation.

“What is it?” asked Rullsilon.

“Your Eminence, Irving Braxiatel, has requested your presence; he is waiting in the Council Chamber.”

“Let him know I will be there shortly.”

“Ah, your lap dog has summoned you, I see.”

“Yes, he can be annoying, but Braxiatel gets the job done, especially when a burn edict gets involved. I must be going, Grandfather. I shouldn’t keep him waiting.”

Rullsilon walked past the Oracle gracefully, his robe dragging behind him as he exited the room.

Standing in front of a window with three circular viewpoints overlooking the rest of the Capitol and Low Town was the temporal assassin Irving Braxiatel. He wore a black robe with a white lining. But, unlike the other Time Lords, his robe was missing a neck collar, and around the neck piece were two Seal of Rassilon symbols. Behind him, sitting in a chair, Valdoynvan, also known as The Scribe, was a significant political rival to Rullsilon. In front of the Scribe was a beautiful table with a white center color and a golden exterior covered with Gallifreyan symbols. The Scribe tapped his feet nervously, sweat dripping from his forehead onto the floor. The silver doors leading into the chamber slid open, and Rullsilon entered. He patted down his hair slightly and adjusted his neck collar.

“I thought I told you to burn him. Why is he still here?” asked Rullsilon angrily.

“Wouldn’t it be wise to attain as much information as possible from him before he’s burned? You never know who else could be plotting against you.”

“For once, you are right, I suppose.”

“Your Eminence, this is all a big misunderstanding,” the Scribe said, frightened at what may happen to him.

“If it is a misunderstanding, why are you sweating everywhere like a looming fresh out of the tubes?”

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The Scribe went quiet and tried to avoid eye contact.

“Thank you. Please spare me the lies,” Rullsilon said as he sat across from the Scribe.

Rullsilon put his hands together and placed them under his chin. He stared across the table with an imposing gaze. The Scribe tried desperately to keep his composure.

“Now, you know why you are here. So I’m only going to ask you once. Who else have you planned to overthrow me with?”

The Scribe began to shake intensely, unable to speak. All he could do was unintelligible murmuring.

“Well?” the Lord President asked, waiting for a response.

The Scribe continued to avoid eye contact as his arms practically vibrated. Rullsilon nodded to Braxiatel. He then sighed and walked over to the nervous wreck of a man, pulling out a staser and hitting the blunt end of the weapon on top of the man’s left hand. The Scribe grabbed his hand in pain but held in his screams.

“Ready to talk?”

“Pain will not get me to speak. No matter what I choose, I’m history regardless. They will kill me for foiling their plan, and no, I am not frightened by your primitive tactics. It is *him* that truly frightens me.”

“Tell me who you speak of, and I will at least grant you banishment.”

“Do with me as you wish. It does not change what will happen. A new power will rise, and you and your relic of a house will be the ones burned from history.”

“Such defiance, you would rather die than reveal the identity of your partner, quite admirable. I must say, I will miss our little political bouts, but I can’t have you standing in the way of my grandfather’s vision. Whoever your partner in crime is, we will find them with or without you.”

“Just quit talking and get it over with.”

“As you wish, my old rival.”

Braxiatel slowly pulled a small dagger from his robes. The blade was missing a top piece, and the handle was an old silver color. The center of the handle included another Seal of Rassilon. It is called the Hand of the Lords, forged by the Founding Fathers of Time Lord society, Rassilon, and Omega. Powered by pure time energy and the only one of its kind, the blade was passed down from the first Lord Burner to the next, enacting the will of the Lords by burning their enemies or any wrongdoers from history.

Braxiatel firmly grasped the handle, causing an energy blade of time energy to form. With one swift strike, he stabbed the Scribe in the chest. Time energy began to flow through the Scribe’s body. He looked down at his hand as it began to glow brightly before engulfing it in a golden flame. Finally, the Scribe let out a pained, echoed scream as his body disintegrated, and the blade began to absorb the blaze along with the collective history and memories of the Scribe. His essence is now trapped inside, as well as the thousands of others who met their end.

The blade began to vibrate with great power as Braxiatel held it. A massive wave of energy blasted outward. The pair shielded their eyes as the energy wave exploded out of the

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Council Chamber, touching the minds of everyone across space and time. Braxiatel opened his eyes slowly and looked down at the handle. In an almost ghastly manner, a symbol representing the face of the Scribe appeared, sitting alongside countless other faces. Rullsilon opened his eyes slowly. He seemed confused as to why he was in the Council Chamber. He gazed around the room before noticing the blade.

“Ah, fulfilling the latest burn edict, I see.”

“Indeed. Another victim to the collective will of the Burners. No one will ever know he even existed, not even you.”

“Excellent. One less thorn in my side.”

Rullsilon approached Braxiatel and placed his hand on his shoulder. They then walked toward the window in a gentleman’s manner.

“What you have done will shape the course of our people for all time. Soon, my family will be restored as the rightful rulers of Time Lords once you and I weed out those unworthy of the title.”

Braxiatel sighed with little interest in what the Lord President was saying.

“Why so down? Thinking of your brother again, are we?”

“You know me too well. I never wanted any part of this. I just wanted my brother back.”

“But you have been bestowed the title of Lord Burner, a far greater purpose than your foolish brother, who was a disgrace to our society.”

“You have no right to determine that,” Braxiatel retorted.

“Take care of your tone. I decide who is deserving and who isn’t, who lives and dies, and nothing in your power will ever change that. Remember your place.” Rullsilon raised his voice.

Braxiatel restrained himself, holding in his rage.

“Good, now it would be best to put him out of your mind. Amazing things will happen soon, Braxiatel, and you will realize how insignificant your brother is. Mark my words,” he said reassuringly.

A thunderous sound rattled and boomed through the Capitol, catching the attention of the two.

“What was that?” Braxiatel said to himself.

“Perhaps a storm of some sort, but it is not the season for that kind of activity.”

Braxiatel put a hand over his eyes and looked out into the distance. He noticed a strange dark cloud with purple lights oozing through it. The gaseous mass grew, and tentacles spewed out from the top.

“Looks like that’s the source of our sound. It doesn’t look like any storm I’ve ever seen.”

Rullsilon took a look for himself, the sight baffling him. “I know what that is,” he said, almost frightened. “Someone has invoked the Ritual of Azathoth, an act that grants one person any wish they choose.”

“Azathoth?”

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“An ancient god the Shobogans worship, but only the most cultish of its followers enact the ritual. Even the Shobogans would think twice before enacting it,” said the Lord President worryingly.

“A new power will rise,” Braxiatel repeated under his breath.

“What are you saying?”

“I believe this could be the latest plot against you, and judging from my knowledge, *someone* must want you dead. I can’t say I’m surprised.”

“With that mouth, you’ve just earned your latest assignment. Find out who the perpetrators are and bring them here!”

“Walk through that? Seems suicidal,” he said, raising an eyebrow. “You wouldn’t be trying to get rid of me, are you?”

“Silence! Take an escort, a skytank. I don’t care! Find out who is causing this, or I will personally—”

Braxiatel interrupted. “Yes, you’ll burn me yourself or throw me to the Pig-rats. I’ll get it done.”

“Good dog.”

“But I must say there’s only so much I can do. One of your enemies will get you eventually, mark *my* words.”

Braxiatel left the room swiftly without another word. Taken aback by what Braxiatel said, Rullsilon looked out toward the cloud. He pulled out an old photo of Arkytior’s mother.

“Perhaps he is right. Eventually, a knife will come from the front or the back. It is inevitable for me. The Oracle will replace me one way or another. Having Arkytior destroyed my reputation in the house forever, yet I continue to be loyal. I tell Braxiatel to put his brother behind him, yet I cannot forget my daughter nor you, my love. Hypocritical. I chose my path, and maybe today, I will finally see you again, my love.”

The Lord President shed a tear that dripped on the photograph. He looked back toward the clouds as his doom crept ever closer.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PRIMORDIAL CHAOS

At immense speed, the trunk flew into the primordial storm with great haste; Theta and Arkytior clung on for dear life. Purple lightning struck the ground around them, and strong winds rushed past as their clothing fluttered about. Theta could hardly see through the chaos. He looked back to check on Arkytior.

“Are you all right?” he yelled.

“I’m hanging on. How far is the village?”

“I can hardly tell through this storm. Hopefully, we aren’t far.”

Arkytior suddenly began to wince as if she was in pain. She placed her head against the trunk.

He looked down at her, confused and worried. “Arkytior?”

“Theta, I can hear them. They are screaming. In pain, we have to hurry!”

“I cannot hear anything besides the weather.”

“I can hear them in my mind! We must hurry!”

Moments later, the trunk came up to where Arkytior’s village stood. The storm enveloped the surrounding area, creating a strange barrier of sorts. Once through the obstruction, the weather seemed just fine. Above, Azathoth hung, but now several tentacles were extending down toward the village. Theta and Arkytior gazed upon the unholy sight in horror.

“What is that thing?” she asked, frightened.

Theta thought back to his time in the Academy. He remembered learning about the old gods as he and the Master’s tutor, Borusa, had described them as beings of primordial chaos. That, in theory, existed before the creation of the universe.

His eyes widened as the realization came to his mind. “It can’t be...”

“What?”

Theta pulled out his new sonic screwdriver and pointed it toward the entity, scanning it. The readings he got back widened his eyes even more.

“It’s Azathoth!”

“Azathoth? I thought it was just a story.”

“Trust me. I know from experience that gods *do* exist.”

“But why did it come here?”

“I don’t know. From what little I learned in the Academy, it lives in a plain beyond our existence; merely entering our realm causes unspeakable horror.”

Theta patted the flying trunk. “Take us down, will you?” The coffin-like box vibrated in response and began to descend to the sand.

Landing not far outside the village, the duo quickly jumped off and bolted toward the center. Theta continued to scan the surroundings. Arkytior grabbed her head again. The screams in her mind became so painful that she collapsed to her knees and began to scream herself.

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“Arkytior!” he screamed, running over to her.

“It’s killing them!” she screamed in pain.

Just up ahead, Azathoth’s tentacles began to snatch up its entranced victims, one by one being pulled effortlessly into the monstrosity’s gaping mouth. Theta quickly helped Arkytior to her feet, and they hurriedly rushed to the scene. To their shock, no one was moving an inch, just staring up into the sky as they got devoured.

“Everyone, run! What are you doing?” Arkytior screamed.

She desperately tried to get everyone to flee to no avail. Theta grabbed one villager by the shoulder and turned them around. He then used one hand to cause the villager to make eye contact. Despite this, their eyes continued to look up, almost rolling back into their skulls. A tentacle oozed its way down and grabbed the villager, lifting them into the air. Arkytior quickly grabbed their hand.

“No! Leave them alone!” she cried out.

Theta quickly grabbed her. “Let go, or you’ll get pulled up with them!”

The villager slipped from Arkytior’s grasp, and they both fell backward. Theta quickly got back to his feet.

“They are all under a trance of some kind. No wonder why they’re not fleeing.”

“Can they be freed?” she asked, panicking

“Hang on. I’ve got an idea.”

Theta gazed through the crowd and noticed Tink. Quickly, he bolted towards him and grabbed his head so he could face him. He then hovered his hands on either side with both middle fingers touching the skin. Theta stared into his eyes.

“Tink, concentrate. It’s me, Theta. I know you’re in there! Focus on me! I am here to help you all. You must break free from this!”

At that moment, Tink’s eyes began to blink rapidly.

“That’s it, come on! Fight!”

Tink shook his head and finally came to his senses. “Theta, is that you?” he asked, sounding groggy.

“Yes, it is me. Why is Azathoth here?”

“I don’t know. All I can recall is a voice telling me to obey and perform a ritual. I tried so hard to resist.”

“It must be posthypnotic amnesia. Someone forced you all to enact this ritual and bring Azathoth here.” Suddenly, tentacles began to descend from above, interrupting them. “Quickly! Both of you, grab something sharp!”

They each scrambled to find a weapon to beat back the approaching tentacles. Arkytior grabbed a pitchfork and began to stab at the slimy appendages. Theta and Tink found old axes swinging at the tentacles, beating them back. The arms whipped around violently, trying to knock the trio away.

“Keep it back!”

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Tentacles continued to rain down, attempting to scoop up more victims. Bravely, the trio fought back, stabbing and cutting away at Azathoth's arms. Furiously, they swung everywhere, tearing down tents and knocking down several villagers.

The god roared in anger. "You dare take up arms against me? I, the Eternal Sultan of Chaos!"

"Look out!" Theta yelled.

From within Azathoth's center mouth, a glowing mass of light began to accumulate, forming a ball of energy. It aimed for Theta and Tink and, like a falling star, flew from Azathoth's mouth. They ducked for cover as it exploded, knocking everyone to the ground. Arkytior tried to get back on her feet, but several tentacles grabbed a limb; one even enveloped her neck, strangling her.

"Now, you will learn the meaning of suffering!"

It began to squeeze Arkytior's neck while pulling on her arms and legs, causing her to gag. Theta was slightly dizzy and stumbled to his feet while Tink struggled to stand after the blast. After recovering, he turned to see Arkytior in the grasp of Azathoth. A haunting memory flashed through his mind, the time he was held by the Toymaker, hopeless and afraid.

"No! Not again!"

Theta grabbed his ax and charged, leaping onto one of the tentacles. He hacked away, black fluids beginning to spray from the gash. His clothing was now drenched with black coloring. Yelling in rage, he kept hacking.

"I will not lose you too!"

Finally, the last slash completely severed the appendage. The others let go of Arkytior, and she collapsed to the ground, trying to catch her breath. Theta rushed to her aid.

"Breathe. I got you."

Azathoth retracted its tentacles and laughed.

"A valiant effort. Now, behold the true power of chaos!"

Azathoth inhaled a massive amount of air. A purple fog oozed from its many mouths and floated to the ground. Within an instant, after drifting for a few moments, it was all absorbed into the sand. The ground began to shake aggressively as Arkytior and Theta tried to balance themselves. Mounds of sand began to push upwards, forming small piles before exploding, revealing several scaly hands with sharp claws. They stretched from the sand, grabbing the pair and pulling them to the ground. The god laughed as they struggled to break free. Each mouth began to inhale, causing an upward gust of wind to lift the villagers into the air. Arkytior noticed Sadax floating among the bunch, still in a zombie-like trance.

"Sadax! No, please!" she cried.

They all then wooshed upward straight into each of Azathoth's many mouths. In unison, they clamped shut as blood began to drip in such quantities that it almost appeared to be raining briefly. Arkytior watched in horror while Theta tried to struggle free of the arms.

"The ritual is complete. I now return to my plain of solitude!"

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Azathoth began to fade away, the weather surrounding the village clearing up, revealing the stars in the sky. The scaly arms then turned to dust, releasing both Theta and Arkytior. She sat up, wiping blood from her face, and looked at her palms, now covered in the remains of her former friends and family. She let out a heart-wrenching scream before breaking down in tears.

Theta stood silently, his memories continuing to haunt him. All he could see was when the Toymaker sent him back to Gallifrey, both of his friends trapped in its domain. He remained silent, not knowing what to do other than ponder his thoughts. Once again, he failed to help those he considered friends in the face of unspeakable evil.

Tink approached Theta from behind. "This can't be happening," he said.

Suddenly, a persistent, slow clapping emerged once the dust settled.

"Koschei?"

"For the final time, my name is The Master."

"I don't give a damn what you call yourself. You're the last person I want to see right now, be gone with you," said Theta angrily.

"But don't you want to know who brought this horror upon these people?"

"What?"

"Oh, come now, Theta. It shouldn't be that hard to decipher."

"That voice, the one that told me to obey," Tink said.

Theta realized right then and there, aggravating him even more. "It was you. You sentenced these people to death! Why? To appease your twisted sense of superiority?"

"Good guess, but incorrect. I did this for one reason only. For you, old friend."

"For me? What are you saying?"

"Despite our fractured friendship...."

"Fractured? That is a poor choice of words. You destroyed it!"

"Indeed, a choice made out of jealousy and hatred for your growing fame within the Academy. But after hundreds of years of pondering, I realized how petty and childish of an act it was."

"Is this you repenting? By killing innocent people?"

"They were insignificant pawns, like every other being in this universe. But you and I, Theta, we are superior. We are the same."

"I am nothing like you," Theta said, disgusted by the thought.

"But you are. We both seek to break free of our chains to this cursed world to discover our true destiny. Soon, all will kneel before us!"

"I once thought you to be a madman. You're something far worse. A monster." Theta gave him an angry look.

The Master noticed Theta's sonic screwdriver in his pocket. "Ah, I see you have acquired a sonic screwdriver. It doesn't look like any model I've seen. Homemade, perhaps?"

"Quite so, and I'm not sharing," retorted Theta.

"No need. I have a little something of my own already," the Master said with a smile.

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He reached into his pocket and pulled out his very own sonic device. It had a bronze and silver color mixture with three slim, pointy pieces of metal protruding from the top.

"I call this work of art the laser screwdriver! Instead of telling, how about I show you what it does?"

He looked to Arkytior, still crying immensely. "A broken sheep needs to be put out of its misery."

She then looked the Master straight in the eyes. It was then that he began to hear whispers in his mind. He looked around, wondering who was speaking.

"You have taken everything from me!" the whispers said.

"What is this? Get out of my head!"

The Master yelled and grasped his head, allowing Theta and Tink to lunge and tackle him to the ground. While on the ground, he punched Tink away and wrestled Theta back. Theta struck the Master with two rapid punches, knocking out a tooth.

"I'm the monster? Look at *you* go! I like this new you over that pathetic pacifist you used to be."

He tried to punch him again, but the Master swiftly kicked out his left leg. Arkytior jumped on the Master's back, grabbing his face and sinking her nails into his skin. He tried to shake her off, but surprisingly, she climbed on well. He began to bleed a small amount from the scratch marks. Arkytior screamed in anger as she tried to smack and scratch him. With one precise move, he jerked his head backward, striking Arkytior violently. She fell straight to the sand. Quickly, Tink grabbed one of the axes, and The Master aimed with his laser screwdriver, firing.

"Tink! Arkytior!" yelled Theta.

Tink collapsed like a corpse, void of any life.

"He won't be getting back up. This beauty both kills and prevents regeneration!"

"You will pay for that!"

"Oh, come now, don't take it too personally. I'm just trying to teach you how little people like them matter. It's their destiny to grovel at our feet."

Theta tried to stand up straight, but before he could, the Master kicked him to the ground and cackled.

"Don't worry. I'll get through your thick skull eventually, and then you will realize that you and I are all we've got!"

In the distance, the Master noticed an approaching skytank and the still flourishing storm that now engulfed the Capitol and Low Town. He stroked his chin and thought to himself for a moment. "Perhaps some time in a cell will lighten you up. Give it some thought, will you?"

The Master kicked Theta across the face. Slowly, his vision began to fade. He turned his head to the now unconscious Arkytior. It was the last sight he saw before everything fell into total darkness.

DOCTOR WHO

CHAPTER NINE DOCTOR WHO?

The wind whistled peacefully through the night as Theta and Koschei sat under the stars. Silver leaves blew through the air, and red grass danced with the air. Theta, still resting on Koschei's lap, turned his head and looked up. He stared upward at the endless array of stars hanging in the sky with the lonely orange moon above them.

"Koschei," Theta said.

"Yes, my friend?" he said, looking down.

"If...if you knew how evil someone would become, would you do everything in your power to change that outcome?"

"Yes."

"Even if it was you?"

"Wait, why are you asking this?"

Theta sat up and covered his face, hiding the tears. Koschei placed his hand on his shoulder, attempting to comfort his friend.

"I know your future, what you will become."

"Come now, Theta. You must have just had a bad dream, that's all."

Theta began to hear a voice whispering into his ear. Everything around him started fading away, leaving him in a dark abyss. Alone.

"Kill him. Why do you hesitate, Doctor?" said a voice.

Theta looked around, puzzled.

"Who's there?"

Slow footsteps began to approach Theta. He turned behind him, and Koschei was gone. A small opening revealed itself with an invisible staircase going downward. Theta stared downward, fire spewing from the hole as the footsteps became louder. A black figure walked up the stairs, hands behind their back like a dark specter rising from the depths of Hell. To Theta's horror, when they reached the top, who stood before him appeared to be himself. Except they were shrouded in shadows and eyes glowing red.

"W-what?! What are you?"

The reflection adjusted a colorless tie they wore before speaking. "I am a part of you lingering in your conscience. Waiting, gaining strength."

A light shone, revealing Koschei strapped to a chair. The dark reflection imitated a walking motion with their first two fingers. Theta strangely began to walk along with the movement of its fingers.

"Stop! What are you doing to me?"

"Since you won't do it on your own, how about I give you a little push?"

Theta approached Koschei. He looked up to Theta, frightened. "Theta, what is happening? Get me out of this chair!"

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

"I can't do it! Please stop!"

"Yes, you can. You know he has to die. Remember all of the trouble he caused you? Oh, and let's not forget poor Arkytiar. The poor little thing will live a horrible life because of him."

The dark figure opened his hands. Theta mimicked, and then his hands grasped each other while Theta grabbed Koschei's neck.

"This...isn't who I am."

"It is now."

The figure squeezed its hands as Theta's grip began to tighten. Koschei gagged for air. Theta began to sob as his hands turned against him. Finally, a loud crack allowed him to release his hands, but his friend's neck went limp.

Theta looked down at his own hands, horrified. "What have I become?"

"You have become better. Thankfully, the Toymaker allowed me to gain more control over the years. Soon, I will dominate your psyche completely."

"What does the Toymaker have to do with this?"

"The mental effect that day had on you managed to weaken your mental barriers, allowing me to access the strings that pull your thoughts, emotions, and desires. Like your years of despair, and you resort to violence against the Master? All me."

"You called me... Doctor. Why?"

"You always liked that title in the Academy. Unfortunately, your subconscious has a slight hold on me, so I'll address you as such, forced as I am."

"It was just a nickname. There was nothing special to it."

"Come now, we both know *that's* not true. You wanted it to be your name when you became a proper Time Lord."

"But that, of course, never came to fruition, so therefore, it is irrelevant," Theta said persistently.

"Choosing a name is like making a promise, one you are failing."

"A promise..." he said, thinking.

Suddenly, he began to hear his voice all around him.

"The Doctor. It's not just a name. It is a promise. Never be cruel or cowardly, never give up, and never give in! That will be my name. That is my promise."

Hundreds of voices began to drown out Theta's hearing, some he didn't even recognize. They all spoke simultaneously. Theta grasped his head, eyes widened. His dark reflection laughed gleefully.

"Let me take it from the top. Hello, I'm the Doctor," one voice said.

"Come on, the Doctor has done us no harm..." said another as it trailed off.

"Why on Earth are you dressed like that, Doctor?" a woman's voice said as she sighed.

"Pleasure. I'm the Doctor..."

"Good day, sir. I am the Doctor, and these two are my children..."

Theta slowly stood, their eyes closed momentarily, their dark self taking a small step backward. His eyes opened, making direct eye contact as if they were staring into their soul.

DOCTOR WHO

“I *am* The Doctor.”

“You realize a sudden memory relapse will not stop your descent? Perhaps I must make it more clear.”

Dark Theta snapped their fingers, and a light imitating a stage shined, revealing Arkytior. She sat with her arms and legs crossed, her head buried between them. She was crying immensely. The Doctor felt a wave of sadness rush over him.

“A poor broken soul just like you. A good person would be wise to put her out of her misery.”

It was then that he became compelled to move forward. As they approached, he pulled out their sonic screwdriver. The device quickly evolved into the Master’s laser screwdriver as he aimed, fighting back. She looked up, tears streaming down her face.

“Do it. Everyone I have ever loved is dead. I have no one left, nothing to live for.”

The Doctor slowly began to lower the screwdriver to his reflection’s shock. He crushed the device into dust and extended his hand, helping her to her feet.

“What? How did you do that?” asked his dark self.

“We have each other, Arkytior. And I promise you that I will do everything I can to protect you no matter what it takes. You showed me the light once again, my friend. Now it is time I brought you back to it as well.”

The Doctor placed his hand on her shoulder, and small waves of golden light entered her body. Arkytior smiled and began to sob with joy.

“Thank you, Doctor! Thank you!” She hugged him firmly as she slowly faded away.

His dark reflection couldn’t believe it. “Impossible.”

“This is what a good man can do.”

“Please, you are far from a good man!”

“You are nothing but an amalgamation of the tiniest fraction of my soul. Every dark, twisted, and vile urge, thought, or desire all rolled into one disgusting package. No man is without their demons. It’s time I conquered mine.”

The reflection marched forward aggressively. It began to throw punches at the Doctor, but he swiftly dodged his head, avoiding each swing.

“Ill-tempered and quick to anger, only someone who knows they are in a losing battle resort to such barbaric behavior.”

They swung again, yelling angrily. Shockingly, the Doctor sat still, allowing their fist to hit them, but just before they did, they froze. The reflection started to get nervous.

“I can’t move?”

“If we technically are the same being, wouldn’t it be possible for manipulation of the other to work both ways? Didn’t think about that, did you?”

Their surroundings began to brighten with a golden hue. The Doctor slowly stepped forward, their reflection mimicked by walking backward. The floor cracked open, flames erupting. The Doctor rapidly began to glow brighter before a stream of light burst from within, striking his dark self. He sent him into the crevice like a divine being banishing a demon back to

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

Hell. The reflection screamed in rage as metal chains spewed from the flames, dragging them further down. The crack began to seal up swiftly, smothering their screams.

The Doctor let out a sigh of relief. "That should keep him cozy. Now it's time to return to the real world."

Slowly, the Doctor's vision came back. He was in a cell similar to when he got put on trial. He felt his head where he got kicked by the Master. He winced slightly and sat up, gazing around the room. He noticed Arkytior in the same position as he saw her in his sleep.

She heard him sitting up. "They're all dead, all of them. Tink, Sadax... I was powerless to stop it. Stop him. I'm worthless. I disappointed my father. Now, I couldn't even save those I called family," she said sorrowfully.

"Arkytior. A long time ago, I lost my friends to an omnipotent being. I was powerless to stop any of it. It's what got me banished. I know your pain all too well," he said sympathetically.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I felt I was worthless. I was only disappointed and failed everyone I knew. That's why I chose to wallow away in the desert. But then you came along and changed me. *You* helped me see the light again."

"Really?"

"Yes, and now it is my turn to help you. We'll escape into the stars far away from this appalling planet and go wherever the universe takes us!"

Arkytior began to sob as she hugged the Doctor closely. He paused in shock until he hugged her back, comforting her.

"You're all I have left, Theta...." Arkytior said in anguish.

"I swear to you, my friend, that I will do everything I can to protect you from this day forward."

"Thank you, Theta...."

"Theta is a thing of the past. You can call me the Doctor."

"Doctor? Doctor who?"

He smiled. "Just the Doctor. My true name."

The Doctor patted Arkytior on the shoulder. He then began to observe their surroundings. "How did we get here?"

"I don't know. We must've gotten picked up by Time Lords."

"Ah, indeed. This design is all too familiar to me. I was in a cell like this before I went on trial all those years ago. It appears I have come full circle."

"But we committed no crime," she said, aggravated.

"We were the only survivors. They needed someone to question. No one could have missed that freak show in the sky. And on top of that, it's clear the Master fled the scene, leaving us to take the fall for his actions," the Doctor said, unsurprised. "He was always a coward."

Footsteps echoed against the floor outside their cell. Two chancellery guards stepped in front of the energy door, pressed a few buttons outside, causing it to collapse, and stepped inside.

DOCTOR WHO

“You both are to be taken before Rullsilon and Lord Burner for questioning.”

“Full circle indeed,” the Doctor said, raising an eyebrow.

Stepping into the dimly-lit vaulted chamber, he remembered the Doctor and Arkytior seated in two swivel chairs within a small, illuminated, railed area. The lights came on, brightly flooding the rest of the chamber. He looked over at the tiered rows of seats where fellow Time Lords once sat as his jury years ago, but there were no such people this time. Only guards stood protecting the room. Across the way, he saw the Lord President at his podium with the Lord Burner set in his railed area.

“These were the only ones you found?” Rullsilon asked.

“Yes, my Lord. The only survivors. I saw an entire Shobogan village sucked into the sky as we approached,” replied Braxiatel.

Rullsilon looked toward the Doctor. He stroked his chin slightly.

“You. You seem familiar. Have we met?”

“Indeed. I am The Doctor. You may know me by my old name. Theta Sigma.”

Brax’s eyes turned to Rullsilon, filled with a sudden mixture of anger and confusion. Rullsilon nervously looked down at Brax, realizing his minions’ loyalty was deteriorating right before him.

“And what are you called, child?”

“Funny you recognize someone you prosecuted faster than your child, Father,” Arkytior said.

Rullsilon gasped and took a few steps back. The guards became slightly alarmed at their President’s distress.

“Your Excellency?” one of them asked.

He quickly barked. “Leave us. All of you!”

They slowly left the room, their scarlet capes dragging behind them. Rullsilon recomposed himself.

“You survived after all this time. I am proud, Arkytior.”

“You’re proud of me? How? You forsake me! Lied to me!”

“Wait, please listen to me,” he pleaded to her.

“What is there worth listening to, Father? You always hated me, just like the rest of the family did.”

He yelled. “I did it for your protection!”

The room temporarily went silent.

“I knew that, eventually, the Oracle would have conspired to have you murdered—something I could not allow to happen. I promised your mother on her deathbed that I would protect you. And if I had told you the truth about the Schism, you would never have faced it. Have you heard voices in your head?”

“Voices? How do—”

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

“It is the telepathy trait manifesting in your mind. Only womb-born children receive this unique ability.”

“I—”

“Yes, Arkytior, you are the first womb-born in eons. That is why you were always frowned upon.”

“But you could have stopped all of them. You *are* the Lord President.”

“In protecting you, I would have destroyed my reputation with Time Lord society. You would have gotten killed if I had done nothing to protect you. A double-edged sword, my child. I merely found the best solution to both problems.”

“I would never have believed all those years ago that there was more to you than meets the eye before I saw a heartless judge casting his will upon all under him. Now all I see is a conflicted father who can hardly choose between his given destiny and his daughter,” the Doctor said to the Lord President.

“It seems you have a way with words I did not anticipate, Doctor. But this isn’t the only family reunion here.”

“What do you mean by that, good sir?”

“You remember your brother Irving Braxiatel here? He’s gone through a regeneration since you last saw him.”

He looked over toward Brax, shocked. “Brother, is it you?”

“Yes, it is. I’ve been looking for you for quite some time, Doctor. That’s what you call yourself now?”

“Yes. How are Father Ulysses and the sisters?”

“After you stole that TARDIS, we never got told what happened to you, so Ulysses took to the stars hoping to find you while our sisters and I searched here on Gallifrey. I came close to the truth. That was until a Lord Burner got sent by this oaf to kill me. As fate would have it, I slayed the Burner instead, and here I am.”

The Lord President heard enough. “This is all touching, but we have strayed from why you both are here. Were you two that enacted the Ritual of Azathoth?”

“No. It was the Master or Koschei. He enslaved the entire village with hypnosis and summoned that ghastly storm that I can barely hear,” said the Doctor.

“Professor Koschei? He is one of the Academy’s top graduates. What motive would he possibly have?”

“Ah, it’s clear you have not seen his true self. He lives for chaos, for power. He seeks to spread his will across the universe. Although his latest obsession is trying to rekindle our old friendship in his twisted way.”

“It’s true, Father, all of it. I was there,” said Arkytior assuringly.

“I believe you, child, but what also concerns me is what you were doing with an object that carried the Seal of Rassilon. I’d get prosecuted for allowing something like that to fall into your hands.”

DOCTOR WHO

The Doctor spoke loudly and proudly. "It is under my protection. I've sworn to keep it from falling into the wrong hands like the Master's."

"What is it, brother?" Braxiatel asked.

"If I told you, you would have to kill me."

"Now, what am I to do with you both?" asked Rullsilon rhetorically.

Arkytior became confused. "Father?"

"Having a treacherous professor is hardly a concern. But, if word got out about this box, it would ruin me."

The Doctor became furious. "This again? What is with you and your *ruin me* stick? You're more concerned with your reputation and ego than your flesh and blood!"

"It is my destiny to lead our kind into the future. Without it, I am nothing," said Rullsilon.

"No. It is a predetermined fate passed down to you. You must find the courage to discover your true destiny for yourself."

"My true destiny..."

"Yes, the universe has something special for all of us. And it is up to those with the courage and will to seek their purpose."

Rullsilon was speechless, brushing his hands over his eyes. He let out a sigh of confusion while Brax looked toward him curiously.

"So what will be done with them?"

"I truly do not know. The Doctor speaks some truth. I have followed the Oracle's will all my life and never sought out my own path. I sacrificed my daughters' well-being to do so," he said, pausing momentarily. "I know it may be too late to say this, Arkytior. I am sorry, so sorry."

"I find it hard to believe that, coming from you," Arkytior said, unconvinced.

"It is the truth from the depths of my twin hearts."

Arkytior gave a faint smile.

"And as for you, Doctor, I cannot change what has already gotten erased. Your records, accomplishments, your whole life. As far as matters are concerned, you don't exist."

"No matter, that was Theta Sigma's story. The Doctor's has just begun."

"And we shall see how well he fairs."

Braxiatel looked toward the Lord President. "What's the plan?"

"Despite the ramifications, they are free to go."

The Doctor quickly chimed in. "Well, your Eminence, we both have a small request."

"A request?" Rullsilon asked with a pinch of surprise.

"We are looking to obtain a TARDIS."

"A TARDIS? Why do you need one?" asked Braxiatel, slightly confused.

Arkytior stood up. "Our destinies are in the stars, so we must search for them."

Rullsilon thought long and hard for a moment. "Is this truly your desire, my child?"

"It is."

"Then so it shall be. I will get you a TARDIS."

"What?" said the Doctor and Arkytior in unison.

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

“Please, daughter, give me this chance to redeem myself. It is the best I can do.”

Brax looked disappointed, trying to hide some tears.

“Brax? What’s wrong?” asked the Doctor.

“All those years, searching, wondering if you were alive or dead, and now, at last, I found you. But it seems we must part ways too soon.”

“I understand your sadness, Brax, but I never belonged here. On the bright side, I will never be far away,” he said. At that moment, he remembered the Hand of Omega. “Oh, and we will need the box back too.”

“I had it sent off for inspection shortly after you arrived. It’s not too far from the TARDIS repair shop.”

Rullsilon stepped down from his pedestal and approached. He slipped his hand into his robe to pull out the picture of Arkytior’s mother.

“Before you depart, I want you to have this. It is the only surviving image of your mother.”

Arkytior was shocked. “She looks just like Sadax’s daughter!”

“You knew Sadax?” he asked, confused.

“He was the man who found me, raised me. How did you know him?”

“The naiveness of the innocent. Sadax is your grandfather. I took you in once you were born.”

Arkytior closed her eyes, reflecting on past events. “*Was* my grandfather.”

“Was he at the epicenter of the ritual?”

She nodded. Rullsilon gave a saddened sigh before briefly hugging her tightly. “You have lost so much...and it is all my doing. Carve your path, my child. Let no one determine your life but you.”

An explosion violently rocked the room. The power quickly short-circuited, creating an almost pitch-black room. Chancellery guards rushed into the room, encircling the area. A few directly stood on each side of the Lord President, pointing their stasers at the Doctor and Arkytior.

“Put your weapons down! They are no threat,” exclaimed Rullsilon.

“We are under emergency lockdown. All prisoners are to be—”

“Lower your weapons!”

Reluctantly, they did. A violent rumble nearly shook everyone to one’s knees as thunder boomed from outside.

“The shield is down! Without it, the Capitol is defenseless against that storm!” said Braxiatel, alarmed.

The door leading into the room was blown open. Staser fire flew inside, taking out multiple guards. Emergency lights illuminated the courtroom, revealing the Master and a few Academy students under his heel. Several other guards ducked behind several points of cover.

“Well, isn’t this my lucky day? All of my problems are in one place. My old friend, a failing Lord President, and Lord Burner. My, my. So, have you given any thought to it, Theta?”

DOCTOR WHO

“The Doctor, thank you very much; indeed, I have. Upon further thought, I realized something about you.”

“And what would that be, Doctor?” he asked mockingly.

“You’re nothing but an infantile and egotistical lunatic who craves attention. I once loved you, but that man died a long time ago. Now, I can see right through your evil facade. Deep down, you know, you’re pathetic. What did you tell these students? That you were fighting for a just cause?”

“Silence! How dare you speak to our mentor that way!” yelled one of the students.

But he wouldn’t back down. He remained firm and undeterred. “Ah, you have not exposed your true self to them. Once things go sideways, we shall see how quickly you abandon them.”

The Master clenched his fists, holding back his frustration, sweat running down his face.

“Just put down the weapons. No one else has to get hurt,” Braxiatel said.

Both parties readied their weapons, fingers tense.

“Last chance!” yelled Braxiatel.

One student’s fingers slid slightly on their staser, causing it to discharge. Both parties fully began to open fire. The Doctor tackled Arkytior into cover while Rullsillon ducked and grabbed a staser from one of the dead guards, opening fire. He dived over to Brax.

“Take the Doctor and Arkytior, and ensure they reach their destination safely!”

“Will do!”

Rullsillon yelled. “There’s an exit on the other end of the room! Hurry, I will hold them off!”

He continued to draw fire as Braxiatel ran over to the duo. He grabbed them both by their shoulders. “Both of you follow me quickly! I will take you to the box!”

“Very well. Let’s get out of here swiftly!”

“Agreed,” said Arkytior.

They quickly ran for the back of the room. Arkytior looked back, worrying for her father as she stopped. The Doctor grabbed her hand tightly and tried to pull her along.

“Go!” he yelled urgently.

Reluctantly, she turned and fled with both the Doctor and Braxiatel as laser bolts seared past all over the room.

The trio fled a hallway illuminated with flashing red lights and blaring alarms. It was deafening. Escaped inmates were locked in several rooms, yet some escaped into the halls. Guards quickly swarmed from every corner to intervene, with violent fist brawls ensuing. Braxiatel quickly led the Doctor and Arkytior in another direction away from the chaos. They then approached a large, closed metal door. Brax placed his ear on the door. He heard loud gunfire on the other side.

“Bad news. Our route to the box was blocked back there. The quickest way now is to go through this courtyard. Keep your heads down and move quickly. It’s hard for either side to distinguish friend or foe in this flurry.”

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

“We will be alright. Lead the way, brother,” the Doctor said confidently.

“Get ready!”

Braxiatel opened the door with a few button presses. In the center of the courtyard lay a pond. Everywhere else sat small bushes along with light gold benches for seating. Small staircases led to upper walkways. On either side, students and guards fired at each other. Some even charged straight into the fray, leading to physical fighting. On the top of a roof edge, guards positioned themselves to fire with staser rifles. The rebellious students were cut down individually, forcing them to retreat further into the complex. The guard’s superior training was beginning to show.

The trio swiftly snuck through the courtyard, avoiding the traveling bolts as guards and students collapsed. Both sides were too focused on each other to even care to Brax’s delight. They finally reached one of the clear stairways before an explosion from a grenade knocked the Doctor down. His ears rang intensely. Arkytior and Braxiatel helped him to his feet quickly.

“Doctor, are you alright?” Arkytior asked, worried.

“I’m alright, just some ringing ears and a dirtied getup. Nothing I can’t survive, my dear.”

But this was no time to take one’s time. Brax knew this well. “Let’s move,” he said hurriedly.

They moved through another door, revealing a hallway of different elevators. Braxiatel carefully examined the symbols on each one until he found the one signifying the lower levels of the Capitol.

“Quickly, get in!”

They all jumped into the elevator. Brax quickly pressed a specific symbol, causing the elevator to descend the shaft.

“Such unnecessary carnage,” commented the Doctor, disappointment echoing in his voice.

“No time to dwell on it now, brother. We will put a stop to the Master,” Brax said, handing the Doctor a small circular device. “Take this. It will help me find you once things settle down here.”

“I’ll keep it handy, brother. Please make it out of this alive. We have so much to catch up on.”

“We do indeed. I’ll send for Father Ulysses as well. He will want to know your whereabouts.”

He lets out a slight sigh. “Very well.”

The elevator came to a slow stop. The sliding door opened to reveal a room full of strange relics. One of them was a small pyramid-like device with non-Gallifreyan symbols covering it. A dark blue helmet sat on a glass pedestal with black eye spots. A broken wing that must’ve come off a statue hung along a wall. Across the room in the back stood a lone Time Lord investigating the Hand of Omega.

“You there! I’m here to retrieve that box.”

“You mean the Hand of Omega?” said the Time Lord.

DOCTOR WHO

“The what?”

“Upon investigation, I have determined this is the long-lost Hand of Omega, a stellar manipulation device. And besides, do you have authorization? I can’t just hand this off. It has a Seal of Rassillon, after all.”

He then noticed the Doctor and Arkytior.

“And who are those two? They don’t seem to be of Time Lord authority.”

“I don’t have time for this. I apologize,” Braxiatel said, annoyed. He swiftly grabbed the Time Lord and slammed his head into the box, knocking him out and causing the object to awaken with angry shakes.

“Calm down, calm down, old friend. He didn’t mean it. We are in a huge hurry here,” the Doctor said, trying to calm the box down.

“Does it have a mind of its own?” Braxiatel asked, confused.

“Yes. He got it from a renegade buccaneer and her talking parrot. This universe can’t get stranger enough,” replied Arkytior.

“Well then, it’s time for us to part ways. I must head back up top and help Rullsilon clean up this mess. Just head through that door, and the TARDIS repair shop is just down the walkways.”

“Thank you, Brax. We will meet again.”

“Good luck, brother! And to you, madam,” he said as he bowed slightly to her.

“Thank you as well,” Arkytior said gratefully.

The Doctor and Arkytior ran along the metallic walkways below the Citadel as the alarms still blared. The large leather trunk hovered immediately behind them. She held his hand as they ran, going deeper into the depths and up and down stairs until they reached another elevator.

In a workshop, two engineers stand, hunched over work counters, screwing screws and welding parts together. As they worked on different projects, an alarm went off, causing both men to look up. One walked over to a small monitor fixed to a wall. On the monitor, a line of gray metal cylinders sits.

“Something wrong?” one of them asked.

“It’s the repair shop. What kind of idiot would try to steal a faulty TARDIS?” the other replied.

An elevator’s doors open as the Doctor and Arkytior quickly exit, stepping into the vast repair shop below the city. Several TARDIS ships sat in disrepair, some rusty, others in total pieces. Their parts sat on workbenches full of tools and bolts. They both carefully walked down the aisle of old machines. The Doctor stopped at a workbench to inspect the tools briefly. He picked up a Gallifreyan laser cutter.

“Some of these could come in handy.”

“But Doctor, shouldn’t we pick a TARDIS first?”

“You’re right, my dear. I get distracted sometimes. Let us continue.”

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

The Doctor approached a shiny TARDIS labeled as a Type 75. Its beautiful metal exterior glistened as light reflected off.

The Doctor stroked his beard momentarily. “Arkytior, How about this one? It’s newer
“Perhaps, but anyone is ultimately good to me.”

“All right then. Let’s hop in.”

The Doctor pushed on the heavy metallic door. As he opened the ship, no lights brightened the interior. It was nothing but complete darkness. Arkytior slowly walked inside as the Doctor followed behind her. But, before he fully entered, a man’s voice echoed throughout the repair shop.

“Doctor? Doctor?”

He turned around, standing in the doorway of the TARDIS, to see a man in a cyan-colored robe. Underneath, he wore an orange robe, and the collar was a dark purple. This look differed significantly from any other Time Lord style he had seen. They may be part of a secret division.

“I apologize, but we were just leaving.”

“Sorry for interrupting you. I must inform you that you’re about to make a big mistake.”

“I beg your pardon?”

The man leans against another TARDIS, arms crossed and smiling. “Don’t steal that one. Steal *this* one. The navigation system’s knackered, but you’ll have much more fun.”

“That one? What’s so special about it?”

“Why don’t you see and find out?” he said, his smile so affectionate and charming.

The Doctor thought to himself for a moment. He turned to pull Arkytior outside.

“Doctor, what’s wrong?”

“I’ve had second thoughts. Let’s try this one over here.” He turned to thank the stranger.
“Tha—” But they were gone.

“Doctor?”

“It’s nothing. Let’s hop in.”

A speaker came online with a voice booming through it. “Ah, running away, now are we?”

“Why yes indeed, Koschei. Far away from here,” The Doctor said with resentment. He rushed Arkytior into the other TARDIS.

“My name is... Nevermind. I will find you no matter where you go in the universe; my voice will haunt you for all eternity! In time, you will call me the Master!”

“Good luck with that.”

“Luck is not needed. I see through the cameras. There are already dozens of guards on their way. Surely, you won’t be able to dematerialize in time.”

The Doctor smiled. “Watch me!”

He quickly hopped inside the TARDIS, allowing the hovering trunk to shuffle in, and pushed on the door, shutting it.

DOCTOR WHO

The Doctor and Arkytior couldn't see what was in front of them. The interior was incredibly dark, almost like a void. Arkytior stuck her hands before her, trying to feel for anything physical. The Doctor began to rummage around his pockets.

"Now, let's see. Where did I put those... Aha! Here they are!" he said as he pulled out a small box.

"What is it?"

"My everlasting matches!" he said excitedly. He flicked one match against the box. "Let there be light!"

The match burned brightly, covering the two in its fiery warmth. Strangely, it even emitted a lemon scent. Slowly, the two walked forward as the light illuminated the surrounding interior. The appearance of the interior was similar to the one the Doctor stole all those years ago.

Eventually, they reached a console. The Doctor gently slid his hands across the machine, wiping away some dust while feeling a sense of comforting familiarity.

"Poor thing. It hasn't been used in a while. Perhaps it's been waiting for the right pilot," he said.

"You say that as if it has a conscience."

"All TARDISEs have a form of sentience. They are remarkable pieces of engineering."

The Doctor began to press specific buttons and pulled a lever. The machine began to emit a soft whirring sound as the center column lit up and moved up and down. All the lights in the console room began to turn on, bringing everything back to life instantly.

"Ha ha! I've done it!" he said cheerily.

"It works!" Arkytior said excitedly.

"Yes, it does! Now, let's get the dematerialization started, and we are off!"

Guards began to pound on the door from outside. The Doctor hovered his hands over the controls, almost as if he was unsure how to operate the ship. Finally, he reached for a lever and pushed it forward.

Suddenly, the ship trembled. The lights overhead glimmered, and the circles that honeycombed the walls gave off a pale glow. From deep below their feet, the engines pulsed.

"Are you sure about this, Doctor?" said Arkytior, frightened by what was occurring.

"I'm thinking."

"Please! At any second, that door could give way!"

Quickly, he leaned forward and pressed a sequence of buttons. Down below, the engines let out a bellow of protest. The glass column on the console shuddered, rising more in its housing. Inside, instruments lit up and rotated on a central pivot. The room spun as the Doctor and Arkytior got thrown to the floor, clinging to each other. Along one of the walls, a large screen flickered on by itself. An image of the world, the brown-green snow-capped planet of Gallifrey, kept shrinking away from them. Further and further. It became out of reach as the streaming lights of the time vortex veiled across the screen.

BIRTH OF A RENEGADE

The Doctor and Arkytior weren't going to let each other go then. Each other. That was all they had left. There was no going back.

Instantly, the whole ship lurched, and the two slid down the floor, colliding back into the console. The Doctor grabbed at the edge, pulling him and Arkytior up. With the panel facing them, a button flickered red, and a label read, '*Flight Stabilizer*.' He slammed his hand down on the button.

Something engaged as the ship steadied itself. Too shaken to move, they both slid back to the floor. The steady pulse of the engines became soothing and reassuring.

The Master sat inside a security room. In front of him, several monitors displayed camera footage of various places within the Citadel. He saw several of his dead students and others getting arrested, and the vicious storm finally dissipated.

He violently slammed his fist into the console, shattering it, knowing his plan had failed. The Master looked to see the TARDIS dematerializing. He grinned slightly, grabbing a small device like a lighter with a crystal red button. It began to flash consistently, almost as if sending out a signal.

"Run, rebel, run! I will get you soon enough."

Arkytior woke up with a start. She slowly sat up to see the Doctor working at the TARDIS console. But, as she woke, all the fears and despairs of being runaways flooded her head.

"Oh, you're awake. I hope you didn't get too hurt."

"I'm fine. It's just... I'm worried we'll get hunted."

"Who? The Time Lords? They have bigger things to worry about than two runaways. Besides, there are several renegade Time Lords. It's quite a common occurrence."

"Oh."

"Don't dwell on it too much, my dear. We have the whole universe to explore! Isn't it exciting!"

"It is. I am delighted to be on this journey. Where to first?"

"I know a place, thanks to Tink. A little planet called Earth."

The Doctor pulled out the coordinates and started entering them into the console.

"Why don't you start exploring the TARDIS? Learn about our new home?"

"All right. Please don't cause a crash landing."

He laughed. "Trust me. I'm crazy, but not *that* crazy."

Arkytior began to walk toward a door leading into the rest of the ship. She noticed her pocket was glowing slightly and reached inside. She pulled out the crystal that the Master had given her. Her hatred for him began to boil, so she crushed the crystal. It dropped to the floor as she walked away. The mechanical parts continued to emit a faint red light.

Back at the console, the Doctor had finished entering Earth's coordinates. He began to hear the sounds of dragging chains all around him. He turned frantically.

"Arkytior?"

DOCTOR WHO

The chains grew louder.

“Are you meddling with something back there?”

A voice whispered behind him. “Miss me yet, Doctor?”

The Doctor yelled, slightly startled. He turned to see his dark reflection sitting on the TARDIS console, except now they were covered in chains like a straight jacket. They grinned maniacally.

“Didn’t know you were easy to scare,” he said.

“Nonsense. You just caught me by surprise. Enjoying your confinement?”

“I think that answer is obvious enough for you to answer.”

“Perhaps. I see you can move about outside of dreams unexpectedly.”

“While I may have gotten chained and sent to the bottom of your mind, I can still have a bit of chit-chat with you however I please. After all, I am you.”

“And it will be my pleasure to spend every conversation blocking out everything you have to say. Like I said before, you are an amalgamation of everything I hate, so don’t expect to be released from those chains anytime soon. Just sit back down in the depths of my mind where you belong and enjoy the ride to come.”

“Oh, we will see about that, *Doctor*. We will see.”

“Yeah, be seeing you, my dark half.” The Doctor mocked while smiling as his dark half vanished.

EPILOGUE

THE DOCTOR'S NEW CLOTHES

The Doctor's mind wandered as he walked through the TARDIS corridors. The past few hours, which almost felt like days, had been quite the ordeal for him and Arkytior. He had left her back in the console room so she could relax.

But then again, he wasn't all bushy-tailed and wide-eyed himself. After the recent events involving an old friend-turned-enemy and a rough departure from Gallifrey, to put it lightly, he needed time away to think. They both did. Thankfully, he stabilized the ship's flight pattern so they could drift through space. Away from their home, safe and sound. After everything they'd been through, how could they call Gallifrey home?

The Doctor stopped in his tracks, looking down at his robe-like clothing. "If I'm going to be traveling, I need to change my look," he thought. "Perhaps this ship has a wardrobe."

He continued on his way down the corridor, one of many. There was no telling how big the ship could be.

The Doctor didn't know how long he had been walking through the ship's halls. It was easy to get lost as they all looked alike; bright lights and circular round indents lined the white walls.

On his path, he did come upon several doors, each leading to very different rooms. There were bedrooms, an expansive library, a swimming pool, a garden, an armory, and even a laboratory. None of which was what he desired.

He rounded a corner and came across another door. "Let's see what's behind this door, shall we?" he said.

He had found what he was looking for, entering the expansive wardrobe. Several racks of different kinds of clothing lay before him, including various hats, coats, and scarves. There was even a wig with a cascade of dark curls.

The Doctor rummaged through each piece gently, picking up everyone and observing them. On one of the racks, he noticed a navy tweed frock coat with seven silver buttons, a kente shirt with frills, and a Prussian blue tweed waistcoat. On another, he saw a fur-collared cape over a leather jerkin, some bright-colored clothing like that of a Georgian aristocrat, and a late Victorian outfit with a black top hat, among many others.

"What to wear, what to wear," he thought. "There's so much to choose from that it's hard to decide."

As his eyes glanced at the clothing, he saw a double-breasted town coat of ebony black velvet. It was paired with a beige tweed waistcoat over a white shirt with a royal blue ribbon tie and gray tartan trousers.

But, just then, his attention got caught off guard by several pieces of clothing: a sable brushed frock coat, a herringbone tweed waistcoat with checkered pants, and a dark red ribbon bow tie. His eyes lit up with excitement. This was going to be his outfit. He just knew it.

DOCTOR WHO

The Doctor stepped out of the wardrobe in his new outfit. To his surprise, Arkytior was waiting for him. She glanced over at him with curiosity at his new look.

“What do you think? It’s better than I wore before,” he said, smiling.

“That’s an excellent look for you, Doctor. I found this rigger’s workcase while I was exploring.”

The Doctor began his inspection with a pair of small glasses he had found. Upon closer look at the box, a tab on the lid identified the owner as *’Quadrigger 3911 Stoyrn’*.

“I presume it must’ve been left here when the owner went off shift,” he said. “I’m guessing they meant to carry on the next day by potentially tearing this ship apart for parts.”

“Perhaps we could keep this toolbox for future use. It might come in handy, Doctor.”

“Yes, yes. Hand it here, please.”

“And, is it alright if I peek in the wardrobe? I’ve needed to change up myself.” She chuckled while handing him the toolbox.

“Go right ahead, my dear. Everything inside is yours for the picking!”

“Thank you so much,” she said joyfully, hugging him tightly and disappearing inside the wardrobe room.

He smiled. Life beyond the stars would be better for them, after all. At home, they felt stifled. But out here as exiles, they’ve received infinity.

THE ADVENTURES CONTINUE...

TAKE THE PREHISTORIC ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME IN:

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