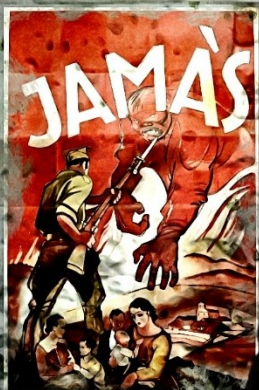


# BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

no pasarán



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One thing was certain, thought Juan Negrín Lopez: the conflict between the Spanish people was finally coming to a close after nearly three harrowing years. Unfortunately, being the Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic meant that he happened to be on the losing side.

Negrín gazed out of the mansion of *El Poblet*, or *Posición Yuste*, which the officers had codenamed this new base of operations for the government cabinet when they arrived nearly two weeks prior. It was a decent enough location, being quite near the town of Elda and the Mediterranean coast, which could be a great advantage if Negrín and his cohorts wanted a quick escape should things turn for the worse. Negrín's current environment was the complete opposite of the views in the Spanish capital of Madrid. During his many visits, he could swear that everything was in a constant state of vibration from the artillery strikes from Francisco Franco's armies.

But the scenery mattered little to Negrín. Ever since the fall of Catalonia, the world had come to the conclusion that the war had nearly ended. This sentiment solidified when Great Britain and France officially recognized the Nationalist regime only weeks earlier, and Manuel Azaña formally resigned as President, a month after abandoning the country to its fate. Following this, Negrín decamped to *El Poblet* to continue running the Republican government—what was left of it.

Negrín stood at the window, apart from his cabinet members and other politicians, quietly murmuring amongst themselves. Negrín didn't need to turn away from the window to know that almost everyone had expressions of weariness and hopelessness. The numerous debates about their next actions had clearly taken a mental toll on all of the politicians.

"Our officers have failed to report to us today, and the past week", said Torres, one of the politicians. "We've heard little to nothing from Madrid."

"Of course we've heard nothing", replied Ramos, a man particularly bitter about their situation. "You've heard the rumors, yes? Supposedly, their officers have resorted to contacting Nationalist agents to save their skins..."

"That's absurd."

"Is it?" Ramos shook his head. "The war isn't exactly going in our favor, you know."

Shocked, Torres glanced towards Negrín, who continued looking out the window, as though ignoring this squabble. "Don't say such things, that sort of talk is treason!"

"That's enough, both of you," Negrín said, now turning to face his colleagues. "This is not the time, nor place, to bicker amongst ourselves."

"Can you blame us, Negrín?" Paulino entered the conversation now, glancing downwards for a moment. "Morale is at an all-time low for our people."

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Negrín leant heavily on the meeting table. “That much is plain to see whenever I have visited the capitol. But tell me sir, what other choice do we have?”

“Colonel Casado seemed keen on talking to Franco,” added Ramos, crossing his arms. “Do you think he could do better than we can?”

Segismundo Casado. The name caused inward groans from Negrín every time it was mentioned. It guaranteed that the troublesome officer would mention surrender with the Nationalists whenever they met face to face.

“Certainly not,” answered Negrín, slicking back his dark hair. “He just doesn’t seem to comprehend that we’ve tried everything to make a peace agreement with Franco.”

Negrín had attempted to reach an agreement with Franco for nearly a year, but the Nationalist general would accept nothing less than unconditional surrender. That was something the Prime Minister would *never* agree to, for he knew what consequences would be brought upon the Republican populace if they laid down their arms. He refused to allow himself to be responsible for that fast-approaching possibility.

Negrín vowed to fight Franco’s forces to the bitter end. This decision did not sit well with many political groups within the Republic, especially the anarchists and socialists. The cracks within the already fragile Republic had deepened, and would certainly worsen in the days to come.

“We still have plenty of allies in our party,” continued Negrín. “I have already assured Casado that our weapons and supplies from the Soviet Union will be here in due time, despite the delays.”

“And if the new shipment doesn’t prove to be enough?” asked Ramos slowly.. The thought alone was something that Negrín could hardly imagine despite how imminent a certainty it may be.

The cabinet continued their seemingly endless discussions and debates when a strange groaning and wheezing sound erupted. Everyone looked around to try to find its source. But Negrín waved it off as nearby machinery. “Then we will stand fast, and fight till the last man falls. No matter what Casado, or any other officer might think, there is simply no other option.”

“Is that so?” spoke a muffled voice outside. The door suddenly swung open, and a newcomer strutted into the board room. “Because in my experience, there is *always* an alternate option.”

The new arrival was of smaller height, his middle age more apparent with his short receding dark hair. He wore rounded glasses over his hazel eyes, and a deep brown tweed three-piece suit. He had a jolly, almost comical expression as he beamed at the bewildered collection of men.

“Who the devil are you?” asked Negrín incredulously. “Where are the guards?”

“Guards?” The man looked behind him, as though looking for his supposed escort. Then he shrugged. “Hm, I certainly don’t see them. Do you?”

All the politicians looked in bewilderment at this sudden arrival, once more murmuring amongst themselves. “I ask you again, sir,” said Negrín, more agitated by the second. “Who are you? This is supposed to be a top-secret establishment—”

“Only a friend of the Popular Front, Prime Minister.” The man raised his hands, opening his palms wide like a showman in a circus. “I assure you that I come in peace. In fact, I am here to help, if you are willing to hear me out.”

The politicians all turned to Negrín. Giving a sigh, Negrín waved his assent. “Very well, speak what’s on your mind. Perhaps you can give me a reason not to arrest you as a spy for the Nationalists.”

“Good man.” Ignoring Negrín’s last sentence, the man clapped his hands together and strolled around the board room as though he owned the place, his eyes suddenly serious as they bored into every person as if looking at a chessboard. “Things have become rather dire for you lot, am I right? I can see the familiar look of defeat on each and every one of you.”

“If you are here to mock us, sir, then you may as well leave!” cried Torres, with a few others joining him. The little man rapped loudly on the table with his fist until the collected throng came to complete silence.

“For heaven’s sake, I wasn’t finished! Please save the comments and questions until *after* my speech, yes?” The man cleared his throat and continued. “It seems to me that most of you are already aware of the reality of your situation. Very soon, the Nationalists will march upon your lovely capital one way or the other, and you all know what will happen when they do arrive, don’t you?”

“You don’t have to tell us what we already know, little man,” said Negrín bitterly. “We’re resigned to our fate, and we don’t intend to fall without a fight.”

The man scanned his eyes around the room and noted the hesitation on some of the politicians’ faces. He turned to Negrín, his mischievous grin returned. “What if I were to tell you that I, and *only* I, have the means to turn this war around to your precious Republic’s favor?”

“Then I’d be skeptical.” Negrín took a few steps forward. “I think we’ve heard quite enough. Paulino, call security to remove this man—”

Before he could finish giving the order, the strange man quickly pulled a small object out of his jacket pocket, and showed it around the room like a child doing show-and-tell. It looked to be a ball made of chrome, with a big red button. Despite the simple appearance of the object, Negrín couldn’t help but silently note its ominous presence.

“Voilà.” Negrín wasn’t the only one whose attention was caught by the object.

“What is it?” one man said.

“Looks like an ornament one would place on a Christmas tree,” another said.

“Now now, gentleman,” the man tossed the ball in the air and caught it as he walked to the window.

“This is only a sneak peek of what I have to offer.”

Ramos gave a derisive snort. “And what is it you are offering, exactly? A tad too early for Christmas decorating tips, don’t you think?”

“You are a funny one, aren’t you?” the man’s eyes flicked back at the object. “Don’t let its plain appearance fool you. What I hold will bring your enemies to their knees the moment they see its first use on the battlefield, and nobody would dare oppose your cause ever again.”

The men all glanced towards one another before Ramos spoke once more. “You are telling us that *this* is a weapon, then?”

“For you lot, I’d say that this is your Republic’s salvation.” The man returned his full attention to Negrín. “What do you say, Prime Minister? Will you allow me to explain my proposition at length, or shall we just get on with the arrest?”

Negrín stared at the man. The stranger radiated confidence, and Negrín couldn’t help but be intrigued. “All right, we’ll hear what you have to say. But you’ve never told us your name.”

“I’ve been known by a few aliases in my lives. But for now, it is best to refer to me as the Monk. Gentlemen ...” He spread his arms out wide enthusiastically. “I am here to change the future.”

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“I’m telling you, there isn’t much you can find out here in these parts,” Alvaro groaned, slinging his rifle over his shoulder. The young woman he followed, his younger sister Sofia, half-turned back to him. She looked to be in her early twenties, had shoulder length dark hair, and possessed an enthusiastic expression, which was a rarity nowadays for the people of Madrid.

“And you didn’t have to come with me,” replied Sofia, turning forward again. “Yet here you are.”

“Hey, somebody’s gotta watch your back. These streets can be dangerous at night, and I don’t mean the fascists roaming outside the city.”

“I can handle myself, Alvaro. I’m small enough to hide in a hopefully empty trash-can. The only thing I’ll lose is my personal hygiene for a spell.” Sofia shook her head as she and her brother walked on. The sun was setting; they had less than an hour until dark.

For the past few weeks, Sofia had journeyed to the abandoned parts of the city to find food, water, blankets, and warm clothes. Some were for her, and others who needed it more. Only once or twice did she have close calls with roaming civilians desperate enough to rob a lone young woman for her few cans of food.

Sofia knew that she wouldn't be able to do this forever. She had only left Madrid a few times since the siege began, and her most recent expedition made her realize just how dire the situation really was. The reports she heard on the radios announcing the falls of various Republican cities caused much despair among the populace.

"What are we going to do when the time comes?" asked Sofia after a moment of silence.

"What do you mean?"

"You know *exactly* what I mean." Sofia stopped and turned on her heels to face Alvaro, stopping her brother in his tracks. "You heard it on the radio. They will soon march into Madrid, and who knows what they will do to us because we are living in the wrong city?"

"Come on, not this again, Sofia... as I've said before, we can hold out." Alvaro straightened his posture. "We've managed to do so for the past couple years."

"Sieges don't last forever. We may only have weeks, maybe days, before the city is taken over." Sofia turned once more and continued down the sidewalk before turning a corner, toward a small grocery shop. Sofia tried for the door, but found it locked. Giving a frustrated huff, she got on her knees and pulled out a hairpin. If it was locked, there had to be something worthwhile in there.

Alvaro pressed the current topic, and crossed his arms as he watched his sister do her magic. "Even if we had to leave, where would we go? The only family we have left in this god-forsaken country is our uncle, but he was in Barcelona when it was taken by the fascists."

"Uncle Dario will be fine," Sofia replied quietly, unsure of the words, her focus on the lock.

"Sure, but will *we* if we take our chances outside the city?"

"Alvaro—" Sofia snapped before realizing that she raised her voice much higher than she intended. "Look, you and I both know that it won't be easy, whether we leave Madrid or not. But I want to be far away by the time the city falls and live for another day."

"Sounds like living on borrowed time to me." Alvaro countered. It was an argument that Sofia and Alvaro had had for months on end, and the constant back and forth of the same points was starting to become repetitive and frustrating for the both of them.

As Sofia inched closer to succeeding, a strange sound erupted in the air. Sofia assumed this to be a marching band that was very much out of tune, but as it went on, it sounded like it was much more. Alvaro unslung his rifle, and looked down the street.

"It's coming from a ways down." Alvaro glanced at his sister. "What do we do?"

"Why are you asking *me*?" Sofia looked back at the lock. "Okay. We, or rather, *I*, should go check it out."

"What? Alone? You don't know what could be over there. What if it's something dangerous?"

"Trash cans, remember? Just stay nearby, and if I'm in danger, you can come to my rescue, all right?"

Sofia heard Alvaro grumble as she made her way down the sidewalk. Only after the setting sun disappeared over the buildings did Sofia wish she brought her torch, because she was about to be as blind as a bat in a few moments. The noise came from an alleyway. As she got closer, she heard a door squeak open and a pair of footsteps.

"No, no, no..." spoke a new voice. "This is absolutely *not* the botanical gardens of Caliban. We've arrived way off course once more, old girl." The voice belonged to a man: rich and cultured, like an aristocrat.



Sofia peeked around. There was only a lone man, standing outside a big blue box. The man's voice matched the appearance: he was tall and thin, and she could see that he wore a gray morning coat in pristine condition.

"What would Silver say about this? She'd likely mention something along the lines of, what was it, *taking the left turn back in Albuquerque?*" He chuckled quietly, with an air of sadness as he recalled that strangely named individual. "Dear me, this place has certainly seen better days. Not the best spot for a holiday, I think."

Sofia took a step back, and winced as she kicked a piece of rubble. Of course, this was a moment where the constant bombardments ceased for a moment, causing the sound to echo throughout the whole block.

"Hello?" The man called out. "I have ears, you know. Come out where I can see you." There was something about his tone of voice that reminded Sofia of an old school teacher she knew. Silently cursing herself, Sofia took a deep breath before showing herself to the man.

"I —" she cleared her throat before attempting to speak again. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to eavesdrop."

The man gave her a stern look before softening into a tight smile. "It's quite all right. I have an unfortunate habit of eavesdropping as well. One of many"

Sofia stepped further into the alley and received a better look at the man. He was an older gentleman, his graying hair swept back suggesting he was somewhere in his mid-fifties. With the morning coat, he also wore black trousers, and a solid navy-blue necktie. The clothing definitely matched the description of an aristocrat.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" asked Sofia, getting straight to the point. "People don't normally come out here at night."

"I am known as the Doctor. I suppose you could say that I am simply sightseeing."

Sofia raised an eyebrow. "At night? Dressed like that?"

The Doctor blinked, glanced upwards to the dark sky, then back down to her. "Yes. Nothing wrong with an evening stroll. It can clear the mind, you see."

"Right..."

"Now, this may be an odd question, but would you perhaps mind telling me where—" The Doctor suddenly stopped speaking, staring past Sofia, now frozen like a statue. Sofia turned to see Alvaro at the end of the alley, his rifle aimed at the Doctor.

"Alvaro, what are you doing?"

"Step away, Sofia."

Sofia did not move. "Why? He doesn't look like a threat."

"Exactly. Look at his clothes, they're too clean, not a single speck of dust on them compared to everyone else. Want to know who I think he is? A Nationalist spy."

"A spy? Now look, I assure you I'm—" The Doctor abruptly stopped as the barrel of Alvaro's rifle hovered inches from his face.

"Keep quiet. I know what you are, and there's no convincing me otherwise. Sofia, skip your scavenging today and help me take him to the government building."

"Is that really necessary?" Sofia stared at her brother with bewilderment. "He could have just lost his way. That happens to people around here all the time."

"Then why don't we help him?" Alvaro gave a forced smile. "We're trying to be good Samaritans, aren't we?"

Sofia turned to the Doctor, who looked at her with a mixture of amusement and annoyance. All Sofia could do was give a slight shrug, hoping the Doctor would humour Alvaro.

The Doctor then looked back at that strange blue box. He could just turn around, enter his beloved ship, and leave this place at this very moment if he so wished and pretend this whole encounter never

occurred. But then again, after a quick scan of his eyes over Alvaro, his finger barely hovered over the trigger. The gunman was clearly trigger-happy and was looking for any excuse to fire his rifle into one of the Time Lord's hearts.

The Doctor may have taken countless risks in his travels, but he was certainly no fool and recognized when his chances of success were slim. "Very well. Lead on."

"Oh no," Alvaro's forced smile remained. "You first. Don't want you running to the hills and back to your superiors, now do we? Now move it."

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"You are a strange fellow, Mr. Monk," spoke Negrín. The others had left the room to leave Negrín and the Monk to talk alone. Unusually, the politician found it difficult to think of something to say.

The Monk snapped his head towards Negrín. "Oh no, Mr. Monk was my father's name." He smiled again before suddenly scrunching his face. "Wait, no it wasn't. Never mind, just Monk, if you please."

"I see..." Negrín nodded slowly. He wanted more direct answers. "Now, this weapon of yours..."

"Now, now, that would just ruin the surprise, wouldn't it?" the Monk wagged a finger in Negrín's face, almost causing the Prime Minister to swipe it from him.

"But all you've told us is that this strange Christmas bauble of yours is capable of wiping out entire armies."

"Yes, but you'll see a demonstration in time. I think your government will be pleased by its results."

"I'll believe it when I see it, Monk." Negrín returned his gaze towards the dark countryside.

"I take it that you don't trust me? That I am simply a mad man with a mad plan?"

"Do I really need to answer that? The only reason I am accepting your help now, no matter how absurd this "wonder weapon" sounds, is because I am desperate. I want... no, I *need* proof that you're not just an escapee from a nearby asylum."

A manic grin crossed the Monk's features. "I don't normally do this, but I think I can make an exception of you, Prime Minister. I'll give you a sneak peek. But..." He pointed at Negrín's face admonishingly. "No guards, no escorts, your eyes only. Deal?"

Negrín sighed, wondering just what he got himself into. "Lead on, then."

Without another word, the Monk spun on his heels, and marched to the door. Reluctantly, Negrín followed. The strange fellow led him outside. The few guards posted around noticed this, and looked ready to follow, but Negrín, against his better judgment, subtly waved them off.

The men found themselves in front of a run-down tool shed. The Monk leant against its side with an air of confidence that was borderline smug. Negrín couldn't fathom what made this shack so special.

The wood was warped and rotted, the door looked about to fall off its hinges.

"Not the most glamorous appearance, I know." The Monk shrugged and pulled a long glittering keychain from his jacket pocket, unlocking the warped and rotted door and gently pushing it open. "After you."

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All the Doctor wanted was to visit Caliban for the sixtieth annual botanical festival. Caliban was known for having the biggest botanical garden in the Saphea galaxy. It featured a vast array of plants from all over the galaxy, some imported from the outer reaches of space. He could still recall the last time he was there, a few regenerations ago when he took Peri to the twenty-fifth festival as a belated birthday gift sometime before their fateful arrival on Thoros-Beta.

After his visit to the Gamma-Magna Star System was rudely interrupted and ultimately ruined by an unseen force, the Doctor tried to take his mind off recent events by shaving down his ever-growing bucket list of sights and wonders across the universe. This produced mixed results, much to his dismay, as he felt the constant presence of a rifle at his back.

Whenever the Doctor glanced back, he invariably saw Alvaro glaring, ready to shoot. The Time Lord wouldn't dare, for he was in no mood to regenerate, and could only imagine the sibling's mood if he had to explain suddenly changing into a short man with a mohawk. But they had been walking silently for almost ten minutes now, save for the occasional whisper from that young woman, Sofia. Alvaro only replied in quiet grunts, not giving in to her demands.

Their journey was cut off by a sudden explosion in the distance, causing all three to flinch and turn in its direction. Alvaro and Sofia, however, quickly recovered and continued, with the Doctor forced to comply. But that didn't stop him from speaking up again.

"How long must we continue walking? I was all set to enjoy a nice urban stroll, but this is just ridiculous."

"Close," answered Alvaro gruffly.

"Certainly doesn't feel like it." The Doctor glanced back. "And what exactly is the situation here in this city?"

"You sure talk a lot," commented Sofia, the tense situation making her uncharacteristically irritable.

The Doctor couldn't help but chuckle at her remark. "Yes, I have that habit. Occasionally, when explosions don't interrupt my train of thought, I'm even known to finish a sentence."

"This man was never sent by Franco." Sofia glared at her brother. "I doubt a spy would be as clueless as he is."

"He's just playing stupid. I know what he is, Sofia."

The siblings began to argue. The Doctor sighed and observed his surroundings. Almost every building on the street had either been broken into. Entire streets were littered with rubble from past artillery strikes.

Then there was the populace. There weren't too many active, but those who remained all looked miserable. Their clothes were dirty, some looked as though they'd gone on without food for days. It was sad to behold, and led the Doctor to conclude he had arrived in a war zone. The Doctor tapped his chin thoughtfully, trying to put the pieces together. His attention was caught by something stuck to the wall. It was a poster—a piece of propaganda—that depicted soldiers firing their rifles at an unknown enemy, with a text on top that read:

**¡No Pasarán!<sup>1</sup>**

The Doctor stopped to study this, rubbing his chin thoughtfully as the cogs in his mind clicked into place. "The Spanish Civil War..." he muttered grimly.

He could now recognize this war-torn architecture belonged to Madrid. The city was embroiled in a siege mere months into the conflict, which lasted until the war's final weeks. The bigger question was *when* had he arrived?

"Hey, sightseeing are we?" the Doctor felt his arm nudged by Alvaro's weapon, and turned to see Alvaro and Sofia regarding him strangely.

"Listen to me, this is important. What year is it?"

Alvaro wasn't having it. "Don't play dumb with us—"

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: They shall not pass!

“Young man,” the Doctor spoke sharply, which once more reminded Sofia of her old school teacher. It seemed to affect Alvaro as well, who tensed up at the Doctor’s sudden tone. “Just answer the question, no matter how strange it might sound.”

“It’s 1939, the beginning of March,” Sofia answered. “Why?”

Instead of answering, the Doctor continued down the sidewalk, leaving the siblings bewildered as they followed.

“At least he’s walking a lot faster now,” Alvaro observed.

“Yes, but look at him. Something about the date has him spooked.”

Alvaro shook his head. “Doesn’t matter. We’re close now, and then who knows, maybe we’ll get a little something for our efforts.”

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Ever since they answered the Doctor’s rather strange question about the date, the mysterious gentleman had not spoken another word, but Sofia noticed that he was now noticeably more on edge, even without the rifle pointed at his back.

Her brother strode up to the front desk and explained the situation to the receptionist, while Sofia kept an eye on the Doctor. She needn’t have worried. He was sitting in a chair, hands clasped in front of him in a state of deep contemplation.

“Sofia.” The young woman was brought out of her state of mind, and realized that it wasn’t Alvaro who spoke her name, but the Doctor. It was then she also realized that she was likely staring at him the whole time.

The Doctor gave her that same smile and gestured to the seat next to him. Sofia was reluctant, but had an inkling that the Doctor wasn’t going to take any reckless actions.

She warily left a seat between them. She still had to play it safe—Alvaro might be right. He watched with distracted amusement as Alvaro talked to the receptionist with noticeable zeal. Sofia was the first to speak up. “You’re not really a spy, are you?”

The Doctor turned, a knowing twinkle in his eyes. “Oh? What makes you think I’m *not* a spy?”

“You’re oblivious.”

“Oblivious?”

Sofia nodded. “Yes. You didn’t even know there was a war going on.” She then narrowed her eyes. “Either that, or you’re not a very intelligent spy.”

This caused the Doctor to laugh. “You, my dear, are very perceptive. What is it that you do?”

She grinned. “I’m a schoolteacher. At least, I was officially for a few years before the war started. It can be hard to teach when you’re in constant danger of bombs falling from the sky.”

“Ah, that explains it, you have that certain demeanor about you.” The Doctor’s smile faded slightly as he reminded himself that thousands of teachers loyal to the Republic, or simply living in the territory, either lost their jobs or were rounded up and persecuted by the Francoist regime following the war. The Time Lord dared not say anything, but internally feared for the young woman’s future.

Sofia tilted her head. “What is it?”

The Doctor shook his head. “Nothing, it’s just ...” He looked at Alvaro, and gestured at him, hoping to change the subject. “He’s very eager to please, isn’t he?”

She couldn’t help but sigh “He’s... enthusiastic, to say the least. He’s gone down the communist path, and tries to preach it to me whenever possible, but I always brush it off.”

“What about yourself, then? Don’t tell me you fall under the anarchist category?”

It was Sofia’s turn to laugh now. “No, that’s not entirely my cup of tea. I used to just trust in the government, but now I don’t know what to believe.”

The Doctor nodded broodingly. "Because things are very unpredictable. I understand that. Do you plan to go back to teaching once the war's over?"

Sofia hesitated. She debated this internally almost every night lately. Would she even be able to go back to her job? "One can hope." she answered simply, and continued staring off towards the floor, letting her thoughts and doubts occupy her mind.

The Doctor observed Alvaro, getting nowhere with the receptionist, and couldn't help but pity the young man. The Doctor knew there would be no way that he could convince the older brother that he was not a spy. More to the point, how was he going to get out of this situation? It wasn't the first time he had dealt with a case of mistaken identity, and he always made it out narrowly.

He usually had a certain way with people. Surely there was one sympathetic soul in this drab building who would let him go his merry way. He had a festival to attend, and he'd rather not be here when Madrid's inner turmoil came to a head.

Alvaro slapped his hand on the receptionist's desk. The receptionist didn't even react. "I want this spy taken to the Prime Minister himself, pronto."

"For the last time, Dr. Negrín isn't here, sir. In fact, he isn't here in Madrid at all."

"You're telling me you can't contact Negrín?" Alvaro pursed his lips. "My sister and I deserve some compensation for turning in a prisoner of war, and we aren't going to sit here all day while everybody here twiddles their thumbs."

"Look," she replied, pinching the bridge of her nose, "I can't promise you'll get the results you want, but I'll see what I can do, all right?"

Alvaro gave a faint yet satisfied grin as the receptionist dialed a number.

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In the Prime Minister's personal quarters, Negrín collapsed into his chair while the Monk stood over him, his arms crossed and that same smug expression on his features. "That was—" Negrín stammered, blinking rapidly. "What was, I mean, how did—"

"Don't think too much about it, Prime Minister. But tell me, didn't I deliver?"

Negrín didn't know the answer, but what he saw in that rickety old shack was enough to convince him that the Monk was as powerful as he claimed.

"Who are you, really?" Negrín asked, stumbling over his words.

"I told you already, I'm the Monk."

Negrín stood up. "Your alias is one for a holy man, you come here to our secret headquarters, offering a solution that will immediately bring the Republic back to its feet. This all sounds very promising, almost too good to be true. I should be praising the Lord. So why do I get the feeling I am making a deal with the devil?"

The Monk raised his eyebrows, amused by the comparison. Negrín stepped closer to the Monk, torn between desperation and anticipation. "Just tell me what you want, because clearly you wouldn't help us on a whim."

"Oh, this and that. Perhaps a little bit of power in your cabinet once this war comes to a close?"

Negrín took a breath. Oddly enough, he expected this. "Of course. I suppose that's a suitable bit of payment for your... assistance."

"I do want to go over a few other terms and conditions as well." The Monk brushed Negrín's shoulder. But before the Monk could list off his requests, there was a knock at the door. Relieved, Negrín moved past the Monk, and was greeted by an officer. "Forgive the intrusion, Prime Minister, but you have a phone call from the capital."

"Yes, yes, of course." Negrín eagerly followed the officer down the hall, with the Monk not far behind. It was clear that he would indeed be the devil on Negrín's shoulder from now on.

The Prime Minister reached his desk, and picked up the receiver.

"I'm sorry to bother you Prime Minister, but I've been speaking with a soldier who has claimed to have captured a Nationalist spy."

Negrín raised an eyebrow, and glanced at the Monk, overhearing the exchange with interest. "A spy, you say. Where was he found?"

"In an alleyway. He mentioned that he stood by a blue box of some kind. He seems to think it's important."

"A blue box?" Negrín repeated, noticing the Monk's expression change to one of concern.

"The name. Ask her if she knows the name. If that is who I think it is, then he could very well ruin everything I've proposed to you."

Blinking, Negrín put this question to the receptionist. "All he knew is that he's a doctor of sorts."

The Monk's features paled. "Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear ..." He took off his glasses, and nervously wiped them with his sleeve. "This is an unexpected turn of events. If he's here, then he may know *I'm* here. And if he knows I'm here, then he must know what I—" He then broke off, and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. "Calm, Mortimus, calm..."

"Do you know this doctor, Monk? .Is he a threat to us?"

"Well, no... I mean, yes! He is a dangerous man, a potential wrench to my... *our* plans."

"I shall arrange a firing squad and end this in one fell swoop—" Negrín raised the phone to his ear.

"Ah, if only it were that easy," the Monk interjected.

Negrín sighed. "Then what do you propose? We can't just let him run free if he is dangerous."

The Monk grinned. "Quite right. I'll take care of this myself by having a pleasant chat with the fellow over tea."

"What should I tell the capital, then?"

"Tell them to send the Doctor to your office, no matter how impractical it may seem." the Monk smoothed his tweed jacket. "Because I will already be there waiting for him."

Negrín nodded as he caught the Monk's meaning. He would not be surprised if that shack were nowhere to be seen outside.

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Alvaro paced in front of the reception desk. Was he being overly dramatic? Sofia would certainly say so. He'd never admit this to his sister, but Alvaro knew that the Republic was desperate, and could use almost anything to give them a slight advantage.

The joy and anticipation of what rewards they could be given washed away as Alvaro set his eyes on Sofia, chatting with this so-called "Doctor". What on Earth was she doing, talking with the enemy as though he was a next-door neighbor? Sofia had always been the more compassionate between the two, and Alvaro always warned that this could be her downfall.

"You may take the prisoner to Negrín's office," the receptionist informed him. "He can't personally be there, but he's sent someone in his place."

Alvaro groaned and shook his head. Before he could make another petulant complaint, the receptionist sharply added, "He gave his approval. I think it's better than nothing, don't you?" The woman nodded to the guard, who walked over to the Doctor and Sofia.

"Oh, is it time?" the Doctor asked, standing up, straightening his tie, and smoothing down the knife-sharp crease on his black trousers. "Let's get on with it, shall we?"

"Why the sudden enthusiasm?" Sofia asked quietly.

"I don't think sniveling would help my situation." The Doctor winked. "Lead on, my good man."

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The guard opened the door to Negrín's office. The Doctor crept inside, sensing someone in the office waiting for them, sitting in an office chair facing away from the group.

"It's about time," the unseen man said. "I was starting to think you lost your way."

"Yes, the wait was rather appalling," the Doctor replied. "But then this entire exercise is a waste of your time."

"Oh?"

"These young people brought me here under the assumption that I was a spy."

The man chuckled, and swung his chair around to face the group. "The Doctor is many things, but I know that he would without a doubt be the most inept spy." He then nodded to the guard and Alvaro. "Leave us, I wish to speak with the Doctor and his companion alone."

The guard left, a little fed up with this rigmarole, but Alvaro dogmatically remained. "But I was the one who brought him here!"

"And you will be justly rewarded. Now shoo. You..." He pointed to Sofia. "I would like you to stay."

Sofia looked just as confused as Alvaro. Why was she staying here and not him? Was she going to get all the credit? "Just go, I'll be fine, Alvaro." Her brother stormed out of the office.

The Doctor, meanwhile, stared at the man sitting on the desk, rubbing his chin. "I'm sorry, I don't believe we've met."

"Really? I would've thought you'd recognize me. Then again, I've been through a body or two since the last time."

The Doctor thought he recognized a familiar aura about the man. But if so, it had been a while. He stared for another moment before the truth dawned on him. "Oh no ...just as I wondered how this evening could get any worse, here you are."

The Monk clapped his hands together and laughed. "There we are, much better! You're getting a bit slow for your age, Doctor. Which one is this? Ninth? Very dignified, reminds me of your earlier selves."

He looked to Sofia, who was edging to the door in the hope she might slip away from this pair of madmen. "Surely the Doctor has told you about me, my dear? We're old friends, you know."

"First of all ..." The Doctor raised his head from his hands, his eyes narrowed in contempt. "We most certainly are not old friends. Secondly, she is not in my company, she's a local. In fact, I'd be obliged if you could leave her out of this."

"My aching hearts." The Monk placed a hand on one side of his chest, and shook his head. "My mistake, old friend, but let's just get down to business, shall we?"

"Business?" the Doctor raised an eyebrow. "What are you even doing here, Monk?"

"In the process of making myself known on this planet, which you have rudely interrupted, as usual."

"But why now? Why during the Spanish Civil War?"

"Spain is on the verge of a massive change, as you may very well know. As we speak, Franco plans to sweep his armies through the remainder of the Republic's territory and emerge victorious. I seek to fix that."

"Ah yes, you're up to your usual blatant disregard for the Web of Time, I see." The Doctor leant on the desk, bearing down on the Monk with his full gravitas. "You do realize that things are very dire here for this side of the conflict? Why not jump ship and join the winning side?"

"That was the initial plan, unbelievably. But then I realized that a nationalist government sounded too stuffy for my tastes. So, I wanted to mix things up for a change and ensure victory for the Popular Front." The Monk grinned. "Besides, I do enjoy a challenge."

"You mean," Sofia spoke up quietly, only just catching the last part the Monk said. "You could save us? How?"

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The Doctor sharply turned his head back, causing the young woman to flinch. “I assure you, Sofia, that he will no doubt make things worse. He is a meddler, not caring about the results of his interference, wantonly disrupting events for the fun of it.”

The Monk burst into laughter. “Oh Doctor, don’t make me laugh! You interfere on a near daily basis! You weren’t quite up to my standard when we first met, I’ll admit, but I’ve seen the aftermath of some of your exploits since, and you’ve got a most impressive track record. Far grander than I could ever hope.”

“How flattering. Perhaps occasionally I am forced to bend the laws of time, but *not* for my own gain, unlike you. But Sofia did put an intelligent question to you, Monk. How do you intend to achieve this?”

“Just a little nudge in the right direction.” The Monk placed both his hands inside his jacket pockets, and pulled out his strange metallic ball.

The Doctor knew immediately that the object was not of this time period—far from it, perhaps by a few centuries at least. Transfixed, he swiped the ball from the Monk’s hand and stared at it. It was such a simple thing, but there was more to it than met the eye. Pulling his sonic screwdriver from his morning coat pocket, the Doctor performed a quick scan on the ball.

Almost instantly, the Doctor’s head snapped furiously towards the Monk, which caused both the fellow Time Lord and Sofia to flinch by the suddenness. “You fool. Of all the schemes you’ve come up with, this has to be the most reckless yet.”

“Doctor, this conflict has gone on long enough. I think the Spanish Republic could use a victory or two, don’t you agree?”

The Doctor shook his head in a mixture of surprise and outrage. “By using *nuclear technology*?” he spoke aloud, forgetting that Sofia was still in the room, the confusion on her face growing. “Humanity is on the verge of discovering the atom bomb, and look at what will happen to Japan in six years’ time. Yet here you are offering such advanced power to a country with enough issues to work out as it is on a silver platter.”

“Perhaps, but in the hands of someone who knows what they are doing...” The Monk pointed at himself, raising his eyebrows.

The Doctor chuckled in bafflement. “This is rich. What did you ask for in exchange for your help? Some power within the government, perhaps?”

“This isn’t my first time dealing with politics, Doctor. Besides, if the Master can run governments when he isn’t shrinking people, what’s stopping me from lending a helping hand?”

“I wouldn’t trust the Master to run a rotten borough, and you, my poor deluded chap, are even less adept. Even if you *were* to somehow climb the political ladder, you will struggle keeping the political groups in check. You know how fanatical and changeable these humans are.”

To his surprise, the Monk’s features brightened as he took the point. “That much is true. But who said that I must do this alone?”

“What are you suggesting?”

“I think we may have gotten off on the wrong foot. You are without a doubt a wise man, Doctor, and I am willing to offer an olive branch and let bygones be bygones, in exchange for... shall we say, an equal partnership?”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then I will order your execution,” he said, suddenly cold.

The Doctor glanced at the floor, the cogs in his mind moving. Then he shrugged and smiled back at the Monk. “Well, you certainly know how to sway people to your side, I’ll grant you that.”

“Then you accept?” There was a certain eagerness to the Monk, his eyes now beaming with hope.

“I do,” the Doctor brushed down the lapel revers of his morning coat. “Clearly these humans will need help recovering from the Civil War, and who better to assist than people like us?”



“Yes, exactly! It is the right thing to do, after all.”

The Doctor nodded, and turned his attention to Sofia, standing tantalizingly close to the door. He shot her a sympathetic look as he realized just how lost she was in the conversation.

“I’m sorry, this must all be very confusing for you,” the Doctor said sincerely. “But you can tell your brother that his so-called “mission” to turn me in is now accomplished.”

“I—I don’t know, this doesn’t seem right...” she started. Something about their easy alliance left her deeply disturbed.

“Sofia,” the Doctor said. “It’s all right. You and your brother will be well compensated for your efforts, isn’t that right? My, er, ‘old friend’ will see to that.” He spoke a bit louder at the latter half, getting the Monk’s attention.

“Hm? Oh yes, of course.”

“Of course,” the Doctor echoed. “He is a man you can take at his word, I assure you. Now, off you go.”

Sofia had long since noticed the dramatic shift in the Doctor’s demeanor. At first, he looked ready to tear the Monk apart, but now they were bosom buddies. Neither ‘Time Lord’ acknowledged Sofia quietly slipping away from the office, shutting the door behind her. It reinforced her feeling that they were up to something. Neither of these cosmic aristocrats would give a poor ordinary teacher like her much thought.

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“Now then.” The Doctor looked back at the Monk. “How exactly do you intend to use these explosives? Do you have only the one?”

“No, no, of course not. I managed to get a whole crate of these for a discount at the Klaylock black market. Mind you, they certainly weren’t cheap.”

“Indeed. I suppose you did that old compound interest trick?”

“Certainly did. The Klaylock Imperial ducat weathered the Gabriadeles Stock Market crash admirably, if I say so myself.”

The Doctor looked around the office. “Where is your TARDIS, by the way? If I’m going to collaborate with you, I’m going to have to look at your stockpile, take an inventory as it were, and see what we have to work with.”

The Monk’s smile faded. But then his mood swung back. “I don’t see why not. Come along.”

He knocked his wrist three times on top of the desk. The side suddenly slid open like a PEZ dispenser.

Giving a chuckle, the Monk waved for the Doctor to follow as he crouched into his TARDIS.

“Oh yes, a very respectable entrance...” the Doctor grumbled, and swiped his hand across the desk, swiping the bomb and slipping it into his coat pocket before following the Monk.

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Upon standing, the Doctor noted that the console room was the same design the Monk used all that time ago in Northumbria in 1066, with its roundels, bright white walls and matching center console. It was clean and pristine at the time, a brand-new Mark Four, but now, the Doctor noted, the centuries had taken their toll and it had a very lived-in appearance. The room was suffused with an unhealthy green tint, the surfaces were covered in dust and grime usually repelled by the temporal grace of the interior dimension, and the roundels glowed more dimly.

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There was antique furniture in one corner, complete with a large bookshelf and coffee table. Other parts contained a myriad of knick-knacks, paintings hung on the walls, and a patterned rug spread asymmetrically across the entryway.

“Could certainly use a spring cleaning,” commented the Doctor, brushing down his trousers.

The Monk flicked a switch, closing the doors behind the Doctor. “Much to see, and much to do. I haven’t time to hire a cleaning lady, I’m afraid. Don’t forget I wasted a considerable number of years marooned on Tigus, thanks to you.” This was said with no hint of malice, and the Doctor wondered if he would be as charitable if their roles were reversed. The Monk amiably waddled to the other end of the console room, beckoning the Doctor to follow.

After a brief journey through the corridors, the two Time Lords entered a room filled with boxes of various materials and sizes. The Monk stopped in front of a metal box, and opened its lid. The Doctor peered grimly inside and saw that it was filled with the same identical nuclear explosives, stacked like decorative baubles.

“And how do you plan on distributing these weapons?” the Doctor asked. “Giving one each to an officer with a big bow on it?”

“The bow doesn’t sound like a bad idea, come to think of it.” The Monk tapped his chin, lost in thought. “But this should more than be enough to help the Popular Front.”

“And you’re not concerned with the repercussions?”

“A few measly craters on Earth will cause initial concern, yes,” considered the Monk. “But think of the bigger picture. When the people realize that they possess such firepower, they will be united more than ever. As ever, I’m an altruist in my hearts.”

As the Monk left, the Doctor pulled out the bomb he slipped into his pocket back in the office. He didn’t want to do this, but he was left with little choice. It would be more than just a concern amongst the populace of Spain. The entire world would react with terror and fear as they wondered how a country at war with itself suddenly became a leading figure in an arms race that hasn’t happened yet. Priming the explosive’s timer, the Doctor placed the beeping object into the box, quickly closed it, and soon caught up with the Monk en route back to the console room.

“Would you care for a cup of tea? I can make it at an instant,” offered the Monk.

“Thank you, I’d like that,” accepted the Doctor. “A couple of lumps, if you don’t mind.”

Giving a nod, the Monk walked ahead of the Doctor, and opened the door to the console room. When the Doctor followed, he saw the Monk disappear around another corner, presumably to prepare the tea. The Doctor glanced around the room, admiring the Monk’s collection. They did have similar taste, he admitted ruefully. Some were no doubt stolen, but the Doctor would be lying if he said he never nicked anything from the places he has visited.

The Doctor aloud admired the console. “I’m surprised it still works, considering what it’s been through. What I put you through, I should say.”

“Oh yes, how could I forget? The dimensional control ... the directional and design unit ...” he replied from the other room, listing things off. “Oh, I spent many a cold night on Tigus cursing your name!”

The Doctor’s hands hovered over the console as he tried to remember the layout. He didn’t have long before the kettle would boil. “We’ve gotten off on the wrong foot. Ah-ha...” Finally finding the correct component, the Doctor began to get to work on the console.

“Now Doctor,” the Monk spoke. But his voice sounded a lot closer now. Quickly turning, the Doctor found himself facing the Monk’s jolly features were replaced with a stony expression. He was aiming a handgun towards the Doctor’s left heart, and cocked back its hammer. “Is that any way to treat your host?”

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It didn't take long for Sofia to find Alvaro, alone in the corridor outside the office, deep in thought. He double-took when he saw his sister. "What happened in there?"

"I... I don't know," Sofia answered quietly. Her mind was elsewhere.

"What about that reward? Did we get it?"

"I think so." She shot a brief glance at the office door before shaking her head, walking away quickly.

"You *think so*? Sofia, what's wrong with you?"

Sofia slowed her pace. She didn't really want to talk about the strange men and their bewildering, alien talk, and furthermore doubted that Alvaro would be a sympathetic ear. "Something isn't right, Alvaro." When Alvaro gave her a strange look, she continued, "The man waiting for us in Negrín's office, there was something shifty about him..."

"I could tell that too." Sofia could see his eyebrows shift in concern.

"They knew each other, the Doctor and that man."

"That's definitely suspicious."

"He said that he wanted to help end the fighting, but the things they talked about..." she trailed off. She couldn't grasp the Doctor and the Monk's conversation, with the mentions of meddling, Japan, and a weapon that the Doctor abhorred.

Alvaro regarded what she said with suspicion. "They knew each other? So maybe this Doctor was a spy for Negrín? What did they talk about?" The siblings continued to the front office, with Sofia trying to explain.

"The man claimed he had a way to win the war. But the way he said it, the way the Doctor reacted... I don't know, I had a bad feeling about it."

"Maybe I had that Doctor wrong. Any hope to push the fascists back is worthwhile."

"A fool's hope, maybe." Sofia now noticed a group of people gathered by a radio, listening in mounting worry as the new broadcast played out:

*"...As revolutionaries, as proletarians, as Spaniards, as anti-fascists, we cannot endure any longer the imprudence and the absence of the forethought of Dr. Negrín's government. We cannot permit that, while the people struggle, a few privileged people should continue their life abroad. We address all workers, anti-fascists, and Spaniards! Constitutionally, the government of Dr. Negrín is without basis. In practice also, it lacks both confidence and good sense. We have come to show the way which may avoid disaster..."*

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"What on Earth do you think you're doing?" This was the second time tonight the Doctor found himself facing the barrel of a gun, and he was getting tired of it. The two Time Lords remained where they stood, neither daring to make the first move despite the Monk's clear advantage.

"Did you really think your sudden about-face convinced me?" sneered the Monk. "I'm no fool, Doctor. If anything, getting rid of you inside my TARDIS makes things less complicated."

The Doctor arched an eyebrow. "This is certainly out of character for you, Monk. Never have you threatened me at gunpoint. You'd either set an elaborate trap, or have someone else do your dirty work."

"Times have changed." the Monk said simply. "What was that saying? *If you want something done right, you've got to do it yourself?* I was willing to give you a chance, but you've taken advantage of my curiosity."

"Only because what you're doing is obscene!" the Doctor cried. "You'd not only be threatening the Nationalists, but the innocent populace as well. You know the indiscriminate barbarity of this kind of slaughter. Such power takes no prisoners!"

“But think of what Franco will do to those who had any involvement with the Republic? My plan will bring our enemies to heel—”

“They are not your enemies,” the Doctor observed, stopping the Monk’s self-justification in a trice. “Whether we like it or not, the Nationalists win this war. Earth’s history is full of many such wrong turns that it is our duty to preserve, because to change them would merely bring about greater mayhem. And what you propose is no exception. Your so-called plan will only cause more bloodshed, and I won’t allow that to happen.”

The Monk tightened the grip on his pistol. “Whatever you took from the console, give it back if you please. You’ve sabotaged my TARDIS one too many times, Doctor.”

It seemed that the Monk wasn’t aware of the ticking time-bomb within his TARDIS; rather, he expected the Doctor to take something from his console. The explosives should go off at any moment, but the Doctor knew that he would meet his end if he made a dash for it. Stall him, he thought, buy a little more time.

“It must be very important for you to succeed, mustn’t it? Normally you would’ve just run for the hills by now, but you... you seem in a hurry to resort to plans such as this.”

The Monk gave a quiet sigh. “Spain isn’t the first place where I’ve established my influence, and it won’t be the last. I’m just preparing for what is to come.”

The Doctor scoffed at this. “I’m afraid Spain won’t be in any shape or form to fight in the Second World War regardless of your success.”

“What?” The Monk’s momentary confusion turned to a grin. “Oh Doctor, I don’t mean the affairs on this planet.”

“What do you mean?”

“There are whispers, Doctor. Something lurks in the dark corners of the universe, and if I’m not mistaken, it has a particular interest in you.” This rattled the Doctor, causing him to forget himself and step towards the Monk, only shaken by a flail of the handgun. “But perhaps things will be different if you’re already gotten rid of.”

“What?” Now the Doctor didn’t care about the gun or his possible imminent demise. “What is coming?”

The Monk opened his mouth to answer, but was cut off as the console room started to shake violently. “What have you done?!”

Before the Monk had a chance to pull the trigger, the Doctor leapt forward and shoved the other Time Lord, causing him to drop his weapon as he fell ignominiously. “You say you weren’t a fool, but you shouldn’t have left that bomb back in the office,” said the Doctor, flicking a switch on the console that opened the large doors. “One day your meddling will come back to haunt you, Mortimus, and only then you won’t be able to weasel your way out of it.”

The Monk stumbled to his feet, grabbing onto the console for support as he began to stabilize the TARDIS, readying it for take-off. He was far too busy and distracted to notice the Doctor making his escape.

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The Doctor stood up mere seconds before the sliding door retracted back into the desk, and the object dematerialized. He turned his attention to the office window, stepping over scattered papers and other documents. It was well into the evening by this point, and there was barely any illumination in the streets. But the Doctor could spot a large group gathering outside the building: soldiers, with an officer pacing back and forth, presumably either barking orders or giving a motivational speech.

“Time to go...” the Doctor murmured.

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Sofia stood against the wall in the front office, watching both office workers and soldiers alike leaving in droves, either going off to defend the capital, running for the hills, or simply hiding at home. Alvaro had just finished talking with an officer, and met Sofia.

"I've been given permission to take you home," said Alvaro. "But we've got to be quick, because I must help the others."

"You're seriously not going to stay here and throw your life away, are you?" Sofia looked up to her brother, her eyes widening.

"You heard the broadcast, Casado and his traitors want to give up Madrid to the fascists on a silver platter." Alvaro had a stone-cold expression on his face, no doubt attempting to look strong for his sister. But she could see, deep down, how horrified he really was. All the time Sofia feared that the capital might fall, and now, on the same night those two strangers visited, it looked to be coming true. "When we get home, I want you to hide somewhere safe, and don't open the door for anybody except me."

A thought seized Sofia. She wished and hoped Alvaro would consider it. "This could be our chance to escape this."

Alvaro immediately scoffed at the idea, and glanced past Sofia, spotting someone new making his way through the door. "You!" Alvaro yelled hatefully, raising his rifle. Sofia turned around, and was shocked to see the Doctor, frozen in his spot. "Did you cause this?"

The Doctor sounded weary, his eyes half-closed, as if he had seen these events before. "No ... no I didn't. I think you know that, Alvaro. This has been building up for quite a while, I'm afraid."

Alvaro kept his sight on the Doctor's chest. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't shoot you where you stand."

"Alvaro!" Sofia cried out, and tried to lower his rifle, but her brother pushed her away roughly.

"Because..." The Doctor paused, looking across at Sofia, straightening herself out and trying to ignore her brother's violence. So many people didn't deserve to be embroiled in the coup unfolding. Another of history's unchangeable atrocities, another taunt to his abiding wish for a moral and just universe. But perhaps he could try saving a couple from the bloodshed that was to come. "Because I am your only hope of escaping Madrid alive."

Alvaro gave a bitter chuckle. "That sounds like desertion to me. Desertion is not tolerated in the Republic, especially now."

"Think for a moment, man!" the Doctor snapped.. "Your own Republic is turning on Negrín and his cabinet, and more importantly, turning on you. Believe me, you are better off living to fight another day than laying down your life for a government on its last legs, a government that would, that *is*, abandoning you."

"Alvaro..." Sofia spoke softly, gently touching her brother's arm, hoping the idealistic boy could be reached beneath the brittle ideologue. "Don't do this. The Doctor is right, it'd be foolish if we stayed here any longer."

Her brother's tough-guy persona finally showed its cracks. His face drooped and with it, he lowered his rifle. "Can you do it, Doctor? Can you get us out of Madrid?"

"I can."

Alvaro placed a hand on Sofia's shoulder. "Go wait by the entrance, I just want to talk to the Doctor alone for a second." Slowly nodding, as if sensing what her brother was thinking but too tired and worn to object, Sofia made her way out of the front office.

The two men stared at each other, waiting for someone to say *something* to break the silence. When Alvaro spoke, the words were as predictable as they were sad for the Doctor to hear. "I won't be going with you two when you leave the city."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Sofia deserves a second chance, but me ... I've seen some horrific things during this war. I know we're on the verge of being defeated, Doctor, but my place is here with my comrades. Just promise me that you'll make sure Sofia is safe."

The Doctor regarded Alvaro with silent sorrow, before answering, "I promise."

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It was eerily quiet, save for the faint explosions in the distance. The travelers barely spoke amid the tension that had quickly filled the air. The Doctor focused on trying to retrace the route they walked earlier that same evening, to take his mind off the sacrifice he could do nothing to prevent, or the terrible page of history presently unfolding.

"Why did you have to land us so far away, old girl? Why did I have to wander so far? Oh yes, I was dragooned at gunpoint."

"We're close now. This is near where we found you," observed Sofia, peering through the darkness. "Isn't it?"

They passed another block when they started hearing voices. Alvaro tightened his grip on his rifle, readying himself to face any threat to come upon them

"Don't do anything reckless," the Doctor whispered harshly. "If it's the rebels ahead, then they will no doubt tear us apart in seconds."

"I won't let them hurt my sister," declared Alvaro.

Before the Doctor could answer, they heard another large group of people behind them. As the Doctor led the siblings to the side of the street, the voices shifted as both groups spotted each other.

"We'll be all right," the Doctor said, reassuring the siblings. "We just need to stay in the shadows, and avoid getting in their way. It's going to get rather loud in a second, so let us keep..."

The Doctor wasn't able to finish his sentence before both groups of soldiers opened fire. The coup has officially begun. Sofia instinctively dropped to the street, covering her ears to block out the popping gunfire.

She felt the Doctor pick her up and pull her along, and heard him call out to Alvaro. When she turned around, her eyes widened as her older brother raised his rifle towards the group ahead

"Traitors!" Alvaro cried out, and fired his rifle, pulling the bolt back and forth, and fired again.

Breaking from the Doctor's grip, Sofia stood up, and heard a bullet whiz by her head once, then twice. Now in a daze, Sofia shook her head, but felt her heart drop down her chest as she returned her focus to Alvaro. He had stopped firing now, and stood still with his mouth agape as he felt his chest, and looked down at his hand. It was covered in liquid crimson. Dropping his rifle, Alvaro stumbled backwards against the wall, and slid down to the ground.

"No, no, no," Sofia whispered repeatedly as she knelt by her brother, cradling his head in her hands. "Alvaro, look at me—"

Alvaro looked up at his sister, his vision already glassy, and gave a ghost of a smile. "I... I guess that's that. I thought I'd have more time ..." He swallowed hard, the boy she knew again, before continuing. "Damn it."

"Don't you dare give up, we're almost free ..." Sofia attempted to lift Alvaro off the ground, but he gave a pained groan and he slumped away. Sofia looked at the Doctor, barely visible through her tears.

"Can't you do something? You're a doctor, aren't you?!"

"Sofia," Alvaro croaked, weakly prodding her with a bloody hand. "You have to go, I don't want you to be a part of this. I wanted you to get away, but I wanted this. You deserve a second chance. I had to go with my comrades."

"But I..."

"Listen to me, just this once, Sofia. Go..."

Sofia felt his grip on her hand lighten, before falling limp to the ground. Sofia lowered her head, and let the tears run freely down her face.

The Doctor placed a firm hand on her arm. "We must go."

She wished she could pull away from the stranger's hand on her shoulder. "I can't leave him."

"I'm sorry, but we can't afford to remain here any longer." He efficiently pulled her to her feet.

She pulled away. "Let go of me—"

"Come on!" he pleaded. "I can't let anything happen to you, please!"

"Let me go!" Sofia cried out as the Doctor dragged her with surprising force. The sounds of battle around them, and the sincerity in the Doctor's eyes, pulled her to her senses, and she ran along as the battle raged in earnest.

They ran down the alley together. Everybody was too distracted fighting for their lives as a gust of wind blew from the alley, an unearthly noise filled the air, and the strange blue box that stood within for a few brief hours now gone.

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The Monk stumbled out of his TARDIS, which took the form of a large wardrobe, and held a handkerchief against his mouth and nose as he tried to not breathe any of the smoke that billowed from the inside. Shutting the doors, the Monk spent a brief moment catching his breath.

"That was close," he murmured, wiping his brow. "Too close. Dear me, I thought I was a goner." He patted the shell of his TARDIS.

Despite ejecting the sections of the TARDIS affected by the explosion into the time vortex, the Monk didn't want to think about the extent of the damage—yet more damage—the Doctor has done to his beloved time machine, and how many possessions he had lost.

The Monk turned away to get his bearings, and realized that he had landed back in Negrín's personal quarters. "Why back here, eh..?"

Leaving the room, the Monk walked the hallway to the meeting room. The headquarters were a lot livelier than the last time he was there. It shouldn't have been that long since he left, should it?

Opening the doors, he was greeted by various cabinet members and military officers scurrying around like headless chickens. An officer was on the telephone before he called over Negrín, and handed him the phone.

He raised the receiver up to his ear reluctantly. "What is going on in Madrid, General?"

"I have rebelled," answered Colonel Segismundo Casado.

Negrín's face sank. "Against whom? Against me?"

"Yes, against you," replied Casado simply

The Monk came up to the officer, General Matallana, and tapped his shoulder to get his attention. "Excuse me, but, what's going on?"

Matallana took a breath. "There is a military coup in the capital. The officers had enough of Negrín's leadership, and seemingly have taken matters in their own hands."

Struggling to keep his composure on the phone call, Negrín continued, "General, what you and your cohorts have done won't make things better for us!"

"I am not a general," said Casado, keeping his voice leveled. "I am a colonel, who had done his duty as an officer, and a Spaniard. If you won't end this war, then we will."

Before Negrín could speak more, Casado hung up.

"Casado's coup..." the Monk said aloud. How had he got his timing so wrong? Casado's coup stemmed from a combination of eagerness to end the bloodshed, and a worry of a communist takeover in the government, since Negrín and a majority of his cabinet were of that ideology. If only he had arrived earlier, perhaps this would have been avoided.

Negrín, having now heard the familiar voice of the Monk, snapped his head towards the renegade Time Lord. “You,” he hissed, and bounded towards him. “You knew about this?!”

Eyes widening, the Monk twiddled his thumbs anxiously. “Well, I—”

“And you didn’t warn me that this was going to happen?!”

“This was something out of my control ... I wasn’t aware of how imminent this was when I arrived!”

Negrín stared hard at the Monk. “Then we’ll threaten to use your weapon,” he declared. This caused some heads to turn towards the Prime Minister. “Desperate times call for desperate measures.”

“Actually, about that...” the Monk gulped, stepping back towards the door. This wasn’t going to end well. “See, back at the capital ...”

Negrín raised a hand to silence him, took off his glasses, and pinched the bridge of his nose, standing still in silence until slipping them back on. “Arrest him,” he ordered, keeping his temper in check.

“All this false hope he provided was a complete waste of time.”

When the two guards approached the Monk, the Time Lord turned around, and made a run for it, narrowly dodging the butt of a rifle, and ran as fast as he could down the corridor, pushing a poor woman to the floor.

“Prime Minister,” Negrín’s attention turned to an officer still loyal to the him. “I advise you and your cabinet to make preparations to evacuate. It won’t be safe here at the villa for much longer.”

“I’m aware of that. But I want that damned idiot of a monk arrested, and put up for the firing squad. Same goes for Casado. We can only hope our forces can push back and end this insurrection.”

After giving a salute, the officer exited to begin the search for the Monk. Negrín, feeling like a hollow man, walked through the meeting room before stopping in front of the window, looking out towards the countryside once more. They may very well try to salvage the situation, but the Prime Minister of the Second Spanish Republic knew the war they fought so fiercely for nearly three years had now been lost.

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Sofia quickly departed the TARDIS. That strangely beautiful interior was too much to handle in her present state of mind. As she crossed the threshold, she felt tall blades of grass brush against her legs, and realized that she was no longer in Madrid. She had also realized that it was no longer dark, but rather, it seemed to be early morning, with the rising sun from the east illuminating the landscape. How could that be, she thought, for it was still the middle of the night when they left her brother’s body behind in the chaos. But after all Sofia had been through, this was the least strange aspect.

Sofia now stood on a hilltop, a light breeze brushing the side of her face. She could still see Madrid, and was hearing faint gunshots and occasional explosions even from this distance. The city, and even worse, the heart of the Republic, was tearing itself apart before her eyes.

The Doctor stepped out of the TARDIS. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully, cleared his throat, and awkwardly vamped while he wondered what to do with her. Before he had the chance to say anything, Sofia asked,

“What happens now?”

“It isn’t safe for you to remain in this country. The best course of action would be—”

“No,” Sofia interrupted, heavy with sorrow. “That’s not what I meant. What happens next for me? How do I live my life?”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

Sofia looked up to the towering figure with a mixture of desperation and defiance. “From the way you talked with that man, about a resource not yet discovered, and knowledge of future events, I think you know more than you let on.”



The Doctor looked down at her, his mouth wide. For once he didn't know what to say as she bombarded him with all these things that he simply couldn't excuse or explain on a whim.

"My brother is dead, Doctor. At least tell me what is to become of my country."

The Doctor winced. It was unwise to tell somebody of the immediate future. But despite himself, he could not keep future secrets close to his hearts when looking into the eyes of those who have yet to live it. People like Jane Grey came to mind from his recent memories.

When the Doctor opened his pale blue eyes, Sofia could see for only the briefest of moments just how ancient this strange man really was. "Colonel Casado's coup was the straw that broke the camel's back for the Spanish Republic. Dr. Negrín will flee to France as the last of his supporters hold out against the rebels. Casado and his men ultimately succeed, and by the end of this month, the Nationalists will claim all remaining territory."

"We were never meant to win this."

"I believe you already knew this for quite some time, my dear. I'm sorry."

They stood there for a while, neither saying a word. A myriad of thoughts formed in the Doctor's mind, eventually going back to the immediate matter at hand. He could give her a lift in the TARDIS. Preferably out of the country, away from the much larger war to come in a matter of months. He suggested this to her. Sofia turned her head slightly. She wasn't facing the Doctor. He found her manner vexing, but he understood. And with the same sad inevitability he greeted her brother's decision to stay, he could tell what she had decided. "I can take you to another country, another time altogether, where you will be safe from harm." For just a second he entertained the prospect that she would agree. "But you're deciding to stay."

"Yes," Sofia replied. "I appreciate the offer, Doctor, but... Spain is my country, my home. I want to make my brother's sacrifice matter. If I were to leave for another country, I wouldn't be any better than Azaña, Negrín, or anyone else who has fled. I need to stay here, no matter what form of government my country takes."

Solemnly nodding, the Doctor walked back to the TARDIS.

"Will things get better?"

The Doctor avoided her gaze for a long while, staring at the door of his ship. He flashed her a tight smile. "Yes. Yes, I do believe so. You are a brave human being, Sofia, and I wish you the best wherever your life leads you next. Goodbye."

The Doctor stepped back inside the blue police box, and a few moments later, the wind began to pick up beneath Sofia's feet as the lamp on top of the box flashed brightly. Sofia watched the TARDIS fade in and out of reality before vanishing completely, a slight imprint on the grass being the only trace of that impossible machine ever being there. She wondered where or when she could have gone; she wondered where the Doctor would go. Mostly she wondered and doubted if she had done the right thing. Did this validate her brother's sacrifice, or make a mockery of it?

Sofia turned away from this madness and put her thoughts toward the journey east to the Mediterranean coast. It would be a long trip, but that will give her plenty of time to think of where she will end up in this new and terrible era of her home country.

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The Monk was silent as a mouse while he hid inside Negrín's room, not making a peep as he heard stomping boots pass. "I think I've rather worn out my welcome," he conceded, smoothing down his hairy tweed suit. "Still, it *might* have worked. Not my fault I arrived too late. Onto the next time and place, then."

The smoke that had built up in the console room had mostly cleared, but the smell of burnt circuits still flooded the Monk's nostrils. Stepping up to the dematerialization lever, the Monk shut his eyes and

crossed his fingers, hoping that his much-abused TARDIS could manage another landing, somewhere safer.

Sparks immediately shot from multiple panels on the console, which only ceased when the Monk returned the switch to its former position. Scratching his scalp, the Monk walked to the far end of the console room, and checked the fault locator. Among minor malfunctions that could easily be self-repaired, there was one error that stuck out from the rest.

“The dematerialization circuit ...” Rushing over to the console, the Monk opened up a panel, and saw that the small yet essential component had been fried, no doubt heavily damaged by the Doctor’s sabotage. “He did it again,” he said, collapsing onto a lounge chair. “He’s ruined my TARDIS, *again!* Now this will take some time to fix ... but fix it I shall, Doctor, and one day I will get the better of you.”

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The Doctor looked around his faithful TARDIS, lost in thought and following the time rotor’s rise and fall, taking him to a new, or perhaps familiar, destination. He was glad to get away. The Spanish Civil War was a conflict that saw its fair share of horrors and atrocities, and his hands were tied from preventing any of the dark days to come. His only consolation was that it very nearly became a lot more destructive thanks to the Monk, and he had prevented that.

Then there was Sofia. From the brief time he knew her, she seemed a strong young woman, and she was brave indeed to remain in the country. Yet he left her there with only the clothes on her back. Despite her turning down his offer, was he right to just leave her there? The Doctor recalled the same dilemma when he first met Silver. He ultimately ended up going back for her, and they had many adventures before parting ways not too long ago.

But he was a different man then. Right now, he felt that it was right to continue traveling alone. Yet he would be deceiving himself if he could shake the ever-increasing feeling of loneliness that plagued his hearts during his periods of isolation. Perhaps he could check in on Sofia at a later time. Another addition to his bucket list.

Shaking these thoughts out of his mind, the Doctor began to set a course for Caliban, thoroughly checking the input to make sure the coordinates were correct.

“No more unexpected stops, old girl.” said the Doctor in a quiet plea to his eternal companion. “I think we are long overdue to simply stop and smell the intergalactic roses...”



1939, Spain. After nearly three years, the civil war between the Republicans and the Nationalists have finally started to come to a bitter conclusion.

With the besieged Republican controlled capital Madrid beginning to buckle under the weight of its long siege by Nationalist forces, and growing internal political strife within, chances of victory for the Popular Front, it seems, would only be achieved by a miracle. That miracle may come in the form of a mysterious visitor, who offers a quick solution to turn the tide in the Republicans favor. For Prime Minister Juan Negrín López, this offer seems too good to be true.

When the Doctor arrives in the besieged capital, hopes for that victory may very well be crushed. Will the Doctor be able to make sure history stays on its correct course? Or will the Spanish Civil War become a lot bloodier.

This story takes place between Season 36 stories:  
Questions & And The Child Shall Lead Them

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This is another story in a series of original fan authored Doctor Who fiction published by The Doctor Who Project featuring the Ninth Doctor as played by Anton Robbins.

