

INSIGHT

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Words.

Grae sat in the middle of a room, cross-legged. And all she could see were the words.

Words.

The room was dim, save for an invisible source of light that permeated the room. There was just enough light for Grae to read the words. The words in her books.

All around her stood towers of books. Towers reaching far into the sky, had there been one here. Instead, outside of the realm of dim light that filled the room, was darkness. No doors, no windows. Just a room full of books. Some were thrown about haphazardly; others were neatly placed in small piles at the base of the other towers of books.

And words. And Grae. Reading.

Words.

It was a tale that felt oddly familiar to Grae. In the book she held, the words told her a story of a king. The Wandering King. Wherever he went, he would fight valiantly against many perils- the galaxy-sized dragon Vromath; the tiny spider people of Metallis VI; the mighty god Draxius, who could punch holes in the universe with a thought, creating black holes that would suck in whole galaxies; and the thirteen-headed chimera Bramura, who devoured pure time and created anti-time it's wake. The Wandering King had defeated them all, and in the meantime he kept changing his face. Sometimes happy, sometimes sad; sometimes young, sometimes old- the Wandering King changed his face, but would never be happy with it for long so he would change it again. After living with thirteen different faces, the Wandering King defeated one last horror, which the tales dared not recite, and ascended to a place beyond. The universe would no longer have the Wandering King, but it would not matter. He had done all the good he could in the universe.

Grae's eyes narrowed slightly, and then she closed the book and threw it aside. The story made her feel sad; but she did not understand why. In fact, she did not fully understand the story. The words were familiar but the context vague; the punctuation precise but the premise obscure. Grae wanted to grasp what it was the story was telling her, but she couldn't. For a moment, Grae opened her mouth, and wanted to speak, to scream, to say anything. But nothing came. The words quietly died in her throat, and within moments she forgot what she would have said. She began to read the next story. After what could have been days, she put down the book. The words did not make sense to her. Grae threw the book aside. Inside one of these books, she would find what she was looking for. In her hearts, she knew it. She just needed to be patient. She would find the answer. It would just take time. Something a Time Lord certainly had.

Grae began to read another book.

* * * * *

The first thing Tamara saw was the blue sky above her. She was lying on her back, against moist earth. She could feel the grass tickling her lower back where her shirt had ridden up. Tamara rolled over slowly onto her stomach, and looked around. Around her, she saw high walls of bushes leading away into a hallway of green. She stood up, and got a better grasp of her surroundings. She was in a maze, it seemed. A garden maze, no less, as a warm wind blew across her face. Tamara glanced down at her hands. They ached for some reason, though they were not bruised or scarred in any way. Tamara walked up and touched one of the sides of the maze wall. It stood high, about ten feet or so. Just frustratingly out of reach for Tamara to run and jump in an attempt to grab the top. Tamara made a casual attempt to climb up using the branches from the bushes, but it was of no use. No matter how good a grip she had, she would fall to the ground. Tamara sighed in frustration and glanced around. She then decided to continue down the path in front of her.

Hours passed. Tamara was no closer to finding a way out of this place. She punched on of the walls in frustration. *If I keep following the one wall, I will eventually find my way out,* she

thought to herself. But she had been doing this for a while now, and she was no closer to finding her way out. The sky remained unchanged this whole time. Oddly enough, Tamara did not find herself to be hungry nor thirsty. Tamara stopped for a moment and stamped her feet in anger.

“Is anyone out there?” she cried out, at the top of her lungs.

She heard her own echo come back, except it said, “Is anybody out there?” Tamara stopped for a moment. *That can't be right*, she thought to herself. Or was it? Maybe she really did say, “Is anybody out there?” and she really meant to say, “Is anyone out there?” Tamara paused for a moment. Maybe someone else was lost in this maze? But the voice... it was distinctly Tamara's. She decided to try again.

“Help me, I'm lost in this maze! Is there a way out of there?” she cried out. She waited. She could hear her own echo.

“Help, I'm lost and alone! I don't know if there's a way out of here!” came the echo, as it repeated and then died out. *Now, I know I didn't say that*, thought Tamara. This was madness! Tamara gritted her teeth. *Someone else must be in this maze*, she concluded. *Or I've gone quite mad.*

More time passed. The sky remains unchanged. Tamara had not tried calling out to anyone in a while, and thought perhaps that it was best not to. After all, perhaps whoever else, if indeed there was anyone else, may not be friendly. And if she was indeed going mad, she did not want to help further the process along. If only *so-and-so* was here.

Tamara paused. *So-and-so?* No, that wasn't right. Who was *so-and-so*? Hadn't she come here with someone? Yes, she thought she did. In fact, she was sure of it. She had arrived here with someone. And now they were- missing? Were they lost in the maze with her? Perhaps. But were they the one responding to her cries earlier? Did she have a twin sister? No, it was a man. She was sure that she had arrived with a gentleman. Mr. *So-and-so*? No, that wasn't right either. Tamara grabbed the right side of her head, brushing back her dark hair. She couldn't have been going mad, was she? Why couldn't she remember his name? And just how did she get here? Tamara began to think hard, but nothing was coming to her. There was darkness, and then waking up in the maze. But surely she had had an existence, a *life*, before waking up in the maze... right? Tamara looked around quickly. The world seemed to be engulfed in vertigo for a moment. She fell to one knee and pressed her back against the side of the maze.

Breathe.

She decided to simply breathe.

Tamara placed her head between her knees and began to breathe. Tamara secretly hoped that madness would not overtake her, if it hadn't already.

* * * * *

Static. It's almost like static. My face is melting away into static, my body becoming the black spread immeasurably amidst the white. What must have it been like, a child seeing his or her first television set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it on for the first time, only to find static. Only to find my body and soul ripped apart and painted before him.

The mind wanders.

Static.

I couldn't save her.

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Grae opened a new book. *Static*. The words spilled off the page, but Grae did not mind. She put it aside and opened a new book. *Parliament Heights*. It reminded her of something else. For a moment she imagined that she was walking down a long corridor, with giant statues around her,

into a large central chamber with many other people dressed in fine robes. She looked down at herself for a moment and saw that she too was dressed in robes. The thought faded and became unimportant, as Grae continued to read and lose herself in the vastness of the words.

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Tamara had been walking for at least an hour since she last stopped. Her legs were starting to feel cramped, but she still did not feel tired. The sky remained unchanged. She decided to not call out anymore, for fear the responses would not match her own original thoughts. Perhaps she was safeguarding her sanity that way. Perhaps she was furthering it along towards madness. Either way, it did not matter here. Tamara figured that sooner or later, madness would come if she didn't find her way out of here.

Turning a corner of the maze, Tamara almost bumped into someone. Tamara jumped back in surprise and shock, readying herself for any danger. She looked at the person standing before her. It was a man; not very tall and wearing white clothing. He carried an umbrella in his one hand, and wore a rather dour expression on his face. Tamara blinked in surprised, and then fought to speak.

“How... how long have you been in here?” she mustered.

The man said nothing. He merely stood there and looked at her, somewhat sadly. Tamara looked away, and then suddenly realized that she could not remember what he looked like. She turned back to face him, and saw his face, noticing his short dark hair. Tamara looked up at the sky for a moment, and again realized that she forgot what his face looked like.

“Look, something strange is going on here. I don't know what it is. Maybe you have some ideas, maybe know a way out of here?”

The man said nothing.

“You're the first person I've seen in what seems like forever! Aren't you going to say something? Maybe we can work together and get out of here!”

The man continued to stare at her, and for a moment Tamara thought he was wearing clown makeup. Upon blinking, she found that it was not the case.

“Say something!” Tamara screamed in frustration.

The man in white then slowly reached into his jacket, and pulled out something. With a closed fist, he approached Tamara. Tamara was cautious; part of her wanted to run. But she stood firm, and then the man reached out his closed fist. He held that pose, waiting for Tamara. She looked down at this fist, and extended her hand, opening to her palm. The man placed something in her hand, and then turned and walked away. Tamara looked down at her hand. There, he had placed three playing cards. She looked up at him.

“I'm not sure what good this is going to do me! I need an exit, not a way to pass the time!” she said.

But suddenly, the man in white doubled over in pain, and Tamara thought she could hear him cry out. He turned, and Tamara was shocked to see several bullet holes in his chest, bleeding profusely. Tamara gasped and stepped back. The man in white collapsed to the floor, and upon hitting the floor he disintegrated quickly to ash. Tamara watched on in horror, as the wind blew the man's ashes away, until there was not one trace of him left. Slowly, Tamara took her eyes off of where he had lain, and looked at the cards in her hands. She spread them out in her hand, as though she were about to perform a magic trick, and found three cards.

A King.

A Priestess.

A Female Knight.

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becoming the black spread immeasurably amidst the white. What must have it been like, a child seeing his or her first television set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it on for the first time, only to find static. Only to find my body and soul ripped ap

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Tamara was shaking, and she couldn't stop. The cards almost fell out of her hands, and using her free hand, Tamara grabbed her other wrist. She breathed in slowly, trying to let the panic submerge. The man in white had seemed familiar, somehow. Was he the man she came here with? Her shaking slowly subsided. Why hadn't he spoken a word to her? *Was he mute?* Tamara shook her head. *This is maddening!* She decided that it would be best to continue walking. Despite herself, Tamara took slow, painful steps over where the man in white had crumbled into ash, and hurriedly continued on.

As Tamara walked on, she thought she heard a voice cry out again. This time, though, it was a man's voice, though quite faint and in the distance.

"Tamara!" came the voice.

Tamara looked around. She strained her ears to pick up any other sounds or voices. But none came. A man's voice... *Tamara?* she asked herself. *Who was that?* An interesting name, Tamara. Russian form of the name Jewish name *Tamar*, meaning "date palm". But *Tamara* wasn't her name, was it? She could not remember. The realization that she could not remember her name hit Tamara like a blow to the chest, and she reeled back, slamming against the side of the maze. *What's my name?* Tamara thought to herself. She looked up at the unchanging sky.

"Hello?" she cried out desperately. "Who are you? Is that my name? Is Tamara my name?"

No response.

"Answer me!"

No response.

Tamara began to fight back tears. "Where am I? What are you?" Tamara ripped at the maze wall in frustration. "What are you doing to me?"

Tamara began to slowly walk down the maze, leaning against the wall for support, tears streaming down her face. She slowly placed the cards into her side pants pocket, and proceeded along the maze. There had to be a way out.

There just had to be.

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Grae looked up for a moment. She could have sworn a name was called out. Her name? Grae? Perhaps it was. The sound of man. A noble man, she thought briefly. Yes, the voice sounded like it was from a noble man, just and true. Much like some king in a story she had read a long time ago. But her mind had little time to contemplate those unimportant things. All that mattered were the words. Grae looked into her book to understand the deeper things of the words. But somehow, it kept eluding her.

* * * * *

When Tamara came upon the fountain, it was as if she had entered into Paradise. The maze wound and turned, sometimes taking twists that defied logic. But at last, when the maze led into a large, round area, and there before her stood the fountain, Tamara felt that she had found the greatest treasure in the world.

The fountain was rather large. At the base was a large pool of water. Tamara's eyes then slide from the crystal water to the statue that was in the middle, and in fact took up a large portion

of the fountain. The statue was of a woman, kneeling down and partly submerged. The smooth, white stone of the statue was perfectly sculptured. As her eyes followed the knees upwards, she saw the woman's face was one of sorrow, and tears were sculpted down her cheeks and arms. Her hair was long, flowing down to the middle of her back. Tamara's eyes glanced down around the base of the fountain, and she saw thousands, perhaps millions, of rose petals scattered about. Tamara approached the fountain, and as she did Tamara was filled with the strange fear that it would come to life and consume her. Tamara gently stepped on the rose petals as though they were sacred, and as she reached the fountain Tamara leaned over to gaze into the water. Although she had been in this maze for hours, she was not thirsty.

Upon gazing into the water, Tamara saw her reflection. However, the reflection soon gave way to a different face. Wrinkles covered her face, betraying the smoothness of her skin. The hue of her skin softened, and her hair grayed. Tamara instinctively touched her face, but did not feel the changes presented by her reflection. She looked closer at the reflection in the water. The woman looked familiar... it was her own face but at the same time someone else's...

"Mother," Tamara heard herself say in a hushed whisper. With a drop of her own tears, the water in the fountain rippled, washing away the her mother's reflection, leaving behind Tamara's own sad face.

Tamara then felt something cold touch her nose. Her eyes narrowed to see what it was, and she found a snowflake melting quickly before her eyes. Tamara looked up to the sky, and found snow falling gently all around her, and judging from the accumulation around her it was as if it had been falling for several minutes. The sky had changed to a dull gray, as though it had always been that way. A thin blanket already covered the rose petals and the statue. As the wind began blow, Tamara began to feel it's cold touch her bones. Looking around, Tamara felt a sadness well up inside of her. Her paradise was now a lonely, desolate place, in a gray world of snow. Tamara felt like ripping her hair out in frustration and anger. She looked at the statue of the woman closely. Then she realized something.

She could climb the statue.

Tamara's heartbeat spiked at the thought. She could climb the statue and find the exit to the maze. With haste, Tamara began to climb. Hooking herself to the statue's arms, she hoisted herself up and climbed up the arms, then over the hair, to the top of the statue's head. Breathless, Tamara took an anxious look around in search of her exit from the maze.

Except the maze extended into infinity.

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Grae read on.

The Female Knight slayed the evil sorceress who had contested with the Wandering King. A war with the Giants shattered the realm, leaving the High Priestess dead. An army of shadows conquers twelve realms. Tales that Grae absorbed, dissected, deconstructed, and rebuilt. Her hearts felt pity for those in the stories, but again, she did not know why. For a moment, frustration crept into Grae's mind. Why was it so hard for her to sometimes understand? Then she remembered. That's why she was reading. To gain understanding. To understand the words.

Grae read on.

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What must have it been like, a child seeing his or her first television set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it on for the first time, only to find static. Only t

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Tamara wondered, if she would scream, would anyone hear her? Tamara looked out in astonishment. *How could this go on forever?* It defied logic. A maze did not go on forever. Perhaps she was on a planet where a maze the size of a continent had been built. *That's in silly science fiction stories,* Tamara thought to herself. This was the real world.

Or was it?

Tamara looked around, not knowing what to do. Casually, she placed her hand in her pocket, and pulled out one of the cards. Looking down at it, she saw the High Priestess card in her hand. Tamara looked at it long and hard. "What am I supposed to do with you?" she heard herself say out loud. Just then, a strong gust of wind blew across Tamara's body, and the card slipped out of her hand. Instinctively reaching out to grab it, Tamara lost her balance, and fell. As she fell to the water below, Tamara was able to grab the card in mid-air, but not before thinking *I'm going to break my neck.* Tamara screamed as she fell, head first, and for a moment she thought her screams were echoing everywhere. Tamara continued to scream until she hit the water.

The moment Tamara hit the water, Tamara was sure that she was dead. However, much to her subsequent surprise and relief, she was not. She fell into the water, and it was as if diving into a pool. Except she didn't remember the water being this deep. In fact, the fountain certainly hadn't been deep enough to hold her complete body, but it now was. Tamara found herself swimming in a sea of blue, with the card still firmly in hand. All around her was a vastness of blue. It seemed as if she in a large pool, much larger than the fountain was. She glanced upwards, and could see the statue above. However, something else grabbed her attention. Her eyes were attracted to a light below her. There was a bright light deeper into the water, and Tamara felt drawn to it. She swam, deeper and deeper into the pool of water. Her breath was running out; she could not hold it much longer. She felt a slight current working against her, but Tamara pressed on. Suddenly, nothing else mattered. She needed to reach the bottom of the pool, to touch the light, even if it meant drowning. And that was where she was at- dangerously close to drowning. Tamara began to feel darkness overcoming her. She needed to reach the light, which was growing brighter and brighter.

Almost there... almost there...

Tamara reflexively opened her mouth for air but was only met with water.

The light engulfed her.

Suddenly, she fell and slammed onto a hard surface.

Tamara breathed in hard, exhaling just as quickly. Her lungs felt tight, and her legs were cramped. Water dripped from her body onto the floor, which was now tiled. Tamara began to cough up water onto the floor, her stomach hurting with every convulsion. Looking up, she found that she was no longer in the garden maze. She was in a strange, multi-sided room. In the center, there was a strange console, full of buttons, switches, displays, and levers. In the center of the console was a glass cylinder, with wiring and circuitry in it. This cylinder was moving up and down. In the background, Tamara could hear a strange humming sound, like machinery. The walls had roundels in it, and the room was brightly lit. Tamara noticed a man standing at the console, with his back to her, working some of the controls. He was of better than average height, with slightly long dark hair and wearing a midnight-blue waistcoat. He did not seem to notice Tamara, as he made no movements nor spoke. Tamara decided to take the initiative.

"Hello?" she offered.

No response.

"Who are you? Hello, sir? Where am I?"

The man continued to work the controls, not once turning his attention towards Tamara. Annoyed, Tamara stood up and marched over to the man. She grabbed his arm to turn him around.

"Are you deaf? What's wrong with you?" she yelled, until she saw the man up close. Then Tamara took horrified steps back.

Standing there was a faceless wax figure of a man. His arms and hands were stiff, and the color of his skin just a shade off of being truly human. The wax of his skin felt clammy and cold. Tamara realized that the figure could never have been moving at all. It was just a wax figure, after all. But she had seen him move- she was sure of it. She hadn't imagine it, had she?

Frantic, Tamara moved away from the wax figure and in the process she accidentally pressed a switched and pulled a lever on the controls. She never took her eyes off of the wax figure, terrified that it would soon move. Then she heard the sound of doors opening behind her. Tamara jumped back, and as she chanced a glance over her shoulder she saw two large doors swinging open from across the console room. There was only darkness beyond. Tamara ran across the room, and for a moment she thought she could see, from the corner of her eyes, the wax figure coming after her. Terror gripped her. Tamara felt like she was in some B-grade horror movie, and that she couldn't escape. Tamara moved quickly, too terrified to turn around. She then heard something like footsteps in the room, and they were certainly not her's. They were moving towards her, from the console. *The wax figure.* Tamara was almost at the doorway. She wanted to turn around and reassure herself that wax figures didn't move. But as the footsteps drew closer, and as the hairs on her neck felt like they were going to shoot out from her body, Tamara could only think of one thing: *make it to the exit.* As she leaped through the door, Tamara could feel cold fingers brushing against her shoulder. Tamara dared not look back. And as she jumped into the darkness, Tamara found herself falling into forever...

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ild seeing his or her first television set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it on for the first time, only to find static

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Grae was about to give up reading. Clearly, she would never understand the words. Their true meaning. The etymology behind them was complex enough, regardless of the double meanings people could use them with. The wit, the sarcasm, or even the sexual innuendo- you had to know more than the language. Perhaps it was the culture she could not understand. Maybe it was the subtleties that escaped her. Maybe she should have concentrated on that. The culture. Perhaps if she found a book on cultures she would understand.

Grae had just picked up a book called *Citadel* when there was a crashing sound behind her, amongst the books. Several towers of books collapsed inwards, but Grae didn't mind. She would get to them later. Right now, she only wanted to worry about the culture of words.

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Tamara looked around. She had fallen for several minutes, and then out of nowhere she crashed into books. Terrified for a moment, Tamara looked upwards to make sure the wax figure was not falling after her. When it became apparent that it was not, she looked around. Everywhere, she saw books. Stacks of books, some leading back into the darkness from which she fell. Some of the piles were impossibly high. There was a light in the room, but Tamara could not discern from where it was originating. She went to stand up when a book fell into her lap. Looking at the title, it was called *They Call Me Tamara*. Curious, Tamara opened the pages, but they turned to ash as soon as she tried to read them. Throwing the book aside, Tamara was about to pick up another book when she noticed that she was not alone in the room. Looking over, she saw a young woman enthralled in her reading.

The girl looked familiar to Tamara. She had seen her somewhere before... a dream? A vision? Tamara glanced aside at the books and was tempted to pick one up and begin reading,

when she forcibly turned her attention back to woman. Tamara moved closer, crawling over books and taking great care not to knock one of the huge piles over.

“Hey, you there,” Tamara offered.

The woman did not acknowledge her.

“Hello? Can’t you hear me?”

The woman lifted her head, looking straight at Tamara. The woman looked at Tamara with a certain curiosity, like a scientist to a monkey, and then turned her attention back to reading. Tamara grew furious.

“What is wrong with you?” she yelled. “Can’t you understand me? Who are you? Where are we? Do you know of a way out of this place?”

The woman kept reading her book, oblivious to Tamara’s tirade.

Tamara stared at the woman for a long while. Then, slowly she slipped her hand into her pocket, and pulled out the cards that were given to her. Tamara thumbed through the cards, until she came upon the High Priestess card. She stared at the card, and in the back of her head something began to click.

It began to glow.

A small orb of light grew out of the card. The light was of a faint white-yellow, and it moved towards Tamara. She was too enchanted to move. Suddenly, the light enveloped her, like a million fireflies swarming around her, and then, just as quickly, it faded. Tamara looked over at the woman again. The woman had not taken any notice of what happened. Tamara’s eyes softened.

In a small, vulnerable whisper, Tamara said, “Grae...”

Tamara quickly moved over to Grae’s side, who was still reading, closed off in her own small world.

“Grae, listen to me,” she said quietly, “it’s me... it’s...” Her voice rose to an almost fevered pitch. “Tamara! It’s me, Tamara! Grae, listen to me! I don’t know what’s been happening. Something’s gone wrong and we need to get out of this place. We need to find the Doctor!” Tamara stopped, as if hitting a brick wall. *The Doctor*. What had happened to him? She thought she had seen him back in the TARDIS console room... or *was* it the console room? She thought back to her awakening in the maze. She couldn’t remember how she got here, or even where here was. But something was terribly amiss... and Grae was affected still.

Tamara looked around desperately. “How can I make you understand?” Tamara looked at how intently Grae was reading her book. And then an idea sprung into her head. Tamara looked around frantically. She began to push aside books and move others aside. Tamara narrowly missed having a large pile collapse onto her. Looking aside, she what she was looking for. On the floor, Tamara saw a pen. Picking it up quickly, Tamara then opened one of the books and tore out a blank page from it’s back. She then began to rapidly write on it, and when she was done, she moved over to where Grae was. She yanked the book Grae had in her hands and replaced it with the piece of paper.

“There,” Tamara said, “read this. Maybe you’ll understand this.”

Grae looked at her for a brief moment, and then turned her attention back to the piece of paper. On it, Tamara wrote about their recent vacation. About the beach. About a young man named Emory. About how self-conscious Grae was about putting on a bathing suit, when she didn’t need to be. About the Doctor. Time travel. A blue box. Grae turned her attention back to Tamara, and for a moment, there was a hint of something. Tamara noticed Grae trying to remember, but soon the moment passed, and Grae reached out for another book. Tamara grabbed the book out of Grae’s hand and threw it across the room. Then she stopped, and quickly reached into her pocket. Pulling out the Female Knight card, she placed it into Grae’s hands.

“Please, Grae... remember,” Tamara said. A glow came from the card, and again a white-yellow sphere enveloped Grae. This time, she noticed, and looked around, awestruck, as

the light collapsed all around. Slowly, Grae turned her attention back to Tamara. Her eyes were full of tears.

“Tamara?” she said weakly, and Tamara gave Grae the biggest hug she had ever given anyone before.

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first television set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it on for the fir

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“Where are we?” Grae asked, looking around at all the books.

“I don’t know. I’ve been wandering around this strange place for a long time. There isn’t much rhyme or reason to it.” Tamara then quickly recounted her awakening in the maze and the events that followed.

“I don’t know how long I’ve been here,” Grae said weakly. “All I could think about was the words. The words and the books. It was like I was searching for something but I couldn’t find it. And the search was driven by something... something deep inside of me.” Grae stood up, slowly. She stretched her legs, which ached badly. Tamara stood along with her.

“There must be a way out of here,” Tamara said.

“Well, you would know better than me. You found you’re way in here.”

“Grae, I *fell* in here. That hardly means I know my way around.”

“Maybe this is a dead-end.”

Tamara looked around. “Maybe this is Hell.” Tamara paused and glanced over at Grae. “‘Hell is other people,’ or so I once heard.”

Grae scoffed. “Hell doesn’t exist. It’s a human construct designed to keep people moral.”

Tamara looked at Grae in slight annoyance. “I was speaking symbolically.”

Grae paused. “Of course.”

“We need to find a way out of here. The Doctor could be in trouble.”

“But how? You said you just fell in from the sky, and there are no doors here.”

“True, but there must be an answer here.” Tamara paused for a moment, looking down at one of the books. She picked one up. “Maybe it’s in one of these.”

“The books?”

“Yes. You’ve been here for who knows how long, just looking at them. Maybe your subconscious mind was trying to find a way out.”

“I think you’re stretching it, Tamara.”

“Do you have a better idea?” Tamara took a deep breath. “There must be a clue hidden in here. Some sort of way out. Think about it- every step along the way, I have been lead to you through some sort of symbolic gesture or object. These books can’t be any different.”

“It’s a sound theory, I suppose,” Grae said, sighing as she looked around at the books.

“It may be our only shot.”

“Okay, let’s go for it.”

And so, together, they began to open the books and read.

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Tamara looked up from her book. Grae was sitting there, intently enveloped in the book before her. For a moment, Tamara’s heart sank. What if Grae had succumbed to the same state that she had been in previously? Tamara looked closely at Grae, and there was something different about her. Just slightly different... was it the few strands of gray hair? *Grae with gray hair*. Tamara

almost laughed out loud. No, that wasn't it, though. Perhaps the crow's feet that had developed around Grae's eyes? Hadn't they always been there, though? Grae looked tired, Tamara observed. How long had they been reading these books? Tamara looked behind her, and saw the gargantuan pile of books that they had already read through and tossed back behind them. Tamara looked down at her own hands, and saw they were a little more worn, with lines and dry skin more apparent now than before. Tamara ran her hand through her hair, and as she did some cobwebs and gray strands of hair were pulled through. Tamara stared at the hair for a long while, and then proceeded to read the books again. To find an answer.

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It was getting harder and harder to breathe, Tamara noted. She had been having trouble, recently, with reading the books. She could still discern the words, but they were blurry, and now Tamara found herself having to go over a passage two or three times to make sure she read it correctly. There could be no room for error; she knew that the answer was in one of these books.

Tamara glanced up at Grae, who was still intently reading her share of books. Grae had been able to go through them quicker than she was. Tamara didn't mind; all she cared about was finding the way out, to get to the Doctor and save him. If it wasn't too late.

Tamara opened her mouth. Dry lips cracked unexpectedly, and Tamara grimaced in pain. How long had it been since she had spoken? In fact, when was the last time she had eaten or slept? Tamara didn't care. Tamara opened her mouth again, and tried to say something to Grae. Her vocal chords strained, and all that came out was a low crackle. Grae raised her eyes to Tamara, and smiled. She nodded understandingly, and went back to reading. Tamara smiled, and then lowered her eyes back down to her book.

* * * * *

"I... I think I found something," Grae said, with great effort.

She looked up, and for the first time noticed that Tamara was laying on the floor, the book having slid out of her hand. Grae quickly moved over to Tamara, and looked her over. Tamara's hair was absolute white, and her face full of wrinkles. The skin was tight against her bones, stretching over her skull like a worn out mask.

"Tamara!" Grae said, finding her own voice was somewhat shaky.

Tamara did not move, although a low, guttural moan came from her throat.

"Tamara, don't die on me yet," Grae said, turning around and reaching out for the book behind her. She grabbed it and turned back towards Tamara. "I think I've found the way out."

Grae looked down at Tamara's frail body. *How many years have we been here?*, Grae thought to herself. She noticed that Tamara's breathing was slow, lazy. Grae looked back the book that she had been holding. *Today All Red Doves Incant Solemnly*. It had to be the way out. Grae looked back frantically at Tamara. Tamara's voice slid open, very slowly.

"Grae," came the weak voice.

"Tamara, just wait, I'm going to get you out of here.

"No," Tamara said again, just as she coughed up some blood.

"Hold on!" Grae turned back to the book in her hand. And then, she began to read aloud.

By stars' delicate light

He sets the course and gains might

In the realm of the Thirteen

He seeks from Wisdom to glean.

For a terrible moment, everything was silent. The kind of silence that made Grae want to curl up and die. She was not even sure if Tamara was still breathing. Grae closed her eyes. If she were one to pray, now would have been the time to do it.

And then it happened.

It was so simple and quick, that it almost seemed inconsequential. Looking aside, Grae saw a door open. It appeared in the blackness, across the room from where Grae and Tamara were. Grae stood there for a moment, half-expecting the door to close again, or to vanish as if it were simply a dream. But it was real. Grae could not see what lay beyond the door, but it did not matter. For the moment, it was *freedom*.

“Tamara, come on!” she cried.

Grae looked down. Tamara was lying still. Too still. Grae leaned down and placed her arms under Tamara’s picking her up slightly and dragged her towards the door. She could faintly hear Tamara objecting, muttering something about her mother. Tamara’s breathing was slowing down drastically, and a rattle began to echo from her throat.

“No, don’t give up, Tamara. Not yet…”

Grae continued to drag Tamara to the door. She felt her own bones, weakened with age, strain as she struggled to move quickly at the same time as holding Tamara. The light from the doorway almost seemed to be mocking Grae, and deep inside of her an anger soared. Tamara went limp in her arms, but Grae ignored it.

I have to reach the door.

Grae’s only thought.

I have to reach the door.

In her haste, Grae twisted her ankle and buckled to one knee. The pain shot through her foot and leg, bringing tears to her eyes. Tamara almost fell out of her arms, but Grae held onto her.

I have to reach the door.

Several piles of books fell in front of Grae, but she impatiently kicked them aside. As she dragged Tamara, a book fell open before her, and the pages that faced her bared the text:

What Are You Doing? Turn Back Now!

I have to reach the door.

Grae stepped up to the light. Without a second thought, she used her strength to toss Tamara through the door, into the light. Grae would have followed suit and jumped herself, had she not passed out and happened to collapse into the light as well.

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set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it

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Tamara opened her eyes, and was greeted with a blinding light. She could feel moist dirt beneath her, coupled with leaves and some undergrowth. A bug crawled over her arm. Slowly, raised her head. Tamara found herself on her stomach, and as her eyes adjusted she found herself amongst some trees. *A forest?* she thought to herself. She sat up, and quickly placed her hands on her face. Her face was smooth, moist from the earth but soft. She looked at her hands; they were no longer the hands of an old woman, but of a younger woman, showing her true age. Tamara quickly looked around, and saw Grae laying on some vines nearby. She quickly moved over to Grae’s side.

“Grae?” Tamara inquired.

Grae slowly got up, and upon seeing Tamara, her eyes lit up. “Tamara!” She leaned over and quickly kissed her on the lips. Upon pulling away, she noticed Tamara’s bewildered look. “I’m so glad you’re alive! And young, at that!”

Tamara quickly recovered, and offered a smile. “Yes, and I see you’re no longer stuck on reading!” Tamara glanced around. “What happened? Weren’t we old? It seemed like we were in that room forever!”

Grae looked around. “Yes, it would seem so. Whatever is happening to us is undoubtedly happening to the Doctor. We need to find him. Usually he’s the one to find us!”

Tamara glanced around at her surroundings, now that her eyes had adjusted. They were in some kind of jungle. All around, the trees stretched impossibly into the sky. Leaves that Tamara scarcely imagined could be so large, obscured much of the light above them. From what she could tell, there appeared to be two suns on this world. It was terribly hot and humid, as Tamara already felt the uncomfortable irritation of her clothing. She turned back to Grae.

“Where do we head off to?” she asked.

Grae pondered for a moment. “I’m not sure.” She looked around. “This way,” she said, in a seemingly random direction. Tamara nodded and followed.

After several hours of walking, Tamara was the first to notice the monkey following them. It was black, with white fur around its head and down its back. It must have stood about four feet, and it stood perched on one of the nearby trees. It observed Grae and Tamara with curiosity, or so it seemed to Tamara.

“Hey, it’s a monkey.”

Grae, who was up ahead, turned, and saw the monkey in the tree. She moved over to stand beside Tamara, and looked up at the monkey. “That’s strange.”

“What about this place isn’t?” Tamara said sarcastically.

“True.” Grae paused. “Oh, well. Let’s contin-” And before she could finish her word, a rock hit her on the chest. Grae cried out in surprise and mild pain.

Tamara looked up, and saw the monkey with another rock in its hand. “The monkey did it,” she said, trying to keep a straight face.

Grae looked up at the monkey, and dodged the next rock, as it just barely missed her shoulder. She looked over at Tamara, who could not help but smile. “It hurt!” Grae said, with as much dignity as possible.

Tamara looked up at the monkey, and before she could do anything it took off, jumping rapidly from tree branch to tree branch.

“I wonder what that was about,” Grae said as she rubbed her chest.

* * * * *

Days passed.

As Tamara and Grae walked on, they encountered the monkey several times. Each time, it would appear out of nowhere, and each time it would throw stones at them. Tamara once threw one back, but the throw went wide. However, the monkey did not always seem to be aiming for them. Occasionally, the shots seemed ridiculously inaccurate. Each visit would entail two or three stones thrown, and then it would disappear into the density of the jungle. Each time, Tamara and Grae would be left to ponder as to why the monkey was following them. As they traveled on, there seemed to be no end to the jungle. They saw very little signs of animal or insect life, which pleased Tamara to no end. There were no snakes or large tarantulas in the jungle. In fact, it was eerily silent as they continued their journey. The heat would not let up, however. Grae seemed to be handling it well but Tamara had stripped off her shirt and tied it around her waist. Still, she was sweating greatly, and she was, at long last, very thirsty.

On the monkey’s next visit, after the third stone was thrown, Grae noticed something.

“You know, I think this monkey is trying to tell us something,” she said.

“What, that it doesn’t like you?” Tamara responded.

“Hardly. Do you notice that it always throws the rocks in the same direction?”

“No, not really.”

“Hmm.” Grae looked at the monkey, and then turned in the direction that the monkey had thrown the rocks. “Every time this monkey had appeared, it had thrown the rocks in this direction,” Grae said, pointing due east.

“So, maybe we should go that way?” Tamara asked.

“It’s worth a shot.”

Tamara turned back to look at the monkey, but it had already vanished.

Tamara and Grae continued on in the direction that the monkey had thrown the rocks.

Two more days passed.

After those two days of walking, they saw their first break in the jungle.

“Look!” Grae cried, pointing ahead of them.

Tamara looked, and she saw what had Grae excited. The jungle appeared to end up ahead. There seemed to be a clearing, and some mountains beyond that. The quality of light was greater beyond this area, as well.

“It could be it! How far do you think?” Tamara asked.

“About two hundred yards. Come on!”

The women took off at a sprint, renewed with vigor at the prospect of what lay beyond. Their sprint turned into a full-fledged run, as they hurdled tree roots and sidestepped trees in order to reach their goal. As they ran, the clearing drew closer and closer. The mountains became more defined, as well as the earth below the mountains.

“Judging from the angle, it looks like a valley. We may be on some plateau!” Grae said, ducking to avoid a tree branch.

“I don’t care, as long as it’s out of this jungle!”

They ran for several more minutes, until they were indeed clear of the jungle. And then they beheld the sight before them.

They were on a cliff, looking out to a large valley below them. In the distance, snow-capped mountains walled the world in. Below, there was a huge city covering the floor of the valley. The building looked like a dull brown, and the homes were countless. But both Tamara and Grae’s eyes remained fixed on the item in the center of the city.

Out before them, in the center of the valley, was a huge, half-constructed statue, of the Doctor...

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“It’s unbelievable!” Tamara cried out.

It was the Doctor. Of that, there was no doubt. The statue was immense, appearing to stretch halfway to the clouds. On various sections of the statue were scaffolds, where the statue was not yet complete. He appeared to be standing solemnly, looking down onto the rest of the city. His face was a remarkable replica of the original.

“It’s amazing. It must have taken centuries to build that!” Grae said, astounded.

“Are we too late?” Tamara said, fear growing in her voice.

“No, I don’t think so.” Grae paused. “At least, I hope not.”

They looked around and found rough, chiseled steps in the rock face. Grae and Tamara made their way down the side of the cliff, onto a gentle slope that lead into the city. As they trekked towards the statue, Grae and Tamara noticed that the buildings were made of dust. Tamara reached out and almost touched one of the buildings, but feared bringing the whole thing down. The buildings seemed to be barely held together- another oddity of this strange place, Grae thought. Tamara felt the desolation of this place in her bones, and wanted to immediately leave. It was as if this place was at the end of the world, and they were the only ones left. Tamara pushed the thought and the fear out of her mind. They continued on until they found the base of the Doctor statue. They approached it slowly, and found that the statue was the only thing not made of dust in this city. Coming upon the statue’s base, they found a door with no handles.

“What do you make of that?” Grae thought.

Tamara looked at the door for a moment, and then quickly reached into her pocket. She pulled out the last card that she had, *the King*. She looked hopefully at Grae.

“It’s worth a shot,” Tamara said.

She pressed the card up against the door.

Nothing happened.

“So much for the obvious ending,” Grae thought to herself. Grae then stepped closer to the door, and began brushing at the place where Tamara had placed the card. “Hey, wait. There’s something here.”

Grae and Tamara began to brush the dust off the door, and there they found something written on it.

Dock on trig

“‘Dock on trig?’” Tamara said.

Grae stared at the words for a moment. “Hmm. I wonder if the words can be rearranged to make something useful.”

Tamara glanced back at the text, still unsure.

“Doctor King,” Grae said, in a flat voice. “Yes, that’s it!” she said, more excitedly.

“Doctor King! It’s another clue. The Doctor must be here!” Tamara said.

Then Grae let out a shriek that made Tamara jump. Tamara quickly turned towards Grae, who was laughing hysterically.

“What’s so funny?” Tamara said, the hint of annoyance quite obvious.

“The words!” Grae said, fighting back her giggles. “‘*Dock on Trig*,’ don’t you see? It’s quite funny! As you know, ‘trig’ is short for trigonometry on Earth.” Grae paused for emphasis. “The Doctor would pride himself on his mathematical skills!” Grae continued to laugh.

“Well, it’s rather amusing, but it doesn’t help us with the Doctor,” Tamara said dryly.

Grae was looking down at the ground, and remained doing so for a little while. “Maybe it does,” she said beneath her breath. She then promptly sat down, lotus-style, on the ground, and began to draw symbols in the dust with her fingers.

“What are you doing?” Tamara asked.

“I have a theory.”

“Which is?”

Grae continued to draw in the dust. Tamara recognized some of the symbols as being mathematical. “This whole place appears to work on the concept of symbolism, correct?”

“It would appear so.”

“What if the Doctor was somehow trapped here symbolically, as well?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, we don’t quite understand the nature of our environment,” Grae said, as she continued with her equations of dust. “I’m sure the Doctor doesn’t either, but he may have a better idea than we do. We don’t have all of our memories back yet, but what if he does? What if he remembers why we’re here and what this place is? It’s possible that he’s been providing us with clues all along.”

“Providing us with clues? Why doesn’t he just come out and say what he means!”

“Maybe he can’t.” Grae scribbled out the last four alphanumeric characters and drew in new ones. “Maybe he’s incapacitated. Whatever the reason, I think that this is the most vital clue we have to reach him.”

Tamara looked down at Grae as she continued to work in the dust. “You still haven’t told me what you’re doing.”

“I’m defining the Doctor.”

“What?”

“You see, the trigonometry statement got me thinking. What are we made up of? Could we simply be defined as numbers, equations, and theory? Maybe the Doctor is best defined this

way. So I'm trying." Grae paused for a moment. "I'm extrapolating the Doctor in mathematical terms."

"And then what?"

Grae ignored the last statement, as she delved deep into thought and into the equations before her.

Hours passed.

Tamara was getting restless. On the ground in front of her, Grae was furiously scribbling her equations into the dust. Top to bottom, the equations ran about six feet of tiny wording and numbers.

"Done!" Grae cried out loud. She stood and stepped back beside Tamara.

"Now what?" Tamara asked.

"I don't know," Grae said. "Maybe throw out a hope and a wish?"

"I don't think that'll help us."

"Look!"

Grae pointed madly at the ground where the equations were written. Slowly, the numbers and letters began to glow. The ground moved beneath, and slowly it began to rise. Dust moved and twisted, reshaping itself. Into legs. A body. Arms. A head. Pants and a jacket.

Finally, the dust took the full form of the Doctor.

A wind came and blew the dust away, revealing the unconscious form of the Doctor in its wake.

* * * * *

Tamara and Grae stared at the Doctor's body for a long time. They almost didn't want to believe it; they almost *couldn't* believe it. Was this really the Doctor, at last?

"Is he alive?" Tamara asked.

"Of course I'm alive," came the Doctor's voice. Slowly, he opened his eyes, and began to sit up.

"Doctor!" Tamara and Grae rushed up to him, giving him a hug. The Doctor returned the display of affection and smiled.

"Are you both alright?"

"Yes, for the most part," Tamara said. "You wouldn't believe what we've been through to get here."

"Yes, well, I would imagine so," the Doctor said, standing up. He looked up at the statue of himself. "Oh my. Hero worship was something I never cared for."

"Doctor, where were you?" Grae asked.

The Doctor stared at her for a moment. Grae thought that he was looking through her. "I was in a strange place."

Suddenly, the world around them began to shimmer. The statue, the twin suns, and the city of dust collapsed into particles of light, and then darkness overtook them. For a moment, Tamara thought it was pitch black, until she realized that it was night. And they were still outside, but this time in a forest clearing. The sudden shift from day to night left Tamara disoriented, and she looked at the Doctor and Grae. They were equally confused. Nearby, Tamara noticed, stood the TARDIS.

"What happened?" Tamara asked.

"Were we here the whole time?" Grae said, thinking aloud.

The Doctor's face grew darkly serious. "Into the TARDIS, now!" he cried out.

Without thinking, Tamara turned to run for the TARDIS when she saw figures emerging from the darkness of the forest. They were humanoid but wore sleek, black helmets. They were dressed in some sort of uniform, most likely part of some military branch. Tamara considered

making the run for the TARDIS anyway, but when the military officers raised their weapons, those hopes quietly died.

“Maintain your position!” one of the men cried out. The Doctor, Tamara, and Grae froze in their spots.

One of the officers walked up to the TARDIS crew. Judging by the rank on his shoulder, he was the commander of this group. “You should not have come here, Doctor,” he said. He turned back to his troops. “Take them away!”

* * * * *

The room was cold, but the steel made a welcome change from the room of books and city of dust, thought Tamara. They had been waiting for some hours, and Tamara was getting restless. The guards had lead them to some domed base about a mile from the TARDIS, and after entering the base they were quickly placed in this room, apparently for questioning. Several guards stood outside, and judging from their temperaments, they were more than willing to shoot a couple of escaping prisoners today. The Doctor had sat quiet for those hours, and everyone was too exhausted to speak. Tamara moved over to the Doctor, and sat down beside him.

“Doctor?” she said quietly.

“Hmm?” He appeared to have been deep in thought, and turned his head towards Tamara. “What is it?”

“Why are we here? Do you remember?”

The Doctor looked back down at the floor, and then slowly raised his eyes up towards the opposing wall. “Yes, I remember.” He paused. “I’m sorry, I should have come alone.”

“Why, Doctor?” Grae asked, moving over to the Doctor. “Why are we here?” Just then, the door opened. Two men entered, followed by four soldiers. The men, Tamara noted, were of smaller stature than the soldiers, and were not as fit or built. They carried with them small tablet-shaped computers, and keenly observed the TARDIS crew. *Scientists*, she thought to herself.

“Greetings! My name is Sumer and this is my colleague Keremar,” said one of the scientists, the shorter of the two with balding hair and growing waistline.

“I hope that you are doing well,” said the other scientist, Keremar, a man with gray hair and a thin nose, wearing glasses.

“Just lovely, thank you for asking. Your genuine concern is refreshing,” said the Doctor with a smile.

“Ah, yes,” said Sumer. “So, have you found your stay here... interesting?”

“Do you mean in this base or on this crazy world?” Tamara said with acidity.

“Ah, so the planet thoroughly entertained you?” said Keremar, with the smile of young schoolboy.

“The planet?” Grae said, confused. “Are you saying everything we experienced was because of this planet?”

“Yes, it is,” replied Sumer. “One of our many advancements.”

“So my suspicions were correct,” chimed in the Doctor. “You do work for Section 13.”

The two scientists exchanged quick glances, and then turned their attentions back to the Doctor. Tamara and Grae also looked at each other in surprise. Grae quickly turned her attention back to the Doctor.

“Yes! I think it’s coming back to me now,” she said.

“We were coming here,” Tamara said slowly, with the revelation dawning on her. “We were investigating something, some kind of...”

“Some kind of weapon,” finished the Doctor, his eyes squarely set on Sumer and Keremar. “I had heard that Section 13 may have been developing some sort of weapon on this planet. Little did I suspect that the planet itself was the weapon.”

Sumer coughed. “This planet is the latest in temporal metaphysics.”

“Temporal metaphysics?” the Doctor yelled. “You’re tampering with the nature of time and reality? What’s wrong with you people?”

“Doctor, please settle down,” Keremar said weakly, as he took a few paces back. Tamara could not contain her smile.

“I thought that temporal metaphysics was an unproven theory,” Grae said, genuinely fascinated.

“It was once, my child,” Keremar said. “But we have not only proven it, we have given it some practical applications.”

“Wait a minute,” Tamara said. “What is all this crazy talk? ‘Temporal metaphysics?’”

“My dear,” began Sumer, “when you were in that room of books, did you not grow old?”

“I felt old, but I was young again once Grae dragged me out of the room. I thought that it was all in my head, maybe some kind of illusion.”

Sumer chuckled. “No, you were, in fact, old, and you did in fact age in that room.”

“You mean we really spent over fifty years in that room?” Grae said, aghast.

“Yes,” replied Keremar.

“But it passed by quickly... it seemed like we were in a waiting room for a long time, but not fifty years!” Tamara said.

“The beauty of temporal metaphysics is that you can manipulate the properties of how time passes and how it effects people. Your perceptions were altered as such that you were aware that time passed, but some of the effects did not occur to you- such as hunger, or the need to bathe.” Keremar noted something on a data pad that he removed from his jacket.

The Doctor’s eyes grew dark. “Localized custom realities. A terrible weapon if I ever saw one.”

Sumer ignored the Doctor. “Now, we kept the Doctor aside in a different TM Field, but something went wrong. The TM Field completely went haywire.”

The Doctor smiled. “I just love causing problems for the bad guys. Your temporal metaphysics field just couldn’t handle me.”

Keremar gave the Doctor an annoyed glance, and then went back to keying some data into his data pad. “Yes, we believe that it has something to do with your complex biodata. You would be an excellent specimen to perform biodata deconstruction on.”

The Doctor stiffened up. “Didn’t anyone ever tell you that it’s rude to play with someone else’s biodata?” He straightened his shirt. “Apparently not.”

Sumer smiled. “It was interesting, all that we saw was... static. Care to enlighten us, Doctor?”

The Doctor turned his attention to Keremar. “But I was able to contact my companions, so your system is not full-proof, isn’t it?”

“There are still kinks to work out, but as Sumer said, your complex biodata allowed you to implant yourself in the TM Fields of these two ladies. Since this planet’s self-defense mechanism draws upon subconscious fears, doubts, and insecurities, it merely took aspects of your subconscious and dispersed it throughout the system.”

“Like a computer virus,” Tamara said.

“Yes, if you’d like to use an archaic system of reference,” Keremar said.

Then the door beeped, and Sumer moved over to the control panel beside the door. Pressing the comm button, he said, “Yes, what is it?”

“Sir, the commandant is here. She wishes to see the prisoners,” came a voice.

“Of course,” Sumer responded quickly. He stepped back beside Keremar, and then the door opened. In walked the commandant, followed by several guards. The Doctor’s eyes narrowed quickly. Grae’s eyes widened, and she recoiled visibly. Tamara moved closer to Grae, positioning herself in front of her. Tamara clenched her fists, and her teeth locked together.

“Bramahl,” the Doctor said angrily.

* * * * *

“Yes, Doctor,” Bramahl, smiling. She turned her attention back to Grae and Tamara. “Ah, yes, your companions. Tamara, is it? And...” Brahaml turned her attention towards Grae. Her voice became acidic. “Oh, yes, of course. Grae. How wonderful. You always seem to lead them into danger, don’t you? How do you live with yourself?”

“The Doctor doesn’t force us into anything!” Tamara cried, standing up before Bramahl.

Before Tamara could utter another word, Bramahl reached out and grabbed Tamara by the throat, slamming her against the wall in the process. Tamara gasped for air, as Bramahl kept her pinned against the wall. Around Bramahl’s hand, small bands of energy were rippling, some sparking off of Tamara’s neck. Tamara frantically clasped her hands on Bramahl’s arm and tried to push it away, to no avail. The Doctor stood up, and the guards trained their guns on him.

“Bramahl, let her go!” he screamed.

Bramahl turned to him and laughed. “Why do you get so angry, Doctor? You do this to yourself. You are always leading your companions into danger, and you expect them to never get hurt?” Bramahl let go of Tamara, who slumped down against the wall onto the floor, breathing in hard. “Need I remind you, Doctor, of what the cost of having companions is?” She paused for a moment. “Katarina, Sara, Adric... *Leela*. The Doctor turned away from Bramahl. Bramahl pressed on, obviously enjoying herself. “I am very familiar with your history, Doctor. More than you may realize

“What does that mean?” the Doctor said quickly.

Bramahl smiled, and then leaned down to the gasping Tamara. She smiled maliciously as Tamara rubbed her neck in pain. “Just remember, I could have killed you.” She snapped her fingers. “Like that. Maybe in another universe, I did. Right now, you may have just died across a million times across parallel universes, and perhaps right now you are the only Tamara left in existence.” Bramahl moved her face closer. “It’s a lonely feeling, isn’t it?”

“Stop playing games with us,” Grae said angrily.

Bramahl stood and faced Grae. “Games, huh? You think I’m here to play games? You three intruded upon this planet and disturbed our research. You three are the ones playing the games. Your little spy games with the Doctor that will not go unpunished.” A smile crept across Bramahl’s face. “What do you know about being a spy, or even a true Time Lord, young one? Why are you traveling around the cosmos with the Doctor? Aren’t you the one playing games, pretending to be some daring adventurer and do-gooder? More than likely, you’re just a little girl, playing hero worship and doesn’t have the intelligence to tackle the universe alone.”

“Enough, Bramahl!” the Doctor yelled. “Let them go, it’s me who you should punish.” He paused, and then spoke softly. “Just let them go.”

Bramahl considered the Doctor’s words for a moment, and then walked up to him, meeting him face to face. The Doctor saw how cold her eyes were, the stillness and frost composing her soul.

“Let me tell you, Doctor. I am not moved by pity. I am not moved by acts of self-sacrifice. Your desire for them to live only makes me want to see them dead even more. Someday Doctor, you’ll realize that all your goodwill and good works will have amounted to nothing.”

“I pity you, Bramahl,” the Doctor said, keeping the tone of his voice leveled. “I pity you for whatever made you so cold and hateful.”

Before the Doctor could even react, Bramahl brought her hand across his face, knocking him down onto one knee. Bramahl bent down near him. “I don’t need your pity, Doctor.” She quickly stood. “Take them away to their cells.”

“Aye, sir,” replied the soldiers. They quickly swarmed around the TARDIS crew, and upon lifting them up they lead them out of the room.

As they proceeded down the corridor, the Doctor turned to Tamara, who was still massaging her neck. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“Yeah, I’ll live,” Tamara replied.

“I’m so sorry,” the Doctor said wearily. “I should have come here on my own.”

The Doctor felt a hand touch his shoulder. Anticipating it to be one of the soldiers, he was surprised to see that it was Grae. She smiled at him.

“Doctor, we’re not just your companions. We’re your friends. We couldn’t let you do this on your own.”

The Doctor smiled and patted Grae’s hand. “Thank you, Grae. I appreciate that.”

Grae most likely would have responded, had she not fainted away at that very moment. She slumped towards one of the guards, who instinctively went to grab her, allowing his weapon to hang loose on his shoulder harness. Tamara then quickly spun around behind the guard, locking her left arm around the soldier’s neck and using her right arm to grab a hold of the weapon. Seeing one of the soldiers moving out of the corner of her eyes, Tamara turned and fired at the soldier. The energy discharge hit the soldier squarely in the chest, and he slid across the floor. Tamara quickly turned her attention to the remaining two soldiers, and she saw the Doctor standing over them. Looking down in amazement, she saw that both of them were unconscious on the floor. Tamara turned her attention back to the Doctor.

“How did you-?”

The Doctor looked at Tamara sternly. “While I appreciate your initiative to get us out of this situation, I think you may have killed that soldier.” He looked over at the soldier, laying motionless on the ground. “And I can’t condone that.” He stepped up to Tamara, and judo-chopped the soldier that she was holding by the neck. He fell to the floor, and the Doctor grabbed Grae before she fell as well. He turned his attention back to Grae, smiling.

“Good distraction, Grae! I didn’t think that that old trick could still work!”

Grae did not respond.

“Grae?” he asked again. The Doctor looked closer. Grae’s face had gone pale, and her skin was clammy. He quickly checked for her pulse, and found that it was erratic.

“Doctor, what’s wrong with Grae?” Tamara asked quickly.

“I don’t know!” he yelled. He laid her quickly onto the ground. “Come on, Grae, come on!”

Grae’s breathing slowed dramatically. The Doctor took out a small flashlight from his pocket and flashed the light into her eyes.

“Weak responses to all of my tests.” He stared down at her. “I think Grae is dying,” the Doctor said frantically. He put her arms under her and picked Grae up. He turned to Tamara. “Guards will undoubtedly be coming after us. We need to make our way back to the TARDIS. It may be Grae’s only chance.”

Tamara leaned down and grabbed one of the energy weapons from a fallen soldier. “Then we’ll need this, Doctor,” Tamara said, ignoring the Doctor’s stern look. She turned, and after equipping the weapon, led the Doctor down the corridor. Grae was dead weight in the Doctor’s arms, oblivious the world around her. The Doctor carried her quickly as Tamara led them to a strange looking doorway, looking like an elevator.

“This looks like some kind of exit,” Tamara said. Quickly pressing a button on the panel beside the doorway, the two doors slide sideways, revealing a small room with a raised platform in the center. Behind them, they could hear footsteps moving quickly down the corridor.

“Hurry, onto the platform!” The Doctor cried. Tamara jumped onto the raised platform, followed by the Doctor with Grae. For a moment, nothing happened.

“Maybe we need to press some kind of button,” Tamara said. Suddenly, a light overcame them, and Tamara had a curious sensation of becoming lighter than air. Before she could contemplate the feeling any further, it was gone, and suddenly her and the Doctor were

somewhere different. The room around them was darker, and the room led out into a corridor, which ended in a large chamber.

“What now?” Tamara said.

“We don’t have much of a choice!” the Doctor said, running ahead and down the corridor. Tamara was amazed at how quickly the Doctor moved, while holding Grae at the same time and never once seeming tired from it. Tamara quickly followed, but she saw the Doctor had stopped shortly after entering the chamber at the end of the corridor. Tamara ran up to him, and looked down at Grae. Grae was sweating profusely now, and visibly shaking. Tamara looked at the Doctor.

“Why did you stop, Doctor?” Tamara asked.

“Look there,” he said, his voice filled with both awe and disdain. Tamara turned her head, and gasped.

Around them, the room was a clear dome. Beyond the dome stood the stars, and below was the planet. *We’re on some sort of space station*, Tamara thought. But the object in front of them grabbed her attention even more. Floating outside of the station, clearly visible through the dome, was a flat, circular ship, with two huge engines underneath. The ship was an off-white color, with several strange designs inscribed onto the engines. The two engines were large cylindrical shapes, which appeared hollowed out at first, but upon closer inspection harbored ripples of blue-white energy. Resting on top of the flat surface was what Tamara could only describe as a giant cannon, perhaps the size of a city. The cannon was thick in the back and grew narrow as her gaze followed it up to towards its front. The front of the cannon was massive in size, looking as though it could tear down the stars of heaven. Tamara could only stare at it, and then finally she turned her attention back to the Doctor, who visibly shaking.

“How foolish of me!” the Doctor said. “The planet isn’t the weapon. All that talk about temporal metaphysics. That’s just the defenses of the planet.” He stepped closer to towards the visage of the cannon platform. “That... that’s the real weapon!”

“Bravo, Doctor,” came Bramahl’s voice from across the chamber. He turned, glaring at Bramahl as she walked across the room towards them.

“This is the real weapon, isn’t it?” he yelled.

“You’re always missing the bigger picture, Doctor. And you hate that, don’t you? That feeling of being powerless, of being outsmarted. It’s horrible, isn’t it?”

The Doctor gripped Grae closely. “Did you do this to Grae?” His voice grew louder. “Did you...?”

Bramahl smiled. “I didn’t do anything. But I suppose the planet can have some ill effects on those of... weaker health.”

“What are you talking about?” the Doctor said, having difficulty keeping his cool. Grae’s breathing was barely noticeable now.

“You only have yourself to blame, Doctor,” Bramahl said. She turned and began to walk away.

Tamara raised her weapon and pointed it towards Bramahl. “Wait right there!”

Bramahl stopped and turned slightly. “What, are you going to shoot me? It won’t do you any good; I’m giving you a chance to leave. But if you kill me, then I can assure you, the guards will cut you down before you ever leave this planet.”

“Not until you tell us how to help Grae!” Tamara said.

“If you take her back to your TARDIS, then the Doctor will be able to help her there.”

Tamara charged her weapon, and aimed squarely at Bramahl’s chest.

“No,” came the Doctor’s voice, low and gentle.

“But Doctor,” Tamara said, keeping her sights on Bramahl.

“You heard her. We have a chance to leave, where otherwise we may not. We need to help Grae, that’s the most important thing here.” He stepped closer to Tamara. “There will be another day for this.”

Tamara's eyes narrowed as she saw Bramahl smiling at her. Tamara paused for a moment. She then lowered her weapon.

"I could have killed you," Tamara said slowly. "Don't think next time I won't."

Bramahl laughed. "Better be on your way now."

Tamara stood her ground for a moment. The Doctor looked at her and leaned in close. "Come on, Tamara. Grae may not have much more time."

Tamara turned toward the Doctor. "Of course. Let's go."

They took hurried steps back down the corridor and into the room with the platform. The Doctor turned to Tamara.

"Here, take Grae for a moment."

Tamara reached out her arms and took Grae. The Doctor then moved over to a panel on the wall, and took out his sonic screwdriver. He removed the paneling on the wall and began to fiddle with some of the circuitry underneath. After a few moments he turned back toward Tamara.

"Step onto the platform."

"What did you do, Doctor?" Tamara asked, as she stepped onto the platform.

"This platform is basically a transmat system. Not hard to tinker with, to be honest. I just tweaked it to home in on where the TARDIS is."

Tamara bit her lower lip as the Doctor stepped onto the platform. "Are you sure it'll work?"

"No, of course not," the Doctor said, as a matter of factly, when they were overcome by light.

* * * * *

set, back in

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The TARDIS. Tamara could not have been happier to be back in the TARDIS. It was strange how she had come to consider this place being like home. In a way, she couldn't imagine ever having another home, or having one as secure as this one. She stood by the console, seeing the rotor moving up and down in a beautiful rhythm. Her thoughts drifting off about recent events when the Doctor entered the room.

"How's Grae?" Tamara asked quickly.

"She'll be okay. Once we got her into the TARDIS her vitals began to stabilize. I have her resting and under observation." The Doctor smiled and gripped Tamara's shoulder. "She'll be fine." The Doctor then turned back to the TARDIS console, and he began to work some of the controls.

"Now what?" Tamara asked.

"We go back," the Doctor said, not lifting his eyes from the console. "I've got a plan. First, we materialize above the surface of the planet." The Doctor flicked a switch that turned on the view screen.

There was no planet there. Only empty space.

"Are these the right coordinates, Doctor?"

The Doctor madly checked the readings on the console. "Yes, of course!" He paused for a moment, looking over some more readings. "These are the correct temporal and spatial coordinates." He looked up. His voice dropped to hushed whisper. "The planet's simply vanished." The Doctor looked down at the screens on the console again. "There's some residual temporal signatures, but they're too faint." He paused. "Like a TARDIS."

Tamara looked at the Doctor with a worried look. "A planet-sized TARDIS?"

“I-I don’t know.” The Doctor looked aside for a moment. “It’s possible, I suppose.”

“And that cannon... it’s gone as well.”

“Yes. Bramahl knew exactly what she was doing. She allowed us to get away, but she had to gloat at the same time. She knew I wouldn’t sacrifice Grae in order to destroy that weapon of theirs.” The Doctor slammed his fist onto the console. “Always one step ahead.”

“But at least we know now, right? We know what their weapon is,” Tamara said, hopeful.

“Yes, but what is it for? That’s the key question.” The Doctor tapped on some buttons on the console, and the TARDIS rotor began to move again. Tamara could feel the familiar hum of the TARDIS in flight.

“We’ll stop them, Doctor,” Tamara said, weaker than she’d hoped.

“Yes, we have to.” The Doctor paused. “I’d like to be alone for a while, if you don’t mind, Tamara.”

“Of course not.” Tamara turned and walked to the doorway leading to and from the console room. She turned, and saw the Doctor standing stoically over the console, his mind a million miles away. Tamara wanted to offer some words of comfort, of hope. Anything to make the Doctor feel better. She had never seen him this frustrated before, and it scared Tamara. She depended on the Doctor for so many things; whom could the Doctor depend upon? Whom could he confide in?

No answers came to mind.

Tamara went off to bed, to catch up on some sleep for the first time in what felt like years.

* * * * *

“How do you feel?”

Grae looked up to see where the voice came from. Across the room, she saw Tamara approaching. Grae shifted in her bed and smiled vaguely at Tamara. “Better, I suppose.”

“That’s good to hear,” Tamara said, sitting beside Grae on the bed as she spoke.

“How’s- how’s the Doctor?” Grae asked, concern seeping into her voice.

Tamara’s eyes fell towards the floor. “Not good, I think.” She paused, and then looked back at Grae. “He’s taking this hard. He took the TARDIS back to get the weapon from the planet and it was gone.”

“The weapon was already gone?” Grae asked, her voice full of surprise.

“Worse. The whole planet was gone.”

Grae sighed in frustration. “It’s almost too terrifying to imagine what kind of weapons Section 13 has.”

“It’s even more scary to imagine Section 13 actually using them,” Tamara added grimly.

Grae turned her head away. Tamara could see her eyes watering up. “And we can’t do anything now, Tamara?”

“Nope.”

Grae was silent for a long time. “I’m scared.”

Tamara looked back at the door, imagining the Doctor somewhere down those corridors, alone, contemplating what to do next. Perhaps feeling guilt, frustration, anger, or any number of other emotions. Though the TARDIS had a unique ability to keep the air temperature comfortable for her, Tamara felt cold. A shiver went up and down her spine. Tamara took Grae’s hand into her own.

“I’m scared, too, Grae.” Tamara’s voice dropped to a low tone. “I’m scared too.”

* * * * *

Static. It's almost like static. My face is melting away into static, my body becoming the black spread immeasurably amidst the white. What must have it been like, a child seeing his or her first television set, back in 20th century Earth, and he turned it on for the first time, only to find static. Only to find my body and soul ripped apart and painted before him.

The mind wanders.

Static.

I couldn't save her.

I'm sorry I failed you, Leela.

The Doctor awoke in his bed. He wiped his forehead with his hand, removing his sweat. Turning his head, something caught his eye in the darkness. For a moment, he could have sworn he saw a figure in the shadows across the room. The Doctor stood quickly, startled but alert. He took a long look, his hands trembling slightly. A woman, with long, dark hair. She stood there, unmoving, quiet and sad. He focused his eyes, and for a moment he almost reached out towards her. *It's okay, he thought. I won't let it happen again. Never again.*

But it was only an echo. And it soon faded.