

Gunpowder

Kyle Bastian and Julio Angel Ortiz

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*“Then, when the Universe has returned to the primordial chaos from which it was born
Thirteen shall descend over Talchia and the skies shall burn in their name.”*

-The Collapse of the Heavens, author unknown

The TARDIS door swung shut, leaving Tamara alone to face the Doctor. Solemnly, he set the machine in motion.

“So,” he said calmly, crossing his hands in front of him. “More death.”

She smiled thinly. “War. Hell. I'm sure you've read the poetry.”

“Yes. I just didn't think it'd be at the hands of one of my companions.”

“Ah.” The smile died. The central column of the console continued its slow rise and fall.

“Is that all I am to you?”

He shook his head. “No. You're actually the closest thing I've got to a best friend.”

“So?”

“So watching you shoot someone in cold blood isn't the easiest of things.”

“You know,” she said, “it wasn't the easiest of things from my perspective either. Or do you think I've switched off completely?”

“No -”

Her lips twitched into a wry grin. “It's not like this was the first time.”

He shook his head sadly. “I know.”

“Then why is it a problem? You've killed before. You brought me onboard knowing what I've done, knowing what I was, knowing what kind of life I've lead. Besides, someone needed to step up and do something.”

A gentle knock tapped against the door. The Doctor looked over his shoulder and watched as Grae walked silently into the console room, each footstep masked by the low hum of the instruments. He turned back to Tamara.

“I appreciate that, but surely there was another way.”

“I had to think on my toes, Doctor. Learn to live with it; I know I can.”

“Maybe I thought I could change you.” Each word was hard, underlined.

“Change me? What am I? An animal that needs training?”

“No,” he said, his arms out wide. “A human being. A tired, wonderful woman who needs showing that violence isn't always the answer.”

“Then what? You say that quite often, Doctor. You're always the first to throw about your morals. To criticize those of us who try to make a difference. Those of us who aren't you.”

“I've never professed to be better-”

“No, maybe not. But you're doing a damn good job of implying it.”

“I don't mean to-”

“That's not it. You never mean to!” She flung her arms out wide, her voice rising, the words rushing out. “Otherwise you wouldn't be who you are. You wouldn't be the Doctor. Rich and moral; always right. Impotent.”

Grae took a step back, her jaw shivering silently. Tears were bubbling behind her eyes. “Please-”

The Doctor shut his eyes. “If we become killers, we lose everything. We become no better than Bramahl.”

“What does that even mean?”

“An empty victory is nothing more than a defeat.”

“What does that mean? Tell me what you're trying to say! Make some sense!”

He stared at her. His eyes were empty, stripped. "I have to believe I can make a difference without resorting to this."

"To this? To me, you mean." She folded her arms across her chest. "Well, you aren't the only one who's had to live in this world. I know what it's like. You might've seen worlds crumble; empires fall. But I've seen things too, lived through things you'll never see. People like Lon Maral don't stop after a quick talking to. They go on with their job. They go on wrecking lives. And it's knowing that people like you exist that lets them."

"You don't understand."

"No, Doctor. You don't. You want the monopoly on being good. But when push comes to shove, what matters more? Helping other people, or preserving your precious dignity? Goodbye, Doctor."

Tamara pulled a sleek communicator out of her pocket. Activating it, she spoke slowly. "I'm ready."

"No Tamara," the Doctor pleaded, "after all we've been through. Don't leave like this."

She cast a look at Grae.

Her emerald eyes were full of tears.

"Tamara, please." Grae sniffed.

"I have to do this, babe." She pulled the young woman into an embrace, then kissed her softly on the forehead. "Besides, everything is taken care of."

Then she vanished, and Grae collapsed to the floor, her body convulsing with grief.

INTERLUDE ONE

The Doctor sat looking over the chessboard. It had come this far. Everything was nearly in order.

A too-close amber star glowed ferociously in the rust colored sky above.

A bead of perspiration rolled from the Doctor's wrist onto the dusty ground below.

A modest looking stone arch stood solemnly, its interior black and star-studded.

The Gateway. That was their goal. This was Talchia.

He slid a knight into position.

"Don't think for a minute that they won't expect you to try something like that," the Magus mocked. He may have adopted the visage of a kind old man for purposes of communicating with the Doctor, but his eyes were cold and black like the gateway itself.

"Listen," the Doctor said as he looked up from the game, "if you're not going to say something helpful, don't say anything at all."

"Doctor," he chided, "you're still as hasty as you've ever been. Did you learn nothing from your previous visit? You know what they say about haste, don't you?"

"Yes, that it makes waste."

"Indeed." The Magus rose and crossed to the arch, leaning heavily on a staff as he walked. "Be sure you don't waste your pieces, they're in limited supply."

"How will I know when things are ready?"

The Magus lifted his staff to eye level and spoke softly. "Show us."

The Gateway came to life and began to swirl with color. Slowly, an image formed.

The Magus laughed and gestured towards the picture that was forming, "Look Doctor, your Rook is nearing position."

ONE

Test tubes littered the laboratory. Beads of sweat formed upon a freckled brow. A bob of reddish hair swished in an arc with each movement of her head, interrupted only by the earpieces

of the clear goggles and the rubber band of the facemask she wore. Perched on her forehead sat a pair of thin-rimmed, oval shaped, rose-tinted glasses.

A Bunsen burner filled with a cyan solution bubbled and steamed noisily. Slowly, a chalky white substance was lowered into the Bunsen burner from a clear Plexiglas spoon, the cup of which turned translucent upon the licking of the steam.

The solution turned green.

“Damnation,” she said sadly as she turned the heat down, removed her facemask and goggles and slid the glasses back down to her nose. “Not again.” Her voice was slightly sandy but youthful, even cheerful, despite her disappointment. It was a voice to which her friends enjoyed listening, filled with sweetness, honesty and an infectious *joix de vivre*.

But her friends were gone.

She was alone.

She tapped a pad on the control panel to the left of her workstation.

“Yes, Lieutenant Asterus,” a male voice replied.

“Please tell Captain Poole I need to speak with her,” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“*Ma’am* my arse,” she mumbled under her breath. A smile formed on her lips when she realized how much she sounded like a friend of hers.

But that friend wasn’t there to share the joke.

The laboratory door swished open. She rose to greet her superior.

“Hello Grae.” The accent was distinctly American and the voice was very masculine, which was out of place considering that Poole’s first name was Kathryn. “How was the last batch of tests?”

“Failures, unfortunately,” Grae responded, “but I keep discovering impurities in the samples. I think if we can get some in pure form, the experiments will prove more successful.”

“Pure Gunpowder?” Poole nearly choked. “I had a hard enough time getting you this street-grade stuff to experiment on.”

“Well,” Grae began as she tapped a sequence into her keypad, “as you can see, the mixture of trace levels of arsenic, vraxoin, and good, old-fashioned heroin seem to be enough to keep me from working directly on the toxins in the Mirandan Milkweed pollen itself.”

“No progress at all, then?”

“I wouldn’t say that.” Grae smirked. “I did successfully manage to create an anti-heroin.”

“Well, that’s something. We’ll forward that formula out to Alliance headquarters for mass production.” Poole pulled a stool over and sat next to her young science officer. “That’ll get Welles off my ass for a little while anyway.”

“Still not so hot about you taking on a mysterious young stranger as science officer, is he?” Grae rose and took off her lab coat. Beneath the coat was the antithesis of what a science officer would be expected to wear: denim Capri’s and a black sleeveless baby-T. Crossing to an anachronistic oak coat rack, she hung up her lab coat and grabbed her favorite gray overcoat.

“Welles is an anal-retentive stickler for protocol and procedure.”

“That’s true, but you don’t become President of the Terran Colony Alliance by shirking responsibility.”

“All the same, he’ll never approve your request.” Poole rose and joined Grae at the door.

“Lunch?”

“Certainly. Welles won’t have to approve my request.”

Poole put a finger to her lips as several officers walked past them. Once they entered a nearby lift, they continued their conversation.

“Somehow, I thought you were going to say that.” Poole punched a button and the lift door closed. “However, I feel a ‘but’ coming.”

“How long would it take for us to reach Uri 5?”

“Uri 5?” Poole shouted. “What the hell do you want to go there for? That colony was abandoned after it got in the way of the Daleks a century ago.”

“What’s there now?”

“On Uri 5?” Poole shrugged. “Nothing really, except a mass graveyard. In fact the whole of Miranda was proposed as a memorial by the TCA, but Welles quashed the idea.”

“So, is it was just left as is?”

“Unfortunately, Welles didn’t even bother to have troops do anything other than bury the ones they couldn’t immediately identify, and return the others to Earth.”

“That’s all well and good,” Grae said happily, ignoring the gravity of Poole’s last statement. “But, I’d still really like to go. After all, Mirandan Milkweed comes from Miranda, doesn’t it?”

Her jaw dropped. “You Time Lords are all the same. Does human life mean anything to you? I still swear that whole damned Dikartis incident could have been prevented! If it weren’t for the Doctor-”

“If it weren’t for the Doctor, we both would have died on Dikartis with its population.” Grae stepped in front of her superior officer and put her hands on her shoulders. “Kathryn, I’m sorry. I sometimes get a bit ahead of myself. It’s just that we Time Lords don’t feel the need to dwell on what’s already past. Just think of all the future lives we can save once we create the anti-Gunpowder! As it stands, it’s the most addictive substance in the known universe, and that’s if you’re one of the unlucky ones who survives the first dose! It’s so dangerous that in its unrefined form, the pollen of the Mirandan Milkweed plant could kill a Glahnik.”

“A what?” Poole shrugged. “Oh never mind, you’re right, as usual. So... Uri 5, eh?”

TWO

“I know that you want to give me some,” she said slowly, her breath falling lightly onto his neck.

Marcus looked her up and down, and couldn’t help but find himself impressed with her. She had on a tight, scarlet dress, cut above the knees and with just enough cleavage showing that it made him curious. Her small, diamond earrings glistened as the club lights moved across her face, and for a moment Marcus was caught off guard by her smile. It seemed... tricky, somehow. But sincere. Marcus couldn’t make up his mind.

He slid his fingers down her arm, her silky brown skin offering a warm greeting to his touch. “You’re quite beautiful. What’s your name?”

She smiled. “Tamara.”

“That’s a beautiful name, Tamara. I don’t know a lot of girls who say it the way you do.”

Tamara looked aside, into the crowd of club dancers, hip hoppers and ravers. “I’m not like a lot of other girls you’ve met. I’ve been around.”

An odd look screeched across Marcus’ face.

“I mean, I’ve been around the *world*,” Tamara quickly corrected, and inwardly cursed herself. Then, trying to recover, she leaned in slightly towards Marcus. “I’ve been to places that you’ve only dreamed of.” Then, after a beat, “And I can take you there.”

Bleech, she thought to herself. *Does this crap really work?*

Marcus smiled at Tamara. “You really want some of the G, real bad, don’t you?”

Tamara slowly nodded her head, grinning.

“Marcus has got you covered, girl. Don’t worry about it.” He used his index finger to quickly rub the tip of his nose. “But, uh, what do I get from you? The G ain’t for free, you know what I’m saying?”

“What do you want?” Tamara said evenly.

Marcus looked her up and down, and moved his arm around her waist, pulling Tamara in tightly. “I’ve got a little bit of a party going on after we leave the club. Some of my other

bitches'll be showing up, as well as some of my boys. I think that if you come, we can hook you up with some G."

Tamara tried not to let her annoyance become evident. "That would be cool. When do we leave for the party?"

Marcus smiled. "Right now."

Seeing Marcus extend his elbow and Tamara grabbed hold. She saw Marcus raise his free arm towards a small clique of men.

"Yo, we're leaving for the house. Let's roll."

Marcus' clique of friends nodded knowingly, and moved towards him. Tamara forced herself to smile at them, and looked back at Marcus, who turned his attention back to her.

"Those are my boys. They're cool, though, so don't worry about a thing, girl." Marcus began to exit the club with his friends, and Tamara kept up. She chanced a glance back, and saw a young Hispanic woman moving through the crowd towards her. The Hispanic woman nodded towards Tamara, and Tamara reciprocated. Saying a small inward prayer, Tamara left the club with her new friends.

* * * * *

"I'm not like a lot of other girls you've met. I've been around."

Agent Rebecca Maria Lopez couldn't help but wince visibly as she heard those words through her earpiece. She was up above the crowd, on the mezzanine, with a perfect vantage point of Tamara and their suspected drug dealer, Marcus. She was trying hard not to be obviously looking at them, but she was hoping that the sheer amount of people at the Egypt Nightclub would provide more than enough cover. Rebecca took another sip of her rum and coke, and continued to lean onto the mezzanine railing, listening intently to the conversation.

"I mean, I've been around the world," she heard through the earpiece. *Nice save,* Rebecca thought to herself, as she continued to listen to the conversation, waiting for the keyword or words to be said.

And then it came.

"You really want some of the G, real bad, don't you?" she heard Marcus say.

Bingo.

It was unmistakable. Marcus was the drug dealer that they were looking for. Rebecca took another quick sip from her drink, her heart picking up speed, thinking that perhaps the trail that they'd been following for the past several months would finally lead somewhere. Lead to whoever had been supplying this drug nicknamed G.

Gunpowder.

Rebecca rubbed her eyes, a little tired, although it was relatively early in the evening. She had been getting little sleep in the past couple of months, since taking on this case. All the reports that she had read, the bodies that she had seen that were a result of Gunpowder, played over and over in her head. The statistics still boggled her. Thirty-five percent chance of death when first using the drug. Why the hell would anyone want to take that kind of chance?

Nevertheless, it didn't stop Gunpowder from becoming the new wonder drug across the country's club and rave scene. Soon, Ecstasy became a thing of the past, something for kids to cut their teeth on until they were ready for the real stuff- Gunpowder.

That's why she was here with Tamara tonight, trying to get to the heart of the distribution.

Rebecca finished off her rum and coke, and threw the cup into a nearby trash dispenser. Her eyes swam across the crowd below, observing the multitude of young people. All races, all types, all sizes. Rebecca wondered how many were on G right now. How many would be taking it for the first time?

How many would die tonight as a result of G?

“*When do we leave for the party?*” she heard through her earpiece. Rebecca shot a glance around towards Marcus and Tamara as he motioned to someone. Looking over, Rebecca saw a small group of men move towards Marcus.

Uh-oh.

Rebecca turned quickly and was about to dash towards the stairway when she bumped into someone. Looking up annoyingly, she saw a male, probably in his mid-twenties, smile at her apologetically. He had broad shoulders and short, cropped blond hair. She couldn't help but look at his exposed arms and admire his well-toned biceps.

“I'm sorry, I didn't see you coming,” he said, in a gentle, deep voice.

Rebecca smiled lightly at him, trying hard not to get lost in his dark blue eyes. “Don't worry about it,” she said, and quickly ducked around him. Rushing down the stairs, Rebecca sighed in annoyance. She finally met someone in a club that she actually would be interested in talking to and she just happens to be working undercover.

Damn this job, she thought to herself.

Veering around the corner of the stairway, she quickly located Tamara in the crowd, arm-in-arm with Marcus, heading for the exit. Tamara turned back towards her. Rebecca nodded, silently comforting her. Tamara nodded in response, and out the door they went. Rebecca remained in close pursuit.

Noticing Rebecca leaving the club, a young woman with dark brown hair nonchalantly put her drink down, and slowly followed her out of the club, all the time keeping her distance.

THREE

“Captain on the Bridge,” Kendal announced as he rose. The others on the bridge followed suit.

Kathryn rolled her eyes as she entered with Grae following closely behind. “Sit, you know I hate it when you do that.”

Her crew obeyed.

Kendal turned to his superior and stated, “I know, that's why I keep doing it.”

“What would I do without you constantly busting my balls, Commander Kendal?”

“Certainly not run as efficient a ship, Captain.”

“Damn straight.” Poole took her seat and was distracted by a giggling from the fore section of the bridge. “Christof, Parker?”

“Ma'am?” Two petite young women jumped to their feet.

“I may be more laid back than your average Captain, but the *Cheyenne II* doesn't fly itself. I know you two were roommates at the Academy, but please stay on task and reset our course for the coordinates Lieutenant Asterus is entering into the system.”

“Yes Captain.” Christof and Parker returned to their stations while Grae sat at hers and fed the spatial coordinates for Uranus' fifth moon, Miranda, into the navigational system.

“What about the severe meteor bombardment of Mercury?” Commander Kendal reminded his superior officer. “You know, the one that was seventy times heavier than normal... the one we're supposed to be checking out?”

“We've had a change of plan,” Grae announced, much to the consternation of the crew.

“Quiet down people,” Kendal ordered, then turned back to Poole and whispered, “We can't just abandon our mission.”

“Look, I've already contacted Frenoy,” Poole whispered back. “The *Telluride* is coming back from its mission and needs to swing past Mercury anyway. Besides, he still owes me one from when I won him out of slavery on Tuskal. But why he was so stupid to lose his freedom over a game of 'Go Fish' is over my head.”

Even Grae couldn't help but chuckle at that one.

Poole rose. “And what have we learned from this, kiddies?”

Everyone on deck responded in unison: "Never gamble with a Tusko."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because they always win, even when they're drunk."

"Right!" Poole plopped back into her seat. "I'll turn you guys into a respectable crew yet. Parker, are the new coordinates locked?"

"They are," Parker shouted.

"Then set our course for Miranda, full sp--"

"Uh, Captain?" Kendal interrupted. "Miranda? Uri 5, 'The Lost Colony'? Why?"

"That's what I'd like to know too." A deep male voice sounded from the back of the bridge. TCA President Ralvac Welles and several armed security troopers entered from the lift. "Disobeying a direct order is a crime Captain Poole; disobeying more than one is grounds for a court-martial."

Poole leapt to her feet and everyone else on deck followed suit - except Grae, who remained intrigued by the data streaming across her monitor.

"Captain," Grae said, oblivious, "I've managed to retrieve a communication from President Welles stating that he plans to come on board to--" Suddenly, she realized there something was wrong. She swung around in her chair and made eye contact with the President. "Oh, hullo!"

"It is customary to rise when a superior officer enters the room," Welles sneered. "You must be the new recruit."

"That's me," Grae answered cheerily and turned back to her work.

"Blasted impudence. That's the trouble with the youth of today." Welles stalked over to Grae's station. "Captain Poole pulled quite a few strings to get you on board. Your record is a textbook example of a fake. Until I'm satisfied you're legitimate, I want you off this ship, effective immediately. Poole?"

"Sir."

"You're temporarily relieved of your command. Come with me, please."

"Yes, Sir." Poole moved to the lift followed by Grae.

"Commander Kendal, the *Cheyenne II* is yours until I decide Captain Poole is worthy of being reinstated. I trust you'll carry out the Mercury investigation without any further delays."

"Sir." Kendal rose, saluted and moved to Poole's chair.

Welles and his escort followed the women into the lift, and the door swished closed.

The bridge crew meanwhile remained silent, uncertain as to what they had just witnessed.

"Right," Commander Kendal stated. "You heard the man. Christof, reset our course to Mercury."

FOUR

"Just relax, girl. You'll be getting your G soon enough."

Marcus slammed back another shot, as around the room his other friends lounged and drank. Tamara was sitting next to Marcus, uncomfortably shifting in her seat.

Marcus looked over at her. "You okay? Girl, you're fidgety!"

Tamara tried to smile. "Ah, it must be the leather. It's a little cold on my legs."

Marcus smiled. "Well, we can heat it up."

Tamara quickly moved for her drink and took a sip. At least the vodka tasted good. "What do you have in mind?"

Marcus smiled and turned back towards one of his friends, who was busy kissing a woman sitting on his lap. "Yo, Andre. Could you turn on the Brian McKnight?"

Andre smiled. "Ah, that's the jam! Good thinking, Marcus." He leaned over and flicked the CD player on. Marvin Gaye's voice immediately filled the room, and it seemed to stir the various couples into a carnal mood.

Except for Tamara. Unfortunately for her, Marcus was feeling frisky.

“Come here, baby,” he said, and leaned in towards her.

Tamara’s first instinct was to move back and away, but she fought it. *I’m undercover, remember that, Tamara darling*, she told herself. Instead, she closed her eyes and allowed Marcus to kiss her. Much to her surprise, he was not a bad kisser, and Tamara decided to let herself enjoy the moment, while it lasted. His hand gravitated down to her leg, touching her exposed knee. Tamara wanted to grit her teeth in annoyance, but kept her cool.

She chanced to open her eyes, and found that his were closed as well. She looked over at some of the others, and quickly regretted it. She looked back at Marcus quickly, but he detected some change in her demeanor. Marcus pulled away slightly.

“What is it?” he asked softly, and then turned back to look at the activities of his friends. “Oh them? Don’t worry about it. They’re just getting their freak on.” He paused and leaned in to her neck, gently planting kisses on her. “Just like we are.”

“I’m just not used to being in the same room as others who are, well, doing it in front of others!”

Marcus smiled. “Just chill, okay? It’s not a big deal.”

“I want the G. When am I getting it?” Tamara responded quickly.

“When I get mine,” Marcus said, returning to kissing Tamara’s neck and sliding ever down towards her chest.

Ugh, if only I weren’t undercover, Tamara thought to herself. *And if only you weren’t a drug dealer*. As if it wasn’t a depressing enough thought, she began to wonder when was the last time she had been this close- or closer- to someone. *Traveling with the Doctor doesn’t really lend itself to romance, does it?* she asked herself. *Well, not for me anyway.*

Tamara pulled Marcus’ head up. “Look, I’m not a whore. Certainly not some crack-junkie whore off of the street looking to score by whatever means possible. You want this booty? Well, I’m not going to lie to you, I think that you’re fine. Really, really fine. But I want to make sure that I get my G before you get yours, just in case you had any plans of not giving me what I really want.”

Marcus looked at her with a mock hurt. “You think I’d screw you out of your G?”

“I think that I don’t know you well enough to trust you.”

Marcus smiled. What was that look on his face? Respect? Tamara couldn’t read him. Not deeply, at least.

“Fine,” he said at last. “You want your G? You got it.”

Marcus stood up, and walked over to the kitchen, out of Tamara’s sight. She looked back over behind her couch, where the rest of Marcus’ friends were, but deciding that it was best not to. She glanced back over at the kitchen, where Marcus was coming back out with a small bag in his hand. He plopped down on the couch next to her.

“Here you go, girl,” he said, handing her the bag. “I hope that you enjoy it.” His eyes narrowed as he looked over her body. “Though not as much as I’m going to enjoy you.”

Tamara looked at Marcus in the eye, holding his attention. When she spoke, it was in a low tone.

“Kimota.”

“What?” Marcus said, but before he could say anything else, the door to his house was rammed down with a thunderous clap.

“DEA: everyone freeze!” came a loud, male cry.

Marcus’ clique and their women jumped up startled. Some of the women instantly placed their arms up. One of the men ran into the kitchen, and apparently tried to run out the back door. Tamara heard the door crashing in from the kitchen and some agents tackling him.

Tamara quickly rushed over to the incoming agents, in particular to a beautiful Hispanic woman with a slender frame and rich, light-brown skin. The Hispanic woman was not dressed up as a Drug Enforcement Agency agent, but rather as if she were going to a club. Marcus thought for a moment that she looked familiar.

“Are you okay?” Rebecca asked.

“Yeah, yeah, fine,” Tamara said, armed crossed. She looked over as the DEA agents swarmed around Marcus’ room and began to handcuff him and his clique.

“Christ, it looks like a scene from *Caligula* in here,” Rebecca said, looking around in disgust.

“You’re an undercover cop? You stupid bitch! You set me up!” Marcus was screaming as he was lead out of the house.

“It’s a shame, he was really cute,” Tamara said.

“I know, tell me about it,” Rebecca agreed. “Boy, could I tell you some stories.”

Tamara chuckled, and Rebecca led her outside, where lights from the vehicles were filling up the area. It was almost like daytime.

“You took some risks, there, Tamara,” Rebecca said.

“I certainly wasn’t going to sleep with him,” Tamara responded.

“But it took some balls to tell him you weren’t his whore. The situation could have gotten ugly really fast.”

“Nah, he’s not the violent type. At least, not before he found out that I was working undercover.”

They stopped over by Rebecca’s car. Tamara was staring at her feet, and then looked up at the house. Her adrenaline was still going, and she was shaking, as if she had severe butterflies in her stomach.

“So what now?” Tamara asked.

“Well,” Rebecca began, until she was interrupted.

At first, Rebecca thought that someone was attacking Tamara. An object, moving like a blur, almost tackled Tamara against the car. Focusing on Tamara, she saw that the object was a woman, with long, dark brown hair. At first Rebecca thought that perhaps it was one of the lady-friends of Marcus’ clique, somehow escaping and now strangling Tamara. However, upon closer inspection, this woman was hugging Tamara.

“I’m so happy to see you, Tamara!” the brown-haired girl said. “It’s been too long!”

Tamara was in a state of shock. She didn’t recognize who this woman was, and was about to push her away when Tamara looked down and noticed the woman’s arm.

The brown-haired girl was wearing a wristcomm.

FIVE

“You could have left me my wristcomm!” Grae shouted as the cell door slammed shut in her face. “Damnation!”

“Relax, Grae.” Poole motioned to a chair opposite her. The chair, like the entire room, was stark white and smelled of PVC. “What’s so special about it anyway?”

“It’s the top of the line in Time Lord technology, that’s what.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, do you really think I was running my tests on your computer system?”

From anyone else that would be an insult, Poole thought to herself. From Grae, she knew that it was just the typical twinge of Gallifreyan ego. She knew Grae was really better than that, but even the Doctor had his share of egotistical moments. She thought back to the Doctor with his short messy brown hair, oversized coat and checkered trousers and his companions Jamie and Victoria. That was where she first met Grae as well, all red hair and pep. Little did she realize that two years later, the young Time Lord would show up on her ship with note from the Doctor, like a student visiting the headmaster with a late slip from their father.

“I suppose you’re right.” Kathryn stood and moved to the window. She always enjoyed the view on the moon from Terra One, but this was her first time visiting the space station as a

prisoner. Strangely, the view from the cell was a particularly spectacular one. "I just hate being cooped up like this."

Grae didn't show much interest in the view, and Poole was sure that she had seen better during her many travels. The young Time Lord, however, did show an interest in the light fixture that hung in the middle of the room.

"I know how you feel, but after traveling in a TARDIS even the *Cheyenne II* feels cramped." Grae moved to the table, and hopped onto it. She continued to examine the light fixture as she spoke. "This place is positively coffin-esque."

Suddenly, the light sparked and an arc of electricity leapt from the device and onto Grae's nose.

"Ow!" she shouted as she removed her glasses and rubbed her nose furiously. "That hurt!"

"What's so special about Miranda, by the way?"

"Miranda, you mean Maryland. I've always wanted to go to Maryland," Grae said loudly as she jumped off the table and moved close to her friend. "They're monitoring us."

"Oh yeah, of course," Poole responded loudly. "Maryland. Nice place; lots of crabs." Then she turned back to Grae and whispered into her ear, "Right, Miranda: why?"

"Yum yum, I love crabs," Grae answered loudly, then whispered, "Let's just say the Doctor left me backup supplies on Miranda in case I ran out."

"I know that the Doctor said Gunpowder would eventually aid in the downfall of the human race, if it isn't destroyed. But how do we get out of our cell and out to Mir..."

Poole turned towards the bug, "...Maryland for some crabs?"

Grae smiled and walked to the window; Poole followed.

"If only I had my wristcomm," she whispered. "That could have gotten us out of here. Of course, there's always..."

"What?"

"My friend Tamara taught me this one, here's what you have to do..."

* * * * *

Corporal Scott Peters of the Terran Colony Alliance Security Force hated his job. But it was better than not having one. Day in and day out, he watched over the security systems of the Terra One detention facilities and notified his superior if there was any suspicious behavior from the prisoners.

That was it.

Most days passed without incident. Every so often one of the prisoners would think he was better than all attempted escapees that came before him. He would call Sergeant Boroffski, and he'd run down there and taser them into submission.

He was quite surprised when he was woken from his nap by a soft female voice coming from one of the cells. She was talking about going to Maryland, so he paid no heed and drifted back to sleep.

Then, entering his dream, he heard the same voice.

"I saw you when they brought me in here Corporal Peters..."

He snapped awake.

"What was that?" he asked aloud. Then he blushed when he realized he was alone.

Just a dream after all.

"If you heard me, Colonel Peters," the voice spoke again, "I want to see you again."

"What; who?" he mumbled to himself. "Where?"

"Cell seventy-one."

Quickly, Peters scanned over his monitors until he found the one that was displaying cell seventy-one and came face to face with the source of the voice. It was that young redhead that

Welles himself had brought in. He remembered her well – all green eyes and curves. He sized her up on the way in and had dreamt about her during an earlier nap. He should be ashamed of himself...

“Well, Colonel Peters?” The young woman leaned forward ever so slightly and exposed a hint of skin.

Suddenly another voice broke through the communications system. “Peters, please report to level fourteen for a systems check. Peters... Where in hell is Peters?”

* * * * *

Colonel Peters slid the cell door open to reveal Grae sitting on the edge of the table, her legs dangling over the side. Her coat was in a heap in the corner. She leaned back onto her hands, causing her shirt to ride up enough to expose her navel.

“Uh, hi,” he stammered.

“Hi,” Grae responded seductively, removing her glasses. “Glad you decided to come.”

She sat up and looked into his eyes and he was transfixed. Nothing existed in Peters’ world except the most amazing pair of eyes he had ever seen. They were more than green; they were emeralds. But it wasn’t just the color, it was the depth. It was like they were penetrating his very being.

Then the eyes were gone and Peters snapped out of his hypnosis.

And he was alone, and locked in the cell.

INTERLUDE TWO

“Well done!” The Doctor cheered. The Gateway shivered away its image as the Doctor maneuvered a pawn to protect his Rook. He glanced at the old man sitting across from him. “You know, Tamara would love this; very Bergman-esque.”

“Who, pray, is Bergman?” the Magus asked, clearly uninterested.

“Twentieth century Tellurian filmmaker,” the Doctor began. “His film ‘The Seventh-’”

“Doctor,” the Magus interrupted, “if you’re trying to bore me, you’re succeeding admirably. You’re enemies, however, will not be distracted so easily. They will come to Talchia and whether the events that lead them here are in your favor or not, have little bearing on what will happen.”

“And what will happen?”

“Ah, an intelligent question at last.” The Magus rose and hobbled to the arch, leaning heavily on his walking stick. “When the Universe has returned to the primordial chaos from which it was born, thirteen shall descend over Talchia...”

“...and the skies shall burn in their name,” the Doctor concluded, irritated. “Yes, yes, I’ve read the book. It’s what lead me to you in the first place.”

The old man pulled himself up to his full height and raised his staff to the sky. “You’ve read it, but you’ve not understood it! You are so very foolish, Doctor. You know so much, yet the simplest things escape your grasp. You’re content to play games, manipulating your chess pieces, as your former self would have done. He never learned; why should you be any different? You’re still just as willing to sacrifice your friends to help the so-called greater good, but you’re blinder than ever!”

SIX

After Marcus had been loaded into the back of a police cruiser, Tamara accompanied Lopez back to her car, trailed by the mysterious stranger.

“So what happens next, then?” the young woman asked, tugging on Tamara’s sleeve like a child.

Lopez stopped in her tracks. “And why should I tell you? This is the private business of the United States Government.”

“It’s okay,” Tamara chimed in, “we can trust her.” Then she turned to the girl and added, “We can, can’t we?”

“Of course.”

“How can you be sure she wasn’t one of the people getting it on Caligula-style with one of Marcus’ boys?” Lopez asked, still skeptical.

“Oh, please.” The young woman responded with a laugh. “I didn’t travel across the galaxy in order to *‘get it on Caligula-style.’*”

“Across the galaxy, eh?” Lopez asked. Turning to Tamara, she asked, “You should have told me we were expecting that friend of yours.”

“But she isn’t...” Tamara looked the new arrival over. Dark brown hair tied back into a ponytail, wide blue eyes and high cheekbones with a fair, if a bit pale, complexion. She stood about five foot six inches tall and was therefore able to look Tamara in the eyes. A blue silk tank top and black slacks framed an attractive, slender figure. She was a striking young woman, one whom Tamara was certain she’d remember having met before. Admittedly, there was a slight air of familiarity about her, as if Tamara had once seen her picture long ago, but that was it.

“Who am I not supposed to be?” she asked.

“Oh, I was expecting a friend or two to be showing up eventually,” Tamara responded.

“You mean the Doctor?”

Tamara tensed.

Lopez sensed her partner’s discomfort. “She knows about the Doctor?”

“That’s right,” the stranger announced. “The Doctor sent me.”

“Really?” Tamara asked, not trusting.

“Yes, he and Grae are still indisposed so he asked me to stop by and see if I could be of assistance.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“He knew you wouldn’t. That’s why he gave me these.” The young woman reached into her pocket and pulled out the Doctor’s favorite pair of sunglasses.

Tamara relaxed at last. “Well you already know I’m Tamara, this is DEA Agent Rebecca Lopez...”

“Hi,” Rebecca said as she shook the stranger’s hand.

“Hullo. You can call me Alice.”

SEVEN

“This is really an official form of transport?” Grae asked as she and Kathryn huddled in the corner of a dank transport vessel, wearing hooded cloaks.

“Public transport isn’t very glamorous, is it?” Kathryn laughed. “Besides, this is the Outer Sol Colony charter. Miranda notwithstanding, you know the state of our colonies there.”

“Mmm.”

Poole looked out the window. Earth was already far behind them and they were nearing Mars.

“That hypnotism thing you do; very impressive, by the way.”

“Thanks. I’ve been able to do it for some time, but lately I’ve been working to strengthen it. Eventually it became so easy for me, I accidentally made the Doctor fall asleep by looking at him and yawning. That’s why he gave me these glasses. The rose lenses help to keep me from doing that.” Grae smiled, then held up the burnt out remains of her wristcomm. “At least I got this back, eh?”

“Unfortunately an Alliance scientist tried to take it apart. Built in self-destruct I’m guessing.”

“Yep, however, these things are programmed to respond to their owners even in this state. I’m going to need to concentrate if we’re going to use it to jump ship on Miranda.”

Grae closed her eyes while Kathryn shifted nervously in her seat.

A moment later, the wristcomm sounded a faint chime.

“There,” Grae whispered. “There’ll be enough of a charge for us to jump ship by the time we get there.”

“That’s great,” Poole asked, “but how do we get off Miranda when we’re finished our business there?”

Grae looked up at her companion and smiled sympathetically.

INTERLUDE THREE

“Lon Maral” the Doctor announced as he slid his knight into position.

“Lon Maral?” the Magus spat out the name like a rotten piece of meat. “Are you certain?”

“Of course I’m certain.”

“Doctor.” The Magus resumed his seat on the opposite end of the table. “You’re finally making the game interesting.”

The Magus pointed his staff at the Gateway...

EIGHT

“Lon Maral.” Lopez read the name off the report.

“So that’s Marcus’ supplier?” Tamara asked. “Do you know him?”

“I do, actually.” Lopez tossed a file to Tamara. “The DCPD nabbed him a month ago, apparently under the influence of G. In fact, he’s been rambling incoherently since we picked him up. When the results came back from the lab, he appeared to be clean. He must be some kind of paranoid schizophrenic.”

“Really?” Alice asked.

“Yeah,” Lopez continued. “When I asked him about his personal drug use, he said something about being on the run for thirteen days from where he worked or something like that. Totally delirious.”

Both Tamara and Alice tensed at the use of the word *thirteen*.

“Was that his exact quote?” Tamara asked as she leapt to her feet.

“Well, something to that effect.”

“I need to know exactly what he said!”

“Keep your shirt on, girl.” Lopez flipped through the file. “Second to last page.”

Alice read the quote out loud: “ ‘They’ll never find me, after all the days I worked for them... thirteen. Damn the Thirteen.’ ”

Tamara rushed to the door, grabbing her coat. “Where’s Maral being held?”

“Downstairs actually.” Lopez crossed to her partner.

“Shit! All this time? All the time I’ve been working with you?”

“What’s the problem? He’s just a schizophrenic, isn’t he?”

“We need to see him immediately.” Alice crossed to the door to Tamara’s side.

“Fine.” Lopez opened her office door and lead the team to the elevator. “I don’t understand. I mean, sure, now that he’s fingered as a supplier, he’ll be moved to a Federal facility. But what’s the big deal about the number thirteen?”

The elevator arrived and the women boarded. Lopez hit the button for the basement.

“Before I started working for you, the Doctor, Grae and myself were tracking a group called Section Thirteen,” Tamara explained.

“They sound like a terrorist group.” Lopez dialed her cell phone. “Hello, yes, this is Agent Lopez. I have a group that’s coming to see Maral. Please move him to an interrogation room. Thank you.”

“A good analogy, Agent Lopez,” Alice stated. “Except they deal with the very laws of time and space themselves.”

“What?”

“They mess with things on a grand scale, Beck.” Tamara shook her head. “I just hope you’re wrong.”

“Why?” Lopez asked. “If I’d been tracking them, I certainly would be happy about finding one of them.”

“You don’t know what they’re capable of, Agent Lopez.” Alice shuddered as she spoke. “Their power is unlimited and they delight in raising all forms of holy hell at the expense of everyone and everything around them.”

“But why?”

“That’s what we haven’t been able to find out.” Tamara looked heavenward. “Hopefully the Doctor will find some information soon.”

Tamara was out the door before the elevator had opened all the way. Lopez flashed her badge at the guard and the door to the cellblock was opened.

“You’re here for Maral, right?” he asked. “Did you pin something on him that’ll get him out of here? He’s nothing but a problem for me and my men.”

“Damn straight,” Lopez answered. “Call Rockwell, tell her that we’ll need her down here to authorize a move to State.”

“Yeah. Maral will be in room thirteen.”

“What?” Alice asked.

“Yeah,” the guard responded. “Since all he talks about is that damn number, we thought he’d feel at home in that room.”

“Call Rockwell,” Lopez repeated, clearly not amused by the guard’s attempt at humor.

“Yes ma’am.” The guard scurried away.

“Idiot,” she spat under her breath.

Tamara reached the door to room thirteen first and pushed the door open for the others.

Lon Maral sat waiting for them, handcuffed and grinning charmingly.

“Ah, the ever delightful Ms. Lopez has brought some friends to say hello.”

Then he saw Tamara.

“You!” Maral leapt to his feet and three officers were on him instantly, securing him to the chair. “How did you find me?”

“Tamara?” Lopez asked as she dismissed the officers. “What is he talking about?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him before.”

“In the future!” Maral shouted. “You’re one of them!”

“One of who?” Tamara asked.

“One of the Thirteen, Section Thirteen!”

“Are you one of them too?” Alice asked.

As Maral settled down, the guards released their grip. “I was, but I took the opportunity to leave when I had the chance,” Maral explained calmly. “Twenty-first century human beings are so bloody predictable. Having bored themselves with all their terrestrial narcotics, I was able to supply something a little better. Supply and demand, that’s what it’s all about. The peoples of Earth are so soulless and aimless they’ll look for pleasure in something that has a thirty per cent death rate. They get off on it, and in turn, it makes their brain leak out their ears. I couldn’t get sales this good in the fifty-third century, even across the entire Terran Colony Alliance.”

“Yeah, I’ve read the reports,” Lopez muttered. “Shit, I wrote the reports.”

“How did you get to Washington DC in 2004?” Alice asked.

“You two are acting like you believe him.” Lopez grabbed Tamara by the shoulders. “Fifty-third century my ass.”

Tamara ignored her friend’s skepticism and kept her focus on the prisoner. “Answer her!”

“The disadvantage of the Daleks initiative against Miranda is that it killed all of my customers. The plus side is that they like to travel via time corridor. I found one, and used it to my advantage. Can you blame me?”

“You heartless son of a bitch,” Tamara muttered.

“Can you blame me?” Maral leaned forward. “It was that or be EX-TER-MIN-A-TED!”

Only Alice picked up on the oddity of Maral’s story: “Why would a Dalek during the Second Dalek War want a time corridor open to early twenty-first century earth?” she mumbled to herself.

“What does the Section want with the Doctor?” Tamara decided to bring the interrogation up a notch.

“The Doctor?” Maral laughed. “You know the Doctor! My dear, the Doctor is doomed. She already knows where the Doctor is and is launching her attack. And you, you idiot child, are in no position to help!”

“I’ve had enough of your games!” Tamara shouted as she pulled a staser from a secret holster in her jacket and pumped the prisoner full of energy bolts.

Maral slumped onto the table, dead.

“Bramahl!” Tamara shouted. “I’m ready for you! Show yourself, you piece of shit!”

“No!” Alice shouted. “Tamara, it’s not supposed to be like this! I can’t stay here and watch. I thought I could make a difference, but I’m wrong. How stupid of me.”

She pulled Tamara into a tight embrace, then ran from the room.

“Tamara what have you done?” Lopez asked in disbelief. “I’ve been trying to track down the Gunpowder supplier for two years, two long years. I finally get positive confirmation, and you kill him! How could you?”

“Beck.” Tamara reached out to her friend. “I’m sorry, but-”

Her voice trailed off as she heard the familiar sound of a TARDIS materializing.

Tamara rushed to the front door of the Police Box that appeared in the corner of the room. But instead of the Doctor, someone else burst out of the doors.

“You called?” Bramahl laughed as she blasted both Lopez and Tamara with a staser.

By the time the guard on duty rushed to Lopez’s aid, the TARDIS was gone.

And so was Tamara.

FINAL INTERLUDE

The Doctor moved his Rook then rose, dusting down his starry waistcoat. The image in the Gateway blurred, and then faded. A slight warm breeze had kicked up, sending sand blowing over his shoes.

“I have to go,” he stated calmly, wiping a small tear from his eye.

“Sacrificing your Queen,” the Magus said. “Very impressive. At last, a move with some backbone behind it.”

“She’s well aware of the risks involved.”

“Yes, but are *you*?” The Magus let out a dry, slow laugh.

“I am.”

“Are you?”

“I’ve been thinking too hard about this, haven’t I?”

“You always do, Doctor, you always do.” The Magus moved slowly around the chessboard to the Doctor’s side. “This is a gateway, Doctor. And what do people do at a gateway?”

The Time Lord shook his head in shame. “They pass through it.”

“Exactly.”

“What lies beyond the Gateway, Magus?” The Doctor walked to the arch and peered into the blackness.

“It’s another universe. It’s where the Thirteen come from. It’s where they ultimately want to return.”

“Why cause all this trouble in our universe, then? Their incessant playing with my life and the lives of my friends, is for what purpose?”

“Remember Giminae, Doctor. That was just a test.”

“A test?” The Doctor tugged at his beard, trying to make ends meet. “It was a test for what they want to do to Talchia so they can go back through the Gateway!”

“You see the truth at last. It appears you may have enough courage after all.”

The Doctor ran to the TARDIS, frantically fishing the key from his pocket.

The Magus watched his opponent furtively. “Why leave now, when the game is so nearing completion?”

The Doctor unlocked the TARDIS door. As he was stepping inside, the Magus heard his reply:

“Because I have a score to settle.”

The TARDIS dematerialized leaving the Magus alone once again on Talchia. The breeze began to blow more strongly, and the Magus raised his staff to the heavens, commanding it stop.

It only got stronger.

Suddenly, a bright light shone down upon the old man, singeing at his flesh. He tried to convert back to his true form, but was unable to do so.

As his body was consumed in flames, he caught a glimpse of the person responsible.

“You!”

NINE

The moon Miranda was a desolate wasteland. The colonists of the TCA Uri 5 colony constructed a huge bio-dome in which to live. The landing bay area was normally guarded by mechanical sentries, however, when the Daleks arrived, they were easily overpowered and reprogrammed to serve new masters, against the colony.

Legend has it that the colonists were able to hold their own against the first wave of Dalek aggressors. However, before TCA forces could arrive, the Daleks unleashed a virus and destroyed the entire colony. Sterilized down to the last microbe.

A century later Miranda was officially deemed safe enough to have the quarantine lifted, but that did little to alter the fact that nobody really cared to visit it.

Dust stirred on the ground and from the jagged upper edge of a half decimated Dalek casing as two women materialized in a blue light.

“God damn do I hate transmatting.” Poole exclaimed as she released her grip of Grae’s arm, much to the younger woman’s delight.

“Yes, I could tell. I think my arm should be bruised for a month.”

Suddenly, Grae’s wristcomm exploded in a puff of smoke, causing the startled Time Lord to drop it.

“You were right about it only having enough juice for one trip.”

“Yes,” Grae added as she watched her trusty device disintegrate before her eyes. “It’s gotten me out of a lot of scrapes in the past...”

“Right.” Poole walked to a window. Uranus hung low on the horizon. Even from their distance, the rings could be seen circling the tilted gaseous giant. “What are we looking for?”

“The Doctor said that I’d know it when I see it.”

“What a helpful guy. I mean, could he be anymore difficult?” Poole turned to share a laugh with Grae, but discovered she was alone. “Grae?”

“I’m in the canteen,” her companion shouted from a few rooms away, “and I think I found it.”

Once Poole reached the canteen, the sight that greeted her was so surreal it startled her.

There were three burnt out Dalek shells in a row, each with a rose stuck down each gun barrel. Sticking up from each creature’s dome was a large yellow smiley face.

“I give the Doctor high marks on originality,” Grae chuckled, “but definitely low ones on subtlety.”

“What do we do?”

“Why, pop them open of course.” Grae reached behind the nearest Dalek, and the seal popped open with a hiss.

Poole followed suit.

“Wow,” she exclaimed when she saw what lay inside.

“One hundred and fifty kilos each of pure Mirandan Milkweed pollen per Dalek,” Grae affirmed. “With a thirty-five per cent death rate per standard club dosage, that’s at least four hundred deaths right here.”

“Damn.” Poole mopped the sweat from her brow.

“How do we get this back to the *Cheyenne II*?”

The women jumped as a male voice answered back. “That’ll be with my help.”

Poole swung around on her feet and came face to face with –

“Commander Kendal?” both women shouted in unison.

“Now, you didn’t really think I’d leave you stranded on Uri 5, did you?”

“But, how did you know we’d be here?” Poole asked, curious.

“I heard you escaped and figured you’d try to make it here.” Kendal turned to Grae. “Do you have what you came for?”

“Yes, it’s inside the three smiling Daleks.”

Kendal switched on his communicator. “*Cheyenne II*, this is Kendal. I found them. Repeat: I found them.”

TEN

“So, are we going to talk all day, or are you going to kill me already?” Tamara said, right before Bramahl gave her another electroshock.

Tamara grimaced in pain, finding to her surprise that it didn’t hurt as much as she expected. *Must be my lucky day*, she thought casually.

Bramahl gave Tamara a quick smirk. “I have to admit, of all of the Doctor’s companions, you’ve given me the most...” Bramahl struggled for the right words. “*Pleasure*, in torturing.”

“This isn’t what I usually do on my first date, but that outfit of yours just drives me crazy.”

Another current surged through Tamara’s body, more painful then before.

“Do you think you’re funny?” Bramahl said slowly, crossing around Tamara and standing behind her. “Do you think that an attitude will get you out of this?”

“I hadn’t thought about it. Would it still be a possibility?” Tamara asked, breathing slowly.

Bramahl paused a moment to consider. “No, not really. I see that you’ve been keeping the Doctor’s company for too long. His... obnoxiousness... is starting to wear off on you.”

“Well,” Tamara began, turning her head in Bramahl’s direction, “I think that’s something we both can agree would be bad.”

“Oh yeah?” Bramahl said, her eyebrows raising as she came back around again, facing Tamara. “Why do you say that?”

Tamara’s eyes slid to the floor in thought. “Oh, nothing.”

“Ah, come on. Don’t hold me in suspense.”

Tamara’s eyes turned back up towards Bramahl, her mouth twisting into a smirk. “You know how he can be.”

“And that would be...?”

“He loves to keep us in the dark. You think that you know what’s going on, and all of a sudden he pulls a trick out of his sleeve. And he doesn’t even have the common courtesy to tell you.”

Bramahl nodded slowly, with a small smile on her face. She turned and moved to a console, inputting several keys. “You hate surprises as much as I do.”

“For God’s sake, I’m an ex-agent of the British Secret Service! I can handle myself. I can be very useful to him in ways he doesn’t realize.”

“You feel underused.”

Tamara rolled her eyes. “What are you getting at? What’s all this?”

To Tamara’s surprise, Bramahl’s face contorted in confusion. “What’s all what?”

“All this,” Tamara repeated, her head moving back and forth quickly, scanning the room. “All this psychological bullshit. You’re playing with me; trying to get under my skin.”

Bramahl smiled. “Is what you think this is?”

Tamara hesitated. “I think there’s more to it.”

Bramahl nodded slowly. “Yes, there is. There always is.” She turned back towards the console, and her hand reached out for a lever.

Tamara sighed. “Yet more shock treatment?”

Bramahl bit her lower lip. Tamara wasn’t sure if it was due to annoyance or pleasure, since she was too busy screaming from the pain coursing through her body.

ELEVEN

The TARDIS materialized in Grae’s lab, and much to her shock, the Doctor wasn’t happy to see her. She rushed to him and embraced him anyway.

“Doctor, what’s wrong?” she asked.

“Grae,” he snapped. “Whatever made you summon the TARDIS when you did?”

“I did exactly what you told me to do.” Grae pulled out of the embrace, confused. “Once I had enough Gunpowder to complete my experiments, I was to summon the TARDIS. We’d collect Tamara then take the *Cheyenne II* to Talchia.”

He stormed out of the lab. Grae followed.

The Doctor paused, then turned to face his young companion. “Tamara’s in the gravest danger.”

“What happened?”

“Bramahl’s got her.”

“No...” Grae’s voice trailed off, unwilling to comprehend the implications of the Doctor’s remark.

“Well this certainly ups the ante.” he said as he and Grae stepped into the lift. “Doesn’t it?”

* * * * *

On the bridge of the *Cheyenne II*, Poole had been reinstated to her former position and was going over her new mission briefing that had arrived via Transmat from TCA headquarters.

The lift swished open and the Doctor marched in, followed by Grae.

Poole noted the forlorn look in her science officer's eyes, but was much more concerned with the stranger whom she was accompanying.

"Captain Kathryn Poole!" the Doctor announced as he shook hands furiously with the confused woman. "How lovely to see you again. I need your ship."

Poole quickly stole a glance at Grae who mouthed the word: *Doctor*.

"Doctor. My you've changed." Poole looked him over, clearly approving the difference between this Doctor and his second incarnation. "And definitely for the better." Then his words sank in. "You need my *what*?"

"Ship, my dear," the Doctor explained. "I need your ship." Catching sight of Poole's first officer, the Doctor shook his hand as well. "Kendal, my good man, delightful to see you too."

"Hi there, Doctor." Kendal returned the welcome.

"Doctor, not even a Time Lord of your reputation and impressive good looks can just waltz in here and expect-

"Kathryn," the Doctor interrupted. "I'm sorry. I was greatly looking forward to seeing you again and having a wonderful time catching up on what's been happening in your life since we last met, but I don't have time. A friend is in great danger. And I need your ship and your crew to help save this reality from destruction. So, I need an answer immediately."

"Well, I suppose-" she began.

"Excellent," he interrupted again, pecking her softly on the cheek. "Set a course for the Talchia system."

"Talchia," Kendal asked. "Isn't that in the outer cluster?"

"Yes." The Doctor nodded. "So?"

"So," Poole remarked, "it'll take us two days to get there at light speed. We don't have that kind of fuel."

"Erm," Grae said quietly as she stepped forward, "actually, you do if you add this to it." She extended her hand; in it was a small packet of Gunpowder.

"Gunpowder?" Poole slumped back into her chair. "Are you going to tell me that the most powerful, dangerous, deadly narcotic known to man is also a powerful fuel additive that allows people to break the light barrier?"

"No it isn't," Grae said proudly. "Unless you refine it properly. Then it becomes a very powerful fuel additive that allows people to break the space barrier."

"Sub-space travel?" the Doctor asked, clearly amazed.

"Yes, Doctor." Grae flashed her friend a toothy grin.

"Impressive."

"I try. It's quite amazing what people pump into their bodies in pursuit of pleasure, isn't it?"

Poole rose and crossed back to the smiling pair of Time Lords. "Well, if you two are finished stroking each other's egos, one of you really should explain to us how to use the stuff. I hope you're realizing that due to the situation I'm ignoring the fact that I've been lied to, Grae. That you've misused TCA resources and wasted my time and energy."

"What?" Grae responded, half-listening. "Oh! Is this about the anti-Gunpowder? I made that weeks ago." She reached into her pocket and tossed Poole a glass vile filled with a blue cloudy liquid. "I kept the chemical components limited to the three-dimensional variety so your scientists can duplicate it easier."

"Never doubt a Time Lord." Poole said to herself. Then louder she added, "You hear that crew: Never doubt a Time Lord. They may come across as infuriating, but their hearts are in the right places."

TWELVE

From his position, face up in the dirt, the Magus watched the sun rise over Talchia. Its rusty warmth crept slowly over his toes and up his legs.

It felt good.

It felt good, because he knew this was the last time he would see it.

He tried to move, but his body didn't respond to his mind's will.

He tried to change back into his true form, but he could not; he was stuck in the form of an old human man, and the weaknesses of that shape had become his downfall.

He looked back up at the sun.

It had gone.

Silently, an object had materialized in front of it, obscuring the sun completely from view.

It was as big as a planet, and the Magus knew instinctively what it was.

"Thirteen shall descend over Talchia," he whispered to himself, "and the skies shall burn in their name."

* * * * *

As the *Cheyenne II* materialized in Talchia's orbit, Captain Poole confirmed the readout from Lieutenant Christof before reading to the Doctor.

"We've picked up a reading on the weapon you described and should be seeing it in approximately ten minutes."

"Damn it!" The Doctor yelled. "That's too much time."

Grae blushed. She had never heard the Doctor use that phrase before.

"That's the best I can guarantee without running us smack into the thing. I'm not exactly proficient at sub-space maneuvers."

"We're receiving a communication!" a young officer shouted.

"Blow it up to the main screen," Kendal commanded.

An image of Bramahl formed before their eyes. She was standing in front of the Gateway, and Tamara was tied, spread eagle across its opening.

Grae turned away from the image, burying her head in the Doctor's chest.

"Too late again, Doctor," Bramahl said with a sadistic smile. "Another companion, mine!"

"TARDIS!" At once, the Doctor and Grae were in the lift, returning to Grae's lab and their ship.

Poole and her crew watched as the TARDIS materialized on Talchia...

* * * * *

The Doctor and Grae quickly stepped from the TARDIS.

The Doctor locked the door and turned towards Grae. In mid-turn, he felt a hand grip his forearm hard, and instinctively he tensed, his heightened fight-or-flight response kicking in. To his surprise and relief, it was Grae who gripping him. Her mouth was slack, open, an expression of fear and shock tattooed onto her face. Slowly, the Doctor turned his head towards where she was looking.

Before Bramahl and the restrained Tamara, lay the lifeless body of the Magus.

The Doctor's mouth opened, curling into a scream of frustration and horror. Time seemed to slow down, his mind racing back quickly to another time... another old friend murdered...

Static.

Nothing emerged from his mouth. The sound, the pain, and the sheer emotion of the moment died in his throat. He simply stared at the body of the Magus. His eyes were still open, looking accusingly at the Doctor.

The Doctor's eyes, narrowing and burning, migrated over to Bramahl. "You," he began, but nothing else came.

Bramahl smiled. "Is that it, Doctor? Is that all you have to say to me?"

Grae shook her head from side to side, eyes not wavering from the Magus' corpse. When she spoke, her voice was choked with tears. "Was this necessary? Was this really necessary?"

Bramahl nodded. "How is it that you two think that in this game we play, no one ever gets hurt? No one dies? How many people have you seen killed, Doctor? How many events of historical importance have you simply allowed to pass, standing back in the shadows and allowing time to take its course?" She raised her weapon towards the Doctor. "This is history, Doctor. And you're powerless to act against it."

The Doctor's eyes were fierce and penetrating, meeting Bramahl's gaze evenly. His mouth was locked, teeth clenched in a silent rage.

And then a smirk crept across his face. For a moment, Bramahl could have sworn the Doctor's eyes changed color.

"I beg to differ, Bramahl," he said simply.

Before Bramahl could react, she could hear the familiar sound of a TARDIS materializing. Except it was more than one, or two.

It was the sound of dozens.

Bramahl's eyes darted about, looking for signs of Time Lords. All around her, she saw nothing.

Her eyes were trained back onto the Doctor. "You're a fool. That was a very clever trick, but you'll need more than that to save yourself."

"Will I do?" came a voice, and as Bramahl turned to her right, she saw Alice, then Alice's fist, and then the dirt.

Grae attempted to absorb everything as it happened so fast.

Alice came in full force, plowing her fist into Bramahl's jaw as she turned. Bramahl fell into the dirt, sliding away from the Gateway. Alice looked down at the Magus, and then quickly at the Doctor. Grae noticed movement all around her, and suddenly, as if melting from the surroundings, about a dozen people, dressed in similar black and charcoal-colored jumpsuits, emerged.

"Doctor," Grae began, but he shushed her.

Alice moved quickly towards Tamara, and began to undo her bonds. The new arrivals quickly surrounded Bramahl, who was slowly getting up, wiping blood from her mouth.

"You've been a fool, Bramahl," the Doctor said loudly, slowly moving over towards her. "I knew you just couldn't resist one of my companions putting herself in a vulnerable a position, just as Tamara did by killing a Section agent and getting imprisoned. You're getting very sloppy, Bramahl. Very sloppy."

Bramahl smiled, glancing at the people around her. "Are these new friends of yours?"

"We're the cavalry," Alice called out, sitting the now-freed Tamara by the Gateway. "And- what's that old Earth expression? 'We gettin' medieval on your-.'"

"That's quite enough, uh, Alice," the Doctor said. Alice looked at the Doctor oddly, and then turned her attention back to Bramahl, as did the Doctor. "The game's over, Bramahl."

"Hardly, Doctor," Bramahl said. And then she began to laugh madly.

* * * * *

Far above the planet, within sensor range of the *Cheyenne II*, space seemed to shimmer, invert, and glow.

"What the hell is going on out there?" Poole asked aloud, and then turned towards an engineering officer. "I want to know, now! All power to weapons and shields!"

“Sir!” cried out a young officer. Poole turned, and couldn’t help but gasp at what she saw. The shimmering slowed and morphed into a large, off-white object. It was a ship, flat and circular, with two huge engines underneath. Several strange designs were inscribed onto the engines, and they appeared to be glowing. The two engines were large cylindrical shapes, rippling with blue-white energy. Resting on top of the flat surface was a city-sized cannon.

“What in God’s name is that thing?” Poole said, her voice trembling.”

“Death, ma’am,” an ensign offered bravely, his voice dark as night.

Suddenly, the cannon shifted position, aiming down at the surface of the planet.

* * * * *

“What have you done?” the Doctor screamed, stepping towards Bramahl.

“Our secret weapon, the one you stumbled upon a few months back. I’ve brought it here... and I’m going to destroy us all with it.”

“You’re willing to do that?” Grae asked, looking up at the uncertain sky.

“Remember the game,” Bramahl said. “The Section can never lose. You should have learned that by now, Doctor.”

Alice stepped up to Bramahl. “Remember the game, my ass.” She turned to one of the dozen surrounding Bramahl, a dark-skinned man with close-cropped hair. “Unleash the TC.”

The dark-skinned man nodded, and quickly moved his hand into a pocket on his jumpsuit, removing a small device, which Grae couldn’t help but notice resembled a Wristcomm, but sleeker.

“Initiate TARDIS Cruiser Remote Protocol 1209. Password: Shazzam.”

Alice smiled at Bramahl. “Checkmate.”

* * * * *

Before Poole knew what was happening, it was all over.

The giant cannon began to glow a faint off-white/blue color. Suddenly, power went out in the bridge.

“Main systems fluctuating!” cried out a lieutenant.

“Report!” cried out Poole.

“That... that thing... is generating a massive power field,” the lieutenant responded. “It’s interfering with our generators.”

“Can we take it out?”

“And risk damaging it enough to have it crash on the surface of the planet?” Kendal asked. “It would cause a planetary disaster! We could create an Extinction Level Event!”

Damn it, Poole said to herself, looking out at the mammoth weapon.

Then, suddenly, something even larger shimmered into existence.

Just above the floating cannon, a large cylindrical object appeared, its bottom opened up into darkness. Its surface was smooth and flat, devoid of features or design. It descended quickly onto the floating cannon, as the ripples of energy grew wildly around it. Several tendrils lashed out at the new predator ship, swiping its side to no effect. Soon, the new ship had swallowed the floating cannon whole, and its opening on the bottom was gone, replaced by the same smoothness as the rest of the ship, as if it were never there.

The larger ship began to shimmer, but then something seemed to go wrong. It shook violently, seeming to warp oddly in places. The shimmering vanished, as the newer ship began to drift aimlessly.

Towards the planet.

* * * * *

“There’s been a problem,” the dark-skinned man said quickly to Alice.

“What is it, Jady?” Alice responded.

“The TARDIS Cruiser was able to contain the blast of the Section’s weapon. However, the resulting destruction of the cannon has also damaged the interior the Cruiser far beyond what we anticipated.” Jady looked up at the sky. “The Cruiser is coming our way.”

Alice turned quickly. “Alright, everybody, back! We’re pulling out of here!”

Alice’s withdrew, vanishing into surroundings. The Doctor glanced over at Tamara, who nodded reassuringly and moved over besides Grae. Grae reached out and held Tamara’s hand, pulling her close. The Doctor then turned to Alice.

“Alice,” he began.

Alice smiled and put up her hand. “Don’t say it, Doctor. We’ll be in touch.” She then turned and ran, vanishing into the surroundings.

The Doctor turned to Grae and Tamara, and then glanced at the sky. An enormous fireball was heading their way, closing in on their position. He then turned towards Bramahl, who was kneeling in the dirt.

“Next time, I suppose,” he said simply, and quickly ushered Grae and Tamara into the TARDIS.

Bramahl looked up at the sky, and the back at the TARDIS. Spitting out some blood from her mouth, Bramahl hurried away.

“Perhaps, Doctor,” she said under her breath. “Perhaps.”

Suddenly, Bramahl found herself unable to move.

Then Talchia dissolved around her and she was someplace else.

* * * * *

THIRTEEN

The TARDIS door swung shut, leaving Tamara alone to face the Doctor. Solemnly, he set the machine in motion.

“So,” he said calmly, crossing his hands in front of him. “More death.”

She smiled thinly. “War. Hell. I’m sure you’ve read the poetry.”

“Yes. I just didn’t think it’d be at the hands of one of my companions.”

“Ah.” The smile died. The central column of the console continued its slow rise and fall.

“Is that all I am to you?”

He shook his head. “No. You’re actually the closest thing I’ve got to a best friend.”

“So?”

“So watching you shoot someone in cold blood isn’t the easiest of things.”

“You know,” she said, “it wasn’t the easiest of things from my perspective either. Or do you think I’ve switched off completely?”

“No -”

Her lips twitched into a wry grin. “It’s not like this was the first time.”

He shook his head sadly. “I know.”

“Then *why* is it a problem? You’ve killed before. You brought me onboard knowing what I’ve done, knowing what I was, knowing what kind of life I’ve lead. Besides, someone needed to step up and do something.”

A gentle knock tapped against the door. The Doctor looked over his shoulder and watched as Grae walked silently into the console room, each footstep masked by the low hum of the instruments. He turned back to Tamara.

“I appreciate that, but surely there was another way.”

“I had to think on my toes, Doctor. Learn to live with it; I know I can.”

“Maybe I thought I could change you.” Each word was hard, underlined.

“Change me? What am I? An animal that needs training?”

“No,” he said, his arms out wide. “A human being. A tired, wonderful woman who needs showing that violence isn’t always the answer.”

“Then what? You say that quite often, Doctor. You’re always the first to throw about your morals. To criticize those of us who try to make a difference. Those of us who aren’t you.”

“I’ve never professed to be better-”

“No, maybe not. But you’re doing a damn good job of implying it.”

“I don’t mean to-”

“That’s not it. You never mean to!” She flung her arms out wide, her voice rising, the words rushing out. “Otherwise you wouldn’t be who you are. You wouldn’t be the Doctor. Rich and moral; always right. Impotent.”

Grae took a step back, her jaw shivering silently. Tears were bubbling behind her eyes. “Please-”

The Doctor shut his eyes. “If we become killers, we lose everything. We become no better than Bramahl.”

“What does that even mean?”

“An empty victory is nothing more than a defeat.”

“What does that *mean*? Tell me what you’re trying to say! Make some sense!”

He stared at her. His eyes were empty, stripped. “I have to believe I can make a difference without resorting to this.”

“To this? To me, you mean.” She folded her arms across her chest. “Well, you aren’t the only one who’s had to live in this world. I know what it’s like. You might’ve seen worlds crumble; empires fall. But I’ve seen things too, lived through things you’ll never see. People like Lon Maral don’t stop after a quick talking to. They go on with their job. They go on wrecking lives. And it’s knowing that people like you exist that lets them.”

“You don’t understand.”

“No, Doctor. *You* don’t. You want the monopoly on being good. But when push comes to shove, what matters more? Helping other people, or preserving your precious dignity? Goodbye, Doctor.”

Tamara pulled a sleek communicator out of her pocket. Activating it, she spoke slowly. “I’m ready.”

“No Tamara,” the Doctor pleaded, “after all we’ve been through. Don’t leave like this.”

She cast a look at Grae.

Her emerald eyes were full of tears.

“Tamara, please.” Grae sniffed.

“I have to do this, babe.” She pulled the young woman into an embrace, then kissed her softly on the forehead. “Besides, everything is taken care of.”

Then she vanished, and Grae collapsed to the floor, her body convulsing with grief.

“Tamara!” the Doctor shouted, running to the spot where she had stood. Closing his eyes, he sat down on the floor next to Grae and asked, half to her and half to himself, “I do good, don’t I?”

He tried to take Grae into his arms, but she pulled away from him and ran from the console room sobbing.

The Doctor rose and walked back to the console. He stood for a moment, keeping his emotions in check.

Then he brought a fist down upon the machine...

...and screamed in anger.

EPILOGUE

The darkness was so intense; it brought a chill even to Bramahl's heart.

She stood upon a raised dais, careful not to stray too far from its center for fear of plunging into the unknown. Her life was already on the line and she feared the worst, she didn't need the extra, added stress of falling into the void.

Although, she thought to herself, it might be the better option.

She could feel three pairs of eyes on her, burning into her mind. Picking through the events that had caused her to be brought before the tribunal.

Talchia: destroyed.

The Gateway: destroyed

Their weapon: destroyed.

Her cruiser: commandeered by the Time Lords.

The Doctor and his companions: alive and well...

...except for one. Tamara was gone. Vanished without a trace.

At least that'll kick him where it hurts.

"Bramahl." A voice.

"Yes?" she answered back, cocky, with a twinge of disgust.

"You have failed the Thirteen for the last time."

"If you would have let me-"

The voice interrupted her. "We have given you more than enough opportunity to accomplish your goals. We have altered time; we have provided you with transportation, the means and most importantly, the power necessary. We have made you a god and you repeatedly fail us. Even after we move you to a less trying task, the capture of Lon Maral, you fail us."

"You're wrong!" she spat. "I have done more for you and your underlings than your pathetic kind can imagine."

"Indeed you have, Bramahl." The voice echoed through her head.

Bramahl was taken aback. That wasn't quite the response she had expected. She spoke quietly, choosing her words carefully. "Thank you for recognizing my abilities in spite of my recent setbacks."

"Your 'setbacks' have shown us that among your enemies, someone lies in wait who is infinitely better-suited to the esteemed position you so clearly do not deserve. Lon Bramahl, there is only one course of action left open to us. Your Section status is revoked."

"No! You can't replace me!" Bramahl shouted, more out of fear than anger. "There's no one that can meet the demands you make!"

"There is one."

A hand gripped Bramahl's shoulder and spun her around.

"You!" Bramahl screamed. "How?"

"Welcome to Section 13," the voice announced. "Ms. Scott."

"Surprise," Tamara said coldly, as she drew her staser and fired one shot.

Bramahl dropped to the floor, blood pouring from the open wound in her head.