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Laplace's Demon



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Anaximander huddled under the ornately carved wooden bed, his knees pressed tight into his chest and his breaths coming fast and low. Around him he could hear the clump of thick soled boots and a harsh voice which barked orders at the occupants of said boots, instructing them to look harder. The Chancellor, said the voice, *must* be found.

From the adjoining bathroom came a cry followed by a squeal of delight. The sounds of a struggle – and then with an almost animal exclamation of pain the Chancellor fell into the bedroom, landing directly in Anaximander's line of sight. The student suppressed a scream at the sight of the the old man. He had clearly taken a rifle butt to the face - blood arced from his shattered nose and black bruises were already forming around his left eye. If the Chancellor could see Anaximander he said nothing to give him away, but simply lay there uttering low moans.

The high pitched voice which had squealed in the bathroom now yelped again. 'I got him, Sir!' it squeaked. "There was some kind of secret compartment in the bathroom. He must have heard us coming and tried to hide himself."

"Yes," intoned the authoritative voice Anaximander had heard before. "I imagine he thought he was being incredibly clever. In fact he's clearly very stupid, or he would have realised by now that there can be no escape from us or the one we serve."

"Should I kill him now?" put in Squeaky Voice.

"Goodness me, no," came the reply. "We are not here to do away with him. Not when our master can find so many more... creative uses for him."

The Chancellor moaned again, and the young student detected rising panic in his voice. He wanted to reach out and touch the old man, but his sense of self-preservation overrode the urge. And then, suddenly, the Chancellor was being hustled to his feet and despite his rising screams and weak struggles he was dragged out of the door and into the darkness beyond.

The remaining boots shuffled out of the door as Anaximander remained where he was, barely even daring to breath now. He must summon help - that was obvious. But where was he to go? The answer came to him in a flash - he must go to his friend Raphael. Yes, Raphael would know exactly what to do.

Anaximander climbed quickly out from under the bed and crossed to the door, opening it a crack in order to see if any guards had been posted in the study beyond. Having seen nothing, he was about to make a break for it when there came a cough from behind him. He wheeled around to see a small man with a clipped moustache and military bearing, wearing the all-black uniform of a commander of the Acolytes.

"Hello there, young sir." It was the voice of the authoritative man. Anaximander froze, his back pressed to the wall.

"Well, I see you're not very talkative," the man continued. "But you might at least introduce yourself. No? Well, it hardly matters. You know," he said, easing a stubby pistol from it's holster on his belt, "if it makes you feel any better there was nothing you could have done to make this turn out any differently. My master knew from the first that we would find you here, just as he knew that sadly you could have no place in his designs. I'm afraid however that his orders with regards to what to do with you were quite explicit." The man raised his pistol. "I'm so sorry." he said without sincerity as the boy's head snapped back and his brains exited the back of his skull at a hundred miles per hour, forming a beautiful, complex pattern on the wall behind.

A shooting star careered over the mountains, dragging with it the first rays of the morning sun. They peeked tentatively between the colossal peaks for some time before, gaining in boldness, they crashed headlong over the mountains and flooded the valleys beneath with a golden haze.

Something akin to a purple mountain goat was tugging tenaciously at a tuft of dry grass which protruded defiantly from a small crack in the mountainside. Appearing slightly perturbed, it sniffed the air and inclined its head as if straining to hear some distant sound. It need not have gone to the trouble, since in a moment the whole mountainside resounded with it – a wheezing groan, rising in intensity, followed by a flashing blue light which faded in and out of view in time with the mysterious sound. Soon it was clear that the light was not simply suspended in mid air, but was attached to something, a large blue box which was now becoming firmer and clearer. In another moment, with a final resounding thud, both box and light became solid. The creature watched all of this before letting go its grasp of the grass and showing the box a clean pair of heels. It hadn't stayed alive this long in the mountains by taking an interest in strange events.

A door in the side of the box opened and out stepped a young girl, faintly attractive with a curly mop of black hair and wearing a thick, woollen red sweater at least one size too large for her. Yellow-stained fingers played nervously with her moonstone necklace as she looked tentatively around. It was cold and she was beginning to regret passing up the chance of trousers in favour of a knee length shirt. But it was a fashion thing - certainly not something that her companion would understand.

At that moment he himself emerged from the box, hefting a heavy looking pack onto his back and adjusting the straps. He looked at the girl sternly. "Silver," he sighed. "We are in the Abraxas mountains in the south of Aurora during winter. I'm sure you would find yourself much happier in the long run if you were to perhaps peruse the perfectly acceptable selection of winter clothes in the TARDIS wardrobe."

Silver regarded him closely. He certainly did look like a mountaineer, albeit one of the 1920s variety, with his tweed jacket and socks pulled up over his trousers. And did he have to wear that damn top hat *everywhere*?

"Doctor, I'm perfectly warm," she lied. "And anyway, we're not staying in the mountains, are we? If you recall we're going to meet the son of that friend of yours."

The Doctor looked a little crestfallen. "Well," he replied, "Yes we are. But these peaks are so lovely at this time of year. I thought whilst we were here we might permit ourselves a little leisure time. Things have been so busy lately, after all."

Silver glared and he grudgingly took the hint. "Well, I suppose I did promise the boy's father that I'd look in on him. I'm sure he'll be fine, of course. Young Raphael always did have his head screwed on, not like his father. Do you know he once got lost in the Panopticon library? For three months! Poor fellow didn't even realise, he'd just been wandering around engrossed in a biography of Omega." The Doctor paused, suddenly conscious of his friend's shivering. "Well," he said. "let us go and take a look at the boy, and then we can get back to having a lovely long hike up the west ridge."

A little over an hour later the pair had left behind the barren mountainsides and were wandering through a golden cornfield at the foot of the range. They had passed a number of tiny hamlets made up of no more than a dozen wattle and daub huts, and as they had gone the Doctor had explained to Silver at great length that Aurora was a university planet given over entirely to learning and contemplation. The planet's natives, primitive

humanoids, supplied the University Houses with food and wine, and to that end had developed a number of relatively advanced agricultural techniques.

The Doctor was in the midst of explaining some of these techniques in agonising detail when Silver realised what it was that had been bugging her for the last half mile.

“Where are they then?” She asked.

“Where are who?”

“These farmers or whatever. We've been walking for ages and I've seen fields, I've seen livestock, I've seen houses and I've seen farming equipment but I haven't seen a single *person*.”

The Doctor paused. “Yes...” he said suddenly, spinning round on the spot and looking all around. “You know, it had quite slipped my notice. But now that you mention it, it is very odd.”

“Perhaps they all went on vacation?” suggested Silver, hopefully.

“Vacation? A *holiday*? These people don't know the meaning of the word. The work from sunrise to sunset every day, and that's the way they like it. And an Auroran day is 87 Earth hours long, by the way.”

Silver looked defeated. “Oh.” was all she could muster.

“No,” went on the Doctor as if he hadn't heard her, “something very strange is going on here...”

“Oh no!” yelled Silver, wagging her finger accusingly. “None of that! These people might not be on vacation but we certainly are! So take that look of curiosity off your face and come on.”

So saying, she grabbed the Doctor by the wrist and marched him off at a brisk pace before he could think of anything to say.

The rest of the walk passed in an uncomfortable silence as the Doctor seethed inwardly at the affront to his dignity. For her part Silver was angry that the Time Lord had attempted to derail their relaxing break by sticking his damn nose in where it wasn't wanted, just like he always did.

When she could stand the silence no longer, Silver stopped and looked at her companion. It had become much warmer since they had left mountains behind, but despite his thick clothes and the large pack he was carrying he hadn't even broken a sweat, and it annoyed her.

“Doctor, how much longer before we get to where we're going?” she whined.

The Doctor turned and regarded her, then he said sniffily “Since you ask, we should be able to see it when we get to the brow of this hill.”

He was as good as his word, and five minutes later Silver was staring in unbridled awe at their destination – Sikylon, Aurora's capital city and greatest of the University Houses.

It looked like no other city Silver had ever seen. In fact it resembled nothing so much as a vast cathedral, and yet it did not appear to have been built from stone like the great cathedrals that Silver had seen in books. In fact it seemed to have been *grown* - from something resembling bone. Silver shifted uncomfortably, unable to decide whether she was impressed or repulsed by the structure's appearance. Noting her reaction, the Doctor smiled.

“Sikylon!” he exclaimed. “13,000 years old at the present time, capital city, seat of learning. Created by the Enokians, extinct now but they were the first race to settle here.”

They founded the university system and the other Houses, but this was their masterpiece – made in honour of Idrael, their Goddess of wisdom. It's impressive, isn't it?"

Silver tried to speak but the words to express how the sight of the city made her feel would not come.

"But," said the Doctor, "something is amiss. If you will permit me to indulge my... curiosity for a moment, note that the great gates of the city, which have for millennia stood open to admit all who wish to enter in search of knowledge are, at present, very definitely closed."

Silver sighed. All thoughts of a relaxing vacation with the Doctor now appeared futile. She cursed under her breath before heading down the hill after her friend.

They soon reached the great white gates of the chitinous city, which stood proudly gleaming in the sunlight. They were indeed, as per the Doctor's observation, firmly shut and guarded by two men dressed in grey kevlar body armour and carrying imposing looking firearms.

"Leave this to me." whispered the Doctor to Silver as he strode over to the guards, who looked shocked to at the sight of these two strangers wandering in from the mountains.

The Doctor marched straight up to the marginally more intelligent looking of the two guards, who began to finger his gun nervously.

"I say my good man," said the Doctor in his friendliest voice. "Would you be so good as to open up these marvellous gates and let us in? We've had rather a tiring journey you see, and could do with a good soak in the bath and a bite to eat."

The two guards looked at each other, and then at the Doctor. The one the Doctor had addressed looked at him dumbfounded and stammered "Do... do you have authority from Mr LeVay?"

"Mr LeVay?" repeated the Doctor. "Well now, who is he and why exactly should I require authority from him to enter a house of public learning? The last I heard it this House was under the control of Chancellor Kronos."

"Chancellor Kronos is... is unavailable. This facility has been placed under the control of the Avalon Corporation and its representative, Mr LeVay." Having clearly realised that the strangers bore him no physical threat, the guard was becoming bolder. "So," he growled, "unless you have written permission to be here, I suggest you..." He trailed off, his voice sounding increasingly distant.

"Suggest we what?" demanded the Doctor impatiently.

"I..." the guard was clearly struggling to articulate his words, and his eyes were glazing over. "I'm sorry. There has been a terrible misunderstanding. You are of course permitted to enter."

With this, the guard signalled to his colleague who, with a mighty shove, opened the gate. With a final glance at the two men, the Doctor went inside. Silver made to follow him, but the two moved to block her path. She swore loudly, and the Doctor turned and walked back to see what the trouble was.

"I say!" he exclaimed, "What's all this about? Why is my friend barred from entering?"

"Only you may enter, Doctor." came the reply.

"And nothing I can say will change your mind on this issue?"

"Nothing."

"You are not prepared to be in the least bit flexible?"

"I am not."

“Well then,” grinned the Doctor. “You give me no choice. Come along Silver, we’re leaving.”

“Leaving?” gasped Silver.

“That’s right. Come on, we’ll head back to the TARDIS. There’s clearly nothing to be gained by standing around here.” The Doctor hefted the pack on his shoulder and made to leave. He had not gone more than half a dozen paces though when the more talkative of the two guards called out to him. Smiling inwardly, The Doctor turned and said, as sternly as he could muster, “Yes?”

“There has been another misunderstanding, sir. It seems your friend is to be permitted after all.”

“Well done,” Silver whispered to the Doctor as the two travellers passed through the gate and into the city.

“Well done for what?”

“You know... arranging it so we’d both get in. Putting the ‘fluence on those two.”

“Oh,” laughed the Doctor. “I couldn’t possibly take credit for that. I don’t doubt that they were under some form of mesmeric influence, but not by my hand.”

“So... how did you know that they’d let me in if you threatened to leave?”

“Because,” said the Doctor grimly, “Whoever *did* put them under said influence clearly wants me to be here. And something else troubles me.”

“Which is?”

“I didn’t tell them that I’m called the Doctor.”

Once inside the city, Silver’s breath was taken away. It really WAS like a cathedral – albeit on an unimaginable scale. The ceiling was so high that it was impossible to look at it without becoming dizzy, great pillars and archways lined the wide corridors and lanes, and everything was made of the same bony material. The Doctor explained that it was indeed bone, albeit bone which could be programmed to grow in a certain way. Enokian architects and engineers had developed it on their homeworld millions of years ago, and with it had grown some of the most impressive structures in the universe – but nothing on the scale of Sikylon. Despite her initial feelings, Silver was beginning to fall in love with this city and its strange beauty. But she noticed as they went that it was almost deserted – only the occasional student crossed their path before scurrying off with little more than a glance and most of the shops, leisure facilities, libraries and other amenities that they passed stood empty.

The Doctor seemed well acquainted with the place, and it was not long before they reached the quarters of the student they were searching for. The Doctor pulled his cane from the pack and rapped smartly on the door with it.

The door was opened by a boy who appeared to be around eighteen or nineteen, with thick dark hair and slightly droopy brown eyes that nevertheless betrayed a fierce intelligence. He wore what appeared to be the standard undergraduate uniform which was comprised of thick, deep red robes in many layers, although his proud bearing and impressive physique were clear enough. Silver felt herself go a little weak at the knees.

“Hello Raphael.” said the Doctor.

The young man regarded his visitors for a moment before breaking out into a wide grin. “Doctor?” he said excitedly. “It *is* you isn’t it? I’d know you anywhere!” He grabbed the Doctor’s hand and began pumping it up and down vigorously. He then began doing the same to Silver, who did not find herself objecting one bit. Stumblingly she introduced

herself and the pair were ushered inside, into a small study whose shelves groaned under the weight of hundreds of books and scrolls. The musty smell of academia hung in the air as Raphael cleared a space at the table and gestured to the travellers to sit.

For some time the talk was of Raphael's father. The young boy and the Doctor discussed him in hushed, reverent tones as Silver, who had never met the man, sipped quietly at her tea (her request for coffee having met with little more than a blank stare) and took in the view from Raphael's window. Though it had been hours since they had left the TARDIS, the sun still hung low in the sky, radiating the fresh brightness of a summer morning. "So," she thought to herself, "the Doctor wasn't making it up about the 87 hour days."

It was at about this time that Silver realised that the conversation had turned, and that the Doctor was questioning Raphael about any strange events which had taken place recently. Raphael sat back in his chair and grinned. "Where would you like me to begin?" he said.

The Doctor and Silver listened intently as Raphael told his story. He had, he said, first realised something was amiss when, shortly after he had enrolled, one of his lecturers vanished overnight. This in itself might have seemed odd, but in the aftermath of the disappearance Raphael's curiosity was piqued again when the older students began talking about the *other* disappearances. From what the young student had been able to establish, these stretched back over a period of about 30 years, and had claimed both members of staff and also some particularly notable students, both from Sikylon and the other Houses. The official explanation which Chancellor Kronos gave was that these men and women were part of what he called the 'Higher Echelon', an elite group of thinkers and academics all dedicated to a secret project which, when unveiled, would make Aurora the most respected institution in the galaxy, if not the universe. But the strange thing was that the family and friends of the disappeared would often report seeing ghost-like images of their loved ones, who often appeared to be trying to communicate. Kronos had refused to discuss this, calling the very idea unscientific.

Despite the occasional disappearance still being reported, things had seemed relatively normal up until a month ago when Chancellor Kronos himself had vanished. At this time, members of the Avalon Corporation's private army, an elite force known as the Acolytes, had arrived on Aurora claiming that they had been brought in to ensure the safety of staff and students. They also claimed to be taking their orders from a Mr. LeVay who apparently had taken command of the whole planet and all the Houses, though it appeared that no one had ever actually met him. This was enough for many of the students and staff who simply packed up and left. Many of the native Aurorans too had left suddenly – rumours persisted that the Acolytes had rounded them up and shipped them off somewhere. Raphael and couple of hundred others were all that remained of the population of Sikylon, and a slightly smaller number at each of the other Houses. They began to regret their decision to stay when the Acolytes, apparently on the direct orders of LeVay, sealed off each of the Houses and banned travel outside – including space travel. The remaining students and staff were now effectively trapped, although inside the walls of the university they appeared to have total freedom.

Having listened to all of this with great interest, the Doctor sipped his tea thoughtfully and settled back into his armchair. "Tell me," he said. "Has anyone disappeared since the Chancellor?"

"No." Raphael replied.

“And who was the last person to see the Chancellor?”

“That would have been my friend, Anaximander.’ sighed Raphael. He and the Chancellor were...” he twisted a little in his seat and looked uncomfortable. “Well... you know. Anyway, he was with the Chancellor the night that he disappeared.”

“And where is he now?”

Raphael stared at his empty teacup and sighed. “He's dead, I'm afraid. No one saw him for a few days, then one morning an Acolyte found him. Said he'd tripped over his robes and broken his neck falling down some stairs. The funny thing is, under any other circumstances I could almost believe it. He was a clumsy chap. But it was too big a coincidence, the two things happening like that. Besides which they wouldn't release the body, they just burned it without even telling us when or where or letting us see it. Said it was a new hygiene directive from Mr. LeVay.”

The Doctor sat quietly for a few moments, lost in thought. Finally he looked squarely at Raphael and smiled. “It's a pretty little problem isn't it? Well, my recent efforts to adopt a less interventionist policy seem to have been foiled again, as do Silver's attempts to curb my natural curiosity. We will, of course, stay until the matter can be cleared up.”

At this Raphael visibly relaxed. The next few hours passed pleasantly, with Silver and the Doctor recounting stories of their recent travels to Raphael, who listened attentively and with great interest.

Eventually Silver's body clock began nagging at her, insisting that despite the bright sunshine still pouring through Raphael's window it was time for her to go to bed. She yawned theatrically, and the Doctor and his young friend took the hint. Raphael directed the pair to their rooms before retiring to his studies. Silver wished the Doctor goodnight before heading to her room, pulling shut the heavy curtains, collapsing onto the huge four-poster bed fully clothed and falling into a deep sleep.

It was a few hours later that Silver was awoken by a bright light. She sat bolt upright, shielding her eyes until they had become accustomed to the light. It was then that she realised that the glow was emanating from a figure standing by the door. A figure she knew. The light emanating from the figure picked out its muscular frame, the green tint to its skin and the great antlers atop its head.

“No...” whispered Silver, sliding out of bed and pressing her back to the wall. “It can't be *you*.”

But it was. Silently the figure moved within touching distance of the girl, and placing a hand gently on her shoulder it began to speak.

The Doctor, by contrast, had sat up in bed for a while reading a little Moliere before blowing out the candle and settling down until he too was awoken by strange lights. Before him, at the foot of the bed, stood two figures, radiant and beautiful. And known to the Doctor.

“You two?” he mumbled. “What... what are you... ah, I see. You're not really here at all, are you?”

“Doctor.” intoned the taller of the two figures. “Doctor, you must be prepared for what is to come. Only you are able to put an end to these events.”

“And what events might they be?”

“Events which must not be allowed to come to pass. The death of the everything!” broke in the second figure.

“Ah.” sighed the Doctor. “I thought as much. But tell me...”

As he spoke, the two figures vanished, a look of anguish on both their faces.

After a few sleepless hours the time travellers gave up on the idea of rest and reconvened in Raphael's study. The Doctor tucked into a grapefruit whilst Silver picked listlessly at a boiled egg. Both looked deep in thought.

After a while Silver could no longer contain herself. “Doctor?” she whispered, worried lest she break his concentration.

“Yes?” came the reply.

“Something happened while we were asleep. Something I think I should tell you about.”

“And what's that?”

“Well...” Silver had rehearsed this in her head a hundred times, but now her mind was blank. She reasoned that the best way was to simply come right out and say what had to be said. “Someone came into my room while I was asleep. It was the Horned God.”

To Silver's surprise, the Doctor did not even look up from his grapefruit. “Who?” he asked absent-mindedly.

“He is the husband of the Nature Goddess in the Wiccan religion. He was right there, as close to me as you are now. He told me that I was to face a trial in the days ahead, and that I would need to face it and not be afraid. So, having spent all this time running me down for my religious beliefs I expected that you would have something to say about it.”

The Doctor sighed and set down his spoon, then he fixed Silver with one of those looks which she knew meant he was deadly serious.

“Silver, I don't doubt that someone was in your room” he said at last. “But I'm afraid I don't believe that it was who you think. I also had visitors last night. Two of them – Omega and Rassilon. Figures from my planet's history and both very, *very* dead. I think someone was trying to contact us, and I think that they wished to appear before us in a form which we would trust and feel safe with. Now, what we need to establish is what they were trying to contact us *for*.”

“No, I tell you it was *him*! You know, he *is* the second most important figure in my religion. I think I'd recognise the guy when he's standing six feet away from me!”

The Doctor harrumphed, indicating that the conversation was over. Silver, too tired to argue after her sleepless night, went back to her breakfast. Soon they were joined by Raphael, bearing a pot of tea, and with books and parchment protruding from every pocket. He joined them at the table and began to pour.

“So,” said the Doctor after a pause, “I should very much like to take a look around the former Chancellor's office. Do you think that could be arranged, Raphael?”

The younger man shook his head dejectedly. “I'm afraid not, Doctor. Nobody has been allowed to enter since the disappearance, and it's guarded day and night by armed Acolytes.”

The Doctor gulped down the last of his tea with a smile. “Good.” he said, cheerfully. “I like a challenge.”

Armed, thought the Doctor an hour later as he crouched behind a bony pillar, was not the word. A guards was indeed posted on the door of Kronos' office, and was bristling with weaponry – an ugly sub-machine gun hung over a kevlar vest embossed with the crest of the Avalon Corporation, various grenades and handguns dangled from his belt and strapped to the man's right combat boot was a 10 inch hunting knife. If this went wrong, thought the Doctor, things could get very unpleasant very quickly.

Fortunately, Raphael knew his part to perfection, and exactly on cue the young man rounded the corner at a frantic pace. “Guard!” he wailed. “Guard! Help!”

Unsure of what to do, the Acolyte pointed his weapon at the student.

“Please!” begged Raphael. “It's my friend, she's had an accident, I think she may have broken something. I need help getting her to the infirmary!”

The Acolyte lowered his weapon. “Wait there.” he said. “I'll radio for assistance.”

Raphael flew into a panic. He was, the Doctor noted, very good at this. “Please!” he wailed. “There's no time! We have to get her to a doctor now!”

The guard looked torn. He was under direct orders from Mr. LeVay himself not to leave his post, yet the young man seemed genuine, and even if he radioed it in, it would take at least 10 minutes for another guard to be dispatched. Besides which, all the Acolytes had been told they had a duty of care toward Sikylon's occupants, and if the girl *was* seriously hurt and it got out that he had refused to help would that be seen as a worse crime than deserting his post? Against his better judgement he found himself following Raphael down the stairs and out of sight of the office door.

Seeing his chance, the Doctor moved silently across the hallway and began attacking the heavy door with a lockpick. In a matter of seconds he was inside.

The office was akin to Raphael's study, albeit on a far grander scale. In a personal touch, the walls were covered with old-Earth style wood panelling, which had been installed over the original bone. All manner of academic paraphernalia lined the walls - there looked to be miles of shelves. The Doctor inwardly groaned as he realised it could take him years to find what he had come for.

Silver lay prone at the bottom of the stairs trying desperately to remember what she had learned in third grade drama class. The Doctor's plan, she realised, had an inherent flaw – even if the guard was taken in by her acting she wouldn't be able to fool a medical professional for long. Altogether, she reckoned that the deception would buy the old man no more than fifteen minutes, even if it all went off perfectly.

Hearing the clump of thick soled boots coming down the stairs she set her face in what she hoped was a convincing grimace.

The Doctor was running desperately up and down the shelves, hoping against hope to find what he needed before his time ran out. Realising that this tactic was never going to work he stopped and began breathing deeply in an effort to calm himself. The Chancellor was not an absent minded man. If he did indeed have what the Doctor was looking for he would not have simply filed it away amongst thousands of other tomes. No, the answer was here. All he had to do was find it.

Looking around the room the Doctor attempted to apply deductive reasoning. It had to be somewhere the Chancellor could easily lay his hands on it, yet where it would not be

visible to anyone who just happened to wander in. But where? The Doctor glanced once more around the room, taking in the oaken walls and grinned to himself. He moved over to the nearest panel and rapped on it. Solid. He took a piece of chalk from his pocket and marked the corner of the panel with a barely perceptible dot. Then he moved onto the next one – the same result.

Looking around at the hundreds of panels lining the walls, he prayed that Silver's acting skills would hold.

The Acolyte arrived at the bottom of the stairs and pulled a small medikit from a pouch secreted in his combat trousers. “What's the problem?” he asked.

Silver moaned theatrically. 'I think my leg is broken.'

The Acolyte bent down and began inspecting both of the fishnet clad legs. Something was wrong. There was no swelling, and none of the outward symptoms which his training in field medicine had led him to anticipate when dealing with broken bones. “Which leg is it?” he asked.

“Left.” moaned Silver.

“Right” gasped Raphael.

For a moment they stared at each other, a look of panic etched on both their faces. The Acolyte glanced from one to the other, realisation finally beginning to dawn. He turned and fled up the stairs, and with a final admonishing glare at each other, Silver and Raphael set off after him.

A hollow clunk rang out through the room. With a grin, the Doctor realised that he had found what he was looking for. He felt around for any hidden switches or mechanisms, but realising that time was of the essence he settled for smashing the hollow panel with his cane.

Inside there lay a thick, leather bound book. The Doctor had just picked it up was preparing to leave when the first shot whizzed by his ear, hitting a crystal ornament on a nearby shelf which exploded spectacularly into a million fragments. Instinctively the Doctor dropped to the ground, seeking cover behind an antique mahogany desk. A rapid burst of machine gun fire tore into the leather upholstery of a nearby armchair, sending fragments raining to the ground.

“Come on out!” rang out a voice. “And keep your hands where I can see them!”

Realising the futility of his position, the Doctor did so, and found himself face to face with the Acolyte who had been guarding the office. The soldier unclipped a radio from his belt and spoke clearly into it. “This is Deitrich at position seven. I have intru...”

At that moment Raphael burst panting into the room. Startled, the Acolyte turned and trained his gun on the newcomer, and in an instant the Doctor leaped over the desk and, grasping a heavy silver candlestick, brought it down on the back of the young guard's neck. The Acolyte went down like a sack of potatoes, Silver arriving just as he did so.

“Jesus.” was all she could think to say.

Suddenly, the Acolyte's eyes snapped open and he cried out in pain. In a moment the Doctor was at his side, but the young soldier was suddenly relaxed and apparently conscious.

“Idrael...” he croaked.

"I'm sorry?" said the Doctor.

"Idrael..." he said again, his whole body tensing as his breathing quickened, then slowed again, then finally stopped for good.

"Well now," said the Doctor, straightening, "What do you suppose all that could be about?"

Raphael looked horrified. "You... you killed him!" he squeaked.

"What? Oh don't be so foolish. I didn't hit him that hard. If I had to guess I'd say he died of heart failure brought on by shock."

"And what do you suppose caused that?" asked Silver.

"I honestly don't know." sighed the Doctor. "But," he brandished the book he had found, "I have a feeling we might find the answers in here."

Suddenly the Acolyte's radio crackled into life. "Deitrich?" said a clipped, authoritarian voice. "Deitrich, come in. What is your position? Deitrich?"

"I think," said Silver, "that that's our cue to leave."

Back in Raphael's study, Silver quaffed tea whilst the Doctor pored over the recently acquired book. Raphael had been in the bathroom for over an hour, emptying his lunch into the toilet. Some people, Silver thought, just need to be a bit more relaxed around extreme violence. Eventually a combination of boredom and curiosity got the better of her.

"Go on then," she sighed, "what is it?"

"What, this?" said the Doctor, not looking up. "It's exactly what I thought it would be, and it makes for very interesting reading. It is a detailed record of Aurora's dealings with the Avalon Corporation."

"And what's so interesting about it?"

"Well, for one thing the two organisations have been enjoying close working relations for rather longer than I expect most people know. Thirty years to be precise."

"Thirty years?" put in Silver. "That's when Raphael said the disappearances started."

"Yes it is. A remarkable coincidence, eh? Now, it appears that the Chancellor was under instructions not to reveal the details of the relationship, which seems to have amounted to a deal under which Avalon would finance a top secret project codenamed..." he paused. "Codenamed Idrael. Well well well."

"So how did you know that you'd find this thing?" asked Silver.

"Well, it seemed that for the Avalon Corporation to turn up so soon after the Chancellor's disappearance was too convenient to be mere chance. I thought that the Corporation must have been involved in some way with the university *before* then, and that if they were Kronos would be the aware of it, and have records. There is also the fact that the Avalon Corporation's nearest base is over two months from here."

"You mean they were already on their way here *before* the Chancellor vanished?"

"I think," said the Doctor, hesitantly, "that they have been here for a lot longer than that. In fact, if I read these records correctly, Avalon has been covertly maintaining a presence here ever since Project Idrael began."

"But what *is* Idrael?" Silver said, excitedly.

"I don't know. It doesn't really go into specifics, I'm afraid" said the Doctor sternly. "But I'm fairly certain that it is responsible for the spate of disappearances on Aurora. And quite possibly for the unexpected guests we received earlier."

But when the Doctor had finished reading he stood up and marched off in the direction of his bedroom, complaining that his exertions had left him in need of a nap. Silver was left alone with Raphael, who was still an unattractive shade of green and was sitting by the window, stirring absent-mindedly at a cup of tea.

"I must say," he said eventually, "I think you're awfully brave. The way you stayed calm back there... well, you saw for yourself how well I cope with these things."

Silver smiled warmly at him. "You learn to deal with death when you travel with the Doctor. It's not that you become desensitised or cold. You just kind of develop a coping mechanism."

The handsome student allowed himself a smile. "It's nice to see that he has someone with him who cares for him anyway. He and my father are good friends, and they have the highest respect for each other. I grew up with the Doctor - he visited us often and he always told such wonderful stories. I used to think he made them all up for the amusement of my cousins and I. It wasn't until a good many years later that my father told me they were all true. I used to think it must be a lonely life, flying about in that old TARDIS of his putting right all the wrongs of the universe."

"Oh, I shouldn't worry about him becoming lonely" put in Silver. "There's usually someone pottering about with him up there. I imagine he'd die of boredom without someone to talk to."

"Well, I can't imagine I'd be much use to him." Raphael said sadly.

"I think you'd do okay" Silver reassured him. "You shouldn't run yourself down all the time." For the first time she noticed a deep sadness behind those big, brown eyes.

Raphael sighed. "It's just that I'm tired of all this" – he gestured around the study and its countless books and musty old papers. "Of just *reading* about the universe. I feel like I should get out there and live it, while I'm still young. I love my father but the idea of *becoming* him, of being a dry old academic more interested in books written by dead men than in real, tangible people and their lives terrifies me. That's why I'm so fond of the Doctor. He reminds me that there's more to life than all this."

Silver sat down alongside him and took his hand in hers. "If there's one thing that travelling with the Doctor has taught me," she said, "it's that if you really, truly want something then you have to go out there and get it, because it's not going to come to you." And so saying, she kissed him gently on the lips.

In his room, the Doctor lay on his bed, his hands clasped together before him. Deep in meditation, he drifted outside time and space, all the while searching without knowing quite what he might find.

As he lay there, floating outside of consciousness and into a world beyond, a shape began hazily forming itself in his mind. The Doctor had the distinct impression of white, flowing hair and horn-rimmed spectacles. The two regarded each other for a moment, each seemingly uncertain of the other.

"Hello there." said the Doctor at last.

"You are the Doctor, are you not?" came the reply.

"I am indeed my friend. Are you lost?"

"My dear Doctor, we are all lost" The answer gave the Doctor pause.

"What do you mean?" he said after a while.

"I speak on behalf of those who are dead, and who are in death enslaved. Beneath this institution there is an abomination. We are those who must exist, without hope of life

or the promise of death, within that abomination. You have given us a chance to be heard, Time Lord. For that we are grateful.”

“And what would you use this chance to speak about?”

“Great and terrible things. Doctor, the universe stands on the brink of destruction. You are to be the agent of this. You are key to the designs of Idrael.”

“And who is Idrael?”

“I have not the words to explain it to you. When we realised you were coming to this planet we knew that you could help us.”

A look of confusion briefly crossed the Doctor's otherwise serene face. “But you tell me I am to be instrumental in the destruction of the universe.”

“That is what Idrael believes. But it is quite mad. It may be right or it may be wrong, that I cannot see. But you must be aware that your every move is known. There can be no escape from your destiny – you must embrace it, whether it be as saviour or destroyer.”

The Doctor took a deep breath. “What must I do?” he asked.

But the consciousness was already fading. With a final, terrible scream it melted away against the backdrop of a billion restless souls.

And at that instant, something dark and terrible leaped forth. The Doctor had an impression of snapping jaws and rending claws as with a roar the shape threw open the doors of his mind and burst in upon him. Pain exploded behind his eyeballs and he fell from his bed with a shriek, now fully conscious yet unable to eject the form from his mind.

“You are the one who thinks he can stand against me?” snarled the voice.

His body racked with pain, the Doctor was unable to respond. Sensing this, the voice went on. “Know this, *Time Lord*. I will have you, to use as I wish. Any attempt to resist me will prove pathetically futile. I have seen your future in the stars and it tells me this – that you will come to me willingly and you will come to me soon. You will come to me through my own image. Down the crooked stair you will come, to the world below. There we will have our meeting and in the end you will submit your will to me and be devoured. I have been watching you Doctor. You have proved yourself worthy many times over, and I would make use of you. You should be honoured. If, however, you choose instead to attempt to cheat me I shall kill the girl. It will not present a problem, as you should realise by now. Remember that, *Time Lord*.”

With a final, mighty roar the form left the Doctor's mind and vanished among the shadows. For a long time, the Doctor lay prone on the bedroom floor, unable to move or cry out for help. “Typical.” he thought to himself as he lay recovering his strength. “Why is it that I always meet the evil geniuses with a penchant for talking like a cross between Nostradamus and the villain in a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie?”

In a dark corner of Sikylon, a lightbulb flickered over a small wooden desk strewn with paperwork, its light reflecting starkly from the bony walls. At the desk, looking bored and unhappy, sat Commander James Ives of the 3rd Mobile Division of Acolytes. He flicked through a few of the reports before him, absent-mindedly signing them without fully reading the contents, before reaching into a drawer and producing a bottle of fine malt whisky and a glass tumbler. He poured a sizeable quantity of the rich brown liquid into the glass and took a big gulp.

With one hand he stroked his moustache, before transferring his attention to rubbing the sleepiness from his eyes. He was a soldier, trained to cope without life's

comforts and to flourish under pressure. But three days without sleep waiting for orders which were taking their sweet time coming was taking its toll, and with nothing besides the death of Deitrich having occurred to keep him occupied his mind was becoming unfocussed and sloppy. Could he risk slipping off to his quarters and putting his head down for an hour? No. Instead he drained the contents of his glass in one long slug and poured himself another. Better make this the last one, he reflected. Being caught drunk on the job was as bad as being caught asleep at his post. And there was no knowing when he was being watched by the one whom he served.

As he swirled the glass, Ives wondered to himself what it was about the death of Deitrich that had worried him so. He supposed that maybe it was simply down to the lack of other things for him to do that he had taken a personal interest in the death of the young officer, apparently at the hands of a simple heart attack. But then Deitrich was a young man, and would not have been in the Acolytes had he not passed a series of strict physicals which should have weeded him out as unfit for duty. Then there was the damage to the room. The official version of events was that Deitrich had loosed of a couple of rounds in panic as he died – but though in public he supported this view Ives had very strong misgivings. The damage to the wall panel had not been caused by a bullet, but rather a blunt instrument of some kind. And what was Deitrich doing in the room in the first place? His orders were to guard it, not to enter. Perhaps this Doctor, was involved somehow? But Ives had his orders – he was not to impede the Doctor in any way. The master was going to take care of him personally. The girl though... Ives smiled to himself as he thought about her. There were no orders relating to the preservation of her safety or liberty. Quite the opposite in fact – Ives had been promised that when the business at hand was complete he and his men would have her. Ives licked his lips at the prospect. Women were another commodity which had proved impossible to come by on this crappy little backwater.

Suddenly the Commander's eyes glazed over and his hands began to quiver. The glass fell to the floor and shattered. Ives collapsed into his high-backed chair and his eyes slowly closed. For a time the little man looked serene, almost dead. Then with a start he leaped to his feet and stabbed at a button on his intercom.

“Snyder?”

“Yes sir?” came back the voice of a tired-sounding young man.

“Assemble the men and break out the weapons. The order has come through. We go at 18 hundred hours, Earth time.”

There was a pause at the other end. Then the voice came through again sounding stronger and more determined than before. “Yes sir.”

Ives sat at his desk for a moment recovering. Then slowly a smile broke across his thin lips. He grabbed the bottle from where it stood on his desk, swallowed several mouthfuls then stood up and marched across to the door, checking his sidearm was loaded as he did so.

“Will you both stop fussing over me? I'm not a complete invalid you know!” So saying, the Doctor batted away the proffered cup of tea and went back to rubbing his temples.

“Well,” said Silver. “Pardon me for being worried when I find you in a heap on the bedroom floor. Maybe next time I'll just leave you.”

“What happened to you, Doctor?” said Raphael, genuine concern in his voice.

“I think I've just spoken to Idrael, of all people.” smiled the Doctor. “I'm afraid the experience was temporarily draining, but I feel perfectly fine now.”

“What did she want?” gasped Silver.

“Interesting you should say that,” said the Doctor, “because the voice was a man's. I think that we may have found the mysterious Mr. LeVay.”

Raphael and Silver looked at one another in surprise. “So,” said Raphael after a pause, “what did *he* want?”

The Doctor looked at both of them for a moment then said quietly “Well, from our brief conversation I got the distinct impression that he rather wants *me*.”

“Okay” Silver sighed, not taking her eyes from her companion, “I think it's time this ended. Just for once you have to let people sort out their own problems. You and me are going back to the TARDIS and getting out of here”. She looked at Raphael and said softly “You can come too. If you like.”

As she stood up the Doctor put a restraining hand on her arm. “I'm sorry,” he said, genuinely. “I'm afraid Idrael is quite determined. I have to go, otherwise there will be consequences. For you.”

Silver sat slowly back in her chair and put her head in her hands. Never taking his eyes from her, the Doctor spoke to Raphael. “Idrael said I would find her through her own image, in the world below. Does that mean anything to you?”

“Well,” stammered Raphael, sipping his tea nervously, “There have always been rumours of a second city, beneath Sikylon. Apparently it was made as a giant shrine, to honour the glory of Idrael. But nobody knows how to get into it, or even if it really exists.”

“I think,” smiled the Doctor, “that we can safely assume it does. Now what about this mention of an image? Are there images of Idrael in the city?”

“Oh, many,” said Raphael. “Thousands in fact. It would take forever to search them all, even if we knew for sure what we were looking for.”

“Do any of them stand out?” asked the Doctor, impatience creeping into his voice. “It would be something that would be considered particularly holy, I'm sure of it. And it would most likely be something that has been around since the city was grown.”

“There is a very large statue in the Garden of Remembrance,” said Raphael, excitedly. “It has been around for thousands of years, it may well date back to the growing of the city. It is supposed to watch over the souls of the departed.”

“That sounds like the kind of thing” said the Doctor. “Can you show me where it is?”

“Of course.”

The Doctor clapped his hands together. “Then we go there. Now.”

It was dark as the Doctor, Silver and Raphael stepped out into the Garden of Remembrance. Silver found herself once again amazed by this city – the graveyard was as big as a small town and without Raphael to guide them it would have been easy to become completely lost among the pathways of tombs and gravestones. She flicked her torch this way and that, wondering at the ornately carved statues which covered every grave. The strong scent of lilies hung in the still night air. The garden was, she had to concede, very beautiful if more than a little creepy.

After they had walked for what seemed like forever, a gigantic form began to waft into view through the half light. Coming closer she realised she was looking at a colossal statue, at least 100 feet tall, of a startlingly beautiful woman. Though the statue was of the same bony substance as the rest of Sikylon the face radiated warmth and intelligence and the arms were outstretched in a gesture of welcoming. Silver thought this was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

The base of the statue was at least as tall as the Doctor, and now the old man was examining it minutely, looking for hidden switches or mechanisms. Eventually he gestured to Silver to bring her torch over.

“Look here” he said, pointing Silver and Raphael toward a small section of the structure. “Look at these hairline cracks in the bone. What does that indicate to you?”

Raphael ran his finger along the crack. “It looks as though it has been broken, and is in the process of repairing itself.”

“My thoughts exactly” smiled the Doctor. He tapped lightly on the section with his cane and was answered with a hollow ringing. “Well,” he said, “it looks like we're going to have to break something again.”

Ten minutes' work was all it took before the three had exposed a hole large enough for the Doctor to squeeze his body through. They peered inside and were met with a faint glow at the bottom of a long shaft, around the edges of which wound a solid looking spiral staircase.

Silver implored the Doctor not to go. She begged him to return to the TARDIS. She would take her chances, she said. But his mind was quite made up. And so Silver and Raphael were soon on their way out of the garden, with clear instructions to go back to Raphael's study, lock themselves in and admit no one besides the Doctor himself.

The steps were slimy and there was little light. The Doctor almost fell several times as he worked his way down, always keeping one eye on the glow at the bottom of the shaft. When he finally reached the bottom, he realised that it came from thousands of large candles set into alcoves in the narrow walls of the underground city. In a few of the alcoves the candles had been removed and replaced with small statues and other offerings to Idrael. Dry rivers of fatty wax hung from every surface and collected in pools on the floor.

The Doctor looked around himself for a moment and realised the enormity of his task in attempting to find anyone in this maze of tunnels, before reasoning that the likelihood of his being guided down here only to be left to stumble around witlessly was remote. Sure enough, he relaxed into a receptive frame of mind and immediately found himself being guided toward a right hand fork. With a look of grave determination, he set off.

Silver and Raphael were back within the walls of the Sikylon before they realised anything was amiss. As they went they held hands and fixed each other sternly in the eye. The Doctor, they said to each other soundlessly, was going to be *fine*. It was for this reason, perhaps, that they were not immediately conscious of the fact that the city's streets, never bustling at the best of times, were completely deserted.

Almost deserted, at any rate. “Stop!” - rang out a voice suddenly across the square through which they were passing. Obeying, they turned to see a small detachment of Acolytes, guns trained on them. Instinctively, Silver checked the exits and weighed up her chances of making a run for it without being hit. But then she realised Raphael would never keep up, and found herself caring very deeply about his well-being. She decided to stay still as the men approached.

“What's this about?” she asked, injecting as much indignation as she dared into her voice.

“All students and guests are to assemble in the main hall,.” said the largest of the men. “Orders from...”

“From Mr. LeVay. Yes, we get the idea. But what's all this about?”

The guard looked her up and down with a sneer. “Sorry, miss. Need to know basis only I'm afraid. Now, if you wouldn't mind following us?”

With a shrug, Silver did as she was asked. As they walked she stared again into those big brown eyes of Raphael and saw real fear behind them.

The Doctor had barely gone half a mile before he realised that the voice in his head was telling him he was almost there. He stopped for a moment and realised he could hear the steady hum of what sounded like a vast cooling system up ahead, and feel the blast of cold air which it was producing. He could easily guide himself in from here.

And indeed it was only around a handful of further corners that the Doctor finally came across what he was looking for. When he did, he recoiled in horror.

He had entered a vast underground chamber, lit like the rest of the underground network by candlelight. The dimensions of the chamber were incalculable – the roof dizzily high and the far walls so distant he could barely see them. The noise he had heard was indeed from a cooling system – huge fans were visible along the length of the chamber looking out of place amid the gothic architecture. But more out of place still was the massive, organic looking mass which hung from the ceiling. Hundreds of meters long, covered in pulsating veins and slimy secretions, it resembled nothing so much as a huge sac of amniotic fluid, but the dark shapes the Doctor could make out within suggested that there was far more inside than liquid. As his eyes followed the line of the sac, the Doctor saw that it tapered to a point, and that at its end it merged into the back of a bald, glistening head. The owner of the head was a tall man in late middle age with intelligent, hawk-like eyes and a thin, cruel mouth. He was wearing a pinstriped business suit and sitting upon a throne of bone which emerged from the floor in the centre of the chamber.

“Hello, Doctor,” said the man coldly. “I am Mr. LeVay of the Avalon Corporation,”

“Yes” replied the Doctor, grimly. “I rather thought I'd find you here. And this I assume is Project Idrael?”

“You are indeed as perceptive as I had foreseen,” smiled LeVay. “Feel free to ask any questions you may have.”

“I think it's rather self-explanatory really. You take the greatest Auroran minds of their generation and band them together under something they know only as the Higher Echelon. Having led them to their fate in this way, you chop them up and harvest their genetic material to be integrated into an... organic computer.”

“Yes, that's the gist,” said LeVay proudly. “It is beautiful, is it not?”

“It's obscene.” spat the Doctor.

LeVay smiled again. It reminded the Doctor of a hungry wolf about to attack. “My dear fellow, it's nothing of the sort. Even the greatest minds grow old and feeble, and eventually they die. All their knowledge and experience – gone, like the snuffing out of a candle. It was this that was behind the instigation of Project Idrael, a desire to grant these great men immortality. To safeguard their collective genius for generations to come. And at the same time to produce a computer billions of times more powerful than anything man-made.”

“You realise they're all alive in there? All conscious, aware of what has happened to them?”

“Yes. That was an unfortunate and unexpected side-effect. It could not be helped. It did give the good Chancellor a few sleepless nights I can tell you. But in the end he saw that what we were doing was for the greater good.”

“I’m sure he did,” said the Doctor. “So at what point did the Avalon Corporation take control of the project?”

“The Avalon Corporation was only ever interested in the potential military applications of the technology. There were Dalek fleets virtually on the doorsteps of the old colonies. The Earth government would have paid handsomely for a battle computer more advanced than anything the enemy could dream up. The university was to be involved as a full partner only for so long as it took for the system to be completed, at which point this planet was to be liquidated and the technology turned over to my masters.”

“But,” snarled the Doctor, “it took rather longer than you thought to make it work. 30 years, to be precise.”

LeVay nodded sagely. “Indeed. By that time the project was haemorrhaging money and the Corporation wanted an end to it. I was in charge at that time, and I was instructed to close down the project and destroy any trace of Avalon’s presence on Aurora. I rebelled against my superiors. It might have seemed foolish, but Idrael represented 12 years of my life, and 18 of those of my predecessor. I did not feel I could throw all that away. I *had* to show the corporation that something useful could be salvaged from the project.”

“So...” said the Doctor slowly. “You tested it on yourself.”

“I did indeed, Doctor. And it was only then that I realised what we had created here. It was like someone holding up to my eye a microscope through which the most intimate processes of the universe were as clear as daylight. A hundred thousand of the greatest minds of an age were being filtered through my own. I ceased then to be simply a user. I *became* Idrael. At first some of the minds resisted me, but as I grew more adept at using the technology I was able to suppress them. To bend them to my will. And it was then that I discovered an unexpected side effect of Idrael.”

“Let me guess,” said the Doctor, an edge of danger in his voice. “A massive build-up of psychic energy?”

“Right again, Time Lord,” said LeVay. “It was not something I had expected, but I began to discover that the same energy which was allowing those within the machine to journey outside and communicate with others could be channelled through me, just as their intellect could. It gave me psychic control over objects and even other people – and although some, such as Chancellor Kronos, were able to resist me, I soon discovered that the detachment of Acolytes I had been given were susceptible enough. Particularly their leader Ives, the odious little cretin. He thinks I plan to take control of the universe and that he will stand beside me as my right hand man. Wielding him and his men as a blunt instrument I have turned the Houses to my will.”

“So,” said the Doctor, deciding the time had come to cut to the chase, as it were. “I hear that you intend to destroy the universe. Is that correct?”

LeVay chuckled to himself. “Straight to the point I see, Doctor. I like you more and more. Yes, that is the long and the short of it.”

“May I ask why? And, perhaps more importantly, how?”

LeVay cradled his chin in his long fingers and fixed the Doctor with a withering stare. “I suppose,” he said at last, “that since you are an integral part of my plans I may as well tell you before you are absorbed into Idrael. You see, Doctor, some may feel that the best use of a machine such as this is to fight wars or engage in commerce. I consider these people short-sighted and mundane. This technology, to me at any rate, always had a higher purpose. It has long been established that there are strict rules governing the interplay of

forces and mass. And for almost as long, it has been postulated that a sufficiently powerful computer could calculate the effects of force on every particle in the universe, from the big bang to the end of time and space. Such a computer would be able to calculate the precise position of every atom in the universe at every point in time. In effect, it would be a window onto the past, the present and the future all at once.”

The Doctor sighed. “Yes, I am familiar with the theory.”

LeVay continued as if he had not been interrupted. “The calculations involved are exceedingly simple. It has only been the sheer number of equations required which has frustrated previous attempts. Now, thanks to Idreal, I have a computer capable of carrying out this task.”

Raphael and Silver were ushered into the great hall of Sikylon - a vast, perfectly circular construction something like a gothic lecture theatre. Inside were around 200 people, dressed in the thick robes which all the planet's students wore, shell-shock etched into their young faces. At intervals around the room stood around 30 Acolytes, each heavily laden with weaponry. It did not require Silver's female intuition to tell her what was going to happen here. A massacre was about to take place and the morons were just going to stand there and take it, like lambs being led to the slaughter. Rage began to boil in her veins.

As the pair found a place at the front of the crowd, the lights dimmed, and a blinding spotlight hit the stage. Out walked a small, rat-like man with a clipped moustache, who threw open his arms and began to orate in a clipped, authoritarian voice.

“My friends” he said, his voice heavy with barely concealed glee. “I am Commander Ives, of the Avalon Corporation. I and my men have been tasked with keeping you safe this past month. Sadly the time has now come for us to bid you all farewell. Our orders are clear. You are of no further use to Idrael. I'm rather afraid in fact that you constitute... the rejects.” He chuckled to himself. “We are going now, to sit at the side of the Gods in the new order. Sadly, you represent a loose end that must be tied up before we leave.”

A murmur rose in the crowd. Silver looked first at Raphael, then at the others behind him. The murmur grew louder. Perhaps, she thought, they aren't as docile as I thought. As weak as the Acolytes are counting on. Perhaps they can be galvanised.

She had barely begun to form a plan when she became aware that the spotlight had fallen on her. Ives raised his hands for quiet. “However,” he said quietly, “since we all have our... baser instincts, it has been promised that the girl will come with us. She will serve as a handmaiden of the Acolytes for so long as she is fit for the purpose.” He held out a hand, inviting her up onto the stage with him.

Her mind racing through possibilities, Silver fixed Raphael with a stare and gave him the merest hint of a wink. Then she stepped up onto the stage and took Ives by the hand. The little man licked his lips as she ran her fingers through his patchy, thinning hair. A cheer went up through the Acolytes in the crowd as she kissed him firmly and wetly on the lips, her arms snaking around his torso. And then came a shocked silence as she pressed his own pistol to his glistening forehead.

“Nobody move!” she yelled as Ives, a picture of shock and fear, checked his holster and found it empty. She was good, he reflected. Nobody had ever caught him out like that before. He relaxed. His desire to possess her increased. In seconds thirty automatic weapons were trained on her, but it was not merely the fear of her death-twitch that prevented him giving the order to fire. It was cold, hard desire.

“The universe doesn't work like that!” the Doctor yelled, barely in control of himself. “You can't map human behaviour like... like Brownian motion! What about free will?”

LeVay chuckled. “Free will? I deny there is any such thing. It is a construct of minds too feeble to accept the truth. Our behaviours are determined by science, Doctor. Pure science. And I have mastered that science. I am the first man to have done so. And do you know what I have seen, Doctor? I have seen poverty and I have seen war. Misery, starvation, violence and death are the commodities in which this universe trades. Things will be better once I have done away with it all. Once I have fulfilled *my* destiny.”

“Which is?”

“I was not so sure myself at first. It was murky, my own future. Too murky for me to see. Then I realised, it is because I *have* no future. Not one in the sense that you, or Ives or that girl you care for so much has. I am free, Doctor. By being given the capability to see into the future I become the only man capable of challenging it. Of *changing* it. I stand outside the laws which govern all other men, Time Lord. Even you.”

“You cannot change the future, LeVay!” cried the Doctor, pleadingly. “If anyone should know I should! It would bring about chaos!”

LeVay waved his hands animatedly. “Doctor, you are a small man by comparison to me. You see the future one tiny, subjective piece at a time. You do not see the whole picture, the way that I do. That is what makes me and not you qualified to take the decisions I have.”

“And what decisions have you taken?”

“I am going to commit an act of great humanity. I am going to end suffering once and for all. For all your philosophical frailty, Doctor, you have one great asset. There is power in your mind. A power greater than any I have yet found. Power which, amplified by Idrael, will give me enough to carry out my plan. I knew that you were the one I needed as soon as I saw you approach. With you as part of Idrael, I will have a collective psychic power sufficient to cause this system's sun to go supernova. Massively supernova, in fact. The energy dissipated will cause the same to happen to the nearest neighbouring suns, as will they in turn. The chain reaction will spread across the universe, until all the lights are extinguished and everything is quite, quite dead. My firestorm will send every living thing to whatever Paradise it believes in, and all pain will be at an end.”

The Doctor turned white. “You can't! It won't work!”

“I assure you, Doctor, my calculations have been checked and double checked. It *will* work. Kronos realised it would. That's why he threatened to expose me and have me shipped back to Avalon. And that is why I put him into Idrael, and killed the boy he cared for. Do not make his mistake, Doctor.”

“What do you mean?”

“At present, a squad of Acolytes has the entire populous of Sikylon at gunpoint. If we do things my way, they die painlessly, incinerated in the blink of an eye. If you resist, they will be killed in the most brutal and sadistic way Ives can conceive.”

The Doctor said nothing, but instead sat down and crossed his legs. “I will make you an offer,” he said. “If you can prove to me that your science is sound I shall do as you wish.” With that, he took from his pocket a small chess set, the pieces carved delicately from ebony and ivory. “We play. If you can see my moves before I make them, as you claim, then winning should present no problem to you. If that is the case, I will happily go into the machine. If I win, will you at least concede that there is a possibility that you have misinterpreted what you have seen?”

As the Doctor had hoped, the mere suggestion that he was wrong caused spasms of rage to break out on LeVay's face. "You sad, pathetic little man. I shall enjoy the look of utter defeat on your face when I have shown you quite how stupid you are."

Smiling a little to himself, the Doctor moved his first pawn. LeVay merely stared intently at the board as his pieces began to move without human agency.

It had all happened so quickly Silver had barely had time to consider whether she was doing the right thing. As she had stood with the gun pressed to Ives's head, a movement had broken out in the crowd. The two hundred had turned on the thirty, and hands long used to the feel of book and pen had become twisted into fists, prepared to beat and gouge. In panic the soldiers had begun to fire indiscriminately into the crowd and a few of the surging bodies had fallen, but within moments more than half of them had been overpowered. Their guns were snatched up eagerly and the few soldiers who remained on their feet were now running for cover, bullets following quickly on their heels.

Silver suddenly felt her wrist grabbed and an insane strength trying desperately to twist the gun from her hand. Ives's face was up close to hers, so close she could feel his hot, rancid breath on her neck. In a panic she lashed out with her free hand, her nails clawing at the face, rending flesh and exposing chalky white bone. With a whimper the hand let go and Ives staggered off, shuffling through a small door at the back of the stage and clutching his face. Silver considered following him, but instead dropped to her knees behind a nearby lectern and began returning fire on the surviving Acolytes.

The Doctor's forces were being massacred. Both his rooks had fallen, and a knight. A look of satisfaction and smugness was etched onto LeVay's hawk-like face. But there, tucked away in a quiet corner of the battlefield, stood a lone pawn. As long as he stood there, benign and unthreatening, the Doctor knew there was a chance. Would LeVay see it? With a look of grim determination, the Doctor continued his game.

As Ives staggered through unfamiliar streets he sobbed. The pain from his ruined face was as nothing next to the realisation that he had failed his master utterly. Finally, when he could go no further he collapsed to his knees and cried out, "Idrael, I have failed you! The unbelievers have taken control of the city! My men are dead! Do with me as you will!"

Then he collapsed into a crumpled heap and wept.

LeVay furrowed his brow for a moment. Ives, absurd little man that he was, had failed. Still, he considered, when one is sailing in uncharted seas there was always a possibility of unexpectedly running into choppy water. Suddenly he became aware of something else which perturbed him - the Doctor attempting to outflank him with a bishop. It gave him pause, because it was not the move he had foreseen. Perhaps it was simply the issue of Ives and his men that had broken his concentration.

Time, he reflected, to put Plan B into action.

In the Garden of Remembrance, something stirred. A shaft of moonlight caught the pallid flesh of a hand emerging from the soft ground. Soon it was joined by two more, like obscene flowers sprouting from fertile soil.

In moments, row upon row of writhing arms – some merely bone, others with rank flesh still clinging to them, began to emerge, contorting wildly as they attempted to gain a purchase in the soil with which to pull up their respective bodies. Soon a silent army was on the march. Wasted muscles flexed again, decaying feet once again trod the ground beneath. Driven by an impulse to kill, they moved toward the city.

Silver was blind with anger - loosing off shot after shot, protected from the answering fire by the solid lectern. The bodies of Acolytes and students alike littered the floor of the hall as the unarmed students ran frantically around looking for cover. Those who had acquired guns were firing wildly at the Acolyte positions. They were less accurate than their opponents, but they had numbers on their side. For every student that fell there was another in his place, picking up his gun and fighting on. She was proud to see Raphael, gun in hand, leading the students. Finally he was getting the taste of real life he wanted. She just hoped it would not be too bitter for his palate. Nevertheless, she thought, this could still go badly. At least fifty students were dead, whilst the losses on the side of the remaining Acolytes numbered less than half a dozen. It was going to be a war of attrition.

Until, that was, the Acolytes ceased firing. Fearing a trick, the students continued shooting, but when they were still not met with an answer it began to dawn on them that something was going on. Had the enemy surrendered?

Suddenly one of the Acolytes stood up, his hands raised. He tossed his gun to the floor and was immediately surrounded.

“My... My name is Lieutenant Snyder” he stammered. “Will someone tell me what the hell is going on here?”

Silver leaped forward, keeping him covered with her gun. “How about you tell us? You’re the ones who started shooting at everything that moved!”

Snyder looked around, taking in the scene, and gasped. “I have no idea. I remember... I remember being told by Commander Ives that we were going to be taking our orders from Mr. LeVay. I remember the two of them sitting in the briefing room together, talking us through our objectives. And then... this. It's as if I just woke up from some nightmare, but I can't remember what it *was*.”

Slowly the other Acolytes were emerging, each telling similar tales. Silver's grip on her gun relaxed as she realised that their protestations were genuine. As the other students kept the soldiers covered, she grabbed Raphael by his sleeve and pulled him sharply to one side.

“What does this mean? If they're not under LeVay's influence any more, does that mean we've won? Has the Doctor beaten him?”

Raphael looked excitedly at Silver. He was about to speak when, out of the corner of his eye, he caught a movement in the corner of his eye, coming from the direction of the great archway which served as the entrance to the hall. Silver followed his line of sight. It was Ives. Jesus, she thought, he looks like hell.

Panting, red in the face and covered all over in blood and sweat, the Commander leaned hard against the archway as he attempted to steady himself. At last, when he had the rapt attention of the entire room, he seemed to find the strength to speak.

“Get out of here...” he panted. “Run, you bloody idiots or you’ll all end up de...”

Suddenly he was jerked back violently into the shadows, as if pulled by unseen hands. Silver again tightened her grip on the gun as his screams echoed throughout the hall, only to end with the sound of a sickening crunch. Nothing happened for a moment, until a thin trickle of deep red blood emerged from the archway. Nobody dared move. The trickle lazily wended its way to the feet of Silver and Raphael. The pair looked deeply into each other’s eyes, then around the room. Acolyte and student alike, those who had weapons and the strength to use them were beginning to instinctively form a protective circle around those who did not.

Seconds later, the undead army poured through the archway.

In the city beneath, things were not going well for the Doctor. Half of his pawns were captured, his other knight had fallen and he had a hole in his left flank, exposing his queen. LeVay, smiling, took the defenceless piece. “Check” he chuckled.

It’s a funny way to go, thought Silver. Eaten by space zombies in a university on another planet. She concentrated on firing at the seething mass, but try as she might she just couldn’t *kill* anything. You could blow out their guts or their brains and they just kept on coming. The floor was now awash with blood and entrails, to the extent that half of her concentration was now taken up by simply trying not to slip and fall. The hordes were unstoppable, she realised, as she saw one tear out the throat of a nearby student with its bare hands - the boy jerking violently and making sickening gurgling noises as he died. Her back now pressed to the wall, she resolved that her last two bullets were being saved for her and Raphael.

For himself, Raphael was showing a remarkable new-found ability to stay calm under pressure. He and Snyder were organising the remaining men into rows, attempting to hit the enemy lines at their narrowest points and expose a hole which could be pushed through. It was a fruitless task, but at least it made him feel like he was doing something. He had half an idea about getting the survivors over to the stage door and making a run for it, before he realised the enemy had cut them off that way too. Finally realising the futility of their position he crouched and, using a nearby body for cover, he checked how many bullets remained in his magazine. Looking up, he saw an Acolyte being disembowelled at the hands of two undead assailants. The stench of offal was overpowering, the man’s screams unbearable. He counted six bullets remaining. The last two, he decided, were for him and Silver.

Triumphantly, the Doctor wielded that unobtrusive pawn, before setting it down gently and springing his trap. “Check. And mate.” he said, struggling to keep the pleasure from his voice.

LeVay twisted in his chair, a look of horror carved into the lines of his face. “No!” he cried. “You have cheated me!”

“No” said the Doctor seriously. “I have not. While there is a spark of life in me, my actions cannot be divined by something so mundane as mathematics. You see nothing but psychic visions filtered through your own, insane mind. You are utterly, utterly wrong. You have failed. Do you understand that? And what’s more,” he prodded LeVay in the chest, “I don’t *like* you.”

But LeVay was not listening. His body was contorting this way and that, his face locked in a horrifying grimace. Until suddenly, he was still. His lips began to move, but the voice which came from them was not his – it had a raspy tone, and the Doctor recognised it as the one he had made contact with during his meditation. “Doctor,” it croaked. “I am Chancellor Kronos. LeVay has lost control, we speak for him now. Yet I feel his strength returning, soon he will reassert his influence. I can give you but a little time, then we must use what power we have left to destroy Idrael, and the city with it.”

Not needing to be told twice, the Doctor scooped up his chessmen, crammed them into the pocket of his coat and ran blindly for the exit. He had barely gotten halfway before he felt a hand closing around his ankle and found himself toppling over. He twisted himself around to see the face of LeVay locked in a mask of rage, blood seeping from his nostrils and his face grey and haggard, as if the bones beneath were collapsing in on themselves. With a strength that belied his appearance, LeVay grabbed the Doctor by his lapels and smashed a fist into his jaw. The sharp taste of blood filled the Doctor's mouth, and he spat out two teeth onto the floor. A burning pain seared across the Doctor's face, his jaw dislocated if not broken by the impact. Blood, mingled with saliva, ran down his chin, splashing wetly onto the ground. The Time Lord looked up just in time to see LeVay's forehead come crunching down onto his nose. He squealed at the sensation of cartilage rending under the force of the blow, and the rivulets of hot blood pouring down his face. Fighting against the pain, the Doctor shoved hard at the frenzied body atop him, but LeVay's hands were now around his throat, squeezing hard. Gasping for breath, the Doctor clawed at the leering face, desperate to get LeVay away from him but mindful that he needed to keep the man's attention focussed on him and away from reasserting his control over Idrael.

It was all over. The questing hands were now inches from Silver's throat. She couldn't even get a clear shot at Raphael. With the last ounce of her strength, she lifted the gun to her head and pulled the trigger. An impotent click was all that she was rewarded with. She had obviously miscounted her shots. Guns – useless in the end, as the Doctor had told her once. She wondered if she would see him again in the next life.

The Doctor was dying. His tongue, thick and dry and turning an alarming shade of purple, lolled from his mouth. Perhaps, he thought as the blackness engulfed him, he would regenerate. Maybe even in time to get up to the city and save Silver and the others. It seemed a forlorn hope. Idrael's chamber was already experiencing the psychic tremors resulting from the giant computer's sudden disconnection from its host. The ground beneath the Time Lord lurched alarmingly, and great slabs of bony masonry were falling from the ceiling.

It was at that moment that the Doctor's hand came to rest one of those pieces of bone. With his last remaining strength, he lifted it and weakly aimed a blow at LeVay's head. More in surprise than pain, LeVay relaxed his grip and with a deep, rasping breath the Doctor forced the hands of his enemy away from his throat. The two men stood, gasping from their exertions before at last LeVay, with an animal cry, leaped once again for the throat of his enemy, hands outstretched. The Doctor, hefting the bone like a baseball bat, swung wildly and by little more than sheer good fortune caught LeVay a mighty blow on the temple. LeVay was unconscious before he hit the floor, his breathing ragged and shallow.

With barely time for a backward glance, the Doctor staggered away in the direction of the city.

And then in an instant the undead army, as one, collapsed to the ground and became once more inanimate.

The hall now resembled a picture she had once seen of the aftermath of the battle of the Somme. Bodies, fresh and not so fresh, littered the floor, many with limbs jutting at unnatural angles or missing altogether. The smell of rotting flesh assailed her nostrils. Her back still pressed to the wall, she sunk down, gripped her knees and began to cry.

The next hour or so was a blur. She remembered hearing the Doctor's voice. Feeling Raphael's strong arms around her shoulders supporting her as she staggered to her feet. Seeing the wounded being carried from the hall as the remaining students and Acolytes fled. The main image she recalled was of sitting on a hill overlooking the city, in a state of near-catatonia, breathing in the sweet scent of the flowers in in the morning sun and watching the capital city of Aurora destroyed by a series of enormous explosions. That was too much for her. She drifted off to sleep, not caring whether she ever woke up again.

She did wake up, though how much later she did not know. She was in a small mud hut, probably in one of the farming villages they had passed only a few Earth days before. The Doctor, Raphael and Snyder were at her side. The Doctor moved to put his hand on hers, but was beaten to it by Raphael.

“Well” smiled the Time Lord. “You have been in the wars haven't you? But it's all over now. You just lie there and rest, and dream of rainbows and butterflies.”

Slowly her strength returned, and eventually she was well enough to attempt the hike back up through the mountains to the TARDIS. Snyder said that the Acolytes had a ship hidden on the other side of the mountains, and that he and what was left of his men would be leaving, with whichever students wished to go with them. Taking with him the Doctor's thanks, he and his followers left. There remained only the Doctor, Silver and a couple of dozen of the surviving students.

Raphael came to see the Doctor and Silver a few hours later to announce that he too was leaving. Silver noticed that some of the warmth had gone out of his eyes, replaced by a cold determination. He had to travel to the other Houses, he said, to see that everyone was safe, and then begin sifting through the rubble to see how much of the collected knowledge

of Sikylon could be salvaged. Silver asked him again whether he would come with them, but he gently refused. Tenderly he kissed her one final time, then he said “I have seen real life, which is all I ever wanted. For once I have made a difference, like the Doctor taught me in his stories all those years ago. And you helped me to do it. I shall never forget you, for as long as I live.”

“He'll make a fine Chancellor one day” said the Doctor as they waved him and his fellow students off. “You know, for all LeVay's madness and evil, I think the boy is disappointed that he was never seen as being worthy to be part of Idrael, as horrible as it sounds. Because of that, he will be spurred on to great things.”

“And what about me, Doctor?” asked Silver. “Did I do okay?”

“Oh more than okay,” smiled her friend. “I should say that every one of those people would be dead now if it hadn't been for your ingenuity. That's a lesson you have to learn, to be glad for the ones you can save, not to drive yourself mad with grief over the ones you can't.” He put his arm around her and smiled warmly. “And it was wrong of me to be so dismissive of your religious beliefs. I'm sorry that you didn't find what you thought you had.”

“That's okay” she grinned. “I don't have to be able to see someone to know that they're out there, taking care of me.”

“Now come along,” he said, taking her gently by the hand. “It's time to go home.”

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