

THE  
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PROJECT

**NOISES**



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Noises

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Emily couldn't sleep. She lay on the bed twisting and turning, this way and that way. No matter what she did she couldn't find a comfortable position in order to get to sleep and she needed as much sleep as she could before tomorrow. Tomorrow would be her first day at the big school. Her mother had reassured her it would be okay. She would meet lots of girls just like herself and have lots of new friends to play with but Emily wasn't convinced. All she could think was that it was a new building without her old friends and that made her nervous.

She turned over and pulled the covers as tight as she could around her. In front of her on the bedside cabinet was her Peppa Pig alarm clock. She watched the second hand move relentlessly round the clock face.

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock.

*Silly clock*, thought Emily. Usually she would have barely noticed the clock but tonight the sound seemed to bounce and echo around the dark bedroom.

"Shut up," she whispered, scolding the clock for being too noisy. Much to Emily's surprise it obeyed her. The hand on the clock froze and came to a complete halt. The second hand that she had been watching so closely was now stationary and little Peppa Pig wasn't moving at all now.

Emily sat up in bed, grabbed the clock and gave it a rapid shake. She hoped this might spring the clock back to life but it was no good. Maybe daddy could fix it in the morning. Emily sighed with relief. At least she might be able to get some sleep now. She smiled to herself, a naughty thought creeping into her head. Maybe, just maybe, with the alarm not working she'd sleep right through tomorrow and miss all the horrors of her horrible new school.

She turned over again and looked out across her little bedroom. A streak of moonlight flashed from a gap in the curtains across the newly carpeted floor. The rest of the room sat in darkness. She liked her room. It was her own special room. She'd help choose the curtains, the wallpaper, the pictures and the carpet. She'd even walked around IKEA with her parents and helped choose all the furniture. To Emily it was the best, most wonderful place in the world and she always felt safe here...until now.

Something was disturbing Emily. Usually Emily's menagerie of cuddly toys made her feel safe. Daddy had piled all her cuddly, furry friends next to her Barbie wardrobe. That way they would keep her safe from the wardrobe monsters but it wasn't the wardrobe that was scaring Emily tonight. It was her collection of dogs, cats, pigs and lions that seemed threatening tonight.

Emily lifted off her duvet and lowered herself quietly to the floor. She knelt down in front of the animals, carefully examining each one. The soft toys stared back with their blank eyes and fake smiles. All seemed well and nothing seemed unusual at all.

Content that nothing was wrong, Emily turned away. Something grabbed her, pulling her back towards the animals and the wardrobe. Glancing back she could see that something had a hold of her ankle. It was a brown, bony claw that was pulling her back towards the animals. She reached out for the bed. For a moment her small fingers wrapped themselves around the handle of the drawer beneath the bed but the claw pulled again and her hand came loose.

Emily tried to scream but it was no good. She couldn't get enough breath in her lungs to make enough noise. She continued to be dragged towards the toys. Behind her the air was shimmering like the planes she'd seen land and take off from the airport. She tried to grab hold of the carpet but bits of fluff and cord just came away in her hands. There was nothing she could do to stop herself.

In one smooth motion Emily slid beneath the pile of toys. With a bang, the pile of toys flew across the room. It was like an explosion in a zoo house with dogs, pigs and giraffes going this way and that. The door to the bedroom flung open. Light streamed in from the hallway, silhouetting Emily's mum in the doorway. It didn't take long for her to realise the bedroom was empty.

Over the coming months and years Emily's mum would again enter the bedroom. Every time she would hope, pray, that Emily would be there on the bed waiting for her but she never was and each time Emily's mum would break down and weep upon the duvet that her daughter would never use again.

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The room sat in near darkness. Like a shroud, the gloom smothered the air subduing all signs of light or life. A few lights and switches tried to pierce the blackness but they made little impression. This place belonged to the night and the alarm.

The alarm was a never-ending, monotonous hum that reverberated throughout the room, patiently waiting to be turned off. Only occasionally would the siren ever falter. From time to time it would waver, as if the sound waves were fighting something but it never lasted more than a moment and the alarm would snap back to its standard tone.

A second noise joined it. A groaning, scrapping sound that echoed and bounced around the room followed by a blue light, blinking and illuminating in the darkness. Beneath the blue lamp solidified the tall blue Police box that was the TARDIS.

The door of the time/space machine creaked open and Val's dark auburn hair poked out from within the time machine. Her blue eyes blinked rapidly as she tried to pierce the gloom but no matter how hard she tried she couldn't see much else in the room.

It was all a bit of a disappointment for Val. Her first trip in the TARDIS and she had dreamt about a number of things. Perhaps something real alien like a slimy, fat, green blob of a thing that talked in beeps. She imagined a story where the alien and her would be at odds with one another but by the end of the adventure Val and the green thing would end up being great friends like a cross between ET and Casper the ghost.

Her other dream was a trip into the past where she could star in her very own BBC costume drama opposite Colin Firth. There would be corsets, frocks, grand houses, horse drawn carriages, men in uniform and all manners of matrimonial misunderstandings but at the end of the day there would be marriages and inheritances for all. However her first trip didn't appear to have delivered either of those dream scenarios. There was no green blob and this didn't feel like a country mansion.

Tom stepped out of the TARDIS and joined her. He ran his fingers through his curly brown hair, took a look at his surroundings, frowned then with a scowl said, "What's that noise?"

Val hadn't actually noticed the noise but now that Tom had pointed it out it was the only thing she could concentrate on. "Sounds like my head the morning after a good night out," she said with a smile.

The Doctor stepped out of the TARDIS, "More like the distress signal we picked up in the TARDIS."

Tom frowned. "Where's it coming from?"

The Doctor examined his surroundings, "It's the base's alarm. Used in only the most critical of situations."

"You mean not like Star Trek when they went to red alert whenever someone burnt the toast," said Tom with a smile.

A puzzled look crossed the Doctor's face like he didn't have a clue what Tom was on about so he just carried on regardless, "I wonder what set it off?"

Val looked back and saw that the TARDIS was wedged in a slim metal corridor as bland as it was silver. "This is a base?"

"Aren't bases supposed to have lights, screens and people?" asked Tom.

"This is just a corridor inside the base," said the Doctor. "This has all the signs of being a terra-forming base."

"Terra-forming base?" asked Tom.

"Essentially a space ship but what it does is this," said the Doctor excitedly. "The ship orbits the planet, scanning the surface until it finds the best place to land, somewhere with adequate resources and conditions then it simply drops down from space, digs itself into the soil and, like a mosquito in your skin, drills its way beneath the surface and lives off all the goodness below. Then the crew and passengers can get straight on with populating the new planet. A very efficient system indeed."

"So the people on this ship are like space age founding fathers I suppose?" asked Val.

"An excellent comparison," replied the Doctor.

"So what do we do now?" asked Val.

"Well," said the Doctor surveying the area, "we have a look round."

"Why?" said a confused Tom. "Not like there's anything here."

"There's still the distress the signal. They're might be people in trouble," explained the Doctor.

"One thing I don't understand Doctor," said Val. "How did you pick up this base's alarm in the TARDIS through time and space like that?"

"That's a good question," said the Doctor with a frown. "And one I don't have an answer to. It's almost as if..."

The Doctor's words fell away and his gaze shifted. Val and Tom watched him carefully. The Doctor looked straight ahead. Val wondered if he was looking into the distance or maybe as a Time Lord he was seeing the future or the past. Tom nudged her and gestured to her to interrupt him. She reluctantly agreed.

"As if what Doctor?" asked Val.

The Doctor snapped out of his thoughts and gathered himself. "What? Oh, why, it's almost as if I've been brought here...deliberately," replied the Doctor.

"By whom?" asked Val.

The Doctor smiled. "No idea and at this juncture we've no time to worry about it. We've got far more important matters to be dealing with."

"Wouldn't it be better to, you know, get out of here," suggested Tom.

The Doctor shook himself. "No, come on."

With that the Time Lord marched off down the corridor. Val and Tom took a look at each other and then hurried after him. They soon came to the end of the little corridor and the two friends stepped out excitedly, each hoping that something new and wonderful would meet them. To their immense disappointment they found themselves in another corridor, one that was just as silver and as bland as the first one.

The Doctor looked back at them with a smile. "Something wrong?"

"Well," said Val, "I was hoping for something a bit more..."

As she searched for the words a door slid behind the TARDIS crew and slammed shut. The Doctor pushed past his two friends, looking through the window in the door he could see his ship. The Doctor's eyes flashed quickly around the door and in an instant he had found the controls. He pressed the button but the door refused to move. The Doctor pressed it again and again like an office worker battling a coffee machine that refused to give him his change.

Val could see something in the Doctor's panic stricken eyes. "What's wrong, Doctor?" she asked.

"The door's not responding," replied the Doctor before reaching into his pocket and pulling out a sleek silver rod like device. Giving it a squeeze, the device let out a buzz. The Doctor stepped back as if waiting for something to happen but nothing did.

"Was something supposed to happen?" asked Tom.

The Doctor looked a bit sheepish, "Well, yes, you should be standing there with astonished looks on your faces as the door slides effortlessly open."

Tom spotted a computer terminal by the side of the door and began tapping away.

The Doctor aimed the rod like device once more at the door and gave it another squeeze. Just like the first time it let out a small whirring kind of a noise but once again nothing happened.

Val turned to the Doctor. "What is that thing?"

The Time Lord held up the device proudly, "This is my sonic screw driver. A sort of sonic lock pick."

Val looked at the locked door and back to the Doctor, "If that's what it said on the packaging, I'd take it back if I was you," she said.

The Doctor was most defiant. "This is my most trusted friend. It can open any door."

Val gave him the kind of look she gave her last boyfriend when he tried to convince her that forgetting their anniversary was a sign the relationship had reached a more mature level.

The Doctor could only look through the glass panel in the door at his ship beyond it and said sadly, "Well, almost any door."

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Tom had been clicking away at the console point for a good five minutes. It was a stubborn little thing. Annoyingly it was quite a simple system but Tom always knew that often the simpler things are, the harder they are to crack. He recalled the day he started in one job and one of the IT staff was boasting about the security protocols and protections the firm's computer system had. As soon as he heard that Tom knew he'd be able to crack it and he knew he'd get this one eventually.

"Bingo!" cried Tom.

"What is it?" asked Val as she and the Doctor gathered around Tom.

"I've got access," said Tom triumphantly.

"And?" asked the Doctor.

"According to the computer some kind of security protocol's been activated," explained Tom as he continued to tap away at the console. "The base is in some kind of security hiatus."

"Can you switch it off?" asked Val.

"Not from here. This is only a dummy terminal, just giving information. It's not allowing me to input anything but there must be a control point somewhere," replied Tom.

"Then we better find it," said Val.

"Indeed. I imagine it'll be in the control room. Which I think should be," the Doctor pointed, "this way."

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The Doctor, Val and Tom wandered down the corridor of the base, the alarm still ringing in their ears. The Doctor led the way, whistling happily to himself. Val and Tom struggled to keep up with the quick pace he was setting with his long confident strides.

The Doctor came to a halt and peered through a glass panel in the door. "Interesting," he said.

Val squeezed alongside him and looked through the glass as well. She saw a medium sized room. In the corner was a console and dominating the centre of the room was a machine. It had a wheel attached to a belt. It reminded Val of the antique steam engines she'd seen when she was a child at the local fairs and fetes, usually driven by white bearded men with little train driver caps perched on their heads but the machinery in this room was different. Instead of the belt driving some kind of motion to propel a vehicle, it was disappearing behind a panel in the wall.

"What is that?" asked Val.

"It's a generator," explained the Doctor. "Behind the panel is a mass of plasma. The wheel turns the belt then the belt disturbs the plasma. It's bit like disturbing a sleeping child. Energy suddenly seems to appear from nowhere."

"Enough energy to run the base?" asked Val.

"More than enough," replied the Doctor.

"Some child," said Val looking at the plasma. "Is that stuff dangerous?"

"Very dangerous," replied the Doctor. "If someone was to go through the protective barrier and into the plasma then, well, they're never coming back again."

"Err...Doctor," said Tom, standing on tip toes like someone trying to get a better view of a street act, "the belt's not moving."

"Yes, I did notice that," said the Doctor. "Nothing to worry about. Probably other generators elsewhere."

With that the Doctor carried on down the corridor. Val and Tom looked at one another.

"I don't like this," said Val. "This is like walking around an empty shopping centre. It just feels wrong without the hustle and bustle of people."

"Maybe it's a Sunday," said Tom.

Val wasn't convinced. She looked down the corridor in the direction the Doctor had headed but she couldn't see him anymore.

"Where's the Doctor gone?" asked Val.

Tom followed Val's gaze but likewise there was nothing to see. "Dunno."

"Come on, let's take a look," said Val and she set off to follow the Doctor. Tom gave chase but almost as soon as he started Val came to a halt and Tom walked straight into the back of her almost knocking her over.

Val spun around and whispered to Tom, "Watch it!"

Tom whispered back, "Sorry," He straightened himself then tapped Val on the back. She turned to face him.

Tom whispered again, "Why are we whispering?"

Val pointed. Tom followed her finger down the corridor and could see that they were approaching a corner. He glanced back at Val and mouthed the word, "What?"

"There could be anything round that corner," whispered Val.

"You mean like the Doctor," said a sarcastic Tom.

"I mean like the fact it's gone quiet and he hasn't come back," she replied.

"Doesn't mean anything," said a now worried Tom. "What do we do?"

"Follow me," said Val gesturing for Tom to follow her.

Val crept towards the turn in the corridor. Tom followed behind her. Step by step they approached, getting closer and closer. Gingerly the two friends approached the corner. Val reached out with her hand towards the edge of the wall, ready to protect herself. She stopped, sensing that something was about to come at her from around the corner. Her muscles tensed, her throat went dry when...

The Doctor's face popped out from around the corner. Val and Tom jumped in fright, each one of them letting out an unexpected high-pitched yelp. The Doctor stepped out into view, looking a bit confused, "Are you okay?"

Val leaned over, hand placed on her fast beating heart. "Don't do that."

"Do what?" replied the Doctor.

Tom shook his head. "I've aged twenty years."

"I aged once," recalled the Doctor. "I looked almost as old as I feel now." He gathered his thoughts and his face became grave. "Never mind that. Look at this."

The Doctor beckoned to Val and Tom and they followed him. Once around the corner the Doctor knelt, examining some marks on the wall.

Val took a closer look. The wall was marked with indentations; long, thin and deep. It reminded her of those old werewolf movies and the claw marks the creature would leave on its victims but there wasn't just one set of marks. They were repeated, over and over again.

"What made that?" asked Tom.

The Doctor took out a magnifying glass and studied the marks closer. "They appear to have been made by a woman."

"A woman?" said a surprised Val. "How can you tell?"

The Doctor moved the magnifying glass as close as he possibly could to the marks. "There's little flecks of red in the marks. Unless men have begun wearing nail varnish then I'd say these were definitely made by a woman."

"Or Eddie Izzard," said Tom giving a weak smile.

"Tom!" scolded Val. "What happened here Doctor?"

The Doctor stood up and raised himself to his full height, rubbing his chin in contemplation. After a moment's thought he spoke, "I think she was fighting for her life. Judging by those marks I would say she was doing all she could to stop being taken."

"Taken?" asked Val. "Taken by what?"

The Doctor looked solemn. "That's what worries me the most. I can see her nail marks on the wall, I can see the marks of her shoes on the floor as she tried to stop herself being dragged away, and I can even see some fabrics from the red top she was wearing that got snagged as she was pulled across the floor but I can't see anything else. There's not a sign of whoever or whatever she was fighting against."

"You mean, on the one hand we have a human being in a life or death struggle and on the other hand we have a ghost?" asked Val.

The Doctor frowned. "Not ghosts."

"Then what?" asked Val.

"I wish I knew," said the Doctor. "Come on; let's continue on to the control centre." And with that the Doctor made off on his quick walk.

Tom gestured towards the marks. "Doesn't all this worry you?"

"Not as much as the fact he doesn't know what the problem is," replied Val and she started off after the Doctor. Tom took a glance at the marks then followed his two friends down the corridor.

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It took them about five minutes to reach the control room. Val and Tom felt another wave of disappointment come over them as they entered. They were in a circular room whose walls were surrounded by computer keyboards and screens. It reminded Tom of the kind of airport control rooms you saw in the movies. The base alarm still rang out but there was no other sign of life.

"Is this it?" asked Tom.

"What were you expecting?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, you know maybe a bit *Blade Runner* or *Star Trek*. Not... Teeside Airport," he replied.

The Doctor seemed to contemplate for a moment then said, "I don't believe I've ever been to Teeside Airport."

"Even if you had I doubt you'd remember it. It's not the most exciting of places. Not the kind of place alien armies go when invading the planet," replied Tom.

"Bit rubbish though isn't it," added Val. "Travel half way across the universe and all we get is this."

The Doctor looked over a bank of switches and levers until he spotted one particular lever and threw it back with a flourish. "Maybe I can fix that for you. This may not be an art gallery but this might impress you a tad."

There was a grinding of metal and the sound of wheels turning. Above Tom and Val's head two large metal plates began to slide open revealing two large windows. If Tom and Val had been disappointed so far they weren't now.

Through the windows they could see the landscape of the planet. Stretching out in front of them was a panorama of hills, mountains and plains that climbed and dipped like a duvet. The ground shone with a wonderful bright red hue that was encircled by a blanket of darkness. On Earth urban lighting often gets in the way and blocks out the stars in the night sky but out here that wasn't a problem. Above Val and Tom's heads sparkled a thousand, million stars, looking brighter and sharper than they'd ever seen.

Val couldn't help herself saying, "There's so many."

The Doctor nodded in agreement, "In this part of the universe there's a denser collection of galaxies and stars."

Tom looked impressed, "It's much better than our sky."

The Doctor didn't seem to agree. "Do you think so? I've always found the view of the universe from Earth quite stunning."

Val smiled at the Doctor then returned to the view outside. It was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen but she couldn't help but think there was something eerie about it. She couldn't work out what it was but there seemed something wrong about the landscape.

"Why's nothing moving?" asked Tom.

Val realised that was what was bothering her. Nothing was moving outside. Not a rock, a stone or even a speck of dust drifted about outside.

"Looks like no atmosphere," explained the Doctor. "This is a pretty desolate planet by the look of things."

Tom and Val were transfixed by the view that lay out before them. The Doctor broke the spell and interrupted them, "Tom, why don't you try the computer? See if you can find any information on what happened here?"

Tom smiled. "You don't have to ask me twice."

With that, he jumped into the nearest seat and began tapping away at the keyboard in front of him. He was in his element. As soon as he started the system threw passwords, firewalls and barriers at him. He may have been hundreds or thousands of years in the future but it was obvious to him that people were still using the same tricks to stop people getting into systems. That meant he could use the same tricks to get past them.

The Doctor and Val watched as Tom threw himself into the computer system with all the enthusiasm of a little kid with a new toy.

The Time Lord gestured to Val. "Come on, let's explore." Together they wandered around the room. In truth there wasn't much to see. As the Doctor had explained, the room was very functional. There wasn't even a cuddly toy on one of the screens or a post it note with a reminder to put two sugars in the boss' tea.

"Why are there no sign of life?" Val found herself thinking out loud.

"The people who volunteer for these kinds of operations are handpicked," explained the Doctor. "Being the first on a new planet and making that planet habitable for those that follow is a tough job. It takes a lot of hard work and commitment and so the people that do it are hard people. There are no creature comforts and no going back. Now this is interesting."

In front of the Doctor and Val was a closed door. The Doctor stopped and stared at the door.

"How do we open it?" she asked.

The Doctor smiled. "How do you think?"

She searched around the door and spotted something. There was a handle that looked perfect for pulling. She grabbed it and gave it a tug. Nothing happened. She tried again, still nothing happened. She heaved at the handle one more time but the door still refused to move.

*Okay, she thought, perhaps that wasn't the door handle.* Refusing to be beaten by the stupid door, she was reminded of the ones in an office she used to work in or the ones at the supermarket where you simply walked straight up to the doors and they opened automatically. She looked around to see if there was any kind of movement detectors above the door then, bold as you like, she walked straight right up to the door but nothing happened. She turned, retreated and then walked up even more boldly than before. Still the door refused to open. This door was being a very stubborn door.

She looked at the Doctor for assistance. He smiled, enjoying watching his new friend try and find her feet in the new environment.

Val could see there was no help coming from the Doctor and so continued her battle with the door. Suddenly she remembered the escalators in the new art gallery. She'd only been there once; a date with some floppy haired, art loving hunk that turned out to be very obsessed with French impressionism and the contents of Val's jumper. She quickly ditched the creep.

She recalled that the escalators in the art gallery worked simply by a wave of the hand over a sensor. One wiggle of your hand and the escalators would start their way up to the next floor. Another wave and they'd stop. *This door could be the same idea,* she thought. She waved her arms and hands about above, below, in front and to the side of the door. She waved her arms and hands about like some over enthusiastic, half demented, un-co-ordinated cheerleader but despite all this, the door still refused to budge.

She gave it a kick. "Stupid thing! You're a door. You're supposed to open. If you don't open then you're just a drafty wall with a handle." She turned to the Doctor. "I give up."

"So easily?" laughed the Doctor.

"Then what's the secret?" she asked.

"You were right the first time," he gestured to the handle. "But its power assisted. Needs some electricity to help it open. Wonder why there isn't any? Never mind, the point is you can pull all you want but the door won't move. Unless you're clever...like me."

The Doctor dug deep into his jacket, pulled out the sonic screwdriver and placed it against the door handle. He gave the sonic a squeeze and the gadget let out a short buzz and the door slid open to reveal a short corridor. He gestured for Val to enter the doorway. "After you."

She nodded. "Thank you, sir," and, accepting the Doctor's invitation, entered the corridor. The Doctor was about to follow her when Tom cried out, "Doctor!"

The Doctor stopped, turning to see Tom beckoning him for some help. He paused, not wanting to leave Val.

She waved him away. "Go on. You boys go and play. I'll be all right."

The Doctor nodded then made his way over to where Tom was typing away. Val watched as Tom pointed to the flat screen and the Doctor explained something to him. She could just about make out their voices but not the actual words.

Taking a deep breath she turned and stepped into the corridor properly. As she did so the door slid quietly behind her, cutting out the sound of the Doctor and Tom's conversation. Val spun round to see the door close with a gentle thud. She rushed forward. There was a similar handle on this side of the door. She pulled at it but it refused to open. She tried again but still the door refused to move. In the middle of the door was a window through which she could see the Doctor and Tom engaged in their work. She banged on the door and shouted, "Doctor!"

And then she realised. She couldn't hear the alarm. *Must be sound proof*, she thought to herself. She realised it'd be no good banging and pounding on the door.

"Might as well explore a bit then," she said hoping by saying something brave it would make her feel brave. She stepped away from the door. The only sounds were her small steps and that of her own deep intakes of breathe. As she walked down the slim metal corridor she began to feel she was not alone. She glanced, this way and that, thinking she could see something out of the corner of her eye. She heard about this kind of thing from ghost hunters. When people were scared in old houses they often thought they saw things out of the corner of their eye even if there was nothing there. She hoped she was experiencing the same thing.

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The Doctor was happy to see Tom continue his work. In truth the Doctor hadn't had to help him very much at all. Seeing that Tom was once again engrossed in the systems the Doctor soon lost interest and began to casually look around the room. He flicked at a couple of buttons and some screens came on in front of him showing other parts of the base. Something caught his eye. He found the zoom and the camera moved in.

The Doctor's face turned to horror. Tom, catching the Doctor's expression, stopped his typing and joined the Doctor looking at the screen. Tom felt sick as he saw the pictures. The Doctor had focused the camera on the body of a man. He was slumped against a wall. His face contorted in fear, his hands clenched in a claw like vice reaching for his throat but not quite making it.

Tom looked up at the Doctor. "Where's Val?"

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Val took a step forward. She sensed something, something around her. "Anyone there?" she cried out. Nothing but silence answered her. She spun round. "Who's there?" But the room was empty. She continued on further down the corridor. Each footstep let out a clunk and then followed by silence. Each clunk would echo around the room then disappear.

Val noticed something else too. After every step her throat was tightening. She'd heard of throats going dry when you were scared but she'd never heard of them getting tighter. Something else she noticed too. Her breathing was becoming shorter.

She stopped walking. All was quiet. Her throat almost snapped. Vice like hands grabbed her neck and began to strangle her but she couldn't see any hands. All she could feel was her throat contracting like the middle of a loo roll being slowly stepped on. She tried to breath but she couldn't get enough air into her lungs. Falling to her knees she desperately gasped for breath.

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"Doctor!" cried Tom as he looked through the window in the door. He watched as Val slumped onto the floor. Grabbing the handle he furiously tried to open the door but it refused to open.

The Doctor joined him at the door and seeing Val in trouble whipped out his sonic screwdriver.

"What's that gonna do?" asked Tom.

"Watch," replied the Doctor as he squeezed his favourite device but the door refused to open. He tried it again but the door still refused to move. "Tom, try the computer."

Tom began to type away furiously at the computer. "Damn it!"

"What's wrong?" said the Doctor.

The Doctor glanced through the window. He could see Val's body and she was barely moving.

"The computer's fighting me," said a desperate Tom.

"Then fight back," replied the Doctor.

Tom nodded and returned his concentration to the computer.

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Val was slumped on the floor. The grip on her neck was tightening and her breathing becoming more difficult. *This is it*, she thought. *This is the end*.

She blinked. In front of her the air began to shimmer. It blurred and distorted right in front of her eyes. Then, from within the shimmering came an arm but it was an arm the likes of which Val had never seen before. It was brown, bony, and almost skeletal. A second arm appeared and two claws reached out towards her.

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"Bingo!" cried Tom as he whacked a key with a flourish. The corridor door slid open. The Doctor and Tom rushed into the corridor.

Val heard the sound of the alarm then the hands and arms slipped away from her and she could feel the grip on her neck disappear. She gasped, taking in lung-full's of air. The alarm was the most wonderful noise she had ever heard, closely followed by the second most wonderful.

"Are you okay?" asked Tom. He was knelt by her side, along with the Doctor. Helping her on to her feet she began to get her surroundings.

She rubbed her head as she spoke between gasps. "Thank you...Doctor."

"It's Tom you should be thanking," replied the Doctor.

She looked at Tom. "Thanks mate."

Tom smiled. "No problem."

"What did you do?" asked the Doctor.

"I made the computer fall in love with me."

"What?" said a surprised Doctor.

"I am now the computer's idea of the perfect man," he said smiling.

"Well, they do say computers are just very clever idiots," said Val.

"You sound a bit better," said the Doctor. Val smiled weakly at him. He returned the smile. "What happened?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. The door shut behind me and then I couldn't breathe."

Tom looked around. "This room must be air tight then."

She shook her head. "I wasn't suffocating. I was being strangled. I could feel the air around me but something was stopping me breathing. And there was something else..."

"What?" asked the Doctor.

"You must have seen it?" asked a stunned Val.

"Seen what?" replied a confused Tom.

"The hands," said Val looking from Tom to the Doctor and back again. "The two hands."

Tom and the Doctor looked at one another blankly then Tom said, "We didn't see anything."

"But there were two hands reaching out at me. There was something in this room and it was going to take me."

"Take you? Take you where?" asked the Doctor.

"I don't know. I just saw this...thing...reaching towards me and I could sense it was going to take me...take me away to God knows where."

"Must have been the oxygen deprivation," said Tom.

"Don't you believe me?" said Val.

The Doctor stood, deep in thought as Tom spoke, "It's not that we don't believe you just..."

"Just you think I'm a liar," spat Val and with that she pushed past them and stomped off back into the main room.

"Val!" Tom cried after her.



Tom went to follow her but the Doctor put out an arm to stop him. "Leave her be. She just needs a bit of time."

Tom frowned. "I don't like this place."

"Neither do I Tom," said the Doctor returning to the control room. "Neither do I."

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It had been half an hour since the attack on Val's life and she wasn't feeling much better. She'd put on a brave face for the others but it had unsettled her, left her feeling a little vulnerable and she hated feeling that way. She was strong, always had been. She sat in one of the chairs, casually swinging from side to side.

The Doctor and Tom had spent the last thirty minutes trying to extract more information from the computer but hadn't had much luck. Despite Tom being the computer's new best friend, it was still refusing to give up access to any of the crew's logs or files.

Val rubbed her forehead as the base's alarm continued to ring out. "Can't we turn that damn thing off?"

The Doctor looked up from his screen. "Not yet."

"Why not?" Val asked frowning.

"Just an instinct," replied the Doctor. "Something tells me that alarm was put on for a reason and I don't want to turn it off just yet."

"Found anything?" asked Val.

"No, Tom keeps hitting barriers," replied the Doctor. "We've been trying to get into the crew's logs but..."

"Freeze!" cried a gruff voice.

The three friends turned to see a crumpled, scruffy middle-aged man holding a laser rifle right at them.

"Hands up," said the gruff voice.

The Doctor put his arms straight up in the air. Tom and Val did likewise.

The rifle in the man's hands shook as he pointed it towards the Doctor and his friends.

The Doctor held out his hands in protest. "Now, wait, don't do anything foolish."

"There's nothing foolish about killing you," said the man. "In fact it makes perfect sense."

The man pointed the gun closer at the Doctor.

"But we haven't done anything!" cried Val.

"I've been watching you," said the man gesturing towards Tom and the Doctor. "This one's been hacking into our systems and this one's been breaching security left, right and centre."

"That's no reason to kill people," said Tom.

"My friends are dead, my colleagues are dead, everyone on this base is dead. That's reason enough," replied the man.

"Not for a doctor," said the Time lord.

The man was slightly taken off guard. "How do you know that?"

The Doctor looked right into the man's eyes, "You might be frightened, your clothes

worn, your body hurting, you may not even have washed for a day or two but I can still see the medi-card around your neck. Fabulous invention, a portable gadget, size of a credit card that measure someone's pulse, heart rate, blood pressure and temperature. Only a doctor would carry something like that and only a doctor that had worn it routinely all his working life would forget he was wearing it. How many years have you been saving lives? Bringing people back from the brink of death. You're not the kind of man who would end a life just by pulling a trigger."

The man lowered the gun. "You're right. I was the one who was supposed to keep everyone safe but look at this place."

"What happened?" asked Val.

The man could do nothing but shake his head. "I don't know. One moment everything was going okay then...people began disappearing."

"Disappearing?" asked the Doctor.

The man continued, "Children in the middle of the night wouldn't be in their beds in the morning. Engineers would go off on jobs and never come back." The man's speaking got quicker, his face redder. "We were about to start the terra-forming cycle."

"Terra-forming cycle?" asked Val.

"That's an environmental control system which gradually changes a planet's hostile atmosphere into a more usable one," The Doctor explained

Val glanced out the window. "I'm guessing you didn't get started on that?"

The man was obviously excited, his breathing quick. "People just began choking and gasping all around me. No sign of disease, no sign of attack. There was nothing I could do, nothing, I was..."

The man collapsed into the nearest chair. The Doctor and his two friends rushed over to him. The man was trying to catch his breath, taking deep breaths. The Doctor slipped the gun from the man's hand and gave it to Tom.

"What's wrong with him?" asked Val.

The Doctor rested his hand on the man's chest. He could feel something under the man's uniform.

"Is that what I think it is?" asked the Doctor. The man nodded and the Doctor explained, "Pacemaker."

Val's eyes were raised, "They're still using pacemakers."

"These are much more sophisticated than the ones used in your time. They are less a replacement heart than a back up one, working in conjunction with the person's original one."

"So he effectively has two hearts?" asked Tom.

"Indeed," replied the Doctor.

"That must be useful," added Val.

"It can be," replied the Doctor as he watched the man recover a little.

"Do you think he'd really have killed us?" asked Tom.

"I couldn't have done it even if I could," interrupted the man. "The gun's empty."

Tom looked down at the gun in his hand and casually squeezed the trigger. Much to his surprise the gun fired, a single laser bolt flew out of the barrel and into the wall, destroying an electronic device on the wall. The alarm went silent.

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The man looked sheepish. "Oops, must have been a shot left in the barrel."

"Least we've got a bit of peace and quiet," said Val.

The Doctor snatched the gun away from Tom and gave the man a look of disgust.

"What's your name?"

"Doctor Ellis, Jack Ellis."

"Well, Doctor..." The Doctor stopped speaking and spun around. He paused, stopped for a moment then spun round again and again. He seemed to be searching for something but couldn't find it.

"What's wrong Doctor?" asked Val.

"Something's here," replied the Doctor.

Tom glanced around. "I can't see anything."

"I'm a Time Lord. My senses are more acute than yours. All the hairs down my arm are beginning to tingle. The kind of tingle I only get when there's something around that I can't see."

"If you're trying to scare me Doctor..." said Tom.

A chair flew across the room and smashed into one of the computer consoles.

Tom's body shivered. "Then you're succeeding."

"It's happening again," cried Ellis.

All four backed into the centre of the room as another chair flew across the room.

"Doctor, what are we going to do?" cried Val.

The Doctor looked around then noticed something. He whipped out his sonic screwdriver, pointed it towards one of the consoles and activated the device. A switch lit up on the console and as soon as it did a blanket of energy dropped down from the roof. It made a circle, enveloping around the Doctor and his group.

"What's that?" asked Tom.

"Security field. It's always considered that terra forms might encounter hostile forces and might need somewhere to detain them," explained the Doctor.

"But we're not supposed to detain ourselves," added Ellis.

"Will it keep them out?" asked Val.

"Let's hope so," replied the Doctor.

They watched the energy field around them. For a moment it was still. Val stepped towards the energy field. Everything seemed calm then the field spluttered. It was as if someone was punching water. The field would splutter and splash then go calm.

"Seems to be working," said Val.

"Will it hold?" said Ellis.

As he finished his sentence the field began to spit and splash all around them, like a class of small children playing in the shallow end. Time and time again the field spat, more and more, over and over again, faster and faster. All around them the field seemed to be under attack.

"It's not gonna hold!" cried Val.

"What happens then Doctor?" asked Tom.

"Trouble," replied the Doctor.

The spitting continued getting more frenzied by the second. It seemed like the whole field was shaking, the motion growing and growing until...it all stopped. The field returned to its calm, circular state. All was quiet. The group stood, huddling together then the Doctor stepped forward, right up to the edge of the field.

The Doctor stood facing the energy field, trying to look beyond the barrier in front of him. He was looking for any sign of change in the air, any movement in his vision. He thought he saw it, leant forward, his nose almost touching the barrier.

A claw broke through the field, grabbed the Doctor by the neck and began to squeeze. The Doctor grabbed the claw and tried to pull them off him but it was no use; the claws were too strong.

The others rushed over to help him, each of them pulling at the claws. The Doctor's breathing became shorter as the claws stopped the air entering his lungs. His eyes glanced over to Val and he slipped the sonic screwdriver into her hand.

"Take this, get out of here," said the Doctor.

The Doctor closed his eyes. His body went limp and hung like a doll in the bony claw. The claw released him and his body fell to the ground. Stepping through the barrier was a whole host of the creatures. As they stepped through the barrier they became visible. Their bodies were like reptiles with long arms, long faces and vicious teeth to match.

Val and the others found themselves surrounded by the creatures.

"What are we going to do?" cried Tom as one of the monsters reached out towards him.

Val could do nothing but shake her head as the creatures approached. They reached towards the group when a shriek of thunder rocked the base. The creatures paused then faded away.

Tom looked around. "They've gone."

Val sighed. "Let's hope so."

"But how do we get out of here?" asked Ellis.

Val looked at the sonic in her hand then copying the Doctor pointed the device at one of the consoles and pressed the gadget. A button lit up again and the barrier disappeared. Val rushed over to the Doctor and checked on him.

"How is he?" asked Tom.

She shook her head. "I'm not sure. I think he's alright."

"You think?" asked Tom.

"He's an alien," replied Val. "I have no idea what's normal for him."

Ellis was by the console flicking switches. Tom joined him. "What on Earth was that noise?"

Ellis gestured. On one of the screens Tom watched as a spacecraft was touching down on a landing pad outside the base. It was a grey and dirty pointed ship with flames coming from the bottom. Val joined them by the screen.

"Why's there no sound?" she asked.

Tom tapped away at the keyboard and frowned. "Not sure. The microphones are working. The sound should be coming through."

"It's the dampening field," explained Ellis. Val and Tom looked blankly at him. "RES? Corbett versus Harrison? The famous health and safety test case?"

Val and Tom's faces remained blank so he continued his explanation. "Corbett sued Harrison Limited in the inter-galactic court of alien rights for repetitive ear strain. They managed to prove that the takeoff and landing of planet hoppers like that one were the direct cause and so he made a fortune," Ellis gestured towards the screen "Companies either had to land miles away from the bases and that meant lumping cargo all over the shop, which costs time and money. So instead they invented the dampening field. In the range of a dampening field all sound is neutralised. Hence, no RES."

On the screen they could see the ship and a ramp opening up. It lowered down to the floor. Descending down the ramp was a group of figures in uniform. Val didn't really recognise the uniform but it certainly looked military. As did the rifles they were carrying.

On the screen the military group moved slickly and as one. Tom and Val watched as the group moved through a series of highly trained, well co-ordinated moves to search the immediate area. After a brief flurry of activity, it seemed the group were happy the area was safe and relaxed as one.

Then the group seemed to tense again. As one the troopers sensed, something was happening. They stopped. Two of the men started to shudder and shake violently. Tom zoomed the camera in on one of the men. He was trying to breath but couldn't. His throat was being crushed but no one was around him or even touching his neck. The trooper tried to scream but nothing came out.

Tom panned the camera around to find the same scene repeated across the landing area. Troopers were grasping at their necks trying to breath but couldn't. Each one letting out silent screams, trying to ask for help from their colleagues but not being able to.

Val looked on shocked. "That's the same thing that happened to me."

Tom could only nod but then he noticed something else. "They're disappearing."

Val looked closer and could see what Tom meant. The troopers would choke, fight then when they had little strength left, the air would shimmer and they'd disappear.

"I told you I felt like something was going to take me," said Val.

Tom nodded as the massacre continued on screen. "We have to help them," he said as he noticed something else on screen and zoomed in.

A small group of soldiers had made it across the landing area and were now at the exit. They were hammering on the buttons, switches and the door itself but it didn't open.

"What's going on?" asked Val.

Tom tapped away at the computer. "Security protocols have locked down again."

"I have a security over-ride if I can get to the door," said Ellis.

"Okay, I'll go with him. Tom, you keep working on the computer," replied Val.

Val and Ellis made for the door. They stopped as Tom cried out, "Val, take care."

She nodded and they hurried out of the room. Tom glanced at the screen as the carnage continued then carried on working on the computer.

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Val and Ellis raced down the corridor, the base alarm still ringing out. They skidded to a halt at the door. Ellis found a small panel by the side of the door. Crouching over he spoke into it, "Ellis, employee ID 064651, password, albatross."

The door slid open. Three troopers almost fell into the corridor. Ellis dragged them inside and began checking them over.

Val stood in the doorway, the alarm from the corridor beating out from behind her. She watched in horror as the last of the troopers choked then disappeared.

She took a step forward into the landing area and shouted, "Hey!" But despite how much she screamed she couldn't even hear her own voice. She felt a tightening on her throat. It was the same as before. Once again she could feel her windpipe begin to tighten.

She felt a tug on the back of her blouse and was dragged backwards into the corridor. The force made her lose her balance and she toppled backwards onto the floor with a thud.

"Ow," she said, relieved to hear her own voice. "Which idiot did that?"

"That was me," said a stern female voice. Standing over Val was a tall, slender, uniformed woman. "You got a problem with that?"

Val got to her feet, dusting herself off. "And who might you be?"

"Major Townsend," she replied looking around for the two other survivors of her group. Both were fresh-faced squadies and both looked visibly shaken as they sat on the floor.

"Hargreaves! Campbell! Pull yourselves together!" barked Townsend.

The two troopers scrambled onto their feet; panting heavily they stood to attention.

"Yes sir," they cried.

Townsend took a deep breath and turned her attention to Ellis. "Who are you then?"

"Ellis, base doctor," said the medical man.

Townsend turned to Val. "And who might you be?"

"She's not part of the crew but I think they're all right," interrupted Ellis.

Townsend looked Val in the eye. "Well, we'll see about that."

"There's more of them in the control room," added Ellis.

"In that case, let's have a word with them altogether," said Townsend. "That way I can decide who's responsible for this carnage and who I'm going to kill first."

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Tom was still tapping away at the computer when he felt something metal dig into his temple. Tom glanced sideways to see a gun held by some sort of soldier. The trooper pressed the gun a bit firmer into Tom's head.

"Is this one of them?" said Campbell, trying to sound as macho as possible but failing miserably.

"Yeah," said Ellis.

"Sabotaging the computer, eh?" said Townsend, "Give me one reason why I shouldn't just kill you and your girlfriend now."

For the first time Tom noticed Val being held by Hargreaves, pointing his gun in her back.

"Because you have no proof," snapped Val.

"People are dead. No one knows who you are. That's good enough for me," said Townsend.

"That's suspicion, not proof," said Tom.

Townsend continued regardless. "Campbell, stand out in the hall. Make sure no one else is lurking about."

"Yes sir," said Campbell turning on his heels and double timing it out of the room.

Townsend moved slowly toward Tom raising her gun.

"You can't do this!" Ellis cried and grabbed for the gun. Townsend easily brushed him off and the medical man fell to the floor.

Townsend raised her gun, poised to pull the trigger when the Doctor swiftly took the major by the wrist, twisted it behind her back and in one smooth motion forced her to drop the gun.

Hargreaves raised his gun at the Doctor but the Time Lord turned to face him using Townsend as a barrier between him and the soldier.

"Captain, think twice about what you're about to do. I'm an expert in Venusian karate and could paralyse the major in an instant."

Hargreaves thought for a moment then lowered the gun.

The Doctor glanced around and looked at the two military personal. "Is this all there is of you?"

"There's another one outside," said Val.

The Doctor let Townsend go and rushed over to the door, flinging it open. Townsend followed behind him. The door slid open and revealed Campbell choking, the life draining from him. His body convulsed then fell to the floor. The Doctor pushed Townsend back into the room.

"Tom, get the alarm back on," cried the Doctor.

"But the alarm's shot to pieces," replied Tom.

"Then fix it," said the Doctor.

Tom hopped onto a chair and found the broken alarm. Taking the parts in his hands he looked at them. "What am I supposed to do with this? I'm a computer genius, not an electronics genius."

Hargreaves looked over his shoulder here and took the parts from him. "Let me." The young soldier began tinkering away and smiled at Tom. "Used to work on a farm. I'm used to fixing things."

In a flash the soldier had connected some wires and had the alarm back in place. As he placed it back into its socket the alarm started up again. Hargreaves looked at the box which was hanging by a couple of wires.

"No exactly one hundred per cent but should do the job," said Hargreaves.

"Good work," cried the Doctor from the doorway. He crept out into the corridor and knelt by Campbell's body then noticed something. He looked up at Townsend. "Why isn't the alarm working out here?" The Doctor shouted across the control room, "Tom, check the alarm throughout the base."

Tom typed furiously at the computer. "No good. Only the ones in this room are working. I've run a diagnostic and none of the other alarms will activate."

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"Sabotage?" asked Val.

The Doctor nodded.

"You seem to know more than you're letting on Doctor," said Townsend.

He nodded again. "I think I know what's happening here."

"Care to share?" said Townsend.

The Doctor stepped back into the room and closed the door behind him. "People say silence is golden but what they actually mean is quietness. Remember that old Hollywood cliché; it's quiet, too quiet. Clichés are only clichés because they're true. Total silence is unsettling. It makes you feel uneasy. It feels wrong. That's because in between all the everyday sounds we hear, there exists a nightmare and it is here with us right now."

"Are you saying there's something that exists in silence?" said Val.

"More or less," The Doctor explained. "If I'm right what we're dealing with here is a race of inter-dimensional beings that can only exist in our universe within a very narrow bandwidth. Noise is a wave form like any other and so if there is enough noise, or at least the right kind of noise, then these creatures have no choice but to retreat back into their own dimension."

"Sounds like a load of old rubbish to me," said Townsend.

Ellis stepped forward. "No, it makes sense. Everything that's happened has been when the sound has been off."

"In that case Doctor, maybe you can tell us how to fight this thing," said Townsend.

"We could try and get the alarm back on for a start," said the Doctor.

"In that case I better get to it," said Tom resumed his hacking of the base computer.

Townsend whispered to Val, "Is he any good?"

The alarm began to sound once again and a smile broke across her face. "Oh, he's better than good."

Tom was looking pretty pleased with himself but suddenly his face dropped. "Doctor?"

The Doctor sighed. "What now?"

"You better take a look at this," stated Tom.

The Doctor reluctantly joined Tom by the control panel and then his face changed from one of apathy to worry. "Oh dear."

"What?" asked Val.

"The power. We're currently running on emergency power," replied the Doctor.

"Damn it!" cried Ellis.

"Damn it? What do you mean damn it?" asked Val.

"Emergency power doesn't last forever," explained Ellis, "And when it goes, everything goes. The lights, the heating..."

"The life support?" Townsend asked.

The Doctor nodded. "But what worries me more is that stopping," he pointed upwards.

"The alarm," added Val.

The Doctor looked grave. "If that stops we're dead."

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The Doctor let out a yell and slammed his fist down on one of the computer keyboards. "Blast!"

"What's wrong Doctor?" asked Val.

"Fifteen minutes we've been at this thing, trying to get the power back up but it's no good," replied Tom.

"How come?" said Val.

"The problem's not with the system. It must be the generator itself," replied the Doctor.

"What does that mean?" asked Townsend.

"It means we're going to have to go down to the generator and fix it ourselves," explained the Doctor.

Hargreaves shook his head. "Out there? With those things. You must be mental."

"G.I. Chicken's right. We can't go out without a plan," Val said.

The Doctor thought for a moment then a thought occurred to him. "And I might just have an idea. What do you know about Buddhism?"

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Val and Tom watched as the Doctor busied himself in the corner of the room. He'd been at it for a while now and all they had heard was a steady succession of bangs and crashes mixed with the odd groan of disappointment and cry of delight.

"What's he doing?" asked Val.

"I have no idea," replied Tom. "Building some A-Team like super tank I hope."

Val smiled. "One that fires cabbages that knocks people out."

"Or a gun that fires a million bullets a second but never kills anyone," added Tom.

"I never use guns," said the Doctor. "Well...almost never."

"So Doctor, what exactly have you made to defeat our enemies?" asked Townsend.

The Doctor spun around and proudly held up a piece of battered cone shaped piece of metal.

"What is that?" asked a disappointed Townsend.

"Isn't it obvious?" said the Doctor. He looked round the group in front of him to see a line of blank faces. "It's a bell," the Doctor said striking the metal cone with a small hammer. Despite the crudeness of the construction it let out a sharp sound that reverberated around the room.

Val smiled. "I like it."

"Good. How's your campanology?" said the Doctor.

"Don't know. I never really wanted to be like Kenneth Williams," said Val. "But I'm willing to ring the changes."

The Doctor groaned at the pun.

Tom looked a bit confused. "What exactly is the plan?"

"Ever been to a Buddhist temple?" asked the Doctor. The others looked on with blank faces so he continued with his explanation, "I see not. Well, if you do, take a look around the edge of the temple and you'll see some bells and if you hang around for long enough you'll see the monks strike the bells..." The Doctor struck his bell, which let out a clear chime. "And the sound wards off any evil spirits that might be hanging around."

"Nice history lesson Doctor," said Val. "But how does that help us?"

The Doctor continued, "You of all people, Val, should be aware that often superstitions are based in fact."

"Do you mean it's all true about vampires, werewolves and zombies?" asked Val.

"Of course," replied the Doctor to a rather stunned group, "But you have to strip away the traditions, the religious imagery and the folklore. Tackled from a scientific viewpoint then all you have is a race that feeds off haemoglobin, a creature whose DNA reacts to moonlight or an entity that's able to inhabit bodies whether they're alive or dead."

"And what about this thing we're dealing with?" asked Ellis.

"Perhaps the worst of all," explained the Doctor. "Some might call it a ghost, others the devil. An entity that you can't see, can't hear. On Gallifrey we had a nursery rhyme, which went something like this," the Doctor recited his poem:

*Beware the dark,  
beware the light,  
keep the candle burning bright.  
As you sleep,  
they will creep,  
quickly make your two hearts beat.  
Make a noise,  
stop the fear,  
and give a big, tremendous cheer.*

A faint smile crossed the Doctor's lips, "We used to scream as loud as we could when we got to the end then run about like mad things. Great fun. Funny isn't it, when you're young, how such small things can give such great pleasure."

"So what's the plan then Doctor?"

"We're going to do what the monks used to do and chant our way through to the generator. Once we get there we'll fix it, get the power back on and then get the two soldiers and the doctor off this planet."

"And what about us?" asked Val.

"We have to find a way to stop this thing," replied the Doctor.

"Wouldn't a couple of soldiers be useful for that?" asked Tom.

The Doctor shook his head. "In my experience soldiers only try and solve problems by pointing guns at them and that's no use to me in a situation like this. Now, Val, Hargreaves, let's get going."

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Val gave the Doctor's bell another whack with the hammer. The clang echoed through the long corridor as Hargreaves, the Doctor and Val moved swiftly through the base.

"Is it me or is it getting stuffy in here?" asked Val giving the bell another thud.

"It's you," replied the Doctor. "It'll be a while yet before the air support packs up. You're just getting nervous."

"Nervous, yeah," added Hargreaves. "I know what you mean."

"Thought you were a tough soldier," replied Val.

"So did I," confessed Hargreaves. "But I've just seen my best friend..."

"Die," interrupted the Doctor stopping at a corridor intersection. "I've seen friends die." The Doctor stood silent as the bell chimed out and echoed around the small corridor junction. For a moment he seemed far away. Val thought he was somewhere else; another time, another place, reliving some terrible moment.

Val struck the bell again and the Doctor was awoken from his contemplation. Swiftly taking in his surroundings again he pointed down one of the corridors "This way."

The group continued on its way until they came to a door. The Doctor nodded to Hargreaves who instinctively positioned himself against the wall by the side of the door. Poised for action he nodded back at the Doctor. The Time Lord acknowledged the nod then flung the door open whilst at the same time Val struck the bell.

Hargreaves darted inside the room, swiftly checking every corner just as he was shown in training. In no time at all he was certain the room was empty. The Doctor and Val followed him inside.

The room was functional with a console in one corner. In the centre of the room was some kind of machinery. Val recognised the standard bells, pulleys and wheels of such devices. Val assumed that this was the generator and the Doctor was already examining it.

Val struck the bell again as Hargreaves looked over the Doctor's shoulder. "Looks like the old McAllister X-J two to me."

The Doctor looked up. "How did you know that?"

A faint smile passed over Hargreaves lips. "I was a farmer before I was a soldier, used to fix all my dad's machines before he..."

The soldier's smile faded away, as did his words.

Val looked on sadly. "How's a farmer end up wearing a uniform?"

"Usual story; recession, debt, bankruptcy," explained Hargreaves.

"Money, who needs it," added the Doctor returning his attention to the machine.

"Me for starters," chipped in Val.

"Me too," said Hargreaves. "You know, if I had the money I'd buy back my dad's farm with a brand new working X-J two."

Val looked at the generator then at the plasma bubbling and swirling behind the two double doors. Being slightly puzzled she asked, "But how can we be so close to the plasma?"

"There's a force field. Not very strong but enough to keep the plasma in and allow the belt to travel in and out," replied Hargreaves.

"Ah-ha," cried the Doctor interrupting, "Got you."

He whipped off a metal panel in the side of the machine, reached in and pulled out a hand full of wires. In no time at all he began stripping the plastic off to get down to the bare wire below.

Hargreaves looked on, a bit concerned. "Are you sure you should be doing that?"

"What is he doing?" Val whispered in Hargreaves' ear.

"I have no idea," he whispered back.

"I'm bypassing the safety mechanism," said the Doctor barely looking up from his work. Val was shocked. "Is that wise?"

"Not really," admitted the Doctor. "But something's disrupted the systems, which has triggered the safety protocols, which has stopped the generator from working. That is, unless I do this."

The Doctor whipped out his sonic screwdriver and began welding some of the wires together. Sparks flew, metal burnt and plastic melted. In a moment he had finished and he held out the wiring pattern to Hargreaves with a grin. "Hold this."

Hargreaves reached out for the jumble of metal but as soon as he touched it, a tiny electric shock went all the way through his body.

"Ow!" he said almost jumping backwards.

"Excellent," said the Doctor taking the group of wires back and putting them back into the generator. In one smooth motion he flicked a number of switches then, in a grand final gesture, threw a large lever then stood back to admire his work.

Nothing happened.

The Doctor looked at the machine like it was a naughty puppy that had just done its business in the middle of a recently cleaned kitchen floor. Frustrated, he looked over the metal panelling of the generator, selected a specific area and gave it a thump with his fist.

The machine coughed then spluttered, coughed again, and let out a bang. Val watched the Doctor. He was like a young kid, watching his new Christmas toy about to start working. Slowly but surely the wheel spun, just once. The Doctor's face broke into a smile.

The wheel turned again. The belt moved, the machine let out a whirr of noise and the lights in the room lit up as the energy began to flow through the base again.

"That's more like it," said Val.

"Like I used to say to my old man, great machines. Don't you agree Doctor?" asked Hargreaves.

But the Doctor's attention had changed to the console in the corner of the room.

"What are you doing Doctor?" asked Val.

"Trying the alarm again. I was hoping that once we were up to full power I could find another noise to filter throughout the base but..."

"No luck?" finished Val.

The Doctor shook his head.

Hargreaves watched as the generator went about its work. He watched the wheel move then stop then move then stop. Back on his dad's farm he used to sit under the trees, breath in the clean air and watch his father's machine do the same. He always found it so calm and so restful. He used to think the machine would go on forever, like his father.

Something about the wheel broke the hypnotic spell it held over Hargreaves. The wheel wasn't quite turning uniformly. *Well*, he thought to himself, *the poor old machine's been through a lot*.

He continued to watch as the wheel turned, stopped, whirred, turned, stopped, whirred. Hargreaves looked closer. The wheel was starting to wobble and buckle and the belt that was attached to it was beginning to shake.

"Doctor!" cried out Hargreaves.

The Doctor was still concentrating on the console, "Hmm?"

Hargreaves watched as the wheel began to shake even more. He moved closer to the wheel. "Doctor!"

The Doctor and Val turned just as the belt finally gave way under the pressure and snapped.

"Hargreaves," the Doctor cried out, "Get away from there!"

The belt flew through the air at lightning speed and caught onto Hargreaves backpack. The other end of the belt was being pulled towards the plasma door. Hargreaves grabbed onto the nearest thing he could which was part of the machine itself. His fingers grabbing and clawing over the machine desperately trying to stop himself but he was slowly being dragged towards the plasma doors. Hargreaves looked back towards the door when suddenly a hand grabbed him.

Val was holding on to him but she couldn't stop his forward momentum, she was only slowing down the speed he was approaching the door.

"Doctor!" screamed Val.

The Doctor was hammering at the controls of the generator. "It's no good, I can't stop it. Without the safety protocols I can't stop it."

Hargreaves was losing his grip, his fingers slipping on the smooth metal plating on the exterior of the machine. Then it was gone. He was holding nothing but thin air. He prepared himself to be flung through the plasma doors when another pair of hands grabbed him. Holding on to Hargreaves was the Doctor and Val.

Hargreaves smiled, relieved that he was almost safe but the belt yanked once more, becoming stronger and stronger. He could feel himself sliding towards the doors again. The Doctor and Val braced themselves, desperately trying to slow Hargreaves descent towards the doors.

"It's no good!" shouted Hargreaves. "The power's increasing."

"I'm not letting go of you," cried Val.

"You have to," said Hargreaves.

"We won't let you go," said the Doctor. "We'll save you."

The machine jerked again as the energy increased once more. The Doctor tightened his grip but he still felt Hargreaves slipping away.

"You have to let go," cried Hargreaves.

"No," replied the Doctor.

"It's no good Doctor. The power's gonna keep increasing and then..." Hargreaves looked back towards the doors then back at the Doctor. "You know what happens next."

"I'm not going to lose a good man," said the Doctor.

Hargreaves smiled. "I'm not all that good."

With that he snatched his arm downward forcing the Doctor to lose his grip. Val tried to hang on but the force was too much. Her hand slipped. Hargreaves flew towards the door and in a flash had gone through them.

The Doctor and Val rushed towards the door. Through the glass panel they watched as Hargreaves body was pummelled with plasma radiation and, bit-by-bit, disappeared. Val turned her back on the door.

The Doctor hammered his fist on the door. Behind him the generator shook itself a few more times then came to a grinding halt. Then all was a quiet. Val leaped across the room, grabbed the make shift bell and hammered it once more. The sound reverberated around the room.

Val hung her head. Is this what TARDIS life would be like? Watching good people die and not being able to do anything about it? Maybe this wasn't for her? She felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to see the Doctor.

He gave a comforting smile. "Come on. Let's get back to the others."

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In the main control room Tom was getting worried. Townsend was pacing the room as the alarm continued to sound. Ellis waited as patiently as he could.

"Where have they got to?" asked Tom.

"No sign of the power coming back on?" asked Townsend.

Tom gestured towards the screens. "The power seemed to peak for a few moments but it's gone dead again now. Hope nothing happened to them."

"We're fine," said the Doctor as he passed through the doorway with Val.

"Where's Hargreaves?" asked Townsend.

"I'm sorry," replied Val.

Townsend frowned. "What do we do now? The power's still temporary and we're in danger of being dead by the end of the day."

The Doctor was deep in thought.

"Doctor?" asked Val. "What do we do?"

Tom stood up. "Isn't it obvious? We should get down to the TARDIS and get out of here."

"TARDIS?" asked Ellis.

"Our spaceship," Tom explained. "We could all go down to wherever it is, get in and just get out of here."

"No Tom," said the Doctor.

"Why not Doctor?" snapped Townsend. "Why can't we get in your machine and leave all this behind?"

"The TARDIS is infinite, these creatures could store themselves away and I could transport them anywhere in time and space. I don't want to be responsible for spreading them throughout history."

"Then what do we do Doctor?" asked Townsend.

"Perhaps a bit of diplomacy," replied the Doctor.

\*\*\*\*\*

It had taken fifteen minutes to arrange. In the corridor off the main room the Doctor was putting the finishing touches to his creation. In the centre of the corridor he had erected a table with some candles on it. On each side the table was flanked by two of his make shift bells.

Ellis looked confused. "What is this thing?"

"A shrine," replied the Doctor.

"I know things are bad Doctor but I didn't think our only hope was prayer," said Tom.

"We're not praying," replied the Doctor.

Townsend didn't look convinced. "Then what are we doing?"

The Doctor settled down on the floor and crossed his legs. "It occurred to me that perhaps if these creatures reacted to Buddhist symbols like the sound of the bells then perhaps I can communicate with them using a similar trick."

"And what trick might that be?" asked Val.

"A bit of meditation," replied the Doctor.

Tom laughed. "That's just mumbo jumbo isn't it? All right for relaxing but not for much else?"

"Some believe it takes you to a higher plane of existence," added Val.

"Surely Doctor, as a scientist you don't believe such nonsense," said Ellis.

"There are many things in this universe I don't understand," replied the Doctor, "But I'm often willing to keep an open mind. Now, let's get on with it. Major, close the door."

Townsend looked unsure. "You really want me to close this door, cut off the alarm from the main room and just leave you here with your two friends and two bells?"

"Exactly," replied the Doctor.

Townsend raised her eyebrows. "Well, it's your funeral. Come on Ellis."

With that she and Ellis stepped back into the main room and closed the door leaving the Doctor, Val and Tom in the corridor. As the door closed the sound of the alarm died away. The Doctor nodded and Tom and Val both struck their respective bells. The chimes rang throughout the corridor.

The Doctor closed his eyes. His breathing slowed and he let out a slow sound, "Aum."

Tom and Val continued to strike the bells whilst the Doctor remained motionless, the only evidence he was alive was the low, deep chant coming deep within him.

Val mouthed to Tom, "Do you think he's alright?" Tom simply shrugged his shoulders. Then the Doctor opened his eyes. Tom was shocked to see the Doctor's eyes were completely white with no pupils.

\*\*\*\*\*

As soon as the Doctor closed his eyes, he began chanting. He slowed his breathing and began to chant, "Aum." Slower and slower his breathing became. Most humans could get close to what the Doctor was achieving but his alien physiology meant he could take it just that little bit further.

His mind began to wander. He was no longer in the corridor in the base but drifting. He wasn't entirely sure where he was. Time and space seemed none existent. He wasn't even sure he was in the same universe. He drifted through clouds, stars and galaxies. Even for

someone who had seen most of the wonders of the universe, it was still a beautiful and colourful sight to behold.

He drifted towards a collection of dust that was spinning and turning in a section of dark space. As the Doctor approached, the dust came together. As the particles coalesced they formed a face.

"Who are you?" The face asked in a deep God-like voice.

"I'm the Doctor."

"You seem a long way from home little man," said the voice.

"I've been away from home a long, long time," replied the Doctor.

"But you've rarely been quite as far as this?" said the voice.

"I'll go anywhere for tea, cake and a good chin wag," said the Doctor.

"And what would you like to talk about?" said the voice.

"You know what I'm here to talk about," said the Doctor. "Your little excursion into my universe."

"It's not the first time we have done so," replied the voice. "Yet you have not felt the need to come and visit us before."

"I have heard stories, legends, of you taking the odd person but I've not heard of anything on this scale," said the Doctor.

"Things have changed," said the voice.

"What's changed?"

"Our need for survival. We have been under attack."

"Attack from whom?"

"We do not know their names," replied the voice, "but they are very powerful and have driven us to find new supplies. We are now refugees, going where we can and living off what we can find."

"But that's not the fault of the humans. Tell me who this mysterious race is and I can help you," said the Doctor.

"But that is not the only thing, these Humans have trespassed on our bridge into this universe," said the voice. "This system has two worlds, this and a twin one. Both were places where we could exist and enjoy but they destroyed it. Turned it into a place with air where they could exist and we could not. Many of us died."

"But they probably didn't even know you existed," argued the Doctor.

"No excuse Doctor. We will rid this world of this Human disease and return this to our paradise."

"I can't let you do that," said the Doctor.

"You have no choice," said the voice. "Either leave or die."

"Not while my friends are out there, ringing their bells," argued the Doctor.

The voice laughed. "You're in our world now, Doctor. Your rules don't apply here."

All around the Doctor creatures began to materialise; brown, reptile like with long claws and long jaws with teeth. They surrounded the Doctor, approaching him from all sides. The Doctor looked around for an escape route but there was no gap in the crowd of creatures.



Two of the creatures grabbed the Doctor's arms and held him in place as a third approached him. The third creature reached out placed his claw around the Doctor's throat and crushed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Tom and Val had been watching the Doctor since he had gone into his trance. They had continued to chime the bells out continuously for all that time but Val was starting to get concerned, "Do you think he's all right?"

"He seems peaceful enough," said Tom.

"You think?" said Val, her voice turning to horror.

Tom followed Val's gaze to see the Doctor convulsing, trying to get air into his lungs. The two friends rushed forward, dropping to their knees next to the Doctor.

"What do we do?" asked Tom.

"Ring the bells," said an anxious Val.

The pair hammered the two bells with as much fury as they could muster then stopped.

"It's no good," cried Val.

"The alarm," suggested Tom.

Val ran towards the door and flung it open. The alarm filled the corridor with noise. She was quickly joined by Townsend and Ellis. Val spun around expecting to see the Doctor recovering.

The Doctor was still fighting for breath as he sat cross-legged on the floor of the corridor. Val, Townsend and Ellis rushed over to him from the door.

Tom was panicking. "What are we going to do?"

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The Doctor was being held by his throat by one of the creatures. He desperately tried to wriggle free but it was useless.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Nothing's working," cried Tom as she shook the Doctor's convulsing body.

Val held her hand out towards Townsend. "Give me your gun."

Townsend looked stunned. "What?"

"Give me your gun...now!" shouted Val.

Townsend handed the gun over. Val was surprised by how heavy it felt in her hands. It was the first time she had ever held a gun in her hand and she felt disgusted by it. Still, she knew what she wanted to do.

She fingered the gun in her hand and looked the Doctor in the eye. "Sorry Doctor." Then took the gun and whacked the Doctor over the head with it.

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The voice sang out across space. "Now it ends for you Doctor."

The creature's grip around the Doctor's neck tightened and braced itself as it prepared to snap his neck.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor slumped to the ground in the middle of the corridor.

The rest of the group looked stunned by Val's actions.

"What have you done?" said Tom.

"Saved his life," said Val then looking down at the Doctor's still body. "I hope."

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor disappeared and the creature was left holding nothing in his claws. Anger grew in the creatures and as a group the creatures let out a silent wail of frustration.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor's eyes sprang open and he sat up with a jolt. Rubbing his head he said, "What hit me?"

"Val," said Tom.

"Sorry Doctor," replied Val.

The Time Lord leaped to his feet. "Not at all. Perfectly understandable. In fact, thank you."

A smile crossed Val's face.

Ellis butted in, "What are we going to do now?"

"We get you two out of here," replied the Doctor.

"But the dampening field," said Townsend.

Val looked confused. "How are we going to get to the ship when we have to cross a space where we can't make any noise?"

"We're dead aren't we?" said a desperate Ellis.

"Not if I have anything to do with it," said the Doctor.

Ellis continued. "What can you do? What can anyone do? We don't have a hope. We're going to die like everyone else." Ellis' breathing was becoming short again.

"Careful Ellis or that thing in your chest might just go pop," interrupted Tom.

"Come on sit down," said Val helping Ellis settle down.

Ellis rested in the chair and felt the device in his chest. "Damn thing. Lost without it and it's lost without me."

"Of course," cried the Doctor.

"What is it Doctor?" asked Townsend.

"I've just had a thought," replied the Doctor. "But first I've got to get you two out of here." The Doctor looked around and then spotted something, "And that might do the trick." He crossed the room and the others followed.

"What is it Doctor?" asked Val.

"These," said the Doctor gesturing to a number of space suits hanging on the wall.

"How's that going to help?" said a cynical Townsend.

"My plan is this," explained the Doctor. "We put on the suits. Each suit has an intercom, we can use the intercom to communicate to one another and create a kind of sound barrier within each of our suits and that should hold the creatures off."

"Should?" asked Val.

"Best I can do," replied the Doctor. "Let's get to work."

The Doctor began to get to work when Tom interrupted, "Are you sure there isn't some way of killing these things?"

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"Come on, keep moving," said the Doctor. "Remember the plan. Keep your intercoms open. Keep the noise going; talk, sing, whistle, anything you like just keep the sound going."

The Doctor began whistling a bit of Mozart. The music drifted through the intercom and into Val's helmet. She lowered her heavy boot down onto the floor. Despite all the weight it didn't make a sound. Val found it rather disconcerting and a little surreal. Bit like those old silent movies.

"I can't get the hang of this," said Val as she struggled to move her heavy boots. In front of her she saw an out stretched hand..

"Course you can," said the Doctor holding out his hand. Val took it and the Doctor helped her along. Townsend and Ellis were following close behind.

"This isn't gonna work," said Townsend.

"It will," said Ellis. "We just have to keep talking through the intercoms."

The intercoms crackled as they talked.

"There's the ship," said Townsend. She looked forward to where the ship was sitting. A shiver went down her spine, "Doctor?"

"I know," said the Doctor.

"You feel it too?" said Ellis.

"They're here aren't they?" said Townsend.

"I think so," replied the Doctor.

In front of the group figures formed all around them. Tall, skinny, fierce reptile-like creatures became visible before their eyes.

"What do we do?" Ellis said in a panic.

"We do nothing. Keep talking and keep walking," said the Doctor.

"Will that work?" asked Ellis.

"We're making sound waves in our suits that should protect us," said the Doctor.

"Come on, let's keep moving."

They moved forward, the Doctor continued to whistle his Mozart as they went along. As they progressed the creatures parted and made way for everyone.

"Are you sure they can't hurt us?" said Townsend.

"As long as we're still making noise," said the Doctor.

“Ellis, you seem a bit quiet, you all right?” said Townsend.

Townsend turned to see three of the creatures surrounding Ellis. He was looking from one to another, trying to calculate which one would make the first move. Then a fourth moved closer to him but it was behind and out of his eye line. Its claw like hand took hold of a pipe. Townsend followed the line of the tube. It ran from Ellis’s helmet to the life support on his back.

“Ellis, move man!” screamed the Doctor.

The creature pulled on the pipe.

“No!” Val cried out over the intercom. “These are innocent people. They’ve done you no harm.”

The creature looked right into the Doctor’s eyes and with a laugh it pulled on the pipe. With a hiss it came free from the life support system and the helmet. Ellis screamed. The scream burst out of the helmet but then went silent like someone turning the volume down on the stereo. In a moment Ellis began to choke and gasp for breath. The creatures around him silently laughed.

Townsend watched Ellis’s body drop to the ground.

“Run Townsend!” said the Doctor and he began to move as quickly as possible towards the exit. The creatures followed after the Doctor. They began chasing and surrounding him. Townsend closed her eyes and let out a slow sound, “Aum.”

The creatures stopped, as did the Doctor. He turned round to see Townsend, frozen in place, eye closed in meditation. “No, Townsend, no!”

Townsend took a deep breath and let out another “Aum.”

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Townsend opened her eyes. She found herself in a world of stars surrounded by the creatures.

“Use your time well Doctor,” said Townsend.

The creatures slowly advanced on her.

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The Doctor turned his back on Townsend. Val didn’t move, rooted to the spot. The Doctor yanked her hand and dragged her away from Townsend. They continued towards the exit as fast as they could. Over the intercom came the screams of Townsend echoed around their helmets.

They moved towards the exit sensing the footsteps of the creatures coming towards them. No matter how fast they moved, the creatures were just a step behind. Just as the creatures got within arm’s length, the Doctor slammed his hand on a button on the wall. A door to a corridor opened and the Doctor and Val crossed the threshold and shut the door behind them.

The Doctor and Val panted, out of breath. In the glass panel in the door they could see the creatures clawing and snarling in their direction. Val noticed the Doctor staring at the creatures.

"Doctor, what's it about these creatures that's got you rattled?" she asked.

The Doctor remained silent for a moment then spoke, "I'm not too clever Val." Val was about to respond but he carried on. "I've tip-toed around this thing, tried to do everything I can to avoid the reality."

"Which is?" asked Val.

"I know how to beat these...things," confessed the Doctor.

"So what's the problem?"

"I'm scared," said the Doctor. Val looked shocked. The Doctor continued. "Even I get scared sometimes. You see, once, a long time ago I faced a powerful enemy. I had taken something from them and had to return it. I did return it but it cost me my life and I feel I'm right back there again. You should have seen me back then. I was a noble man back in the day, quite a dashing figure with my velvet cuffs and frilly shirts. I'm not sure I'm as strong as that man was."

Val thought for a moment. "Doctor, I haven't known you for very long but I think I know the kind of person you are. And how ever wonderful that other you might have been, I reckon you're just as good as that guy."

"You think so?" said the Doctor.

Val nodded. "And I think you can face anything this little universe throws at you."

"But why?" asked the Time Lord.

Val smiled. "Because you're the Doctor."

The Doctor nodded, stood, looked at the creatures, "I know what I have to do."

\*\*\*\*\*

Val and Tom watched as once again the Doctor set up the chimes for his Buddhist like temple.

"So?" said an annoyed Val.

The Doctor looked up from his work. "So?"

"Are you gonna explain what you're doing?" demanded Val.

"I got the idea from Ellis and that nursery rhyme," said the Doctor.

"The nursery rhyme?" said Tom.

"As you sleep, they will creep, quickly make your two hearts beat. After all these years I've finally worked out what it means," replied the Doctor, "But it could be dangerous."

"How dangerous?" asked Tom.

The Doctor flicked his head to one side in contemplation. "Fairly dangerous."

"What does that mean?" asked Val.

"There's a chance you could die?" said Tom.

"There's always a chance of that," replied the Doctor. "Every time you step out the front door there's a chance you can die."

"But we're talking probabilities," said Val. "If I step out of the flat unless I walk into the middle of the road there isn't much chance me getting knocked down by a bus. So come on Doctor, how chancy is this?"

The Doctor stopped his work and faced Val directly putting his hands on her shoulders. "I'll be fine."

He turned away from her and carried on with his work. Tom and Val looked at one another. Neither looked convinced by the Doctor's words.

Tom stepped forward. "Come on Doctor. Tell us the truth. We're your travelling companions."

"And your friends," Val added.

Tom nodded. "Surely we deserve the truth or at least what'll happen to us after you've done what you have to do?"

"No need to worry about that," said the Doctor. "The TARDIS has a failsafe mechanism so if anything happens to me, you'll be taken back home."

"And how are we meant to get back into the TARDIS when you're gone?" said Tom.

The Doctor smiled. "Look in your pocket."

Tom checked his trouser pocket then checked the other one and pulled out a key on a long piece of string.

"You better check you still got your wallet," said Val. Then she turned to the Doctor. "That must mean you think you're not gonna make it."

"It's just a precaution," replied the Doctor.

"Don't give me that," said Val.

The Doctor sighed then gathered himself. "Using your analogy, I'm essentially about to go and walk out into the middle of the road and that a road a major motorway."

"That's all right then," Tom joked, "Every motorway I travel on is gridlocked and the traffic barely moves quick enough to knock down a rabbit never mind a Time Lord."

"Isn't there anything we can do?" asked Val.

The Doctor shook his head.

"Then don't do it," suggested Val.

"I don't have a choice," replied the Doctor.

"There's always a choice," said Tom.

"Not for me," said the Doctor firmly then his voice softened. "Now, let's begin. Start chiming."

He nodded towards Tom and the young man hit the make shift bell. A dull chime sounded throughout the corridor. Val closely followed, doing the same thing.

The Doctor sat crossed legged on the floor. He took a deep breath and began to breathe slowly. He let out a slow "Aum."

Val and Tom continued to hit the bells.

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The Doctor closed his eyes and continued his slow breathing. His mind drifted and once again he found himself in the other universe, gliding through a heaven of stars and planets.

He approached the deep mist of the creatures, "Hello again!"

The booming voice returned, "You again. You're a brave little man."

The Doctor smiled.

"You make your destruction very easy," said the voice.

"One aims to please," said the Doctor.

All around him creatures began to materialise and gather. They clawed and grabbed in his direction but each time they tried to get him, a bell chime would sound out and the creatures would retreat then try again.

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The Doctor had barely moved for the last few minutes.

"I think it's time," said Val.

"Sure?" said a worried Tom.

"What choice do we have? We have to trust him."

Tom nodded and brought his hand down on the bell. It immediately stopped the ringing. Val did the same with her bell. The room fell silent. Then the two friends stepped out of the corridor and shut the door. It slid closed in front of them. They could do little more than watch the Doctor through the glass panel in the door.

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The bells stopped chiming. The Doctor tensed. The creatures all became attentive and perked up like a dog hearing its master shout.

The creatures grabbed him, holding him and stretching out his arms and legs.

"Your friends have failed you," said the voice.

The Doctor shook his head. "No."

"You pathetic little man. Did you really think you could come to our domain and survive," said the voice.

The creatures pulled and the Doctor tried to scream but a thin, bony arm grabbed his neck and squeezed. The Doctor struggled, gasping for air.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Doctor's body convulsed. Val jumped almost in unison with the Time Lord's movements then reached out for the door but Tom held her back.

"But he could be in trouble," pleaded Val.

Tom shook his head. "He told us what to do and that was nothing." He looked through the glass panel and winced as the Doctor's body convulsed again.

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The Doctor screamed as one creature released his throat whilst others pulled on his limbs.

"Are you ready little man?" said the voice, "Are you ready to die?"

In between gasps for air the Doctor battled to his words out, "There's...one thing...you forgot."

"What would that be little man?" said the voice.

"I'm not Human," replied the Doctor.

“Really,” said the voice with relish. “That’ll make your death even more fascinating.”

“I’m a Time Lord,” said a proud Doctor between taking gulps of air.

“We have never heard of them but I’m looking forward to dissecting your body and seeing what makes you tick,” said a happy voice.

The Doctor continued to speak through pained gasps. “And the thing about Time Lords is we have two hearts.”

“Really?” said the voice.

“And the thing about us Time Lords is we can control our hearts,” the Doctor concentrated all of his will onto his second heart, “Like this.”

Faster and faster he began to speed up the beating of his heart. His pulse was increasing by the second. His hearts began to send out vibrations. The beats of his heart were beginning to echo out across the creature’s alternative universe.

As the waves hit the creatures they raised their hands to their head and silently wailed. Their mouths opened but no sound coming out. The Doctor wailed with them. He could feel his heart. He was pushing it as fast as he could. Pain was etched on his face as his heart threatened to explode out of this chest. He wanted to stop, give up but he had no choice. He had to carry on and push his body to the limit.

His heart was on the verge of collapse. He had no idea how much his body could take. The view before him began to change. All around him the blackness of the other universe began to fade away. It was replaced by a stream of white light flying towards him. He recognised this sensation. *Death? So soon? If this how I’m to go, thought the Doctor, then as least I’ll be taking these creatures with me.*

And with that he grimaced and gave his heart and body one final push.

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The Doctor let out a massive, silent scream.

Val couldn’t stand it anymore. Before Tom could even realise it, Val had flung the door open and was into the corridor.

“Val! What are you doing?” cried Tom.

Val stood over the Doctor. She grabbed a hold of his shoulder and shook him as hard as she could but the Doctor didn’t move.

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The Doctor was still seeing the white flashes. Why couldn’t it just happen? Surely it was time; it felt like it was time. He’d done so much and now he’d get the chance to rest.

“Doctor!”

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“Doctor!” Val screamed his name again.



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“Val,” the Doctor’s eyes sprung open. His heart was beating at a lightning speed and the creatures were in pain all around him.

The Doctor grimaced. “Not this time. This isn’t where it ends. Not here, not now!” He screamed and with an intense focus made one last effort. All around him the creatures exploded, shattering into pieces and flying out away from him across the other universe.

The Doctor breathed heavily then closed his eyes.

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The Doctor’s body fell forward.

Val caught him. The Doctor’s body caused Val to buckle under the weight.

“A little help would be appreciated,” she said in Tom’s direction. Tom helped her lower the Doctor’s body to the ground. Val did her best to make him comfortable.

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They watched as the Doctor slept. His breathing was slow and he hadn’t moved a muscle. Val glanced over to Tom. “Does he look different to you? Older?”

Tom took a long look at the Doctor, “He always looked old to me.”

“He looks it to me,” said Val. “Maybe it’s his hair, maybe there’s more grey there. I don’t know. Maybe it’s just my memory playing tricks on me but he just looks a bit...older.”

“I just wish he’d wake up,” said Tom.

“Do you think he will?” asked Val.

“Course I will. I’ve never slept in for anything,” interrupted the Doctor jumping to his feet.

“Doctor,” cried Val giving the Time Lord a big hug. The Doctor looked uncomfortable, gently patted Val on the arm and then removed himself from Val’s hug.

“There, there,” he reassured her.

“What happened?” said Tom.

“I beat them,” said the Doctor.

“All of them?” asked Val.

“You never beat all of them,” replied the Doctor.

“You mean they’re still out there?” asked Val.

The Doctor stood and looked out across the red surface of the planet and nodded.

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The world is never silent; the buzz of the refrigerator, the whir of the boiler, the tick, tock of your bed side clock. Listen to them now. Sound is all around you. All those background noises you usually ignore, listen to them now. Notice how they change, falter. Sometimes they threaten to stop. The hand on the clock will pause and just for the smallest, merest fraction of a

moment you think time has stopped and the room goes silent but then it starts up again. It's almost like something is fighting the noise but it never wins, it always surrenders to the noise. But what if, one day, it wins? What will you do then?



*People say silence is golden but what they actually mean is quietness. Remember that old Hollywood cliché: it's quiet, too quiet. Clichés are only clichés because they're true. Total silence is unsettling. It makes you feel uneasy. It feels wrong. That's because in between all the everyday sounds we hear, there exists a nightmare and it's here with us right now.*

Answering a distress signal the TARDIS arrives on an isolated planet at the edge of the universe. The Doctor, Val and Tom find themselves in a deserted base. The crew of colonists have disappeared and the only evidence they were ever there is the ringing of the base alarm and claw marks on the wall where someone has fought for their life and lost.

Val and Tom discover that travel in time and space is more dangerous than they would have ever imagined.

The two friends must learn to work together if they are to survive the dangers that the universe throws at them and the Doctor must face a childhood nightmare that he thought nothing more than a myth.

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

