

THE
DOCTOR WHO
PROJECT



FUR AND THE SKY

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Strange and Fanciful Tales

The back of Travis Nelson's neck was slick with sweat. It had been another tiring day working in the forest, but on the positive side it was almost quitting time. It wasn't where Travis imagined himself working back when he was a boy, dreaming of his future, but it sure could be worse. And besides, being 'Flash Gordon' wasn't really a career opportunity that came up often.

The forestry crew he worked with for the last few months in Apache-Sitgreaves National Park were a good bunch of guys, hardworking and dependable. The pay was okay and there was plenty of work to do, as the forest spanned 2.76 million-acres from east-central Arizona all the way to New Mexico, ever since the U.S Forest Service had combined the Apache National Forest with the neighbouring Sitgreaves National Forest the year before.

Huge areas of the forest were considered 'Timberland', and the trees there were designated for use in wood products. The teams around here would work mostly with pine and Douglas fir trees, which could be anywhere between 70 and over 300 feet tall. They didn't venture into the reserve land for work; these areas of the park were left to the locals, species of plants and animals. And there were always strange and fanciful tales of the creatures found roaming out there amongst the birds, elk, and deer. Not that he'd ever put much stock in that kind of thing.

Travis heaved a heavy sigh of stale breath as he leant on his axe handle. His short brown hair was slicked to his forehead, he ran a hand over his head and wiped away the beads of sweat, replacing them with a slick layer of grime. His face sported a week's growth of facial hair. Wiping his palm on the leg of his jeans he closed his eyes and listened to the cacophony around him: the crew working, the birds in the trees above, and the slight breeze rustling their high branches. He wished that breeze was a little lower so he could feel its benefit.

It was fall in the park, and he liked this time of year, when the transition to winter was palpable. It usually reached a little over 35 degrees Fahrenheit in November, but the work raised the body temperature. Today, like yesterday, felt unseasonably warm.

"You takin' it easy there, Nelson?" Paul Tanner quipped from over his shoulder.

Travis turned to meet his gaze. Paul's familiar crooked grin splayed across a weathered, but mischievous face which was dirty around the edges, though his spectacular moustache seemed completely pristine. Tanner was a broad man just over six feet tall, his buzz-cut hair the same ash-blond colour as his finely cultivated moustache. He had sweat from the day's work running down his temples and onto his stubbled chin. His jaw line was once firm and square, but it had begun to round with age. He wasn't as fit as he used to be, a bit rounder around the middle and all, but he was still strong as an ox. He was breathing hard from his own labours. Tanner was one of the good ones—strong and hardworking and blessed with a dry wit.

"Not as easy as you Paul," Travis responded with a laugh, slapping Tanner on his upper left arm.

"Never mind, by my reckoning it's time to call it a day anyway. There are a few cold beers with my name on them!" Tanner boomed, flexing his aching shoulders, and letting out a deep sigh of his own. He shouted to the rest of the crew in their area, signalling the end of their working day.

As the crew started to pack their gear into two nearby trucks, there were pockets of conversation, wise-cracks, and teasing. Through the noise Paul heard a rustling in the scrub behind him.

In the last couple of weeks some equipment had gone missing. Some of the guys thought that it was other crews, selling off equipment in town on the side for extra money. Paul wasn't sure about that; most of the workers in the park were blue collar, sure, but honest. He wasn't having anyone steal stuff on his watch, not right under his nose.

Instinctively he moved towards the noises without alerting the others, his hands firmly gripping the handle of his axe, hoping to scare the living daylights out of whoever it was. As he silently crept towards the bushes, the leaves and branches moved from one side to the other. *Perhaps there was more than one thief*, he thought. No matter – he'd handle it all the same.

Tanner, like Nelson, was an Arizona man, born and bred. He wiped the sweat from his right palm on the front of his black and red plaid shirt and tightened his grip on his axe. As Tanner neared the place where he thought the noises were coming from, he heard a strange grunting, like an animal. He slowed – *What if this wasn't a thief at all?* he thought, *what if it was a bear?* Though a grizzly bear hadn't been spotted anywhere near here since the 1930s, there were still black bears to think about – and mountain lions.

Dry twigs and debris cracked under his foot on the forest floor, and he glanced down accusingly. He held his breath, his jaw tightened, and he looked up. Nothing. He exhaled a long breath and allowed himself a smile.

"What the heck are y'doin Paul?" Travis said from behind, startling him so much he jumped.

"Jeez Nelson! Are you tryin' to give me a heart attack?!" he exclaimed, reddening in the face.

"I just though I heard somethin' over here in the scrub," he replied with a snap, "I thought it was whoever's been thievin' our stuff." He said with a shrug, "But there ain't nothing here."

As he swung his head back toward the bushes, his face met something unexpected: not a bear, or the thief he'd imagined, but a huge, hairy, man-like creature! It was easily seven feet tall with change and towered over him. Its eyes' blood-red irises seemed luminous in the dusk, its

pupils were jet black and he swore he could see his horrified face reflected at him. The creature had a large mouth and oversized, human-like teeth set firmly in a snarl.

“Holy mother of G-“, Tanner’s voice was drowned out by the guttural howl of the beast in front of him. It reached out with surprising speed and grabbed him with one hand, lifting him clear of the ground effortlessly.

“PAUL!” Travis screamed as the beast swatted him to the ground with its free hand. Again, the howl filled their ears as the beast dragged Tanner into the forest and was gone in a flash.

Travis was overcome with fear, every cell in his body screaming to get as far away as possible. He scrambled to his feet, kicking up dirt and moss as he did, spraying it in all directions with the adrenaline pumping through his body. He turned and ran for the trucks in panic, screaming at the rest of the crew. Multiple howls rang through the trees behind him in a chilling chorus.

The TARDIS wheezed and whirred as Roger Daltrey’s vocals boomed around the interior over electric guitar and an organ-based ostinato.

‘Sally, take my hand. We’ll travel south ‘cross land. Put out the fire. And don’t look past my shoulder.’

“I mean, if you could watch The Who play live anywhere and at any time – and, well, we can – you have to watch them play live with Keith Moon on drums!” the Doctor shouted across the console to Maggie as he whirled around theatrically pressing buttons and flicking switches with a flourish, ‘Baba O’Riley’ providing the soundtrack to his visual display.

“Well, that makes some sense to me I suppose, and I love a band, so when and where are we going then Doctor?” Maggie said with a laugh.

Maggie wore her chestnut brown hair down and loose, her curls cascading free above her shoulders. She wore a charcoal grey vintage-looking t-shirt with the band’s logo emblazoned on the front and a long sleeve shirt tied around her waist. She had dark denim jeans and a pair of black Doc Marten boots to complete an ensemble which was more her native time of the ’90s than anywhere else. There was a gleam in her eyes and her smile that made her look younger than her years.

She was quietly impressed with the Doctor’s ability to synchronise piloting the TARDIS with The Who’s music. She considered that he may have had a little practice.

Renewing her travels with the Doctor had coaxed Maggie into finding the joy in things again. And the promise of a classic rock ‘n’ roll gig with a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey was something Maggie could see the joy in. All of time and space within their reach, and, given the myriad of options that brought, they were about to rock!

“I’m taking you to Toronto, Maple Leaf Gardens, October 21st, 1976, to be exact,” the Doctor said, triumphantly bringing the TARDIS to a halt and throwing on his thick royal blue Raglan coat. The music continued playing loudly in the vast interior, drowning out the conflicting sounds made by the Doctor’s vessel when travelling the time vortex.

“The last time Keith Moon played live with the band in public,” he said matching her smile and enthusiasm. “Well, apart from the two special gigs for a documentary, and the 2176 ‘Revival tour’, but I won’t be living through that again. The voodoo Priestess of Veridian Six had a lot to

answer for, I can tell you—and it is hardly ever good when a band tries to eat the audience – unless it’s a *death metal* gig.” He grimaced and shook his head at the memory, before checking his reflection, and allowing himself an approving nod.

“Okay, yeah, I could see how that would be a slight inconvenience.” Maggie said with a wry smile. “I was 23 in ’76. I guess I still *am* 23 in ’76!” she said with a wistful air and a shrug, “Luckily, being a BC girl, I wasn’t in Toronto at the time, huh Doctor?”

“Indeed, I wouldn’t usually take the risk of putting you back within your own timeline like this, with the exception of averting a potential apocalypse, *or* an unmissable musical event, obviously,” the Doctor replied over his shoulder with a dismissive wave of the hand, as he opened the TARDIS door and stepped out over the threshold and into the cool evening air.

“Good evening, Toronto!” he exclaimed, flinging his arms wide open.

The Doctor’s smile faded into confusion as he was met with the barrel of a gun.

“Don’t move, or I *will* shoot you,” said a husky male voice coldly as the TARDIS door slammed shut behind.

Reading the Room

Maggie and the Doctor were seated in the middle of the room side by side. The faces of the men of varying sizes and ages around them were stern, laced not just with anger – but also with fear. They looked uniformly tired and frayed. Maggie could instantly tell it was nowhere near Toronto, but the period must have been close—their shaggy manes of hair, large bushy sideburns, and the wide collars on their flannel shirts screamed 1970s. The tension in the air felt like it could be cut with a knife. The one furthest forward held a sturdy revolver in his hand, as he had when he led them away from the TARDIS a few minutes earlier. He seemed calmer than the rest, but for how intensely he fixed them both in his gaze, hardly blinking as he spoke. He wore a heavy dark-green winter jacket over a shirt and tie. He had a thick, but well-maintained beard, which was black with the occasional flecks of brown and grey. The name badge on the left breast of his fleece-lined car coat read ‘Hayle’.

“So, what you’re telling me, is that you were on your way to Toronto, and wound up here, in the park, by *mistake*?” He made little effort to hide his incredulity, his right eyebrow raised slightly. “With no car, or truck in sight, just your blue box and this here lady?” He side-eyed Maggie as he finished his sentence.

“Correct,” said the Doctor flatly, his eyes fixed disapprovingly on Hayle’s gun.

“What, did you stop inside the phone box to call for directions?” a worker behind them asked, the joke falling flat due to his hostility.

“Never mind the phone box for now. And you have no idea whatsoever what happened to the missing equipment?” Hayle pressed.

“Correct again.”

“And I’m supposed to believe you ... why?” Hayle said, eyebrow in motion again.

“Because we’re telling the truth,” Maggie interjected with an air of impatience.

“And also, because if there are people missing out there in the dark, then you’re wasting time trying to get information out of us that we clearly don’t have,” the Doctor said, grimly.

Hayle relaxed his shoulders and sucked air through his teeth whilst he considered what he'd heard. He holstered his weapon and ran a hand through his beard reflectively. He remained still for a moment studying them.

"My name is Eric Hayle, I'm a park ranger here."

"I'm the Doctor, and this is Maggie. We really didn't know what we were stumbling into." The Doctor was suddenly more relaxed and inquisitive. "But I am wondering, why you're not out looking for the missing people?"

"We tried before it got too dark, with no luck." Hayle shook his head slowly. "We came back to get more folk to help, but when we got back here none of the trucks except for mine and the others we'd taken down to the site would start. Their engines are completely dead," he said, trying hard not to seem unsettled.

The Doctor scanned the room, then turning back to Hayle he asked, "Have you called anyone for help?" He suspected he knew the answer.

"Tried but can't. The radio is down. There are five ranger districts in the park, and I can't contact one of 'em."

"All right." The Doctor stood and clapped his hands together. "If we're going to help, someone is going to have to give me the lie of the land and tell me anything that you haven't already."

Hayle and the other men stood assessing the stranger, who looked more like a merchant sailor than a frontiersman. Another man, of medium build, with a five o'clock shadow and pale with fear, stood suddenly and was the first to break the silence. He introduced himself to the strangers as Travis Nelson, before saying in a gabble of panic, "The man who was taken. His name was Tanner, Paul Tanner, he was – *is*, my friend."

Hayle motioned to a table where a map of the park had been laid out. "As you can see, the park is a large area, over two and a half million acres, running all the way from Coconino here, to Greenlee and the border of New Mexico here. Lucky for us the roads are accessible, so we can get people out if we need to. Though there aren't many itching to leave without guarantee o' pay," Hayle said with a dry laugh.

"I ain't leaving without finding out what happened to Paul," Travis said indignantly. The other men murmured uncomfortably. Walking out of the park was possible, but it was a long walk. The men were scared, but not yet desperate.

The Doctor surveyed the map, Maggie assumed committing it to that vast memory of his and working out what to do next. After a moment he looked between Hayle and Travis.

"You said 'missing' when you first mentioned your friend, but you both just now said 'taken'. Taken isn't the same as missing. What are you not saying?"

Hayle shifted uneasily, glancing nervously at Travis, and then the other men in the room, then back to Travis. "Go on then." he said, "You may as well tell 'em."

Travis loosened his collar and shifted his weight. "I was with Paul at the end of our shift today when he wandered off towards an area thick with plants and trees. So, I went after him. He thought he could hear someone; he thought maybe this thief was lurking around. Only what we saw weren't no thief, well not the 'human' kind anyway. It was a huge beast, all hair, and

teeth!” Travis said, hunching his shoulders and arching his arms at his sides, making his best impression of the creature. “Well sir, it lifted Paul clear off the ground, and Tanner ain’t small, he’s over six feet tall and easily 275 pounds! And it just whipped him away like it weren’t nothin’.”

Murmurs rose again amongst the other men in the room.

“These guys all heard the noise, they didn’t seem ‘em, but they sure heard ‘em,” he continued.

“Them?” the Doctor asked.

Travis nodded. “See, the one I saw made this terrible noise as it dragged Paul off into the forest, and then more answered it, it was impossible to tell how many. And I’m ashamed to say I was scared sir. I ran. Saved my own skin.” He looked downward and stubbed a boot at the floor.

Maggie half expected the other workers to make fun, or make smart comments, but there wasn’t even the slightest whiff of amusement. Instead, she found apprehension and fear.

“Wait, are you talking about the Mogollon Monster?!” Maggie asked with a slight chuckle that instantly felt out of place and ill received.

“Mogollon Monster,” some of the workers repeated in response, nodding and looking from one to another.

The Doctor turned to Maggie, “Mogollon Monster?”

“Yeah, like a Bigfoot or whatever, it has been part of folk tales since the settlers first came to these parts, I think. My grandpa used to love those old campfire stories. The name comes from the Mogollon Rim. Which must be about here.” Some of the forestry workers were nodding in recognition of what Maggie said, others muttering and shaking their heads. Maggie had expected them to scoff at her, and when she saw this reaction, she asked incredulously, “You can’t be serious?!”

Travis looked up from the ground, his expression sincere. “I know it sounds crazy ma’am, but yes. I know what I saw and heard. And most of these guys heard ‘em too,” he said, adding ruefully, “I never would have believed it either, until today.”

Maggie cleared her throat and nodded in apology, then looked across to the Doctor, deep in thought as he studied the map with Ranger Hayle at his side.

“Well, fortunately we’re here to help.” the Doctor said in a positive tone. “I’m good at finding things *and* fixing things. Let’s see if we can’t fix the radio and find your friend or find the radio and fix your friend – depending on what’s required.”

Hayle led them to the radio room. The equipment seemed new and in good condition, and around it was information about working in the park and radio operation instructions were pinned. There was a Ballantine Books J.R.R. Tolkien calendar pinned to the wall, an image of two Orcs illustrating the month of October. Pulling it from the wall, Maggie noted that it sported “1975” in big, proud letters.

“Toronto, 1976 huh.” Maggie whispered to the Doctor.

“One paltry year and 3,211 measly kilometres? Hardly the biggest navigational howler. I used to consider it lucky for the old girl to arrive on the right planet, never mind the continent and city.”

“Fair enough,” Maggie chuckled. She replaced the calendar and turned to the radio. She clicked it on – but there was nothing, not even static.

“It’s been like that for the last few hours, the workers say. It stopped working right after they contacted me at the Ranger station,” Hayle said, glancing at his wristwatch.

The Doctor flicked his sonic screwdriver out of his coat pocket and ran it over the radio, frowning at the result.

“Odd.”

Out at Hayle’s truck he repeated the process.

“Very odd.”

He asked Hayle to pop the hood of the truck and ran the device over the engine block.

“Very, very odd,” he concluded as he looked at the treeline and the sky above them. The night seemed clear, the stars were in full view overhead and the moon shone proudly. It was cold and dry. Maggie untied the shirt around her waist and put it on, fastening the buttons. As she breathed out, she could see the vapour cloud in the night air.

“Well, what’s the problem Doctor?” Hayle enquired. “I mean the power is on inside, but no radio, and my truck worked before, but now ...”

The Doctor glanced from his sonic screwdriver up to the sky around them again. Maggie could tell he was trying to work it out.

“Mechanically, there is nothing wrong with your truck, or the radio, or the radio inside,” the Doctor said. “And I’d bet that would be the same for the other trucks too.” He ran a hand over his chin.

“If it’s not mechanical, then what is it, Doctor?” Maggie said, shuffling on the spot in the cold, crossing her arms over her chest and rubbing her upper arms vigorously.

The Doctor walked briskly toward them both and looked around him like a child with a secret. He slipped the screwdriver back into his pocket and put a hand on each of their shoulders.

“It appears that someone is projecting an interference field that is affecting the radio equipment and the vehicles. Whoever that someone is, they don’t want you to radio for help, and they don’t want anyone to leave, at least not easily.”

“Are they trying to keep us here?” Hayle said gruffly.

“Perhaps. Essentially, it’s blocking all communications and immobilising your machinery, trucks included. But it hasn’t affected your power.”

The Doctor set off suddenly towards the TARDIS at speed, taking both Maggie and Hayle by surprise. The TARDIS stood just beyond the idle trucks, between the site office and the treeline, the blue wood of its exterior bathed in the floodlights from the forestry station, its windows illuminated from within, the doors firmly shut. The Doctor approached and unlocked the door.

“Doctor, what are you doing?” Hayle asked, walking briskly behind him, Maggie in tow.

“If we’re going to go looking for Mr. Tanner and the source of this problem, we’re going to need more suitable equipment,” the Doctor said over his shoulder, disappearing inside.

Hayle stopped abruptly just before the doors to the TARDIS, like a base instinct told him to go no further. He hung awkwardly by the door for a moment, confused at this instinctive dread of the homely looking box. Maggie squeezed past and smiled apologetically as she went inside.

Inside the TARDIS, the ‘Who’ playlist had run its course and only the usual hum of the control room—faintly menacing on this oppressive night—remained.

“What do you think Doctor?” Maggie asked. “What’s going on here?”

The Doctor appeared from the anteroom off to the side and threw Maggie a black woollen hat and a thick red outdoor fur-lined hooded jacket, its left arm embroidered with a 'McMurdo Station' patch. She filed the questions around the coat's origins for later.

"That should keep you warm."

"Do you honestly think that a Bigfoot is taking these men? A real-life Sasquatch?" she said, chuckling again despite herself.

The Doctor clicked on a pair of particularly bright flashlights, clicked them off again and threw one to Maggie. He surveyed her carefully.

"In my experience, if a story is persistent enough and stands the test of time, it is often because there is a grain of truth in it," he replied.

"My grandpa used to tell a tale of Bill Spade and his wife, who were pioneers killed by the Mogollon Monster on their wedding day. That was an old story when *he* was a boy. Maybe it's not sudden at all," Maggie suggested.

"And they just hibernated between then and now?" the Doctor said skeptically. "No, there's something else, something that has pushed them and the humans around here into contact. And then there's that signal..."

"You think Bigfoot has that kind of technology? You think there's a whole race of, what, 'Big-feet'?"

"They might," the Doctor said, holding her gaze, "if they're not Bigfoot at all. They might if they're something else from somewhere else entirely."

Moving Slowly in the Dark

Finding the way back to the site of Paul Tanner's abduction was tricky in the dark. There hadn't been many volunteers to help, and though he was skeptical, Hayle agreed to take the Doctor on foot, along with Maggie and Travis. Maggie observed that Travis' obvious guilt at leaving Tanner behind was a driver. But he was the only eyewitness, and so it made sense for him to be included, especially when he hadn't needed any persuasion.

Each of them carried a flashlight, but Hayle was the only one carrying a weapon. The Doctor wasted no time expressing his disdain for guns when Travis had mentioned they should all probably have them. Seeing Travis' nervy demeanour, she was glad that Hayle flatly refused his request.

Maggie was glad of the wardrobe additions, night-time in this national park was cold. As she walked, she caught glimpses of the night sky where there were breaks in the ancient trees, a blanket of stars shone brightly. The air felt electrified and the forest around them was eerily quiet, like everything around them had held its breath watching them make their way through the dark. The tall trees loomed overhead like giant slender sentinels, surrounding them oppressively. Maggie wasn't concerned about the trek itself; as a teenager she had loved nothing better than camping with her friends and later with Ollie, and that abiding love of the outdoors had stayed with her into her adulthood. There wasn't any chatter as they made their way along a trail, just the sound of their footfalls and their increasingly shallow breathing, until the Doctor punctured the silence.

"How long have you worked in the park, Hayle?" Maggie asked the ranger.

"Been here coming up to ten years myself, ma'am," Hayle replied, his eyes fixed on the trail ahead. "Prior to that I served in the Army."

"Have you ever seen one of these 'Mogollon' creatures in that time?" she probed.

"Never," Hayle answered emphatically. "Don't believe a God-damned word about 'em either. No offence to your grandpa."

"Hey, I never believed him. When I mentioned it I was hoping I'd be laughed out of the room."

A moment passed, and he continued: "Sure, you occasionally hear a couple of the other rangers, locals, or tourists mention sightings from time to time, but then again some people claim to have seen all kinds of things, 'Skinwalkers' and the like – hell, some people would swear they'd seen a Jackalope given the right circumstances!"

Maggie chuckled softly, "I guess if there is any place where people can get caught up in folk tales it's a place like this."

The Doctor could have added his ample experience of the truth behind such folk tales, but decided against getting into a lengthy debate about the existence of extraordinary creatures, instead keeping his focus on the current situation.

"There haven't been any other stories of a Mogollon Monster?"

Hayle shrugged. "There wasn't anything reported, other than the theft of equipment. We spent some time checking into who might have been fencing the stuff, or worried they'd get caught. People running out usually take their stuff, I reckon." Hayle broke off his speech, abruptly stopping.

Several seconds passed with him rooted to the spot. Finally, the Doctor asked with a trace of reluctance, "Is everything all right?"

Hayle stood peering into the darkness, eyes narrow and jaw set firm. Maggie felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand up, though she wasn't sure why, as she couldn't see anything more than a few feet in front of them.

"I thought I saw something ahead, just off the trail, just for a second. But it's gone. Or it wasn't there at all." Hayle sniffed, as if trying to scent the phantom on the air. Impatient with himself for slowing the party down, he shook his concerns away and gruffly insisted, "Come on, it's not far from here."

They moved on in silence again, Maggie now feeling a nervous edge to the movements of the group, an electricity suspended in the air. The Doctor was the exception, of course. He seemed to be walking in quiet enjoyment of the situation, though doing his best not to show it.

The eerie silence in the forest added to the tension. The creatures of the night seemed to hold their collective breath as they observed the small group making its way through the darkness.

At last, they reached the area where the crew had been working in the daylight.

"Here we are Doctor, the scene of the crime." Hayle's tone was sardonic, and he motioned with his flashlight around the perimeter. "Or as best I can tell in the pitch dark."

The Doctor took his sonic screwdriver from his pocket, and arm outstretched, swept it around them in a wide radius – the blue light and buzzing sound amplified in the uncanny stillness of the forest. He halted after a 360-degree turn and held it up to his eyes. "Curious."

Maggie shrugged. "Beats 'odd', I suppose," she muttered sympathetically to Hayle.

"Where were you when your friend was taken?" the Doctor said, turning to Travis.

As the Doctor spoke to him, Travis jolted to life, moving forward, and sweeping his flashlight around the area, the tire tracks having hardened in the chill of the night. Travis traced a line from the tracks into the middle distance.

"This way I think," he said, moving off in the direction of his flashlight beam.

The Doctor whipped a secondary device from his pocket as he made after him: it resembled a small hand-held Yashica U-matic 8mm movie camera, with the addition of a blue light and what looked like a scientific calculator meshed to the side.

“How the mother of mercy did you get that in your pocket?” Hayle asked with incredulity. He flashed the ranger the shiny silk lining of his coat. “Special Time Lord pockets – bigger on the inside.”

“Time-what?” Hayle said, understandably confused.

The device made a ‘ping’ not unlike a radar as he peered through it and swept the ground and trees with its blue light. “Come along!” was all he received in response as the Doctor hurried after Travis.

“Sometimes, it’s just best to nod and tell him how great he is,” Maggie said in sympathy with the bewildered ranger. “Then wait for the break, where he decides to fill the silence by letting you in on what’s actually happening.” She walked past Hayle with a shrug as they followed the Doctor and Travis away from the tire tracks, carefully crossing the uneven ground, with Travis heading the group. Vestiges of the working day were littered around the site: abandoned tools, felled trees and the remaining stumps. Their flashlight beams projected out in front of them, there were intermittent pings and pops from the device, which the Doctor held to his eye, like he was filming an 8mm home movie. Maggie followed, grinning to herself at the absurdity of the sight.

“Here!” Travis said in a hoarse whisper, almost as if the creature he’d encountered might suddenly appear if he spoke too loudly. He pointed to a patch where the plants and trees thickened.

The Doctor swept the area of with the camera-like device, its ping-popping intensified and the calculator-like display glowed. He turned the device to read the numbers displayed and grunted.

“There’s some residual energy here, it’s very interesting, I brought this device on a hunch, and I’m glad that I did.” The Doctor handed it absently to Maggie. “That signal is still present – projected over the whole area.”

“Are the energy and the signal the same thing, Doctor?” Maggie asked.

“No, good question, but no. They are distinctly different. The energy readings I am picking up haven’t been left intentionally. It’s like a footprint in the snow, and it’s fading all the time.”

“So, what’s this thing? Sort of an energy detector?” Maggie said, looking through the viewfinder and moving it around – to find the device ping-popped when she swept the area in front of Travis.

“Sort of. It looks for special kinds of energy,” the Doctor said, taking it back and tweaking dials on its side. “I’m altering the parameters slightly. I hope we can pick up a trail.”

“A trail for what?” Hayle asked, impatiently.

“Whatever took Mr. Tanner,” the Doctor said, peering again into the viewfinder.

“So, you believe me then Doctor?” Travis said.

“I do. And whoever, or whatever it was, left a residual energy trail behind them that is not of this world.” The Doctor swept the detector left and right to recalibrate its sensors.

“What, like aliens?” Hayle scoffed, putting a hand to his forehead.

“Well, if by that you mean extra-terrestrial beings from places unknown, then yes,” the Doctor replied. “If you mean ‘unfamiliar and disturbing’, then I don’t know yet. Perhaps that too.” He looked around at the blanket of the night sky. “Then again, they might be all too familiar, maybe more at home in this park than you and your workers.”

“I meant like spacemen,” Hayle grumbled, “And what I’m hearing is a big ‘yes’. So, we’ve got Mogollon monsters and spacemen now.” He shook his head and paced back and forth.

“That’s likely an oversimplification, Ranger Hayle,” the Doctor replied, looking away from the device momentarily. He was halted from further comment by a rapid ping-popping from the device. The Doctor glanced down at the reading on its outer display, which was rapidly changing – the number increasing as the ping-popping intensified.

Travis, Hayle, and Maggie held up their flashlight beams in an unspoken unison, the light illuminating the frame of a large creature hunched in the darkness, partly concealed by foliage. Its startled eyes shone brightly – a luminous red. As it stood, almost in slow motion, to its full height they realised its immense size: seven feet tall, with a huge head and shoulders, and almost completely covered with hair, reminiscent of a human-like gorilla.

“Holy crap,” Hayle said flatly.

He raised his gun, and the creature suddenly roared, animated into action. It turned and sped off into the darkness. The Doctor swatted at Hayle’s gun.

“No!” he commanded. “We need to follow it, not *shoot* it – come on!”

The Doctor took off in pursuit, Travis and Maggie close behind. With a huff, Hayle holstered his gun in response to the Doctor’s rebuke and joined the chase.

It wasn’t an easy pursuit in the dark. The Mogollon was quicker than it looked, and there was no track to follow. The creature zig-zagged through the dark forest, and the Doctor, at the head of the group, could only hold the detector in front of him and desperately try to follow the haphazard path.

“Stop – I can help you!” the Doctor shouted after the creature. “Where are you from?”

It didn’t so much as turn its head, trying its utmost to escape.

The forest was dense suddenly and it became difficult to follow at speed, though it seemed barely an inconvenience to the creature, obviously much more used to these surroundings. As they fought through the brush there was a howl from their left, then almost immediately another from their right, then another answering from behind. Maggie stopped in her tracks, wheeling around to gauge the distance from which the howls were coming. The forest fell silent again, and she became conscious of biting hard on her lower lip and the hairs on the back of her neck standing once more. She felt as though they had just walked in to a trap.

“Doctor, where are they?” she whispered, treading carefully.

There was no answer; the Doctor and Travis had vanished from sight. She turned off her flashlight, hoping to catch sight of one of their lights. The howls came again from three or four directions – but not from where they seemed to come from before. They were somewhere close, moving slowly in the dark.

Ahead of her the Doctor and Travis stood still with their flashlights off, rooted to the spot as they heard the howls around them. Travis gripped the Doctor’s arm in terror. “It’s them, Doctor. Those creatures. They’re out there.”

The only sound for the moment was the *ping-pop* from the camera-like detector. The Doctor turned slowly, shifting his feet quietly, “Where’s Maggie?” he whispered to Travis, as the chorus of howls filled the night air in response.

Maggie stood alone in the dark, listening for any signs of movement, or whispered conversation, of the Doctor. She closed her eyes and exhaled slowly. Suddenly she felt very cold, and more than a little foolish. Heading off into the dark chasing the Sasquatch was at first ridiculous, but now seemed dangerous. She reflected that sometimes being on an adventure with the Doctor could make you feel safer than you really were, and because of her lack of seriousness for the situation, she could be in very real trouble. She was now living one of Grandpa's campfire stories – was she about to become the next Bill Spade? And if she was, who'd ever know about it? When she left 1995 to travel with the Doctor, she never considered dying in an American national park in 1975, killed by supposedly mythical beasts!

She shook her head to dispel the notion and listened again. She could hear nothing but her own pulse, her heart pounding in her chest. She turned again and heard a crack of branches underfoot; she opened her eyes and was about to scream when a large hand clamped down over her mouth.

"Shhhh," Hayle said as quietly as he could, "I think they've surrounded us."

"You nearly gave me a heart attack!" Maggie hissed, removing his hand.

"I'm sorry ma'am, I didn't want them to hear me." Hayle winced. "Missed my footing stumbling around in the dark and I've twisted my damned ankle; it might be broken."

Maggie crouched down to examine the injury, but the gruff ranger waved away her concern.

"Never mind that. I can't see where the hell I'm going, but those creatures don't have the same problem. I think I've spotted at least three, but it's hard to tell. They're quicker than they look, and great at using the forest as cover."

"Big-feet after all. Tell me about it. I can't see or hear the Doctor, or Travis." Maggie whispered to him.

"How is it that you're hanging around with a guy like this?" Hayle asked quietly.

"You know, I sometimes ask myself the same question."

"You seem like a smart cookie, so let me ask you, does this seem very smart to you?" The forest was silent again, the collective holding of breath had resumed. The feeling of being watched returned with the silence, newly sharp and unsettling.

Maggie recalled Hayle's question, and answered honestly, "No. Not really. But I've..." She stopped suddenly, sensing movement in her peripheral vision. She screamed.

Two of the Mogollon creatures appeared on either side of them, howling loudly. Before Hayle could lift his gun the creature closest to him swatted it from his hand, while at the same moment the other creature grabbed Maggie, lifting her off her feet. Hayle aimed a punch at the creature, but swung wide and missed, and then he too was hoisted into the air with minimal effort from the creature.

A few meters away, Travis and the Doctor heard the howls and Maggie's scream and came running in the direction of the noise.

“Doctor – over there!” Travis hissed, spying a sliver of light in the darkness. They ran toward it but found nothing but Hayle’s discarded weapon on the forest floor, illuminated by the beam from Maggie’s flashlight a couple of feet away.

The Doctor wheeled around in a circle trying to catch a glimpse of something, *anything* that would indicate the direction in which they’d been taken. But there was nothing but the dark outline of trees, dense and impenetrable.

“Maggie!” the Doctor shouted. “Maggie, can you hear me?!”

“Hayle!” Travis shouted, “Maggie!”

The only response was a distant howling, and then silence fell once more amongst the trees in their silent vigil.

Take Me to Your Leader

Maggie awoke to find herself lying inside what she assumed was a cave. Her head swam, and her eyes struggled to adjust to the dim light. The faint ringing in her ears started to subside as she heaved herself into a sitting position. As she did, the ringing merged with an even fainter buzzing from dim electric lights hanging overhead. She could make out insulated wire running across the cave ceiling, giving it more of a ‘bunker vibe’. She lay on a soft bed of dried leaves that had been layered on the cave floor.

She tried to focus her thoughts. The last thing she remembered was standing in the dark with Hayle and being grabbed suddenly by what could be described as a Mogollon Monster, not some guy in a suit for tourists to photograph, nor for an episode of *Unsolved Mysteries*, but a walking, breathing creature of legend. She had no idea what had happened to the Doctor, or Travis – or Hayle for that matter.

She rubbed her head and neck and groaned slightly. Her back ached with stiffness; she had no idea how long she’d been unconscious, but she felt terrible, and her mouth was dry. This was probably more ‘outdoors’ than she had bargained for, all things considered; it wasn’t the atypical hiking trip to put it mildly. She climbed to her feet slowly as her head swam, and she swayed a little. *Why did the TARDIS dump us here? Why couldn’t we just go and watch The Who?* she thought.

“Because you were meant to be here, I think,” replied a soft female voice that seemed to resonate in her head.

The Doctor walked resolutely with Travis paying close attention as he adjusted the dials on the camera-like device. He simmered quietly as he did; losing Maggie was not something he was willing to accept, nor plan for, and he was angry with himself for leaving her behind.

“Excuse me, Doctor, um – if the detector isn’t working properly, how do you know where we’re going?” Travis asked, trying to keep pace.

The Doctor had almost forgotten Travis was with him, consumed by his own thoughts and his anger.

“The device is designed to pick up distinct particles that would stand out from the rest, like radiation. The signal that was affecting the radios and the vehicles had no point of origin that I could detect, so I took a punt that it was either trans-dimensional, or that the source was dipping in and out of this timeline.”

“Okay.”

“I brought this Trace Particle Spectrometer just in case I was right, and bingo! We had a hit at the abduction site – a seven-foot hit to be precise, meaning your Mogollon monsters are far more complex than a mere ‘Bigfoot’. Residue from interdimensional travel, you see.” He tapped the display, as though Travis had any chance of understanding it.

The young man obediently nodded in response, and the Doctor continued: “But the readings are distorted, and dispersed, there are too many of them to track in any direction. So, it’s working as well as I can expect. Here, you’ll need to hold it.” He passed it to Travis. “I’ve recalibrated the TPS to search for Chronon particles as well as Artron energy, so you’ll need to point it away from me.”

“Chronon particles, right.” Travis held the device like an unexploded bomb, pointing it into the forest.

“Maggie has travelled through the time vortex with me in the TARDIS . By resetting the device, I can use the TPS to track her instead.”

“Sure, Doc,” Travis said uncertainly. His low-key reaction, and complete lack of acknowledgment of the considerable genius of this modification, disappointed the Time Lord immensely.

“Just point the detector,” the Doctor replied curtly, waving a hand away from them.

Travis swept the Trace Particle Spectrometer from right to left in front of him, then back again slowly. The TPS let out a familiar *ping*, then a *pop*, then *ping-pop*, as it picked up Chronon particles in a westerly direction. He looked through the viewfinder and saw a glowing trail of particles highlighted by the TPS stretching out into the forest.

“I can see them, the crawdads!” Travis shouted excitedly, “I can see the particles, Doc. Lit up like a pathway!”

“That’s it! Follow those, er, crawdads then!” he shouted, deciding not to dwell on the fact that they were following time vortex particles and not crayfish.

The progress was slow at times, because the forest was still shrouded in darkness and the Trace Particle Spectrometer highlighted the chronons it detected in the environment, not rocks, diverts in the ground and tree roots. Travis was enthused by the situation and seemed to have temporarily shaken off his guilt at leaving his friend behind.

The Doctor’s own guilt at leaving Maggie behind was still gnawing at him as they walked, interfering with his analytical thinking processes. He often told himself that those who joined him on his travels through time and space were responsible for themselves, until things like this happened. He had no reason to believe that these ‘Mogollon Monsters’ were a threat, but he also had no evidence that they *weren’t*. And that ambiguity was making him tense. He was hoping for the best, whilst fearing the worst.

From Ranger Hayle’s map, and the direction they were travelling, the Doctor calculated they were deep in the ‘Black Mesa’ area of the national park as daylight crept into the inky

blackness of the night sky. The area extended out to the Mogollon Rim and covered a vast landscape from the dense treeline to lake land and high grounds. The trees were sparser here and there was something about moving carefully around at this time that made him feel distinctly crepuscular. He imagined himself more a wily old fox than an owl. The land here was ancient and held many more secrets than he would concern himself with today. The fabric of time and space was indeed weaker here, and he felt as if they were being observed, even now.

As they moved towards a clearing, the trail began to disperse, the readings increasingly irregular, so the pair stopped while the Doctor attempted to recalibrate. He was hoping that this wouldn't be a dead end when Travis spotted something on the ground ahead.

"Hey Doc! Doctor, what d' you make of this?" he exclaimed, beckoning him over.

The ground was sparse and flattened, and a few feet away from the edge of the clearing, Travis knelt next to three indentations. As the Doctor moved in for a closer look, he observed that the impressions were around six feet in diameter, around six feet apart, and in a triangular pattern. Each was filled with rainwater, like small, circular pools.

"How long ago did it last rain?" he asked Travis.

"About three days ago."

"Then these impressions have been here at least that long." The Doctor rose. "I wonder."

The Doctor flipped the TPS on its side once more and ran the device over the circles, putting his eye to the viewfinder like he was shooting the scene. The TPS pinged and popped sporadically.

"A similar energy signature to the creatures," the Doctor said thoughtfully.

"Are these like, crop circles Doctor? Like alien spaceship type crop circles?"

"You know Travis, I think they might be. Minus the crops."

"I thought they were things thought up by crazy people and bored farmers."

"Well speaking as someone who has been both of those things, these are quite real."

Suddenly there was a bright flash above, and they were both thrown backwards off their feet. Where there was nothing before, there was now a large reflective, discus-like object hovering silently above the ground, the forest and sky reflected in its surface in a 'hall-of-mirrors' effect. Underneath the discus was illuminated in brilliant light.

"Doctor! It's a real-life flying saucer!" Travis shouted, trying to get to his feet in the mud.

The Doctor held the TPS aloft, pointing towards the discus-shaped object, at which point the device's ping-popping became one continuous tone, amplified by the lack of noise in the clearing around or from the vessel itself.

"It's more than that!" the Doctor shouted excitedly. "It's a void ship!"

As if in response, the light underneath the vessel divided into several smaller lights and spun around, increasing in speed until a focused beam shot out toward them. Seconds later they began to rise from the ground.

"Doctor, what's happening?" Travis shouted, barely containing his panic.

"It's a tractor beam! And to be honest it's just a bit showy!" They were suspended two to three meters from the ground and rising. The Doctor's mouth curled in disdain; he lost grip of the TPS. As it dropped to the floor, he put his hand in his pocket and produced the sonic screwdriver, aimed it at the centre of the aperture that the beam was emitting from and clicked it on.

The screwdriver fizzed into life and the tractor beam began to oscillate, until its grip loosened, and as the Doctor dropped, he bumped Travis's chest, then grabbed the back of Travis's

coat, trying to use his weight and gravity to free Travis, without success. Once on the ground the Doctor looked around desperately but couldn't find anything to use that would cause the beam to lose its grip on Travis, who continued to rise towards the spinning vessel.

"Doc, don't let them take me!" he shouted over his shoulder, struggling and his eyes wide in terror.

But at that moment he was enveloped by an intense burst of light and an instant later there was a loud crack in the air. As the void ship disappeared, the Doctor was flung backwards again, and the night sky was clear once more.

The Doctor climbed back to his feet and dusted himself off resolutely. He looked around him and picked the Trace Particle Spectrometer up from the mud, and he wiped the display on the sleeve of his coat. The reading from the display was illuminated in a bright LED digits the twilight, its decrement began and the *pings* and *pops* became less regular. He glanced ruefully downwards at the water-filled circular indents on the ground around him.

"Well," he said to himself, shaking his head slowly. "I am more than a little tired of this."

The crack of twigs underfoot behind took him by surprise, and he spun on his heels to see, emerging from the trees, two tall, dark 'Mogollon' creatures, their eyes shining brightly, their arms by their sides. They appeared to be surveying him carefully.

"Ah, I wondered if you might show up," the Doctor said in an even, friendly tone. He took a step forward, opening his palms and putting his arms out by his sides. "Take me to your leader," he said with a wry smile.

The Mother and the Doctor

The Doctor walked slowly through a dimly lit underground tunnel, which had been hewn from the earth and stone under the forest floor. One of the Mogollon creatures marched in front, and one behind, in single file.

They were indeed ‘large and hairy’, exactly as Travis had described them. They had expertly navigated through the dark forest and into the tunnel network without saying anything at all. They communicated telepathically to state that they were taking him to the ‘The Mother’, who was the one in charge.

The Doctor had been allowed to bring the Trace Particle Spectrometer once they had inspected it and found it to be harmless. It gently *ping-popped* at regular intervals in his hand as he held it downward at its side.

The Doctor had asked about Maggie but didn’t get much in the way of response. He had been in contact with a myriad of beings throughout his lives and seen many that were capable of doing harm. As large and powerful as these creatures seemed, there was nothing about them that the Doctor felt immediately threatening. He hoped that he was correct because that would mean that Maggie would be unharmed. Though he had noted from their teeth that the creatures were omnivores, he didn’t feel like he’d been ‘hunted-gathered’ for dinner, and the presumption could be seen as offensive to his hosts.

The Doctor had taken the time to consider events in the park: the abductions, the theft of equipment, the signal jamming radio communication, the Mogollon creatures, and the void ship that had appeared suddenly and taken Travis. He wasn’t sure what to expect when they reached ‘The Mother’, but he felt sure of one thing, the missing equipment was here – and being used, ingeniously, to power and light this network of underground tunnels.

Ahead of them, two more Mogollon creatures appeared from either side of the tunnel, nodding in silent understanding: they were clearly having a detailed telepathic natter, the Doctor reasoned. The two guards proceeded into a large well-lit rounded area which the Doctor surmised was at the centre of the complex.

A group of six Mogollon creatures stepped forwards to meet them as they entered. The Mogollon at the head of the group, with greying whisps of fur and intensely bright eyes, must be 'The Mother' the Doctor thought.

"Welcome Doctor," a strong, melodic female voice echoed, though her lips didn't move. The telepathic link didn't feel invasive: she was projecting, not probing. "We have heard much about you."

"Only good things, I hope." He scanned the room, attempting to remain stoic and confident. "But may I ask from whom?"

"Doctor!" Maggie cried, emerging from behind the group. "You're here!"

Maggie ran towards the Doctor and seized him in a warm, somewhat unexpected embrace. The Doctor let his stoic façade drop, smiling despite himself as he hugged her back. He was beyond relief to see his companion unharmed.

"I'm okay, Doctor," she said, brushing her hair over her ears and composing herself. "The Erreyetree have been very gracious hosts."

"They even fixed my leg," Hayle said, walking gingerly into view on a makeshift crutch.

"I'm so glad you are both unharmed, and thankful to the ... Erreyetree?" Now able to return his attention to Maggie and Hayle's abductors, the Doctor scanned the room. "This is quite setup you have here. You've cannibalised the stolen equipment to power and light the place."

He paused at a device anchored into the ground towards the back of the large space. It looked like alien technology rigged into the wider system. He took out his sonic screwdriver and buzzed it over the device up.

"Interesting. This is the source of the mysterious signal I picked up at the forestry station. You're trying to hide from someone."

"We have always come and gone from this world Doctor, but now it has become a refuge for those of us that remain. It is important we go undetected," the Mother said, her voice singing through the Doctor's mind.

"Come and gone?" the Doctor enquired.

"We have moved across our worlds for many generations. Before the advent of humans and after. Traversing the weak points between time and space. We Erreyetree are wanderers that way, a nomadic people."

"But you don't wander anymore? Instead, you are hiding here, from whom?" As if struck by a current, the answer came to him. "The silver disk – the void ships!"

"Yes Doctor. The vessel you describe belongs to the Parraxis. They pursue us, they have hunted us down for many years now, capturing us, killing us, relentlessly across worlds. We few are all that is left of our race."

"You've said that you moved across the weak points in space and time. How? Where is your ship? I can fix it for you so you can leave. I'm good at fixing things," the Doctor said proudly.

"We are our own vessel, Doctor," the Mother answered. "We move through the space between spaces, as we have for millennia. We don't require anything other than ourselves. The people of these lands that were here before knew us and respected us, they lived in harmony with the land, as we try to do. Some called us 'Sasquatch', or 'The Watchers', those that inhabit the lands at the top of this world called us 'Yeti'."

"You can move across the void between dimensions? You can *all* do that?"

“Yes.” The Mother replied with the telepathic equivalent of a laugh, sensing his disbelief and being amused by it. “We have adapted to do so, since the time before time, we learn when we are young and we migrate between worlds, between universes.”

“Incredible,” the Doctor said under his breath, slack-jawed with amazement. “Simply incredible.”

“But now there are so few of us that remain. We are afraid Doctor, afraid for our children, afraid for our species. And so, we hide. Hoping that our hunters will lose interest.”

“Why do they hunt you for? Are you at war?” the Doctor asked.

“War? We are not a warlike people Doctor. No, we are hunted because this is what the Parraxis do—invade, enslave, and corrupt. They are a desperate people.” A prickle of electricity sounded in her projected tone, “They have harvested all that was good from our mother-planet. We are just trying to survive and ensure we don’t suffer the same fate.”

“And so, they’ve followed you here. But why abduct people from the park? Maggie? Hayle? Mr. Tanner?” The Doctor paused. “In fact, what have you done with Mr. Tanner? His friend Travis Nelson was terribly worried about him.”

“We took them as the Parraxis were close, searching the forests for us. We were scared that they might unwittingly alert them to our presence or be hurt themselves. So we brought them here, and Mr. Tanner is quite alright.” She gestured to a tunnel leading off to the west.

The Doctor and Maggie followed The Mother down the tunnel, lights flickering occasionally overhead. The Doctor silently pondered the Erreyetree as they walked, and how this mysterious species had become biologically able to pass between worlds using tears in the fabric of space and time (a difficult feat even for a Time Lord) and how they had come to be at the brink of extinction. Their existence was a miracle and meeting them moved him to reflect on his good fortune as a time traveller to be able to witness such marvels. As if sensing the questions on the tip of his tongue, The Mother spoke to them both, her melodic voice resonating in their minds:

“We are a matriarchically structured society, Doctor; we have developed our way of life over many generations. We take care of one another, raising our children, sourcing our food and homes in harmony with the planets around us. We always returned to the mother-world each cycle to observe our rituals and begin anew. Over four ages ago, we returned to our world to find it invaded by the Parraxis. They did not hold the planet in the same regard. They came and plundered our resources, destroyed the balance that was our lives and our world, and when there was little left, they used our people as resources too. We are the last of our people. There are no more than one hundred of us, scattered, scared, and hiding in the dark.”

“I was the last to be elected as ‘The Mother’ before our society finally collapsed and we fled, and so that is how I have remained. My name is Delphi-Nor. Though it is seldom said.” She smiled to herself.

“I am sorry that this has happened to you and your people Delphi-Nor. It is a story all too common across the universe,” the Doctor replied, walking by her side, “I will do whatever I can to ensure that you survive. That’s my job, you are The Mother, I am the Doctor.”

“I communicated with one of our people not so long ago who had been taken by the Parraxis, I learned through her that they too are dying. It is our belief that, having taken so much and given back so little, now the universe claims them. In their desperation they have become more ruthless, crueller than I ever thought possible. And now they have followed us here.”

“I promise you that I will do everything to ensure that your people will survive,” the Doctor repeated resolutely.

Delphi-Nor stopped and turned to him, moved by his insistence. “Thank you, Doctor.”

As they neared the end of the tunnel the lights brightened, and the Doctor observed a large human male helping three other Erreyetree with what appeared to be repair work.

“Mr. Tanner has been most useful in helping us repair the damage to these tunnels and helping us strengthen the supports,” Delphi-Nor said.

Tanner turned as they approached and dusted his large hands down the legs of his jeans. He walked towards them and nodded at Delphi-Nor and Maggie in turn, giving each a polite but shaken “Ma’am” by way of greeting.

“Mr. Tanner, my name is the Doctor. I’m happy we have found you; your friend Travis has told me a lot about you.” The Doctor considered his last sight of Travis, disappearing in a blinding flash of light – taken by those that these giant beings feared so much.

“I’ve been here since Delphi-Nor’s people took me in the forest. I can’t say I wasn’t frightened at first, but they are kind, gentle people – and after I learnt what had happened to them, well, I just had to stick around and help for a while. And I certainly didn’t want to give them away to those hunters.” Tanner glanced and nodded toward Delphi-Nor, before a thought occurred to him. “Where is Nelson? Christ – I bet he filled his pants when I was dragged away!” Tanner chuckled hoarsely. “Did he arrive with you?”

“I’m afraid not. Travis was with me, in the forest – but as we were trying to track the Erreyetree, we were surprised by the Parraxis and he was taken.” The Doctor said ruefully, “I tried to stop them, but...”

“Your friend will not be safe with them,” Delphi-Nor said.

His head swam with disorientating haze as Travis slowly regained consciousness. He had been dreaming of a far-off world and of giant hairy men that walked through the forests and fields. Of flying saucers and crop circles. Whatever he’d been drinking, he swore he’d never touch the stuff again. He felt as if he was in a hospital, seeing a bright light bearing down on him from an unseen source. His eyes stung with the bright light, and he tried to raise his hand to shield them, but he couldn’t move. Nor could he move his legs. Panic shot through him like electricity. He was paralysed!

“D- Doc- Doctor?!” Travis forced the syllables out into the air. Though he was trying to scream at the top of his lungs, he couldn’t seem to summon the strength or the volume.

“I suppose I am a doctor of sorts,” a cold flat voice answered, just beyond his field of blurred vision.

“Wh-who’s there?” Travis asked in the same croaky fashion. “Where am I?”

“My name is not important, but you are aboard the Alpha Vessel of the great Parraxis Empire,” the voice replied in the same cold monotone, “You are quite safe. For the time being.”

Travis suddenly realised that his dreams were laced with reality. He had been taken up by a flying saucer, he had been looking for Tanner, Hayle, and Maggie with the Doctor – and it had appeared from nowhere and taken him!

“Who is this, Doctor?” the voice said, now closer. Travis felt the intrusion, like someone poking around in his mind, and he didn’t like it at all.

“G-get out of my head!” Travis said, trying to move in vain. “Wh-who the hell are you?”

A being stepped into the light and into view. Travis’ eyes widened at the sight, his vision all too clear now. It was hairless from what he could make out, with a bulbous head, mottled-grey complexion, and large dark eyes. It was a similar height to the average human. The creature wore what appeared to be a breathing apparatus over its mouth and a finely made dark blue jacket of a shimmering, synthetic material.

“I am the Inquisitor, and I will be asking the questions, Mr. Nelson,” it said, its flat and unnerving tone sounding increasingly threatening in these circumstances. “If you can answer my questions in a satisfactory manner, then you will be released unharmed.”

“Unharmed? I-I can’t move my arms or legs!” Travis said aloud.

“Quite temporary, I assure you. If you cooperate, you’ll be going about your primitive business in no time at all. We’ll put you right back where we found you,” the creature assured him with a tilt of its head, its apparently innocent expression belying its intrusion into his thoughts.

He couldn’t see its lips, but he knew the words weren’t being spoken aloud. This inquisitor was talking within Travis’ mind, and groping around inside it while it did so.

“Stop that! Get out of my head!” Travis screamed internally.

“When you have told me what I need to know,” his interrogator replied. “Tell me about this Doctor and tell me what you know of the Erreyetree.”

Having his thoughts, his memories, his being invaded like this was unbearable. Travis inhaled and then suddenly shouted, “GET OUT! NOW!”

The Parraxis inquisitor jolted back suddenly, as if a door had been slammed in its face, and Travis felt a huge wave of relief.

“Well, it seems that you have chosen to take the harder route,” the creature said, the projected voice sounding further away once more. “That’s a pity. For you.”

He motioned to someone unseen from his right and two more Parraxis appeared. Travis looked down at his hands and feet which were bound by round metallic manacles. Inside there was a faint blue light and he realised he was suspended above the floor of the vessel.

“It appears that Mr. Nelson of Arizona needs to be connected to the interrogator in order to further our discussion,” the Inquisitor said to them, not appearing to be concerned that his communication was transmitted directly into Travis’s mind, “I’m afraid that my assertion that you would be taken back unharmed no longer applies, Mr. Nelson. After the procedure your mind will be quite broken. Not that you humans appear to use them much as it is.”

The two Parraxis took hold of each shoulder and led Travis into a brightly lit corridor. They passed through the heart of a vessel unlike anything he could ever have imagined: cold and sterile in most aspects, but also alive with technology. There were brightly coloured displays set into walls displaying messages and diagrams he didn’t understand. More strange beings were dispersed around the interior, filing past in officious occupation, busied by unknown and incomprehensible tasks. They moved towards a wall and then suddenly passed through an entry way that opened like the aperture of a camera as they approached. They emerged into a brightly lit open space, and traversed a walkway that seemed to be suspended without any surrounding

support in mid-air, between the vast empty chasms in the bowels of this ship. As soon as they crossed it, it floated mechanically down the bowels for other Parraxis to listlessly cross.

This ship was different than the one he had seen with the Doctor, far larger and stranger., A great distance below the walkway, he could see the saucer-like spacecraft that had taken him nestled inside. The surrounding space was circular, with two giant rings swinging around them, one inside the other like a giant gyroscope. The effect was disorientating to say the least.

Travis gazed around woozily at once disconcerted by what he saw and simultaneously desperate to take in its every detail. He looked across to the break in the shining façade of the ship and a clear view of the black expanse of space. The blue haze of a nearby planet convinced him of what he dared not contemplate: he was high above the earth! He felt dizzy once more and for a moment felt like he might pass out again. All the while, his feet floated inches from the floor.

They led him into a circular room at the end that appeared to be like an operating theatre. They approached a large upright metal slab, illuminated by an overhead light, like an obelisk awaiting its worshippers. They roughly spun him away from the obelisk, and the manacles seemed to be attracted to the slab like magnets as he was secured against it. His guards departed as silently as they had arrived.

Left alone in the room and in silence, he tried to make sense of what was happening. A single tear formed in his left eye and began a descent down his cheek. Is this what had happened to Tanner? Had he been taken, left brain-dead and then discarded? He hoped with all hope it hadn't.

Paralysed, orbiting the earth, there was nothing he could do, and no one to help him. His mind wheeled through a terrible kaleidoscope of outcomes until suddenly in the silence he heard a low buzzing sound coming from his jacket pocket. He glanced down and he could just about make out a faint blue light enveloped in the thick dark fabric.

An Uncomfortable Choice

The Doctor walked briskly through the early morning light towards the forestry station. Maggie had settled into a sequence of jog-running to keep up, while Tanner and Delphi-Nor brought up the rear of the group.

“Are you sure about this, Doctor?” Maggie asked a little breathlessly. “Won’t it mean that the Parraxis can find the Erreyetree if we disable their device?”

“Yes, briefly, but that’s all I’ll need. A brief window.”

“But Doctor, if we fight them like this, we will die. They have greater numbers and the weapons,” Delphi-Nor said.

“You won’t need the numbers, or the weapons. I promise, Mr. Tanner and Ranger Hayle will help you down here, and once I have found their ship, I’ll be the arsenal that you require.”

“Slightly overconfident?” Maggie whispered.

“A bit,” the Doctor whispered back.

At last, they reached the TARDIS, standing alone on the outskirts of the logging station. Its blue wooden exterior doors were closed and there was an unearthly hue emanating from the windows in the early morning mist.

“That’s your spaceship?!” said Tanner with incredulity.

“She’s more than she appears,” the Doctor boasted as he proudly clapped his hands on the nearest panel of the police box. “Trust me.”

The Doctor flung the doors open and sauntered inside, the internal lights flickering into life and the TARDIS humming in greeting as he crossed the threshold.

“Look at this place!” Tanner shouted; all his doubts quelled as he took in the vast space stretching before him. “It’s bigger on the inside!”

“*Is it?*” the Doctor and Maggie replied in unison.

“So how do you think you’re going to be able to find them if you haven’t been able to do it before Doctor?” Maggie asked joining him at the console.

“Well, that’s because until now they hadn’t taken Travis,” he replied, clicking switches as the scanner screen dropped from above and sparked into life.

“So, so you can track *Travis* in this thing?” Tanner asked.

“Not as such,” the Doctor said, tapping at the console like a virtuoso pianist, and in response the screen suddenly displaying a graphic like a scope. “But before they took him, I managed to drop my sonic screwdriver into his pocket. And *that*, I can track.” He indicated the screen display and turned to the elder Erreyetree. “Delphi-Nor, I’m going to drop your cloaking defence from here. As soon as I do, I will be able to get a location fix on the Parraxis ship. Return to your people. Make sure they stay safe.”

“But what’s to stop the Parraxis from destroying us all?” she asked.

“Because I am going to offer them an uncomfortable choice,” the Doctor replied grimly.

“OK. Let’s go.” Tanner said, “Please Doctor, bring Travis back safely.”

“I certainly intend to, Mr. Tanner,” the Doctor said sincerely.

Tanner and Delphi-Nor left Maggie and the Doctor in the TARDIS and emerged back outside into the placid Arizona morning. As they stood in the bracing open air of the national park, Delphi-Not took hold of Tanner’s arm, and looked down at him. He looked up at The Mother, amazed anew by her towering height and how out of place, and yet totally at home, she seemed in this woodland.

“This can take a lot of energy, but I feel speed is required,” she informed him serenely. “Try not to throw up.”

Before Tanner had time to question this warning, suddenly there was a low vibrating sound that grew louder and louder, and the world around them seemed to lose focus, like an adjustment to the lens of a camera. Tanner felt as if every cell of his body was being shaken. The vibrating sound reached a crescendo and they were gone.

The Doctor observed them evaporate from inside the TARDIS, visibly impressed. “That’s some nice temporal shifting,” the Doctor said with a nod of approval.

Maggie set her feet firmly and squarely in the glass-floored dais around the console, and gripped the handrail tightly, her body language preceding her statement: “Don’t dare ask me to go. I’m coming with you.”

“I thought you might be.” The Doctor smiled. “Ready?”

“Ready,” Maggie replied with a nod.

“Delphi, if you can hear me. The time is now,” the Doctor said in his inner monologue, concentrating hard.

“Good luck Doctor,” Delphi-Nor replied telepathically, her words slightly distorted.

“Right, let’s see what you’ve got!” the Doctor exclaimed as he threw a large lever on the console.

There was a temporary silence in the console room, apart from the ambient noise made by the living TARDIS, and Maggie realised that she was holding her breath. The moment seemed to last an age, but then there was a loud *‘blip’* from the monitor screen and a blue dot appeared on the scope.

“There! Got you!” the Doctor shouted. With a laugh, he threw the dematerialisation lever and the TARDIS engines burst into life and the time rotor in the centre of the console engaged.

“Hang on Travis,” the Doctor said aloud, his jaw set tightly, “We’re on our way.”

Travis had recognised that the device intermittently buzzing and illuminating in his pocket belonged to the Doctor. He had seen the strange man wave and whiz it around, using it to divine all sorts of facts about their inexplicable predicament. He hadn't a clue how or when it got there, but he hoped the Doctor might have planted it there deliberately, and that it meant the Doctor knew where he was, and not that the gizmo was about to explode or something. He wasn't sure how the Doctor could reach him, but that small prickle of hope was all he had right now.

Since he arrived, he hadn't seen another person—well, another human anyway. Were Maggie and Tanner here too, or had they been dragged off somewhere else? He also noted that these were not the creatures he had seen in the forest. These were very different. Shorter, more human-like in build, with smooth skin. No way would anyone mistake this bunch for a Bigfoot. How many different types of aliens were running around the forest, all unseen and unnoticed by him and his co-workers?

He wasn't sure how long he'd been waiting here alone, but he had decided that he had to try to ignore the device. If he thought about it too hard, maybe the creatures could tell, and it would be discovered.

There was a crack overhead, like the opening of a seal, and the wall opened, spilling a blazing light into the darkened operating theatre. Behind it stood four of the creatures that had captured him. In the centre was the 'Inquisitor'.

"Hello Mr. Nelson. I'm sorry for your wait," the Inquisitor said, the apology carrying an inevitable dose of sarcasm with the same even tone that he projected into Travis's mind. "It takes time to prepare the procedure."

"What procedure?" Travis said aloud.

"The Interrogator will allow us to see into your mind, your thoughts, your memories. We can find out what you know about the race we seek, and anything else you might want to conceal."

"But I-I don't know anything!" Travis said, "Nothing at all!"

"We'll soon see," the Inquisitor replied coldly.

Machinery whirred into life above him, and a helmet-like device secured itself to his head with palpable and audible suction.

The Inquisitor and the creature to his left exchanged nods, and the device sprang into life, shooting a single beam of light from the wall and into a circular aperture on the helmet.

"Soon I will know everything I need to. And your mind will be spent. This apparatus was designed for beings much more complex than humans."

"Please don't!" Travis implored.

"But we have already begun," the Inquisitor replied.

Travis felt a sharp pain in his head, and he convulsed involuntarily as the device connected to his mind. Images of recent events raced through his mind's eye in reverse. His abduction, walking through the forest looking for Tanner, the Doctor's improbable equipment – the Doctor himself and his strange blue box ...

"Wait!" Travis thought he heard the Inquisitor shout within his own mind. "Go back to the box."

In the control room the Parraxis studied the images being pulled directly from Travis' mind on a feed in the control room. They paused on an image of the blue box, partially illuminated on the edges of the forestry site. The image sharpened and refocused.

"Is that a TARDIS sir?" one of the technicians asked.

"I believe it is. Not only that, but it belongs to the Doctor."

"But how? Surely, he's not real? It's a myth, a bedtime story?"

"Apparently not," the Inquisitor said. "I need to see more. Continue."

As the process started again Travis cried aloud in pain, but his cries mixed with another entirely different sound. The cacophony was almost too much to bear, but he couldn't raise his hands to cover his ears.

Over to his right a dark area was suddenly thrown into life as the outline of the Doctor's blue box phased into view, flickering stronger as the sound intensified.

"Sir, we have been breached," the technician to the right of the Inquisitor said suddenly. "Incoming temporal craft – that same TARDIS sir."

The door opened, and the Doctor emerged, brandishing his Trace Particle Spectrometer with a flourish. "Well, here we are – Pismo Beach and all the clams we can eat!" the Doctor said proudly.

"Bugs Bunny, huh?!" Maggie said with a smirk. "Does that make me Daffy Duck?"

"Doctor!" Travis said, almost overcome with relief.

"Ah Travis! There you are! I believe you've got my sonic screwdriver," the Doctor said.

The Doctor approached the slab, and took the sonic screwdriver from Travis' jacket pocket, flipping it into the air and catching it in his right hand. "Luckily, I almost always know where to find it. And this looks like a third-generation mind probing device." He stroked his chin. "They're not very good for the patient. Unless they were looking forward to brain soup that is."

"Brain soup! No Doctor, you gotta help me!" Travis said, desperately trying to move his head away from the onslaught, wincing in pain.

The Doctor glanced at the window to the control room where the Inquisitor stood and arched a disapproving eyebrow.

"And you must be the Parraxis. Shut it down please." the Doctor demanded coolly.

The Inquisitor tilted his head and regarded the Doctor equally coolly. "And why would I do that?"

"Because if you don't, I will blow up this ship and everyone on it," the Doctor replied.

"And why would I *believe* you were capable of that?" The tone was almost sardonic, the first change Travis had noticed since he arrived.

The pain seared through his head and Travis let out an involuntary cry. He had attempted to remain stoic, but it felt as if his head was being cleaved in two.

"Because I've had a very bad day. And when I've had a bad day, I am capable of anything," the Doctor said.

The pair regarded each other in silence for a few moments, like an unseen battle of wills was taking place, and then the Inquisitor reached over the technician, his hand shuddering as he tried to prolong the moment. But eventually, he reluctantly powered down the machine.

“Good, it’s always better to talk without staring down the barrel of a gun,” the Doctor said, walking back towards Travis. “Are you OK?” he asked quietly, releasing Travis with the sonic screwdriver.

“I-I think so Doctor.” Travis said wearily, “But I’ve got one hell of a headache. Thanks for not leaving me here.”

Maggie helped him down from the slab and looked him over worriedly. He could barely stand, so she helped him to sit on the floor.

The Doctor gave Travis a reassuring smile and then turned back to the Parraxis. “So, let’s discuss what you’re doing here, and why you’re going to leave.”

“You no-doubt know why we’re here. We came in search of the Erreyetree – they belong to us. And as for leaving, why would we do that? Are you going to blow us all up if we don’t?” the Inquisitor replied.

“I might,” the Doctor snapped.

“Ah, the vengeful Time Lord. Yes, I’ve heard some of the stories, like my compatriots here, I thought they were fanciful tales used to scare children, but now here you are.”

“You have no idea what I am like,” the Doctor replied, venom lacing his tone. “And the Erreyetree do not *‘belong’* to you. They are a free people, not property.”

“That’s where our views differ Doctor. How would you know, anyway? Surely our internal social problems are of no concern to an all-powerful Time Lord.”

The Doctor pursed his lips, struggling to conceal his rage at their offhand contempt. “The Erreyetree do not have to justify their freedom.”

“Ah, you are as much a meddler as our folklore has suggested. How unfortunate. We do not share your opinion, but there are universes enough to allow for both.” The Inquisitor’s eyelids flicked across his large black eyes with a sudden and unnerving motion.

“You have hunted them to near extinction. Leave them and leave this planet, stay out of their way and mine, and I promise you no harm will come to you or your people,” the Doctor said firmly, his grip tightening around his sonic screwdriver as he spoke.

“I’m afraid we cannot do that Doctor. You are quite correct, their numbers dwindle, but so do ours. Our plight is dire, and I would sacrifice a billion Erreyetree to save my people,” the Inquisitor said. “Surely every race is entitled to its own self-preservation?! If you tell us where they are, I promise you that no harm will come to *you* or *your* people.”

This stand-off was interrupted by a harsh beeping sound in the control room. One of the technicians turned to a separate control panel and surveyed a screen, his lids blinking rapidly.

“Sir, a message from navigation control. We’ve picked up the Erreyetree’s signature on the ground. Sir, we’ve found them.” Not pausing to conceal his telepathic communication in his excitement.

“Then all of your posturing is for nothing Doctor,” the Inquisitor said.

“Why don’t you step from behind the screen, and we’ll see.”

The Inquisitor tilted his head slightly once more and then levelled it again. The sound of his breathing device pocked the silence.

“Dispatch a ground team, round them up and bring them in. All of them.”

“Don’t do this,” the Doctor said, his tone softening slightly.

“I am the Grand Inquisitor of the Parraxis Doctor. This is what I do, and I have done it so very well for so very long. I won’t be stopping today I’m afraid. Not for you.”

“I hoped you wouldn’t say something like that,” the Doctor replied, shaking his head.

“Dematerialise all vessels. Converge on their location.”

The technician relayed the message. It appeared that their telepathic communication was short range, the Doctor mused. A lot less capable than the Erreyetree, but technologically superior. The Inquisitor and the technicians left hurriedly, seemingly dismissive of the Doctor’s earlier threats. The viewing panel in the wall closed as they departed.

“Wait!” the Doctor shouted after them to no avail.

A moment later the ship hummed from every particle, the sound seeming to resonate even through their bodies. The Doctor took the opportunity to reach a small terminal console on the inside of the examination room and used the sonic screwdriver to unlock it and access the network.

“I need to find a way of getting control of this ship,” he said as the console sparked into life.

He quickly scanned through the data entries, internal comms, notes on cruel experiments, and found some entries that surprised even him. The void ship had travelled far and wide, to realms too dangerous even to land the TARDIS inside. Peoples and places he knew only as theories or myths had been seen and catalogued by the Parraxis; but they had merely noted them and moved on. They were surrounded by wonders, but incapable of feeling any wonder.

He turned back to his friend. “Maggie, listen, we are aboard a larger void ship than the one Travis and I encountered in the forest. There are several smaller craft and all vital systems are linked to it. I can use that against them. If I can get to the control module, I can create a feedback loop that will disable them all. They’re unusually co-dependent, moored as they are outside of physical space. Finding the right component to disable will knock the rest out like a row of dominoes!”

“OK, that sounds great Doctor, so what do you want us to do?” Maggie asked.

“Well, that’s the thing – looking at the log data I think there are Erreyetree alive and captive on this ship. I need you to rescue them – bring them back here so we can get them clear of danger in the TARDIS.”

“Oh, is that all?” Maggie said, expelling air from her lungs dubiously.

“Great, I thought you’d be more worried,” the Doctor said, seemingly unaware or unwilling to acknowledge Maggie’s sarcasm. The Doctor tapped the console display, and a large holographic projection of the ship’s vast internal layout was illuminated, floating in the air front of them. A section of the lower level was marked with a red glowing orb.

“They should be here from the information I can find on the network. You’ll need to be careful, but there are very few crew members on this ship. Hopefully they are too distracted by the excitement of the hunt.”

“Hopefully?!” Maggie said, unconvinced.

“Here, take this.” he said, handing her the sonic screwdriver – I’ve added some presets that will help with the doors. It should also fool the ship’s interfaces into thinking you are part of its crew. All you’ll need to do is think of this holding area—” He tapped again the diagram of the

centre of the vast void ship's layout "—and it will bring you there. Find the Erreyetree, get them out, and get back here."

"Mmm'kay," Maggie said nervously. "Doctor, will you be, OK?"

"Absolutely."

Maggie and Travis, the latter seemingly buoyed by his newfound freedom, turned left and the Doctor right into the twisting and spiralling corridors that ran like spaghetti through the void ship.

"I just need to figure out what I'm going to do," the Doctor muttered to himself as they separated.

Nowhere Left to Go

The earth above and around him seemed to shake suddenly with a great seismic wave as Tanner tried to finish sealing up one of the tunnels in the underground maze constructed by the Erreyetree. He looked around to see one of the Erreyetree standing bolt upright, looking at the ceiling.

“What is it?” he asked, fearing that he already knew the answer.

“It is the hunters. The Parraxis are here,” she said telepathically in response, her fear all too apparent. “The Doctor has betrayed us. We must join the others quickly.”

“OK. Lead on Ma’am.”

They arrived in the central area as Delphi-Nor herded some of the children down another tunnel on the opposite side, their eyes wide with panic. Hayle was standing close by, counting the bullets in his weapon.

“Lemme guess, not enough to hold out against an assault from spacemen?” Tanner said with a sideways grin.

“Not unless they’re all good enough to stand in a straight line,” Hayle said.

“We must use the tunnels. Get as many out as you can.”

“But what about you, Mother?” Tanner’s companion, a younger Erreyetree named Marra-Kai, asked her elder imploringly. “Surely you won’t stay?”

“I must. What kind of leader would I be if I let our people die?” Delphi-Nor replied, placing a palm on her shoulder. “Please, go, take care of them.”

Tanner and Hayle silently witnessed the exchange, until Tanner said, “I’ll stay too Ma’am. You’ll need all the help you can get.”

“No Mr. Tanner. This is not your fight; you have family of your own to go home to. Go with Marra-Kai, help our children and know that we are grateful to you for your kindness.” She gestured towards her younger colleague.

“But—” Tanner protested briefly, then a profound awareness of the futility of his objections washed over him. He simply nodded in response to the Mother and followed the tall, graceful Marra-Kai down the tunnel that led away from the chamber.

Hayle shook his head briskly in anticipation to what the matriarch might say next, "This might not be his fight, but this is *my* park, and everyone in it is my responsibility. *Everyone.*" His weapon clicked and he removed the safety.

From a tunnel to the west there came a loud explosion, earth, and some of the supporting struts in the complex shook loose.

"Here they come," Delphi-Nor said, baring a fierce set of teeth.

"Then they'd best be ready." Hayle aimed his weapon straight ahead.

Maggie and Travis stood breathing slowly as the elevator plunged to the lower level. They did not know what to expect, but fortunately Travis had regained some of his strength quickly and he could stand and walk independently, though his head throbbed with the worst migraine of his life.

Fortunately, they hadn't encountered anyone on their way down, and the ship did indeed seem to be fooled into thinking they were crewmembers.

"OK, here goes nothing." Maggie nervously inhaled a gulp of air and summoned a mental image of the holding cell the Doctor had indicated on the map. After twenty yards, they found a large, featureless wall. There was a small console to its left.

Maggie looked around. This section of the ship was a dead end; there was nowhere else to go except back to the Doctor. She looked dubiously at Travis. "We don't have long," she reminded him. Should we try somewhere else?"

"No!" Travis cried, remembering the way the wall had opened in the grim interrogation chamber he was forced into. "It's behind this wall. They don't need doors."

Maggie held out the Doctor's sonic screwdriver toward the panel and clicked it on. The wall separated and whooshed open into a circular entrance, revealing two Parraxis guards in a small chamber. The guards wheeled around to face them. As they did, Maggie instinctively swung Travis by the arm into them, knocking them off balance.

Maggie made the most of their confusion and rushed in, just as one of the sentries began to power up an arm weapon. Noticing the energy surge, she grabbed its slender arm and just managed to point it at the other guard before a single shot discharged. It connected with the second guard's torso and knocked him to the ground. In a stroke of blind luck, the unconscious guard's own weapon fired straight into the side of her hostage as he fell. Both lay motionless on the floor.

"Right, well, that was a piece of cake," she said in relief. She walked to the secondary control and pressed the release.

Inside, lights flicked on, as if motion-triggered, and Maggie gasped as she took in the sight of a large chamber with fifty pods racked together. Inside each illuminated pod was an Erreyetree.

"What in the world...?!" Maggie marvelled.

"Holy cow!" Travis cried. "What are they doing here?"

"Look at those things that look like power cables coming out of them, they feed directly into the ship. It's like they're using them for power!" Maggie exclaimed pointing to the web of cables that ran from each pod off into the ship's structure.

Travis indicated another panel with a nod of his head. Trusting to luck, Maggie repeated the trick with the sonic screwdriver. The console, still recognising her as one of the void ship's crew, sparked into life. The first row of pods descended to their level, their doors slowly opening with a hiss. The inhabitant of each pod began to stir.

"Well, so far so good," Maggie said, "I hope the Doctor is having the same luck we are."

"Yeah, and hopefully these guys don't need breakfast," Travis said worriedly.

The Doctor's Gamble

The Doctor, using the same psychic link Maggie had employed, thought of the navigation deck of the void ship, and emerged on to it, with nothing up his sleeve, still trying to formulate a plan. That was the problem with this extra-dimensional architecture; if he'd had an old-fashioned elevator, he'd have had time on the journey to rustle up some last-minute piece of improvisational genius. He'd taken a gamble on the safety of the Erreyetree on the ground when he disabled their scrambling device to locate the ship, and it was a gamble he couldn't afford to lose. He had recovered Travis, and even located more captives on board, but now he had to find a way to get them out of here alive and ensure those on the ground survived too. *'Easy'*, he thought, though he didn't feel reassured.

The navigation deck was a hub of activity. Twenty Parraxis officers worked at hovering, tree-branch-like control panels, and scurried around, the atmosphere electric with excitement. Various displays depicted the ground where they had begun their assault on the underground camp, others displayed geospatial information, and others displayed the status of the other, smaller vessels (the Doctor counted six).

The vessel's impressive design was even more evident from this vantage point. It was able to generate a field that could destabilize the matter between universes and allow the Parraxis to slip right through. Such technology would have taken many aeons to perfect; to have honed it at this level, the Parraxis must have been the decedents of an unfathomably ancient race.

The Doctor had learned from the void ship's telepathic interface that all the craft and technology employed by the Parraxis were linked remotely, with all key systems routed through this navigation deck as a central hub. He hoped to turn that to his advantage. He had seen many rights and wrongs through his lives, and the blatant genocide exacted by the Parraxis, and their genuine lustre for the hunt made his blood boil. It made their formidable technology pointless. They had come so far but evolved so little.

At the centre of the room was the Inquisitor, surveying his work with what the Doctor thought was a glint in his dark eyes. His slender arms folded behind his back.

“Great Conquistador! I thought I might find you here,” the Doctor said excitedly, stepping into view, flinging his arms wide flamboyantly as if about to hug the Parraxis official.

“Doctor?! I see you managed to escape the interrogation room. How have we been unable to track your movements?”

The Doctor tapped his forehead. “Your little ship is awfully obliging so long as one figures out the correct psychic wavelength to interface.”

“Clever, clever. A pity. I would have enjoyed removing all the oxygen from that room with you and your friends still inside it.”

“What delightful company you are,” the Doctor said in a faux-polite tone.

“Delta-four, Delta-seven, secure the Doctor,” the Inquisitor said flatly.

“Oh, alphanumeric designations. Very nice,” the Doctor said, “I bet you’re fun at parties.”

Two of the Parraxis broke away from their work and advanced on the Doctor. The Doctor observed a fizz of energy transference buzzing from one of their forearms to the other and surmised that a concealed weapon had been activated.

As they closed on him, the Doctor reached inside his coat pocket and produced the Trace Particle Spectrometer, brandishing it like a weapon.

“Don’t get any closer!” he shouted, “Not unless you all want to end up floating in space!” They stopped in their tracks.

“More threats, Doctor?” the Inquisitor asked, appearing amused. “I did expect Time Lords to be rather more civilised and rather less repetitive.”

“This is a focused particle beam,” he lied. “One squeeze of the trigger and I’ll blow a hole in the outer wall, and we’ll all be sucked out into the abyss, there to twist and dangle in that void while your ship disintegrates.”

“But you’ll kill yourself, and your friends.”

“My friends are on their way out. They’ll be well clear when the hull ruptures. So, it’ll just be us taking this trip, sir. And if you don’t think I’ll sacrifice myself to save them and the Erreyetree, you’re wrong.”

“But the ground assault has already begun,” the Inquisitor observed, calling the Doctor’s bluff.

“Then you’d better call it off,” the Doctor said flatly, carefully compelling commands into the ship’s main navigational datasphere with his psychic link.

Below, the Parraxis soldiers had breached one of the Erreyetree’s main tunnel defenses and were advancing inside, their energy weapons providing covering fire for their advance.

Two of the strongest Erreyetree elders had stayed in the inner chamber with Delphi-Nor and Ranger Hayle to defend the retreat.

In the central chamber Hayle waited, one eye closed, the other on the end of the tunnel, the sounds of the fight amplified. With a loud roar, one of the Erreyetree warriors burst through, fleeing a barrage of energy fire.

“This is it,” Hayle said, as much to himself as anyone.

Hayle had served in the United States military prior to joining the Rangers. Joining another service had suited him: he was used to a life in uniform. But even in his army career he could

never have imagined anything like this. Then again, in some ways the situation was entirely imaginable: he was outgunned and outmanned, but there was no way he would leave this people to slaughter and enslavement. He didn't care if this was his fight or not. People like this never stopped—whether they were Russians or Parraxis—and when such conquerors were done with the Erreyetree, his people would be next.

So instead of fleeing and getting out of Dodge, here he stayed, waiting for a shot. The Parraxis soldiers didn't wear helmets; that might be due to arrogant confidence in superior firepower, but to him it meant an obvious shot.

The first soldier crossed the threshold, and Hayle squeezed his trigger. One down. The same followed for the next one, and the next. Two more soldiers came hurtling through the entranceway and were pinned back by the Erreyetree's wooden spears. But they had the numbers and soon they were upon them like a swarm.

Back on the void ship Maggie and Travis had freed the last of the captives, though not all survived their imprisonment.

"We have a, er, spaceship, the TARDIS," Maggie assured them. "We can get you all out of here and to safety."

"Yeah, y'all got to get out of here," Travis implored, "Please, before these sons of—" He broke off, suddenly feeling self-conscious about using bad language— "before they find out we've set you free."

"But surely they will already know?!" one of the Erreyetree said telepathically.

"Well," Maggie said, "our friend, the Doctor, is hopefully keeping them busy and figuring out how to make sure that their hunt it over."

Below the national park the fighting had intensified. and the Erreyetree were being overwhelmed. Only two warriors remained, four including Delphi-Nor and Hayle. One of the soldiers emerged at the tunnel opening, and Delphi-Nor noticed an explosive charge on his back. Quickly she scooped up a large wooden spear and threw the bolt at him like Zeus from Olympus. It struck home with a tremendous force, sending him to the floor.

"Good shot Ma'am." Hayle said, taking aim and removing one more pawn from the field of battle. "But we're not enough. We're about to be overrun."

"Then we will die with honour Ranger Hayle."

"Please, I think you can call me Eric at this point."

"Eric."

As he peered around a makeshift barricade, Hayle spotted the last spear Delphi-Nor had thrown had penetrated the protective layer around the Parraxis soldier's explosive device. Exposed in a small crack was what looked like the same energy that powered their other weapons. He glanced at the soldiers firing energy weapons their way, their payloads exploding on impact.

“Ma’am are those weapons and that thing over there the same kinda technology?” he asked, indicating the broken device near the entrance.

“Yes, I think so. Why?”

“Because I’ve got a crazy idea,” he replied, checking his rounds. One left. *‘Typical’* he thought, tutting aloud at the rotten luck. “Miss Delphi-Nor, please ask your people to fall back and get to the escape tunnel.”

“Why?” she asked.

He flicked his head towards the unexploded device as a response and flicked his gun to the right.

“I won’t have time to get you out!” she exclaimed, her voice humming in his head. “You’ll be killed!”

“And so will they. But you won’t be. And they won’t win.”

She searched his mind and felt the resolve he held there; there was no way she was talking him around, and there was no time. She called to her two remaining warriors, and they responded and fell back to their position.

“Throw me some covering fire, then get the hell outta here,” Hayle commanded.

“How can I possibly thank you?” Delphi-Nor said.

“Get out of this and get your people free.”

The Erreyetree each scooped up two sharpened wooden spears each, one in each hand and roaring aloud hurled them towards the Parraxis line, striking down advancing soldiers. They instantly turned and took off to the escape tunnel at the back of the circular chamber.

“OK Doctor, wherever you are, and whatever your doin’, make it good.”

With a heave he pushed himself clear of his barricade, took a long breath, and squeezed the trigger. The round exploded out of the muzzle in what he felt like slow motion and whizzed through the air, sticking the core between the crack in the outer shell of the explosive device. There was no time for the Parraxis to react.

There was a bright burst of purple-white light and then a pause as the core ignited. Then there was a loud bang, and the chamber was engulfed in a wave of energy. A moment later, all was left in darkness as the caves collapsed inwards.

The Inquisitor restrained himself from attacking the Doctor. “I’ve had more than enough of you. Delta-four, Delta-six.” he said raising his right hand.

At this command they powered up the energy weapons built into their sleeves, pointing them at the Doctor.

The Doctor shook his head. “OK, I did warn you. I gave you a chance.” He brought his left thumb down flat on the console interface.

The interface went green, as the command initiated and then red as the system alerts were triggered. Suddenly all the respirator devices worn by the Parraxis malfunctioned and started to release the gas that they used for breathing, they started to cough and choke.

“Wh-what are you d-doing?” the Inquisitor said, his voice sounding distorted in the Doctor’s mind.

“Don’t worry, they’ll be fine in a minute, this is just to stop anyone interfering with the main process that I’ve just triggered. You see, it’s kick-starting your temporal drives. Without the Erreyetree, once the energy has been discharged, they’ll burn out. I’m sending you and your ships into the void, permanently. You chose war, remember? Now live with it.” Coldly, he transmitted the final command.

At this the Doctor fled the room, leaving the flailing, gasping Parraxis behind on the navigation deck. With one last psychic link, he found himself outside the operating room, the TARDIS still waiting for him. He exited to collide with Maggie, running down the corridor towards him.

“Doctor, you’re alive!” she shouted.

“For now,” he replied, taking her hand. “But we must leave now. Did you find the captive Erreyetree?”

“Yeah, we got everyone we could.”

“Excellent! I knew you would!” the Doctor said triumphantly.

Inside the TARDIS, the Doctor fought through a small cluster of Erreyetree between the door and the console.

“Please keep all hands and arms inside the TARDIS at all times, and please no touching the console,” he said, winking at a miniature Erreyetree child next to him.

The TARDIS sparked into life and dematerialised just as the main void ship’s drive engaged, the rings around the main energy core span, faster and faster. As it did, the ships hovering above the ground as part of the assault were pulled rapidly towards it, dragged violently out of the atmosphere, recalled unwillingly to the mothership.

Inside the mothership the Parraxis desperately tried to stop the process without success, every single interface had been disabled. They had been locked out of their own ship; their psychic links made useless by the Doctor’s tampering. In the melee, the Inquisitor stood motionless in the centre of the control deck.

As the satellite craft approached the lead vessel, the space around them distorted as matter folded and formed into an opened gateway between dimensions, pulling the Parraxis vessels from orbit and over the event horizon in unison, with a loud crack and a bright flash of light they were gone.

The distortion of space rapidly returned to normal and all signs of the Parraxis were gone.

Epilogue

“Here we are at last!” the Doctor said as the TARDIS wheezed to a halt in Apache-Sitgreaves National Park once more. “Anyone fancy some air?”

The console room felt crowded with the rescued Erreyetree, who drank in the TARDIS interior with quiet delight. As the doors opened, they flooded out into the light of the fall daytime. Maggie beamed a wide smile as she saw that the survivors of the ground raid waiting near what had been the entrance to the tunnel complex. They ran to meet the lost relatives emerging from the TARDIS and embraced them warmly.

The forest seemed to reflect the mood, and it felt like a different place in the cool fall light, the sun shone and there was a mist that had formed close to the ground as the moisture began to evaporate. The tall trees stood proudly, dominantly majestic in the daylight. The sky was blue with the occasional cloud.

Mr. Tanner sat on a stump not far away, his hands set into his lap as he peered down at the ground in quiet contemplation.

“Hey, Mr. Tanner, are you OK?” Maggie asked him.

Tanner glanced up and seemed to come to his senses suddenly. “Oh, hey ma’am. I’m as well as can be expected, thanks. Ranger Hayle, not so much though ...” He broke off, overcome with emotion.

Maggie felt the sting of these words, feeling another tragic loss. “Oh no! Hayle didn’t make it?”

“Afraid not. He fought hard, as I understand, he stopped their soldiers at the expense of his own life. Plenty o’ the Erreyetree survived ‘cause o’ him though. The trouble is no one will even know about it.”

“We will,” the Doctor said, appearing suddenly at Maggie’s side. “And they will. A whole race owes their existence to him and the sacrifice he made.” He pointed out the Erreyetree, crowded together in a giant mass of fur and excitement.

“Hayle seemed like a good man.” Maggie said with a sigh. “And here’s another you might know.” Over her shoulder, Travis emerged from the TARDIS blinking in the daylight with the last of the Erreyetree survivors.

“Nelson!” Tanner shouted and climbed to his feet stiffly.

“Paul! Is that you?” Travis said, beaming a wide smile as walked toward them.

“O’course it’s me you idiot!” Tanner cracked a hoarse laugh. “Where the hell have you been?”

“Where haven’t I been! I started out thinking you had been kidnapped by Bigfoot and ended up being kidnapped by aliens!” Travis laughed, shaking his head, “What a wild night.”

Tanner scooped him off his feet unexpectedly and gave him a warm bear hug. Maggie laughed at Travis’s discomfort.

“Right.” The Doctor clapped his hand together. “It’s time I got you two back.” He turned to see Tanner supporting Travis, who cried out in pain as his eyes rolled back into his head.

“Doctor, what’s the matter with him?” Tanner asked panicked. The Doctor knelt on the floor beside them, looking into Travis’ eyes.

“The Parraxis used a machine to try and read his mind, a cruel one at that, and I’m afraid it has not been kind to poor Travis’ brain. I hoped we’d gotten him out without too much damage,” the Doctor said.

“Can you help him?” Tanner pleaded.

“I think can help him, Doctor,” Delphi-Nor said, emerging at the head of crowd. “We are forever in your debt. It is the least I can do.”

She knelt on the floor next to Travis and carefully placed her hands on either side of his head.

“His mind has indeed been damaged by the Parraxis, but I will do what I can to repair it.”

She closed her eyes for a few moments and her fur began to stand on end, statically charged as there was an exchange of energy between them. After a few moments the pained expression on Travis’ face lightened and his body relaxed. She gently released his head and laid him carefully down on the ground as the charge dispersed.

“There, it is done,” Delphi-Nor said rising to her full height with a sigh. “The process may leave his memory a little distorted, but he should recover.”

“Our thanks to you once more Doctor.”

“Nonsense, it is my very great pleasure. Pay me back by living out fabulous lives to a ripe old age.”

“What will you do now?” Maggie asked, “Will you stay here in the forest?”

Delphi-Nor said, “We will move between this world and others, living the way we always had before the hunters came. But first we will return to our mother-world, to see what we can salvage, and find any of our people who have survived there.”

“Well, I wish you the best of luck. And I hope you find the peace you’re looking for,” the Doctor said, plunging his hands into his coat pockets and rocking slightly on his heels.

“Goodbye Doctor, Maggie, Mr. Tanner, Mr. Nelson. We will remember you in our stories and songs, and of course we will never forget Ranger Hayle, who fought and died so bravely to help us in our darkest time.” Delphi-Nor bowed, and the rest of her people followed suit, offering silent thanks to Ranger Hayle and the rest of them as they did.

The Doctor and Maggie bowed in return, and Tanner waved a hand and sheepishly half-smiled in response.

The Erreyetree marched in unison into the forest, passing into the treeline. Before long they had completely faded from sight, enveloped in the ether once more.

The TARDIS had materialised just outside a small town on the outskirts of the national park, when the door swung open once more, and Travis and Tanner emerged from the interior, the latter visibly disorientated.

“You sure he’s going to be all right Doctor?” Tanner enquired.

“Well, I’m no expert, but he might need some bed rest for a few days and plenty of water, and he might not be able to piece together exactly what happened to him. But otherwise, I think he’ll be fine now that you are home,” the Doctor said, patting Travis on the arm. “Though seeing a neurologist couldn’t hurt.”

“A what?” Travis said absently, looked around him vacantly.

“Well thank you Doctor. It’s been a hell of a ride.” Tanner said, “No one will ever believe this. So, I might keep it to myself, don’t wanna end up in a padded room.”

“Look after yourself Mr. Tanner, Mr. Nelson.”

“You too Doctor, and you ma’am,” Tanner said, nodding at Maggie.

“Mister,” she replied with a nod and a smile in return.

The Doctor and Maggie retreated into the TARDIS and as the doors closed Tanner swore he heard rock music from inside as the light atop the wooden box blinked and it started to dematerialise.

“Well, I’ll be damned.” Tanner said. Then he looked around and ruffled a hand through his hair as the blue box faded from sight, taking in the lonely gas station at the side of highway, “Aw heck, this ain’t home Doctor, this isn’t even near the trucks. We’re miles away from anywhere. Doctor?! Doctor!!!”

“Doctor?” Travis said, standing woozily at his side. “Doctor Who?”

THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT

*"If a story is persistent enough and stands the test of time,
it is often because there is a grain of truth in it."*

The Doctor and Maggie arrive in Apache-Sitgreaves National Park, Arizona, unintentionally when the TARDIS materializes prematurely. The Doctor and Maggie discover that forestry works are being terrorized by a surge in activity from a creature of local legend called the "Mogollon Monster."

When the Doctor agrees to help a local ranger investigate, he and Maggie find themselves pulled into a battle between species from another dimension that threatens to envelope the Earth.

As they search the dark forest, cut off from rescue, can the Doctor tell friend from foe before it's too late? And will he and Maggie survive to watch Keith Moon drum live?

Will 3,211 kilometers and one paltry year prove to be a costly mistake? There can be much to lose between the fur and the sky.

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This story features the Eleventh Doctor as played by Winston Adderly

