THE DOCTOR WHO PROJECT



STONE TAPE THEORY PART 2

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Previously on The Doctor Who Project ...

Troubled by some temporal flux, the TARDIS has taken the Doctor and Maggie to All Hallows' Eve 2004 in the quaint English village of Tamworth. In the nearby castle, Crystal Forrester, the psychic medium Dina Ancona, demonologist Frank Catz, and parapsychologist Matt Thorne are broadcasting a live Halloween edition of their show, *Ghost: Haunted.* Many centuries earlier, the warrior queen Æthelflæd and the soldiers under her command faced a terrifying apparition, and Tamworth Castle seems imbued with the memory of that past trauma. Inexplicable events are making cast and crew, and their producer Craig Busby, slightly more jumpy than usual. Paintings seem to summon ghosts from the Civil War, as well as a spectral woman in white, and a far more sinister Lady in Black. Outside the castle, Vikings have attacked the terrified TV crew. In the middle of the broadcast, Dina goes missing, and the Doctor slowly realises that the key to solving the mysterious events lies in wherever she has ended up … or more accurately, *when* she has ended up …

Part Two: Emotional

If … a sparrow should fly swiftly into the hall, and coming in at one door, instantly fly out through another. In that time in which it is indoors it is indeed not touched by the fury of the winter, but yet, this smallest space of calmness being passed almost in a flash, from winter going into winter again, it is lost to your eyes. Somewhat like this appears the life of man; but of what follows or what went before we are utterly ignorant.

—The Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Prologue

Wessex Television was known as a small and scrappy production company. With little in the way of budget or resources, they broadcast out of a small studio complex in York. The building was once a grocery warehouse, and the transition had never fully taken: its two studios were cramped, overly hot, and difficult enough to record the local news in, never mind anything more ambitious.

However, it seemed this regional underdog was punching above its weight. The paranormal reality series, *Ghost: Haunted*, had seemed a long shot, but had steadily grown in popularity. The executives who initially raised eyebrows and quibbled over the hotel expenses for three hosts and a skeleton camera crew were now accepting accolades from their peers about perfectly catching such an alluring trend. While there were as many letters condemning the show for schlocky manipulation and sensationalistic scaremongering, the attention this 'little spook show that could' was garnering W.T.V. was something they could all take pride in. Thus, when the producer Craig Busby and the show's guiding light, Crystal Forrester, outlined their ambitious plans for a live show to be broadcast from the legendary haunted pile of Tamworth Castle on Halloween, they agreed unreservedly.

Since then, though, a few reservations emerged. They would still have to use the warehouse in York to broadcast the studio links—and not using a London facility conveniently put paid to Crystal and Craig's other wish-list for paranormal celebrities, such as Dan Aykroyd, Joanna Lumley, or even the University of Edinburgh's expert from the Koestler Parapsychology Unit, Dr. Bruce Alderman (whose blunt refusal had not deterred Forrester). There were increasing murmurs of trouble behind the scenes—growing friction between the expert in demonology and parapsychology, Frank Catz, and Matt Thorne, and the psychic medium and fan favourite Dina Ancona. When Dina wasn't dressing down her co-stars on air or mugging for the camera, she was making extortionate salary demands, in the hope of being able to jump ship and accept other, solo TV offers.

It seemed appropriate that these simmering tensions should appear to come to a head on this landmark broadcast. The first segment had gone decently, and the fracas between Dr. Alderman and Dina Ancona raised a few laughs and claps from the audience. Crystal had done

a few questions and answers with the studio hosts, W.T.V. news anchors Gemma Kilbride and Dominic Flixton. Then something had changed. The studio audience, many dressed up in costumes and quite a few a little inebriated, sat baffled and restless as sequences of running up and down night-vision-tinted stately corridors, which lasted mere minutes but felt like they were taking hours. The latest footage they were getting looked at best increasingly experimental, at worst inept. They had already cut back three times to the studio, when they were only supposed to go once, and the technicians were barking down the phone to 'Producer Dave' (as one and all called him) and the O.B. supervisor, the ever-lackadaisical Rallye La Merzai, to give them something suitable to broadcast, and quickly.

As they returned from an unplanned, and extra-long commercial break, to Gemma and Dominic increasingly resembling deer in headlights, while vamping and taking barbed questions and outright criticism from the live audience, only about half of whom had even remained after the previous ad break.

"Bloody shambles!"

"Expect us to believe this was a genuine haunting? Looks like bad editing and fakery!"

"And where have they *taken* Dina anyway? My favourite bit of telly totty and she vanishes without an explanation!"

"*Ghost: Haunted* is dead!"

These harsh words and more rose up from the detractors. Particularly shoddy, in the view of the audience, was the tape splice that saw Dina Ancona vanish on the spot. It was, in their view, a clear sign that the supposedly 'live' footage had been doctored. And if it had been manipulated in this way, the near-indecipherable programme they had so far witnessed was all the more inexcusable.

"Well, uh …" Gemma called out over the uproar, barely making herself heard even with microphone in hand. "I'm being told we have a few celebrity guests in the back to comment on what we just saw …"

"They should *apologise* for what we just saw!"

Backstage, the executive producer, Neil Prommel, was desperately dialling every crewmember's number he had and leaving terse messages. The word down from the booth was that the Tamworth unit had gone entirely dead—no word, and no more footage, had come back.

Neil made his way up to the gallery, where the technicians were valiantly patching together whatever B-roll material they had to get them to the end of the hour. He was impressed by how positively they could look utter disaster in the face. The vision mixer, who seemed to have sat hunched over the monitor since W.T.V. first went on the air, grinned broadly. "You can keep your ghosts and ghouls, mate—nothing scarier in our work than dead air."

Neil nodded and requested to look over the location material. The vision mixer grimly obliged, and as they spooled through, Neil shook his head in bafflement.

"How did they let this stuff slip through the net? These shots are barely in focus."

"Beats me," the old gent sighed as they ran through it. They both squinted as the image flared in the top left corner.

"What was that? Looked like a person …"

"I know them folks on this unit. They know how to work a camera, and how to record on the hop. Only reason they're doing this is … they're running scared."

Neil swallowed. “I’ve heard a few times they got carried away with the locations. The Pendle Hill episode…”

The vision mixer nodded. “I remember that too. But it weren’t like this.”

As if on cue, the one really clear image appeared before them. Crystal, Alderman, and the others were running furiously, while a figure in black dominated the frame. The face was blurry, out of focus. But the rest of the image was crystal-clear.

Neil stared down the lens at the indistinct face and felt something shudder deep within himself. The video didn’t lie.

“What the hell is going on down there?” he asked, knowing that neither the technicians in the gallery nor this face of terror would be able to answer.

Act III: Emotional

Emotional /ɪˈməʊʃən(ə)l/ [adjective]
Relating to a person's emotions, arousing or characterised by intense feeling.

Chapter One

An armed guard surrounded the mighty warrior Queen Æthelflæd, the Lady of the Mercians, as she moved quickly and silently on horseback through the night, towards the shouting of Saxon men and the flickering of torches. At her side, fingers playing on the hilt of his weapon uneasily, Leofric turned these events over in his mind. When they had encountered the raiding party from Djúra-bý, and saw the nature of the foe the terrified men were fighting, he merely hoped his queen would give him counsel and direct his future actions. He did not anticipate she would get on horseback and seek to confront the damnable hag herself. He felt great foreboding, and what was more, should any harm befall his dear queen he and his indecision would be the cause of it.

The sky seemed a vast, hungry void stretching on forever. There wasn't a star to be seen, and even the pale light moonlight was obscured. The autumn air was crisp and cold, though thankfully it lacked the bite of winter. The few trees dotted here and there loomed large over them like gnarled grey totems suddenly visible in front of them. They rode only a few minutes from the fortification mound. Leofric stared ahead purposefully by her side with his hood raised. He drew his sword as they approached, and the guards followed suit.

As they approached, there was a sudden and intense flash, and a cry went up into the night sky before being suddenly silenced. The horses reared around them, sensing before the warriors did the ethereal threat around them. They stopped, rooted to the spot at the blood-curdling noise, neither warrior nor steed daring to tread any farther.

They gasped as they beheld the sight in the clearing in front of them, where a handful of Danish warriors stood side-by-side with their fellow Mercians, weapons drawn, mouths agog. There, levitating a few feet above the floor was what appeared to be a woman, her dark and indistinct features somehow exuding a strange otherworldly light, her arms outstretched at her sides and her head titled back at what seemed like a painful angle.

"'Tis the witch that I spoke of, my queen," Leofric said in a hushed tone, "The patrol, as I said, were engaging the Norsemen when she appeared in a blinding flash – screaming a terrible battle cry."

It was evident, as they approached, that the glow derived from the witch's inner transparency. Her shape undulated in the dark, distinct one moment and indistinct the next, there but not there at all. Solid, then incandescent.

"Why are you here? What do you want with us?" Æthelflæd stated her questions clearly as she looked up at the crooked form rising in front of them.

The witch suddenly screamed, sounding as much in pain as in anger, shaking all who heard it to their cores, their heads and ears ringing.

There was another flash, so intense that it seemed like dawn had abruptly broken. Leofric held his arms up to cover his eyes whilst instinctively standing between the witch and his queen. The hairs on his neck and arms stood on end, as did his beard. The air crackled and he felt his feet shift underneath him – he was being pulled toward their assailant! He struggled against it, his feet slipping in the mud as it drew him in.

The light subsided and at the sound of a loud boom, he felt a shockwave push him backwards again, knocking him to the ground. He looked around and blinked rapidly, his eyes adjusting to the darkness. The ground underneath the witch had been hewn, the surface smooth and circular, and it glowed in places like an iron in a fire. He glanced back over his shoulder to see his queen behind him, already climbing to her feet.

Æthelflæd stood with her mouth open for a moment, gazing at the witch floating before them. She suddenly drew her sword, raised it above her head as she bellowed:

"TO ARMS, ALL OF YOU!!! AND MAY OUR GODS BE WITH US!!

****

Dina Ancona sat on the hard floor trying to regain a sense of balance, her equilibrium fried and her head aching badly, but not quite as badly as her chest. She couldn't focus her eyesight to check, but she felt like she had a mortal wound between her ribs. She prodded at the area carefully with her left hand, which felt like a great effort. She was relieved to find no external sign of injury.

"Great, just internal injuries to worry about then," she scoffed aloud to herself and coughed.

She strained to remember what had happened to her. She remembered the ride up to Tamworth, she remembered punching that pompous Doctor Alderman when he called her a fraud (there was something fishy about that fellow, she was sure). More fragmented visions filled her mind of the darkness that befell the camera crew, exploring the castle with Craig, then Crystal fell over on the stairs – the silly sod … and then nothing. Well, nothing concrete, it felt like everything past that point was in soft focus and half speed.

Slowly, her vision returned, and she glanced around slowly. It hurt to turn her head. She was seated on the ground, the palms of her hands sinking slightly into damp mud. She was no longer inside the castle – it was hard to tell where she was exactly, but she was sure it was still nighttime. She wondered if she had passed out and the show had finished. Had they left her on the floor and packed up without her? Was this some kind of revenge for her recent high-handed behaviour? No, she might not have been the best of colleagues (especially with her mind on her future career and these new TV deals brewing), but Crystal and Craig were good people – there was no way they would leave her, especially after the night they had just had.

She climbed gingerly to her feet with a groan, her legs shaky, but she managed to stand with a slight wobble. She'd quit drinking in her late twenties, as she had become convinced it was interfering with her second sight, but she could not recall even her worst hangovers feeling this bad. She placed a hand on the wall to steady herself.

She glanced skyward, blinking hard. She could see the stars above in the cloudless night, and the great expanse of the cosmos – more vivid than she had ever seen it. She paused for a moment, taking it all in. She had never been able to name the constellations, nor make out their patterns dotted in the sky, but she wished she could at this moment. To be able to put names to the beautiful lights above her would have been something.

"Woden's Wagon, Draco and that over there is the North Star," a woman's voice said somewhere indistinct, but close.

She managed to turn her head with great effort and for a moment she saw a regal-looking woman with long, beautiful hair, standing by her side. Dina had not heard the woman approach, but that little strangeness was comparatively minor amid all the other events that night.

"Why are you here? What do you want with us?" the woman inquired in a calm, commanding tone.

As Dina locked eyes with the woman, she felt herself rising off the ground. As she did, she noticed men around her, some on horseback, some at the side of the woman addressing her. They had sturdy and deadly weapons drawn and were looking at her with a mixture of shock and dread.

Dina desperately tried to take in more of the scenery around to get her bearings. But she could see nothing. There was no castle, no town, no light of any kind other than torches carried by the party gathered below her and the moon. Her head wheeled trying to take in who these people were, what was happening, and she felt faint and nauseous.

It was then she heard the scream – more in her mind than her ears. A terrible cry of pain, it rattled through every fibre of her being. It penetrated through tissue, and blood, and bone, through her cells themselves, and they all screamed with matching anguish. The sensation was intense and unbearable. She tried to open her mouth to scream herself in reaction to this searing agony, but she couldn't. All she could do was stand there, trying to regain her balance as her whole body trembled. She felt powerless, locked within herself, unable to move.

The regal woman on the ground below drew her sword and shouted something Dina couldn't hear as she felt her consciousness drift away.

And then there was nothing, no pain, no sensation of any kind or sense of anything. She was completely adrift in a vast, shapeless white expanse. There was no up, or down; no backwards or forwards, nothing other than her own thoughts. Even her body felt detached and distant. Just as she started to consider that she might be dead, a voice came from nowhere and everywhere all at once.

"Help me, Dina …" The voice sounded low and desperate. It was more pleading than menacing, it was distinct from the voice of the deeper, rasping croak she had heard moments earlier.

"I know you can hear me …" the pleading voice stated flatly. "I need you to help me – *will* you?"

"Who are you?" Dina answered, trying to pick out something, some lone point of reference, in the infinite featureless void that billowed around her. "*What* are you?"

"I need your help – will you help me, Dina?" the voice repeated, ignoring her question or perhaps deaf to it.

"How? How can I help you? What is it you want?"

"I made a mistake once, and that mistake has trapped part of me here, and many others like me. I need to make up for that mistake – will you help me?"

This sounded like a dreadful turn of events, yet as it related them the voice sounded even and calm, which made Dina feel even more uncomfortable.

"Yes, I can help," Dina assured it uncertainly, "if you…" Dina's response was cut off, as no sooner had she spoken in the affirmative than she felt something grasping away at her mind, her consciousness.

It felt intrusive, and horrifying, but there was nothing she could do, it was too late. In here, all she had was the essence of her mind, and somehow simply being here had allowed this invader access. She had unwittingly opened the door, and in no time at all it was inside. He grandmother had always said that allowing spirits to communicate through her was a risky business. Not all of them were benign – and you could never be sure of their intentions. Some of the most terrifying tales her granny had told her were those whose souls never recovered, who lived the rest of their lives with a shadow over their very essence. Dina was worried such a moment had happened now. Her momentary agreement had been enough for this one to force its way in, and she had no idea who it was, or what it wanted from her.

She felt her mistake at once. The grasping sensation became a holding, like she was completely wrapped in the blanket of another conscious mind that had enveloped her own, surrounding her on all sides, smothering her. She wasn't sure how she knew, but the woman in black had entered into her mind and as she did, she felt herself fading.

"Wait – please!" she heard herself protest weakly, trying to use her mind to push against the invasion.

"I am sorry," was all the voice said in return as Dina felt herself fade away into an even emptier nothingness than this. "The door has been opened, and I must walk through it in order to be free."

****

Back in Tamworth Castle, the entity that stood in place of Dina Ancona looked down at her new hands and feet as she straightened her spine and stood at her full height. She stretched her unfamiliar arms and hands out in front of her, and flexed her fingers to release the 'pins-and-needles' tingling. She took a moment to admire the blue polish adorning her fingernails, before stretching out her back and giving a satisfied sigh. Then, without saying anything, she turned and walked purposefully down the corridor and into the darkness.

Chapter Two

The Doctor moved at pace through the corridors of the castle; he ignored the various voices that clapped backwards and forwards with statements and questions aimed both at him and each other. He needed to get to the broadcast hub; there, he could see the different areas in the castle and grounds, and see footage of what had transpired.

All too many species he had encountered could travel through time and space – it was by no means the sole purview of the Time Lords. Indeed, his countrymen often allowed their supremacy over the space/time continuum to backslide into complacency, letting others innovate and advance their own technology under their noses. But none of this felt like a fit for any of the 'usual suspects': Daleks weren't known for subtlety, and neither they nor the Cybermen would resort to such theatrical subterfuge – they were methodical, cold, and calculating, with no particular insights into the nuances of human fear. Vists, Eternals, the Huitzilin, the Illia, the Metebelis Spiders and the like came closer, operating as they did on different planes and apt to exploit the inner demons of the human mind; but most of that lot weren't humanoid enough for the 'Lady in Black', and would not see the purpose in masquerading as her.

What of his own people? Could this be some Time Lord hoax to scare the willies out of a few unfortunate humans? He could discount the likeliest suspect right off: the whole thing struck him as too emotional, not to mention too oddly straightforward, to be one of the Master's convoluted capers. No, the more he considered it, the more he felt there was a human scale to this threat. This ghost felt indelibly rooted here on Earth, he was convinced of that, but what was its origin?

The manipulation of time was at the core of the phenomenon; he was almost certain. When he had touched the walls of the castle, he hadn't had a vision of the landscape around the castle in a bygone age like the humans had; he had been transported there. There was temporal energy surging around the castle, the anomaly he was searching for was here – and it was if not at the heart, then at least strongly connected, to the apparent 'ghost' that was haunting them.

Had humans begun to experiment with time travel in the early twenty-first century? Not a chance – there was a brief vogue for near-breakthroughs around the time he was exiled to Earth, but the TOMTIT work at the Newton Institute, then Whitaker's Operation Golden Age and Kerensky's chickens and eggs in Paris, had all proved thankfully brief blind alleys, their discoveries lost in the fallout from their own delusions. By this dreary point in 2004, the idea was ridiculous, unless an enterprising scientist had found some extra-terrestrial technology, that is.

Was it a time-travelling ghost perhaps? If, for ghost, he could substitute some disembodied entity or non-corporeal being … perhaps? He wasn't satisfied, though; it seemed barely less ridiculous than humans in 2004 splitting open the space-time vortex. But he *had* felt Dina Ancona dematerialise; not the physical energy transfer of particle dissemination, but rather a ripple in time itself at that moment. That meant an extraordinary amount of temporal energy had been expelled. She had to have been dragged out of time. But by whom, and to where?

If he knew that, he told himself, then the mystery he had been presented with would be solved.

He turned to the increasingly reassuring figure of Frank Catz, the black-clad, severe-looking demonologist of *Ghost: Haunted.* "Frank, are there any legends around the castle that aren't necessarily about a ghostly figure or haunting? Something that perhaps happened before the castle was even here?"

Frank took a moment to organise his thoughts, taken aback a little by the sudden and direct enquiry.

"*Frank?*" The Doctor's tone sharpened.

"Yes, yes – I'm thinking, wait a minute!" Frank snapped back, rubbing his temples, trying to fight through his concussion.

"Never mind …" the Doctor sighed impatiently.

"Wait!" Frank interrupted. "There was something, not well documented, from a lesser studied version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles that was interesting. Usually, at that time, it detailed raids from Vikings and the like, but there was a short reference to Æthelflæd of Mercia fighting and imprisoning a witch. Not here specifically though, just somewhere in the region."

"A witch?!" Matt scoffed incredulously. "So, we have gone from dealing with the paranormal – which is a legitimate scientific area of study – to *witches* now?"

"I'm sure we've encountered the ghosts of witches once or twice!" Crystal pointed out indignantly, coming to the aid of her colleague. Others chimed in with examples from their previous seasons, either for or against the idea, while still others quibbled with why exactly witches were less scientific than the paranormal, and that as TV personnel none of them were qualified to discuss these points.

Their combined chatter rose irritatingly, until a staccato bellow of "Quiet!" from the Doctor made the party fall silent again.

"I am going to check my equipment." Matt stomped off in the direction of his E.M.F. trackers and lasers. "Forget this nonsense."

That's usually my line, the Doctor thought as he turned to Frank once more. "Did the account say what they did with the witch?"

"Erm, well, I think so, but I'm not sure. According to other accounts on the matter, folklore and such, they interred her in the earth. Alive." There was a blaze of prurient fear as Frank gazed across at the Doctor.

"Alive, indeed." The Doctor frowned, then turned from Frank and increased his pace.

Maggie raced after him, looping the Doctor's old scarf around her neck to avoid tripping. "We've seen things like this before, but there's always been some rational—well, relatively rational—explanation. This time, though …Doctor, do you really think that there's a witch involved here? Like, dark magic?"

"No," the Doctor replied flatly, "Not in the slightest. But of course, we cannot ignore that tales of witchcraft and wizardry were used to explain things people didn't understand, Maggie. Often at the expense of some unfortunate soul."

"Then what?" she enquired.

"My best guess with the evidence we have seen is that something or someone 'out of time', so to speak. Displaced through the continuum."

This jogged a specific memory of Maggie's, of one of their previous adventures. "That séance, Professor Palladius and Dr. Heather Dearborn, in that coffee shop in Mount Pleasant … that boiled down to time disruption too, didn't it? Multiple time periods, the nineteenth century and the 1930s and the 1960s all overlapping and occurring at the same time, if I remember?[1]"

The Doctor nodded. "Very good, Maggie. I'd forgotten about that. Dear, dear, that was so long ago … yes, you've hit on something there, I think. The dimensions of time are so beyond the ken of ephemeral minds as to be magical, heavens or hells for anyone unfortunate enough to experience them if they can even withstand their complexity and their properties. But as to how they are manifesting the phenomena we have seen – breaking out of the vortex into linear time …" He once again collated his extended line of thought, before declaring, bluntly, "I frankly have no idea."

"Doctor, are you enjoying this?" Maggie asked reprovingly.

"Oh yes," the Doctor inevitably replied, with a determined grin.

****

Producer Dave wasn't happy when they arrived in the Outside Broadcast trailer. Not being live at this point wasn't in the plan, but the last burst of energy had taken out the team's microphones and cameras. Thankfully, the network had padded it out with some pre-recorded promos and outtakes from other *Ghost: Haunted* episodes.

"This isn't the ending we had in mind for the show!" he exclaimed, "We've got some back-up equipment ready, but there's nowhere near enough for everyone. Thankfully this unit is on generator, or we'd have nothing!"

"Never mind that now," the Doctor interrupted curtly. "I need to find out what happened to Dina Ancona. Can you play back the footage from here?"

"Yes, of course – but…" Producer Dave's reply was cut off by a look from the Doctor that demanded him to act. Despite himself, he tapped the shoulder of the O.B. technician, a bespectacled woman in her early thirties whose mousey hair was tied in a messy bun, chewing a pen. She obliged them at once by running back the footage from the hallway in front of the site manager's office.

"She's here between you, Doctor, and Maggie, see …" Dave pointed at the monitors as the grainy digital tape recording slowed. "Then as the lights went haywire, she is gone."

"Doctor, she literally vanishes!" Maggie gasped, leaning in towards the monitors.

They played back the footage, second by second, to try to see some 'tell' that showed how it was done. But there was nothing. Even frame by frame, she simple blinked out of existence.

[1] See *The Doctor Who Project* Season 44: *Sensed Presence*

"That's not even the weirdest thing," the technician said without emotion, changing the display on the two screens in front of them. "Here she is an over an hour before she disappeared, sauntering across the courtyard and out through the gate."

She pointed to the screen with the pen. The screen sure enough displayed a slightly dishevelled Dina walking across the gravel, out of the castle gate and into the night.

"But then here she is, at the *same* time with you lot." The woman paused both screens, one showing Dina leaving the castle, and the other a recording of the live feed of the group exploring the castle and, for emphasis, pointed to the time stamp. She spun around to face them, popping the pen back into her mouth, her striking grey eyes shining behind her glasses. "Explain that."

"What's your name again?" the Doctor enquired quietly.

"Rallye La Merzai." She smiled, serenely oblivious to the dread in the air this night—or perhaps insulated from it in the confines of the trailer.

"Thank you, Rallye. I love your work."

"Welcome," she said with a tip of an imaginary hat, before sinking her teeth back into her pen.

The Doctor turned away from the monitors, mulling over what he'd just seen before turning to Maggie excitedly. "Of course! Displaced in time just like I said – ending up an hour into her past."

"An hour seems like a random increment of time Doctor, why such a short hop?"

"Maybe it wasn't an hour," he mused aloud. "Perhaps that was when she was returned to this time period, perhaps she was intended to be returned precisely when she left – it's pretty close when you are flinging someone back and forth in time."

"But you can't know that for sure," Maggie interjected.

"Not until we find the elusive Dina Ancona, Maggie, no."

"So, then what are we waiting for?" Maggie said, grabbing a crewmember's padded coat with the *Ghost: Haunted* logo on the back and pulling it on.

Rallye clicked on a walkie-talkie and threw it to Maggie, saying: "These are working, for now at least. We're on channel 3," with a theatrical wink.

"That's the spirit!" the Doctor said wolfishly.

"No pun intended, I'm sure," she replied as they raced out of the trailer.

****

Matt Thorne grumbled bitterly to himself about witches as he checked his equipment by torchlight. The connected laptop was relying on its battery power given their current electrical misfortunes. Its screen seemed too bright when he flipped open the lid and he blinked rapidly.

"Let's see what we've got on the *scientific* side of things," he said aloud to himself, flicking through readings his equipment had taken. "Without resorting to witchcraft."

Even though some would still be sceptical, Matt considered his vocation a science, involving a search for data, method, meaning, answers. He had come to think of their investigations as revealing some scientific basis for what happens on the other side of this material world. It was a fine line, but it kept his mind rooted in rationality. The thought of that being overshadowed by claims of 'dark magic' brought him more than a little discomfort. He had come

to appreciate Frank; he even liked him. But he could never fully embrace Frank's professional background. Matt considered demonology the entirely wrong approach to explain these occurrences, as bad in its way as Dina Ancona and her medium mumbo-jumbo. It was the twenty-first century, and they could hardly expect to find the literal answers to metaphysical mysteries in folklore and superstition.

Matt stood at a totally different end of the spectrum. He needed to believe his method and his technology could provide the answers. He didn't realise how desperately he needed to believe until the 'W' word was uttered. Flashbacks to Pendle Hill and the inescapable feeling that his gadgets wouldn't find the answers re-emerged. But a proper, scientific explanation *must* be at hand. Otherwise, his work, his philosophy, was meaningless. Otherwise, they may as well start consulting sheep entrails and howling at the full moon.

Earlier that evening, Matt had posited the notion that the hauntings in Tamworth Castle could be explained by the 'Stone Tape Theory': the notion that the horrors of the past imprinted themselves on ancient structures. There was good reason, scientific reason, that haunted houses were often centuries-old piles like this, rather than Brutalist 1970s council estates or tower blocks. And those apparitions—the Civil War ghost Andy had seen, and the woman Frank had described appearing before their startled eyes when they touched paintings depicting those scenes, or the apparently real and armed Vikings that pursued Craig, Andy, and Frank outside—surely reflected those ages-old traumas imprinted on the structures of the past, unquiet and eager to cry out from their restless limbo. But that arrogant Doctor Alderman had pooh-poohed that suggestion, for the reason that the Stone Tape should only manifest when the recordings were played back, whereas these incidents were happening all around them, in real time.

The Stone Tape Theory had to be the right one, Matt insisted to himself. Otherwise, he really did have no answers. He wanted to find them.

Poring over the data gathered, he could see some sharp spikes in the E.M.F. readings, and though he'd need to check the time stamps from the footage they had captured, he was sure that they had coincided with the paranormal events they had witnessed.

There was software linked to his 'locked-off' camera equipment, where the cameras themselves were triggered when something or someone crossed the laser line they projected, each camera placed in a location that the team wouldn't be exploring, so they weren't set off by a wandering chippie. He could see there were recorded items flagged, and opened them to take a look.

"Dina?!" he gasped, as he saw night-vision footage of the psychic sat on the floor in front of one of the cameras. She rose to her feet and stretched, walking away from the camera possessed of a different gait. Dina had a distinctive 'waft' when she walked, and this was more purposeful, controlled. Though it looked exactly like her, it didn't seem like her at all.

"What are you doing?" he enquired aloud to this *doppelganger*, as he watched her walk out of frame. He rewound the footage to see here sitting bolt-upright on the floor. He mused as to how she could suddenly appear seated in the middle of a corridor. The moment she had walked past the camera it would have been activated, she wouldn't have had time to seat herself, and even if she did – why then instantly stand and walk away?

He noted the date and time stamps from the recording; over an hour since she had triggered the camera. His brow wrinkled as he remembered the Doctor's statement on discovering that Dina had vanished: "Displaced, *or moved* – in time!"

He checked the other camera notifications, which showed Dina moving through the castle with that same unnaturally purposeful stride. She appeared to be walking out of the investigation area, but to where?

He thumbed the button on his walkie-talkie as he turned from the laptop. "Doctor, I think I have Dina leaving the castle—but you're not going to believe this…"

His words were cut off as he turned to face a dark figure of a woman standing almost nose to nose with him. Her eyes shone with a haunting energy and her face was obscured by her long-ragged hair. He didn't have chance to make a sound before her hand shot out and grabbed him by the throat and he was gone.

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"Matt? Matt?!" Maggie enquired into the walkie-talkie she was holding; she was rushing out into the night with the Doctor as they attempted to pick up Dina's trail. "We didn't quite get that, are you OK?"

There was, much to her dismay, no response from Matt, only the nettling sound of static buzzing on the other side. She felt in the pit of her stomach how troubling this sign was, and stopped for a moment to catch her breath and look up so she could take in the grim majesty of Tamworth Castle, squinting back to the stoic, silent building in the dark. Even against the dark, the ancient structure somehow seemed darker still.

Yet the Doctor was continuing away from the castle, away from helping the poor man. To her quizzical glance, he answered: "Something tells me the answers we need, and the answer to whatever Thorne was about to tell us is this way. Onward, Maggie. Forward."

"But how can you be sure?" she asked him, quickening her step to catch up.

"Because everything is pulling us back to Miss Ancona, the ghosts, the video, and now Matt Thorne. She's been in two places at the same time and has run off into the night. The answers, my dear friend, lie wherever she is going. Trust me."

There was a gravity to the last part of his sentence, and she understood. Maggie did trust the Doctor, and over time she knew how both he and she had relied on those finely honed instincts to do the right thing, to find solutions. He was never one to run from danger – he'd more likely run towards it, and if he felt like this was the right thing to do, then so did she.

"Sorry, Matt," she whispered into the night air, hoping that she would soon get to make that apology in person.

As they ran down through the tiered gardens, she sensed the Doctor's speed increasing. Before she could ask the question, he smacked his lips at the air. "Can you taste it, Maggie? It's a bit like metal."

"No, I don't think I can," she replied breathlessly.

"It's almost as if there is a trail of residual time energy behind her. She's this way – I'm sure of it!" He pointed to lights at the foot of the mound. As they descended to the point where they had first climbed the mound to the castle that afternoon, two sets of lights came into view: a

stationary set of floodlights, and another moving erratically. Maggie thought she heard a distant beeping.

"What on earth is she doing?" Maggie asked, "Is that the dig site?"

****

In the castle's Great Hall, Crystal and Craig were trying to organise the crew around the chaos, the enthusiasm for the investigation and the adrenaline from the scares subsiding into the desire for self-preservation. Most people had decided that the best way to do that was to leave.

"Look, there was never the intention to place anyone into harm's way here," Craig was saying to the group. "We're missing two people now – both Dina and Matt, and we have no idea what it is we are dealing with, but we have to try and stay calm."

"Calm?! They're fuming in York!" Producer Dave clapped his hands against the tops of his thighs. "We just binned a live broadcast with no warning. The hosts are vamping some kind of wrap-up in the studio, with the live audience … you can imagine how that lot are reacting. If you ask me, this is the end for *Ghost: Haunted*. A laughing stock, with the joke on us."

"Is that all you can think about, this damned show? Most of our equipment is knackered, we're all a step away from the loony-bin, and two of our friends are missing!" Andy fired back with a humourless laugh.

"Whilst Dina humiliated me on air one too many times for me to consider her a friend," Frank sighed from his seated position, "Matt is. And not knowing where they are shouldn't be taken lightly. It doesn't matter if the cause is supernatural or otherwise. We certainly owe it to them to find them."

Crystal stepped in front of them and raised her hands, and such was her effortless command of this ragtag family of TV professionals that all instantly looked towards her.

"I know that everyone is here because they wanted to be, I know we are all here because this show became a passion – but Dina and Matt are missing, Doctor Alderman and Maggie have run off who-knows-where, and we cannot afford to lose anyone else. Craig is right, we never want to put people into harm's way, and until we know what has happened to them, making sure everyone else is safe must be our primary concern."

"So, what now?!" Producer Dave sighed in resignation.

"We gather up everyone and everything that we can and we wait in the trailer. If the Doctor and Maggie can't find them, then we call the police," Crystal said in a tone that denoted she wasn't encouraging counterpoints.

"OK, you heard the lady, let's pack up," Craig said, clapping his hands together loudly.

"Thanks," Crystal said quietly as the team gathered up their remaining equipment and belongings. "Y'know, for backing me."

"We're a team Crys, it's never in doubt," Craig replied with a playful nudge, trying to appear upbeat.

"I hope everyone is all right. This all seems too … real, if you know what I mean?" Crystal bit her bottom lip as she remembered Dina being overtaken by the entity in the dark, "We always hoped we'd find something to prove paranormal activity – but this feels like something else entirely."

"I know, I know," Craig said putting an arm around her shoulders, "this is more than anyone bargained for, our friends are hurt or missing – and if this is a hoax, then it's gone entirely too far."

"How can it be a hoax, Craig? Dina disappeared right in front of the group."

They walked en masse to a large door in the Great Hall that led out. As Craig placed his hand on the handle, a cold shiver ran up his spine so violent he shuddered visibly.

"Are you OK?" Crystal asked him with a thin smile.

"Something gave me the chills." Craig laughed weakly. "It's been that kind of night!"

As the door heaved ajar, they were confronted by a group of pale oncoming faces that were cast in a sickly hue by the thin light. Craig could just make out three or four at the head of the group. To his horror, he recognised them as the figures he'd seen earlier that night outside, their faces painted and full of dark intent. Suddenly the bearded man at the head of the group let out a guttural growl and they charged.

"Craig! Close the door!" Crystal shouted over his shoulder, pushing on the large wooden door.

Craig heaved it shut and the crew jammed up against it as he drew a stubborn iron latch. "Quick! Brace it, with anything you can find!" he shouted, pressing his whole body against the heavy wood.

The crew heaved large tables and chairs across the hall and barricaded them up against the door as their spectral assailants beat the opposite, side shouting in a language that they couldn't understand.

"Craig – are they *Vikings*?!!" Crystal asked in a higher pitch then she'd intended.

"Well, if they're not, I'm not going to wait to ask them, love."

****

The Doctor wiped away the moisture that had formed on his face in night air as he hastened towards the dig site. His body temperature was naturally colder than a humans, but the events of the night had certainly pushed it higher, in stark contrast to the cold, and had taken away any bite from the conditions. As he and Maggie neared the floodlights, the engine's rumble had slowed to a murmur. He had no idea who was digging and what it had to with Dina, but he was sure that she was heading towards it, and he felt a pull gaining force by the minute – urging him onwards. It was the same oppressive, inescapable force he felt in the castle, but whereas before it was fragmented, presently it felt like there was a laser focus to it.

"Doctor, look!" Maggie sounded breathless as she ran beside him. "The machine is on, but there's no one there!"

In a space in the dig area, between a series of carefully marked dig holes and some porta-cabins, the Doctor could see an excavator with its engine idling. Heat rose from it like spectral tendrils. Hastily arranged piles of earth had been pulled from the base of the mound by the machine's unseen pilot.

The Doctor approached the excavator and lifted himself onto the treads. He turned off the ignition, and glanced around before something caught his eye. Leaning around the arm and

bucket he squinted into the middle-distance. "Maggie, there's something in the base of the mound."

Maggie walked toward the area that had been gouged in the side of the man-made hill, where a slight overhang cast a shadow from the floodlights. She steadied herself against the damp clumps of extracted earth. As her eyes gained focus, she made out a stone wall.

She stood frantically studying it, her nerves on edge as she was convinced some ghoul would leap out from the darkness at any moment. And she couldn't see the Doctor anywhere … here she was out in the dark, alone …

"That's unusual," the Doctor said suddenly from her side, giving her a small jump-scare.

She slapped his upper right arm. "Don't do that. Jeez. What's unusual?" She looked around the scene. "The wall inside the hill? Because that's not nearly the strangest thing I've seen today."

"Well, no, indeed – but it is strange for the period nonetheless." The Doctor stroked his chin. "Anglo-Saxon burhs were built using masses of piled earth and timber, not stone – this structure shouldn't be here. I should have noticed that on the way in, when we had daylight on our side. It probably bears closer inspection."

"Someone put a wall here Doctor, inside the – what was it Frank said – 'motte'. I'd put hard cash on it being for a good reason."

"People who build walls often think they have reason enough to do so … often they're hoping they can keep things out."

His tone had gone up at the end, and Maggie knew what he was hinting at. "But in this case," she said, following his train of thought, "to then bury the wall in a hill…"

"Perhaps to keep someone – or *something* – in," the Doctor finished. He walked towards the wall silently and rubbed at the soil residue on the large stones. He traced the stone patchwork and felt out the grooves, then he wiped away patches of earth. "There are inscriptions in the stone, lots of them."

"Warnings?" Maggie asked instinctively.

"Spells, I think," the Doctor replied.

"Spells, and ghosts and witches – fantastic!" Maggie exclaimed sarcastically. "I vote we leave the wall where it is, Doctor."

Before the Doctor could reply, there was a flash of headlights and a loud roar of an engine. A compact bulldozer careered into view.

The Doctor and Maggie threw themselves bodily out of its way. As they dived to safety, the machine slammed into the wall with a loud metallic thud. The bucket thrust out in front of the machine like a shield-cum-battering ram.

With a groan of dissatisfaction from the engine, it shifted into reverse. The caterpillar tracks struggled before gaining purchase on the wet ground, and the machine lurched back, then forwards into the wall once more. A final thrust buckled the stoic surface, and stones began to topple.

The Doctor struggled to his feet, even his hardy Timberland boots slipping in the mud. The bulldozer was stationary in front of him with its engine running, lodged in the remnants of the wall. He wiped the mud from his hands on his black rope trousers and tutted with dissatisfaction.

"Maggie?!" His eyes searched for his companion, "Maggie – are you OK?"

"I'm here Doctor, and I'm fine," Maggie said, walking gingerly, gathering the ends of the overlong scarf, and shaking mud from her hands. "Though I am ready to strangle Miss Ancona."

"Well, you'll have a chance soon, I think. She's inside, I believe," the Doctor replied in a deep, solemn tone.

"Inside where?"

"Inside the mound," the Doctor pointed through the hole in the wall and into a dark tunnel that was now visible, which led inside the mound.

"Ah, great," Maggie replied, before reaching into the pocket of the crewmember's jacket, and pulling out a branded *Ghost: Haunted* flashlight. "Inside we go then, Doctor?" she enquired, shining the flashlight down the tunnel.

Chapter Three

"TO ARMS, ALL OF YOU!!! AND MAY OUR GODS BE WITH US!!!"

Æthelflæd's words still rang in Leofric's ears as he and his fellow warriors found themselves in this unfamiliar place. Though he was pushing his legs to run at full pace, he felt he was sluggishly trudging through several feet of mud. No, worse than that … he was sinking in…

He glanced to his comrades and saw that they were standing around him with the small group of Danes, each with their mouths agog, they had found themselves suddenly enclosed within a confined space, walls had appeared around them out of the night. In place of the witch were ghostly figures in strange dress, holding unfamiliar objects and jabbering to each other in a language they could not understand.

They must, Leofric felt, be the minions of the witch, that harpy from hell had summoned them from the night to thwart them. And only if they were defeated would he return to his home, and his countrymen and his beloved queen would know peace …

The shades had taken shelter in a room in this unfamiliar den of darkness. Leofric knew what to do next … he raised his broadsword and beat it against the wall. To his delight, it would pose little challenge to their combined efforts. He cried out and charged it, sensing the need his party followed suit.

****

Inside the Great Hall Craig, Crystal, Frank and the long-suffering *Ghost: Haunted* crew pressed themselves against their ramshackle barricade of the large Tudor-era door as their Norse attackers smashed and clattered on the other side.

Frank paced back-and-forth shaking his head. "I don't know how – but they *are* real."

"They can't be, though!" Craig insisted over his shoulder as he tried to shore up their bracing of the door. "It just. Isn't. Possible."

"I was shot by blokes from the Civil War, mate, and we were all attacked by the spirit of a witch. I'm not sure what is possible right now," Andy said as he tried to drag a sword off a wall-mount.

"Look – keep it together, OK? Whatever this is – and whoever they are – they're clearly not messing about," Crystal said, mustering as much calm as she could. "We need to think, not bicker."

"Why don't we just head up the stairwell and go around them?" Producer Dave suggested, indicating the back exit. In the melee and the initial activity of barricading the door, they'd overlooked the fact that there was more than one way in and out of the hall.

"That works," Crystal said with a beaming grin. "Nice one, Dave."

****

The Doctor and Maggie tried to slow their breathing as they explored the dark passage, her small flashlight losing its battle against the somehow darkening blackness under the mound. They could just make out sturdy wooden braces and rough stones that supported the man-made corridor. Somewhere not too far away was the sound of dripping water.

"Doctor," Maggie whispered, turning the beam towards him instinctively, "We don't know how long this passage goes on, how long it has been here, or … most worryingly, even how safe it is."

"Right, right, and right again, Maggie. We need to tread very carefully. If there is the sound of anything shifting, we run."

"And hope we can *out*-run a cave-in," Maggie muttered with dissatisfaction as she turned the flashlight to face in front of her once more.

The beam illuminated the ghostly figure of a woman standing in front of them. Maggie gasped, the sudden sight starkly terrifying, but she clamped her hand against her mouth to avoid making a sound.

She was dressed differently than either of the two women they had encountered earlier. She had a long, dark braid of hair, and her clothes were rough-hewn, primitive armour. She looked more substantial, and clearer, than the glowing-white figure or the Lady in Black. Yet she was still transparent, and her eyes still glowed as someone beyond life.

"She is here – and she has awakened," the woman said in a hoarse tone.

The Doctor stepped forwards slightly, in a smooth – gentle motion:

"My dear lady, who has awakened? And how can we help you?" He gestured to Maggie. "We can see you are scared, but we can help, I promise you. But we need to know more."

"We imprisoned her in the dark – and yet she has endured. For so long has she persisted and bedevilled us. All those afflictions befell us because of ill counsel," she replied. The more she spoke, the more evident it was that her bearing and speech were regal and dignified, though limned with deep sadness.

"The witch?" Maggie asked. "You imprisoned her here? Alone?"

The lady in nodded solemnly in response, turning away from them in a motion more like the shifting of mist than a physical body, and pointed into the darkness.

"She is here because of us, and because of us, many remain here – and we will remain here for as long as she does." She extended a long, elegant finger outwards as she spoke.

"Then we must see what we can do about that, my lady," the Doctor said with conviction. "On we go, Maggie."

She reluctantly followed him forward, past the white figure. As they did, they felt a cold but gentle breeze across them, and shivered involuntarily.

The Doctor stopped. "Forgive my curiosity, my lady. You *are* Æthelflæd, Lady of Mercia, aren't you?" When no answer came, he turned to find she had disappeared into the dark.

"Great, let's hope she was a nice ghost queen, and wasn't leading us to our deaths," Maggie said bitterly.

"She's trapped, Maggie. All these ghosts are trapped in time, I think – part of their consciousness is trapped here, at the moment of the rupture, and will continue to be forever, unless we help them."

"Fine, but if I die here, I'll haunt *you* forever," Maggie goaded him.

"You've said that before," he replied with a half-smile.

A loud wail sounded somewhere ahead of them, which echoed down the corridor in a wave that shook the aged wooden supports unsettlingly.

****

Crystal's heart raced as she stumbled through the dark castle with the rest of the crew. They had made their way up the flight of stairs but couldn't be sure that there was some other fate awaiting them in the night.

For all the spooky moments they had experienced (and caught on tape) during the run of *Ghost: Haunted*, nothing compared with the spine-chilling horror, and reality, of this present predicament. She struggled to accept that they were besieged by actual Norse raiders, but after what she had witnessed, she would be a fool to deny it. Not that there was any way of properly corroborating the incredible sights and sensations; it was all they could do to find their way forward in the omnipresent dark. The small night-vision cameras that the crew had for the show weren't suited to running, and the display was only marginally useful as they progressed. The castle had been altered and renovated many times between its original construction in the Norman period. Its most recent large-scale additions were in the Georgian era, with a few modern conveniences added in the twentieth century. These projects had clearly been undertaken in a haphazard, piecemeal fashion; one could round a well-appointed, light-panelled, elegantly carpeted eighteenth-century alcove only to find unaltered medieval archways and bare floors. The clash of styles and fixtures made it a place of contradictions and unforgiving angles, especially for people running through the night. In a more mundane way, it echoed the feeling of Frank or the Doctor, displaced into different periods of time; and when rushing through at speed, it enhanced the feeling of déjà vu, going in circles, or winding into the depths of a labyrinth.

A loud crash behind and below them resounded down the halls, the unwanted signal that their improvised barricade had been breached.

"Don't stop," Crystal commanded. Mustering the same level tone of calm, she reminded them of the next steps as if reciting a shopping list. "We get to the vehicles, we get out of here, and call the police."

The end of her sentence was followed by the battle-cries of their pursuers to add emphasis to her words, not that they needed it.

"Do we know where we're running?" Andy asked breathlessly. It was naggingly apparent that they would have to get back to the ground floor if they wanted to get out of the castle.

"Away – it's the only plan we have," Crystal replied. "Back stairs, back door, tradesman's entrance, a moat down the back, whatever. When we're outside, we'll have made it."

Everyone stepped up their pace, hoping to see any of these routes of escape. Disappointingly, around the next corner was only another long, level corridor. They sped to its end, hoping to round *that* corner and find their way downstairs and outside.

Andy kept on his morbid train of thought. "But getting outside doesn't guarantee anything, does it? We *saw* them outside at first. And even supposing we get in and drive off, we have no way of knowing if *they* won't just follow us into town …"

The loud footfalls getting closer made it plain. They were the quarry and the hunt was on…

Chapter Four

The screaming grew louder and more frequent as the Doctor and Maggie moved closer to the source. There was light ahead, at first barely perceptible to them, then growing stronger. It wasn't constant, it pulsed brightly enough to hurt their eyes, which had adjusted to the dark.

"Every fibre of my being is telling me to turn back, Doctor – to run away, far away," Maggie said as she shielded her gaze with a hand from the flashes in front of them. "It feels like more than just fight-or-flight, or survival instinct … or plain old cowardice."

"Perish that thought," he assured her. "You're braver than most for suppressing that perfectly sensible instinct. You feel that way because whatever lies ahead is wrong, Maggie … ripping through the normal chain of cause and effect. Your very nature is unsettled by it," the Doctor replied. Maggie detected a tinge of apprehension in his voice which was unusual to hear. "The cells in our bodies are put on edge, the fabric of our being is rejecting this unfolding contradiction at a fundamental level, telling us to turn back. The greater the energy, the greater the discomfort."

"How are you managing? I know you're even more … sensitive to this stuff."

He grinned wolfishly again. "It's pure agony. But I did ask for it."

Suddenly the corridor opened out into a bowl-shaped chamber reinforced with stone in places. At the centre was the source of the lightshow and the screaming. It was a woman, or rather the dark silhouette of one – the 'Lady in Black' who was shackled to the floor with long chains terminating in keystones laid into the floor. The rough manacles on her wrists and the stone looked new.

The air around them crackled and fizzed, but the woman and the immediate space around her seemed rough and unfocused, then clear – like an old TV set.

The shackled woman screamed again. Overlaid on this sound was another pained cry in a lower register, adding to the stereo sound created by the hemispherical space.

They saw another figure beside them, a familiar one. This was the woman who supplied the other anguished scream: Dina, doubled over on the stone floor contorted in pain, next to one of the large loops that secured the chains.

"Dina!"

Maggie moved to help her, but the Doctor placed a strong arm across her. "No, Maggie – you don't know what might happen if you touch her. This is the anomaly I have been searching for – or rather *she* is." He flicked his chin towards the imprisoned Lady in Black who was shrouded in static.

"But she's suffering terribly, Doctor. They both are," Maggie implored.

"And unless we want to as well, we must take action carefully." He lowered his arm and looked her in the eye. "We will help, but we need to know what we are dealing with."

Maggie nodded her assent. Much as it wrenched her to do nothing, this wasn't the moment for a debate, and even if she tried, he wouldn't listen. The Doctor's brain was at work trying to unravel the mystery in front of them.

Just as he opened his mouth to speak, Maggie blurted out instinctively, with that incredible human intuition that he could never quite pin down: "She looks like the TARDIS – when you're standing outside!"

The Doctor held her with a stare for a moment. Maggie looked at him, unsure how to interpret his expression. She had worn a bright 'eureka moment' smile, but it started to fade and she felt less sure of herself.

"Y'know, like when you're standing outside and it's dematerialising…" she explained in a quieter voice.

The Doctor's look flickered into a warm, proud smile – like a teacher acknowledging a bright student. "That's exactly what it is Maggie; she's phase-shifting through time and space. Just like a TARDIS …"

The women released another tortured screamed in the same terrible unison, puncturing his thought process.

****

Crystal glanced back every few seconds at the crew behind her; they had already lost track of enough people. It was a remorseless cycle of running, reaching a corner or a junction to recover breath, before dashing down the next stretch. In her off-time, ever mindful of the camera's habit of adding ten pounds and viewers' habit of writing in to comment about it, Crystal enjoyed keeping fit. But she always favoured rowing on the River Tees to running—the gentle plash of oars in the water, and the solitude of the river, was always preferable to the competitive pell-mell of an overcrowded park or the gym. As she felt her burning hamstrings, she considered it would be a miracle if she ever moved faster than a mild jog.

The adrenaline and fight for survival had seemed to imbue the rest of her the *Ghost: Haunted* crew, few of whom seemed in the best of training, to put those weekend runners to shame. The cluster of human bodies had done well to keep at a decent pace, and not to push past or trample anyone in a selfish rush to get to safety; the family ethos of their team had prevailed. Yet inwardly she was wondering as they wound deeper into this darkness, if they would endure. With every pause, no matter how brief, they knew the Norsemen were gaining on them; whether it was due to their ghostly state or their brutal lifestyle, it was clear they did not need to catch their breath.

She paid particular attention to Frank, languishing at the back with his shoulders slumped and his body crying out its exhaustion, but mercilessly pushing his legs ahead as fast as they could. His vision had grown increasingly glassy, making her pretty sure he was nursing a concussion. She stepped out of his way and ushered the others past her; she didn't want anyone to feel they would be left behind. Craig stopped at her side just in front, she could hear his

breathing, beside her own. She stayed still for the few seconds it took to push them all around the next corner. Frank slumped against the stone wall, his breathing heavier and more expectorant.

Craig stopped alongside them, looking back the way they had come. In the darkness, it was impossible to gauge how far behind them the Vikings were—only from hearing them in the distance did they know they weren't far enough.

"Are you all right – well I mean, y'know, besides the obvious?" Craig whispered raggedly.

"Yes, I just need to take care of Frank," she replied primly, without taking her focus away from their older companion.

"I'm OK, I think," Frank answered, waving away their concern. "You can go on."

The clamour behind them grew louder, as the Vikings drew closer. Crystal winced at the sound. They had tipped an armoire and a suit of armour down behind them at the nearest junction in the corridor, which would buy a few seconds. She was thankful indeed their ghostly abilities didn't extend to walking through walls.

"Better get moving," Craig said as gently as he could.

Frank caught his breath, uttering a few fruity coughs, snorting, and then beating at his breast to clear up the phlegm that was impeding his breathing.

"Come on Frank, we've got you," she said gently as she pulled on Craig's arm. They stood either side of Frank as best they could and helped him along. He felt heavy and weary, his legs missing stride periodically and stumbling under him. They had only moved a few feet when they came up against the back of the group, almost bumping into Andy.

"What's going on Andy?" Crystal asked briskly. "Keep moving!"

"We think … there's more of them ahead."

"Vikings?" Craig asked, feeling foolish as soon as he did.

"No, rubber ducks!" Andy hissed back with deserved sarcasm.

"Rubber what?" Frank muttered absently.

"Crap," Crystal said flatly.

"Rubber *crap*?!" Frank sniffed, totally nonplussed.

"Never mind – in here." Crystal pushed open a side door, that led into what she assumed was a large bedchamber. She corralled her team inside, desperately aware of the sounds of stomping Norsemen from both directions.

****

The Doctor paced between Dina and the prisoner, saying nothing, only uttering the odd dissatisfied grunt between nods and shakes of the head. Maggie was trying not to interrupt, but she wanted to know what was going on in his head. He seemed to be having a very heated, non-verbal argument with himself. Every time Dina and the phase-shifting Lady in Black gave out a pained cry, her desperate need to get the answers intensified.

"Doctor?!" Maggie shouted, finally able to take no more.

"Right, right." He held up his hands in acknowledgement. "Well, you see – this woman and Miss Ancona are tethered somehow, psychically linked, I think. Everything she feels, Dina feels too." He shook his head. "I deserved this shiner on my face, Maggie. Dina does have some genuine psychic abilities. She just didn't fully harness them."

"*She's* the 'Lady in Black', Doctor?"

"Precisely, Maggie. She's trapped here beneath fourteen metres of earth, in horrific pain, shifting constantly between time and space," he said, rubbing at his scalp. "And somehow she's using the castle as an antenna – projecting herself upwards and outwards."

"Why?"

As if in response, Dina scrambled to her feet and pulled at the woman's chains.

"Easy," the Doctor replied, "She wants help. This wretch has been entombed here for hundreds of years, in pain. She wants to get out."

The woman gave out another scream and Dina crumpled to the floor whilst mirroring her.

"We need to get her out quickly, before Dina is seriously hurt, or worse!"

"Yes, yes – but how?!"

"Doctor!? Doctor – is that you?" a distorted male voice suddenly shouted from what sounded like somewhere within the chamber.

Maggie knew the voice. "Matt?!" She looked down at the walkie-talkie, but it wasn't coming from the hand-held device. She squinted her eyes through the schism in the air around them, an uncanny fringe of light and air that was like a ghastly halo around the woman in black. That, as near as her mortal eyes could process, must be the anomaly.

The Doctor faced the anomaly and did the same, peering through the fuzzy rippling disruption in time and space. Between patches of brilliant light, he realised that what first looked like the other side of the chamber visible through the haze was in fact another chamber – and inside stood Matt Thorne, waving his arms at them frantically.

"Well, well. If this isn't the most curious thing!" the Doctor exclaimed, "As if you haven't found yourself a hole in space and time and a ghost-witch in the same night!"

"She's *not* a witch!" Matt grumpily responded through the distortion. "She's a time-traveller. This is science, not magic – I think."

"Quite right!" the Doctor shouted a little too loudly. "But she is trapped, and we need to find a way to free her."

"How on earth did you get there?" Maggie asked.

"The woman in black – her, she transported me here, I think. One moment I'm checking my equipment in the castle, the next I'm here and then suddenly you're there – wherever here and there are!"

The Doctor licked the tip of his finger and held it up to the air, then crouched and picked up some dirt and tasted it, his brow furrowing as he spat it out.

"I say – what on earth is he doing?" Matt boomed at Maggie.

Before she could answer about his peculiar appetite for moss and mud, the Doctor answered, "That's not another chamber. We're all inside the mound under the castle. You're in the same chamber we are!"

"Well, the chaps here don't like it either way!" Matt sounded agitated, pointing to some unseen point in the room on his side of the anomaly.

"It's precisely the same chamber, just at an entirely different point in time. Two points of time slapped on top of each other …"

"Time going round in circles?" Matt asked.

The Doctor grimaced as he tried to put the concept into terms Maggie and Matt could understand. "You people tend to think space and time are linear dimensions, stretching from Point A to Point Z, which you pass along by movement, be it traversing space or aging through time. But they're not." He rooted around in his jacket and pulled out a stale old rubber band. This seemed to light something up in his thought process, and he stretched it looser, then tighter, as he continued: "Imagine time as a bit ball of rubber bands like this one, different strands all interwoven and wrapped around each other to make an expanding mass. These bands of time push right up against each other, sometimes the same band winding over itself many times without you perceiving it – without anyone but someone sensitive to it, like Dina here. But then imagine a part of the ball heats up, and it makes the bands sticky, gooey, and brittle – bits of one band start to stick to another."

He mimed a ball shape with his hands, clasping them together to illustrate the violence of the interaction: "Somehow this woman is stuck in at the point of an energy release so intense that it has heated up the bands of space time here. Time has become brittle and gooey, the rubber is becoming brittle and frayed, with parts of different bands latching onto each other. I think the ghost, the witch, the spirits we've experience are overlapping time being experienced simultaneously."

"And if they get too brittle, they'll snap—I assume, like time?" Maggie asked, rhetorically.

"If that were true, and where I am is the same as you, then *when* am I?" Matt implored. "And how do I get back – and who are these people?!"

"Sorry, what?" the Doctor said, realising that Matt was pointing to others. "We can't see what you're pointing at, my friend."

He shifted around and adjusted his vantage point – there was a group of Saxons facing him, dirty, dishevelled and angry looking.

"Well, that is a complication," the Doctor muttered unhappily.

****

Leofric stood next to his Queen. It had been days since they had faced the band of spirits that the witch had set upon them in their dark lair, and they had worked tirelessly to imprison this foul shade inside the mound, only for this new devil to appear from the ether.

"My Lady, this must be a demon from hell to appear in the bowels of the mound. He has crawled from below to avenge his dark mistress," he said, reaching for his sword, "You must leave."

Æthelflæd threw her long braid over her shoulder and adjusted her cloak, an action to underline her purpose and her resolve. She had insisted that she would oversee the interment of this dark entity herself, and she wasn't leaving before the job was done.

"No, we will vanquish this enemy together and finish our work. This witch must never be allowed to harm our people again," she said with grim determination, as she drew her own sword.

As her warriors followed her toward the hell-spawn, Æthelflæd hesitated for a moment, thrown by how human it truly looked. She took in the unusual hair, fine and thin like a lady's, his beard barely grown in. His build was weedy and flimsy like the hair, and rather than armour

or layers to keep out the cold, the apparition wore a short brown garment, like a monk's habit but open and curiously function-less. His legs were adorned with tight and pale coverings, and his intricately designed short footwear looked singularly impractical for marching in this cold and rugged land. Also, most approvingly, Æthelflæd noted that he held no weapons, and indeed was splaying his hands open in an acquiescent gesture. His eyes, hidden behind strange transparent panes, were wide with fright.

For a moment, she considered this imp as a victim. But she had never seen his like before. But of course, beside him was a watery glow, like a candle burning in the icy reaches of hell. Within it could be heard voices encouraging him—no doubt fellow ghouls. All this belied his harmless and odd external features. Clearly, the Queen thought, he had simply adopted this appearance to confuse her, and he was merely surprised that his dark arts had backfired. She was proud of her men, for so confounding this would-be enchanter. Well should he fear the army of the Lady of the Mercians.

*****

Matt Thorne looked from the stern and imposing warrior woman to the brawny and wild-bearded men flanking her. The tips of their drawn swords, serrated and bloodied from past battles, neared him as they marched in lock-step.

"I say," Matt said as he stumbled away from them towards the back of the chamber, "I come in peace, y'know?!"

The Saxons advanced upon him in unison, and he felt vulnerable and unprepared. Matt looked desperately across the room—apparently at the same room, but at a different time.

"Apparition, cease your wretched snivelling!" the Queen roared in a smoky, authoritative voice. "We may be mortal, but we can resist your witchcraft."

"Oh, lordy," Matt groaned reflexively.

"You take our lord's name in vain?" the warrior to her right snarled, his teeth fiercely bared.

"No, no … it's just ironic, that's all. I hate witches, I do. I spent this whole night looking for some other explanation than witchcraft, and here I end up being called a witch … see?" Matt had hardly expected them to see, talking more to soothe his jangling nerves than out of any desire to communicate. They shot each other wary glances, and Matt could easily imagine they would soon be accusing him of speaking in tongues.

"Maybe I have something in my pocket that can break the ice with you lot …" He reached into his jacket, instantly regretting it when an angry line of sword-tips thrust forward a dangerous few inches. He pulled the R.E.M. pod and held it up in his hands, hoping they wouldn't mistake it for a weapon. He squeezed it, finding now it was in his hand, it felt comforting to hold—a tiny, pitiful reminder that possibly a scientific instrument could protect him from the blunt and ugly stab of a sabre.

"Doctor – I, I think I'm in a spot of trouble here!" he hissed through the time fissure, "Do you have a spare sword at all?"

****

Maggie leaped in front of the Doctor, as Dina struggled to her feet and began desperately pulling at the chain again:

"Doctor, couldn't we get Matt in the TARDIS?"

"How? He could literally be at any point in between now and the late eleventh century! I'm not sure we have that long. This anomaly, this schism in time, is unstable and getting worse – this could be catastrophic!"

"Sorry – what's a TARDIS?" Matt asked sheepishly from the past. "And why is that better than a sword?"

"Oh! I don't have time to explain everything!" the Doctor barked, throwing his hands in the air and resuming his pacing.

Left to explain, Maggie said quietly: "It's a sort of time machine – well a space *and* time machine really."

"The Koestler Unit must have some funding! All I have are these lousy R.E.M. pods." He glanced down at the small drum-shaped object he was nervously turning over in his hand. "And from the looks on their faces," he said pointing off towards the opposite side of the chamber, "not a lot of time."

"Yes, well that's all well and good but…." The Doctor stopped in his tracks as recognition sparked across his face. "Did you say 'R.E.M.', as in radiating electro-magnetic, pod?"

"Yes …" Matt answered carefully, expecting another tongue-lashing.

"Why, that could be exactly what we need!" The Doctor smiled in satisfaction.

****

Crystal tried to make Frank comfortable by positioning a large cushion behind his head. She was increasingly worried about his condition; now that he was still, he seemed to lapse in and out of a 'fog', his breathing was a rapid and phlegmy wheeze, and when he gathered his focus, he complained about the pain in his head.

Behind her Craig, Andy, and the team pushed heavy bedroom furniture behind the door as quietly as they could – which in the current situation didn't seem very quiet at all. Everyone felt like collapsing into the four-poster bed in the centre of the room and sleeping for about three months, not assessing the frame's use as a barricade.

"Just sit here Frank, okay – I'll be back, love." Her northern brogue was in full flow, something she had noted over the years that happened under stress, or alcohol; sadly, it was the former, not the latter, that was the current trigger.

She moved to check in with the rest of the group, scanning the room for anything to add to the new barricade or that could be used as a means of defence.

"I think Frank needs to see a doctor," she whispered to Craig, "He's not sounding too good."

They had all crossed to the narrow, mullioned window when they got in a few minutes ago, and groaned in unison when they saw how high up they were. Craig glanced out it again, wishing for whatever dark magic was at play to fiddle with the castle's dimensions a bit and give them an easy escape route. Sadly, the view was unchanged: high and steep, totally lacking in

footholds, and leading down to a paved pathway that promised to break whatever limb hit it. "Unless we can shimmy down a drainpipe, I think we're stuck," Craig said unhappily.

"I know, I know, it was the best I could think of at short notice," Crystal said, cursing her decision to stay here.

"Hey, you are doing a good job." Craig rested his hand gently on her shoulder. "This isn't your fault."

"What the hell is going on here, Craig?!" she asked, not expecting an answer. He gripped her hand tightly in response but didn't say anything.

"I think they might have gone," Andy whispered over his shoulder, his head close the wall. He didn't want to press it all the way against the surface for fear of being struck with some horrific vision or ghostly sight.

That fear was well-founded one second later, when, before anyone could respond there was a loud crash and the splintering of wood as an axe blade split the wall next to his head, missing him by no more than a couple of millimetres. A large splinter lodged into his cheek, and he gave a stifled cry in surprise.

"Andy! Are you OK?" Crystal shouted.

There were violent crashes from the opposite side, and their attackers repeating which one word: 'Myrkriða! Myrkriða!'

"What are they saying??" Crystal asked.

"I don't speak Viking!" Craig sounded panicked. "Anyone else?"

Craig heard Frank weakly reply from across the room and ran to his side, keeping low, as he didn't know what the Vikings would throw at them next. "What was that Frank?"

He strained to listen, and his rheumy vision suddenly clarified as he identified it. "They're saying 'Myrkriða' … it's not 'witch' as such, more of a … dark female-looking … spirit, I-I think …" Frank said wearily, summoning up a last modicum of strength to point out, "And they don't speak 'Viking', it's old Norse."

"Thanks for the lesson," Craig laughed wryly, patting him on the arm before running back to the group. "They're not raiders – they are hunting our witch!" he guessed, as the wall splintered and shredded further under their vicious blades.

"But *we're* not the witch! She's not even here!" Crystal cried, helping Andy to his feet and looking around warily, just in case she appeared at the mention of her name.

The chamber wall weakened under the barrage of blows from the opposite side.

"That doesn't matter to a mob," Craig said sadly. "They just want blood."

****

The Doctor sighed in relief as he saw the clearing of woods beyond the Tamworth high street where the TARDIS stood oblivious and alone next to the mossy wall. Thankfully the sprint had taken him barely six minutes. He was used to running, from nearly three thousand years doing it, either towards danger or away from it. The old girl had known all this, in her own way, as soon as she had landed. Indeed, she probably made sure to land a discreet distance away to avoid making the rupture incalculably worse. That point was worth considering; with Dina and Matt's transference essentially like a TARDIS, landing on top of them would have been like landing

inside another TARDIS during materialisation. It would be like tossing that overstretched, overlapping ball of rubber bands into a fire.

He pondered how this incident had metastasised so quickly. In the course of one Halloween, a mild curiosity had escalated to a threat to not just the planet, but time and space itself. By his calculations it was a very real possibility that the entire continuum could collapse from this vulnerable point, its reach far beyond the humbled corner of the Milky Way that Earth's sun occupied.

He knew that this wasn't a naturally occurring event. Someone, somewhere must have experimented with time travel and got it so terribly wrong that they had punched a hole in causality. He was as convinced now as when he had first thought of it that twenty-first century humans weren't capable of this time of experimentation, any more than Whitaker or the rest had been twenty years earlier. But perhaps it was found tech that they'd stumbled upon—could it have even been a disintegrating TARDIS?

The Doctor had his own experiences to draw upon, as well as his vast knowledge, and given a few centuries to study it at leisure he was sure he could crack the answer, but with this crisis spiralling out of control, that would have to wait. He blinked back the thoughts of the anomaly's origin to concentrate on the more pressing problem: closing the hole, lickety-split.

Maggie had complained bitterly about being left in the chamber, but the Doctor needed her there as his eyes and ears.

He nearly fell into the TARDIS. Once inside the wide-open space of the control room, he threw off his coat and fishing sweater and flung them over a nearby rail, and stood at the console in his long-sleeved Breton shirt, taking a couple of long deep breaths, both to still his panic and to mentally centre himself. Then he cleared his throat and saying aloud:

"Right, it's another Xyosis job I'm afraid."

The Ship didn't always communicate with her crew, and at times it seemed not even capable of understanding them. However, the mention of that name—the horrific, power-crazed, disembodied force that tried to gain substance and power with an ancient Time Lord artefact, whom they had dumped in the primal throes of the distant planet Eosis[2]—triggered a deep and unhappy belch from its inner workings.

"Hopefully we won't have to go all the way to a freshly formed planet, but it does require some vigorous hopping. You're not going to like this old girl, but we're going to do it anyway! We simply must."

The TARDIS answered with a pulsing of its glowing wall roundels, and another gurgle of discontent—a pettish note that sounded like its habitual dimension-ripping wheezing sound.

Understanding the meaning of this communication, the Doctor interrupted: "Yes, yes, but you brought us here – and quite right too, we have to fix what's damaged. You know you like travelling this patch of time and space as much as I do, and you'd miss this lovely blue pearl of a planet as much as I would, never mind the surrounding space/time continuum. Am I right?"

Now, she was pretending not to understand. The illumination in the console room rose to its usual level. Taking that as communication enough, he nodded. "That's what I thought. So let's get to it."

[2] See *The Doctor Who Project* Season 46: *The Disciples of Xyosis*

He pulled a goose-necked microphone from the console's communication panel, and tweaked its dial until he found the right frequency: "Maggie, can you hear me? I have reached the TARDIS, Maggie?"

There was a short pause and static before he heard his companion's response: "You're supposed to say 'over' when you're done talking – over." He could practically hear the grin on her face. He wasn't sure the levity was entirely appropriate, but he did find it calming to his jangling nerves.

"Yes, yes," he said with irritation in his voice, "Has there been any change? – *Over*."

Her response was instant this time, though there was still a strong static sound:

"The pulsing is getting more violent and more frequent, the pain they both seem to be in is horrific, I couldn't get near Dina if I tried. Over."

"Doctor?" Maggie's single-word prompt ended his inner monologue.

"Maggie, this situation becomes more serious as each moment passes," he said as he turned dials and checked displays. "I am using your position to pinpoint the rupture in time and space… I need you to ask Matt to activate his R.E.M. pod – now."

The Doctor felt both his hearts stop as the line remained silent.

"Maggie?"

After another agonising second, she shouted back, "Done! It's activated!" in unison with both women loosing particularly nerve-shredding screams. As painful as they were to hear, with the signal going, he mused, the rest of the going should be relatively smooth.

"Excellent! I am going to use the electromagnetic signal to lock in on Matt's exact location." He moved about the console, tweaking settings and checking the displays excitedly. It was hardly the best technology to use for such miniature-scale work, but with concentration, he adapted the TARDIS systems to synchronise. "We already have an approximate time window of the nine hundred years since the construction of the mound. It's not perfect – but it's something." With a smile, he looked to his left, forgetting that Maggie wasn't with him. The smile faded back into concentration. There was a small 'pip', and his eyes lit up with excitement. He tweaked the control until the sound got stronger. There it was! No fluke, but a definite pinpoint!

"Maggie – tell Matt I have him! I'm on my way!"

Her response was drowned out as he threw the lever and the TARDIS wheezed and shook into life, giving up more resistance than usual as she entered the vortex. But he raised his head from the controls, his eyes boring into the crystalline lattice at the heart of the ship's central column, and pleaded into the vast room that encompassed his oldest friend:

"I know, I know – I feel the pain too. But let's go!"

The whole ship shuddered as it felt more pressure from the unstable vortex, before relenting. At that point, the ride got really bumpy.

****

Matt Thorne circled the chamber. He had evaded the Saxons in the circular space, but they had moved to either side now, penning him in, and he had nowhere left to go. He felt that they would have charged him sooner if not for the bright rippling hole that was widening before their eyes.

He had been interested in the paranormal for years from a scientific perspective, though he knew that many scoffed at the area he had chosen to focus on. But this was science of another kind, right in front of him – albeit indistinguishable from science fiction, or indeed magic.

He distracted himself from the worry at what would happen to him if that rip widened enough to suck him in, by thinking over the words and concepts idly tossed out by the Doctor. Just when he thought he had encountered tangible evidence of ghosts, then the Doctor blithely informs him this wasn't ghosts at all – it was time travel!

Time travel, being so far from his realm of expertise, seemed to Matt as fanciful as ghosts, if not more so, but he had literally been transported from the castle in the 21st century to this place in an instant, and he was relieved that it was apparently underneath the castle, rather than a circle of hell. After this night, that seemed equally likely.

He looked back through the schism and could see the rippling and distorted image of Maggie, somehow remaining cool and focused as she talked into the walkie-talkie. But he couldn't hear what was being said. Suddenly she turned to him, bellowing and making sure she mouthed the words clearly: "Activate the R.E.M. pod!"

Matt scrambled to switch on the squat cylindrical device and extended two small sturdy antennae from its sides. A series of L.E.D.s blinked red and green on top of the cylinder.

"Done!" he shouted back.

Maggie gave him the thumbs-up and spoke into her walkie, as a loud violent pulse erupted, while the woman in the middle of the light screamed so loudly that he felt his blood run cold.

"What on Earth?!" he said aloud to himself.

Suddenly he heard a whooshing-wheezing noise from the corner of the chamber, and he turned towards it not knowing what to expect. He could see a small blinking lamp phasing into view about nine feet above the ground, then the outline of a blue box below it. Matt couldn't help doing a quick double-take as an old-fashioned police box solidified – similar to the ones he'd stumbled past many times on the streets of Glasgow over the years. Perhaps that had been a time machine this whole time?

The Saxons recoiled from the sight and retreated to the chamber entrance, shouting at each other.

"What on Earth?!" Matt repeated, knowing it was nothing on Earth at all.

The door opened, and the Doctor rushed out.

"Doctor!" Matt exclaimed, any further questions were cut off by the Doctor's urgency.

"The pod, I tuned into the electromagnetic pulse through the schism – it acted like a beacon across time." The Doctor hurried passed him, patting him briskly on the shoulder. He stood for a moment surveying the schism from below, where the Lady in Black hovered slightly above the ground and glanced at the Saxons hurriedly closing the entrance to the chamber.

"Incredible," the Doctor said aloud, though ruminating to himself more than anyone else. "She's suspended across two points in time simultaneously, both here and in 2004. Half-here, half-there … not even, *fully* here and also, simultaneously, fully there. I don't know how she wasn't just destroyed. But here she is – reaching out through time and metres of earth using pure emotion – projecting it outwards like a beacon!"

Matt struggled to wrap his head around this concept. He shook his head—though she seemed human enough, the thought that someone could withstand such supernatural forces with their mental power was staggering. "She must be in unimaginable pain," he said with a shake of his head.

"Right, and she's using it, harnessing the pain to cry for help – psychically," the Doctor said over his shoulder, still transfixed at the floating form. "There are multiple types of energy at play here – time is being ripped open, which expels energy, sure, but there's something else too, something – well, stone the crows." Noticing some vital detail, the Doctor stopped and surveyed the woman once more.

"Doctor?!" Maggie and Matt shouted in tandem from across time as the schism.

"Right, right – yes, better plug the hole… Matt, you have another one of these devices, right?"

He rummaged around in his inside pockets and felt its reassuring presence at his breast. "Y-yes, one more here, I have others back at the castle."

"Marvellous! We'll leave this one here and take the other one with us!" the Doctor slapped Matt enthusiastically on the upper arm and led him to the open TARDIS.

"In there?"

"Yes, in here! Fastest way to get you back where you belong, chum." He leapt through the narrow wooden door, and all Matt could see was a dense blackness. Then from inside, the Doctor's echoing voice declared: "Maggie, we're on our way – *over*!"

"You don't have to do it now!" Maggie shouted back, clapping her arms against her sides in frustration.

Matt suddenly saw the Doctor's arm reach out from the darkness to yank him inside. He passed through the dark threshold and then found himself in a gleaming and glowing space, vast and surrounded with incomprehensible technology. Fair enough, he hadn't expected a time machine to be anything he could wrap his head around, but even then this space was impossible to fathom.

Under their feet, a groan growled up in protest.

In response, the Doctor gave the mushroom-shaped console a coaxing pat. "I know, I know old girl, but it's entirely necessary."

Matt looked past this strange one-sided conversation to the far end of this odd, alive space, all nestled inside that Glaswegian phone box. "I-I can't quite believe this! It's bigger—!"

"Infinitely," the Doctor interrupted. "Now old chap, hang on to something – this might get a little rough!"

****

Up in one of Tamworth Castle's bedrooms, another axe shattered the wall, spraying splintering debris across the ruined bedroom. There was now a gap big enough for a Norseman to break through. Crystal could make out angry peering inside, shouting manically.

The group were armed with whatever was to hand: swords from a wall display, a large pike-like implement, and a sturdy candelabra. Faint light crept in through the window, as the sun

was ready to rise in the distant horizon. No one was surprised that they had been at this for hours—it felt more like years at this stage.

"OK, they're coming through – get ready!" Crystal shouted.

"Get ready for what?!" Producer Dave shouted. "We can't fight Vikings, or whoever!"

"We have to – or we're more than likely dead!" she responded bluntly.

She saw an arm the size of a log crash through the wall, followed by another, and then an even more muscular leg. The wall gave in and their last hope of defence with it. Craig gripped Crystal's hand tightly.

****

The Doctor persuaded the TARDIS to land in a more dangerous area, inside the chamber in 2004. For its part, it had resisted fiercely due to the strength of the anomaly. Sparks rained down from the time column's roof housing as it finally came to rest, suddenly still like it had been dropped on its side from a great height. He scooped up the other R.E.M. pod and ran outside, leaving both doors open, and Matt stood frozen for a moment, still gaping at the impossibility he stood inside.

Outside in the hemispherical chamber under the mound, Maggie informed him curtly, "Doctor, the schism is getting bigger, I think."

"Then let's get on with it." He flicked on the small puck-shaped device, and handed it to Maggie as the L.E.D.s on its top reassuringly blinked to life. "Place this near the anomaly, but don't get too close! And then I'll need you to get poor Dina free of the eye of the storm."

"I already feel too close!" Maggie said, wiping her forehead. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to grab our traveller before it's too late, then I am going to triangulate the two R.E.M. devices with the TARDIS' temporal dampers. The resulting paradox should close the fissure from both sides." He nodded towards the silhouette of the woman inside the intense light of the time anomaly. "It's high time you were free," he told her, resolute.

Maggie nodded and turned towards the schism as the Doctor ran back inside the TARDIS. He pushed pass Matt, still lost in his own wonderment, and yanked a roundel free from the wall, fishing around noisily inside its depths. It, like the rest of the ship, seemed infinitely large too—the Doctor rummaged, found nothing, then reached deeper, and deeper, putting his head in, and then both his arms. Now he was inside the roundel up to his waist.

"How's your aim, Matt?" he called from within the storage compartment.

"My aim?" Matt asked dumbly.

The Doctor squeezed back out, clutching a chunky device resembling a harness with a cable and claw mounted in its chest plate. He tossed the harness carelessly across the room toward Matt. "This is a Saturnynian pressure claw," he beamed. "It's made for deep ocean fishing in the dense clouds of the Voronipiax Minimus, but we're going to catch our mysterious time traveller with it!"

"Erm, well …" Matt fumbled in his pockets. "I don't seem to have my glasses."

"Fine, then are you able to press some buttons when I tell you to?" the Doctor instructed, as he pulled the straps to the harness around his chest. "*Exactly* when I tell you to?"

"Yes, I can do that, I'm sure."

He frantically indicated three rows of blinking buttons on the console panel in front of them. "When I say so, you need to press this one and this one at the same time, then press and hold this one for ten seconds, then pull this lever," he said quicker than Matt would have liked. "Got it?"

"Erm …" Matt paused, replaying the sequence in his head, and wishing he could work a panel with fewer buttons.

"Great! I knew I could count on you!" the Doctor said slapping him roughly on the back. "Because if you don't, we might all be dead, or scattered in time, or likely both. And I don't even want to speculate what will happen to the rest of this particular quadrant of space and time."

Matt noted a large coil of thick metallic wire on the back of the harness, which resembled a winch, before he switched his focus back to the controls, repeating the instructions and staring desperately at the appropriate buttons, even miming pressing them to make sure he wouldn't clam up at the critical moment.

The Doctor stood on the threshold, squaring his stance, and clutching the sides of the harness as he once, many lifetimes ago, used to clutch at the lapels of his coat. After a deep breath, he called out, "Now Maggie!"

*****

At the same moment, Maggie diligently followed his instructions, leaping at Dina and tackling her to the floor as the room shook under another strong pulse from the schism. Both Dina and the woman in the centre screamed in a loud, inhuman synchrony. Behind her, the R.E.M. puck was blinking contentedly, mechanically oblivious to the mayhem around it.

****

"GO!!!" the Doctor shouted over his shoulder.

"Yes, right!" Matt shouted slamming the first two fingers of his left hand down onto the buttons.

"Count us down from ten!!!" the Doctor shouted as the din in the chamber grew louder and the TARDIS groaned into life.

"TEN!!!.... NINE!!!...." Matt cried over the noise.

Maggie tried to keep Dina in the foetal position on the chamber floor as the Doctor kept his focus on the woman in the schism and pressed a button on the harness that sent two mechanical mandibles flying out of the side of the back-pack-style housing at the rear of the harness, which anchored onto the floor of the TARDIS. Matt's voice squeaked out each number in time.

"FIVE!!!.... FOUR!!!" Matt continued.

There was a loud boom, and a shockwave spread outwards from the time fissure. Suddenly the woman's visage became solid. The Doctor took aim and then depressed a trigger on the left strap, and the harness claw mechanism shot outwards towards her with a long cable in its slipstream.

"THREE!!!"

The entire chamber shook and rumbled as the claw spread wide, its finger-like implements growing mid-flight as Maggie blinked, straining to see what she could through the blinding light.

The claw enveloped its target of the woman's torso, which made her jerk in the air and cry out. Another wave boomed through the chamber as earth and debris started to fall from above.

"TWO!!!"

The Doctor depressed an identical trigger on the right harness strap, and the winch kicked in. The Lady in Black was flung violently towards them, airborne as the spool wound rapidly, hurtling into the TARDIS like a prize catch.

"ONE!!!"

The Doctor caught the woman in his arms with a thud, the leg supports holding firm and allowing him to remain upright. "Pull the lever!"

Matt released the button he had been holding and pulled the lever, the TARDIS whooshed and whirred and groaned and the hole closed. But the bowl-shaped chamber had given up, and there was a rumbling of earth.

The Doctor placed the woman, now a physical presence in his arms, gently on the armchair in the TARDIS anteroom, and struggled out of the harness. "Now we have to get Maggie!" he cried to Matt.

They rushed outside where Maggie held the unconscious Dina in her arms. They picked up the medium between them and carried her into the TARDIS. The light was dimming rapidly as the fissure reduced in size. The room closed up again, and its true size and humble time-withered nature now became apparent. All the menace and pent-up terror that seemed to drip down its hemispherical walls were illusions, merely the outcropping of the rupture.

The Doctor, Maggie, Matt, and Dina barely made it through the TARDIS doors as one of the main wooden supports gave way. While the humans tended to Dina, reclining almost totally inertly on a fainting couch tucked behind the fault locator bay, he ran back to the console, flicking through instrument readings and stabbing the control panels.

As the double doors swung shut, Maggie caught a glimpse of the collapse outside. She saw the fissure flickering and fizzing to a close. More earth shifted and fell. The entire space was collapsing in on itself.

"Let's go, old girl!" the Doctor said as he threw the TARDIS drives into action.

As the TARDIS dematerialised, the chamber filled over with earth and rock, as if happy to bury the evil aura that had for so long emanated from its depths.

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Crystal winced and gritted her teeth as the group of ghostly Saxons and Danes spilled into the room, weapons drawn, baying for blood. Craig swept in front of her with a blunt sword raised, while she closed her eyes expecting a crushing blow. Their eyes were wide, and their vast broad shoulders filled everyone's vision. They bore down on the cowering ghost hunters, solid and terrifying.

Then the room fell suddenly silent. All she could hear was her own breathing, and the slight cries of her friends.

She opened her eyes tentatively. The room came back into focus as the sun began to rise through the large window behind them. There was no one there – not a single soul, no weapons or shields. All that remained was a huge, ragged hole in the bedchamber wall.

She exhaled in relief, and looked around the room. Everyone else seem just as confused and relieved. "They're gone?!" she said cautiously, almost expecting them to pop back into existence as she said it.

Frank propped himself up, shaking his head in relief and looking at them with clear eyes. "Head's stilling ringing, and every muscle in my leg's strained, but that brain-fog's cleared at least …"

"What in God's name is going on here?!" Craig said scanning the room, the display sword tight in his white-knuckled grip, as the rest of the grouped climbed to their feet and dusted themselves down.

"*How* in God's name are we going to explain this hole??!!" Producer Dave added in, his hands on his head in dismay.

Craig hugged Crystal tightly and kissed her emphatically on the forehead. "Never mind that for now, we're alive – and that's what matters." He sighed in relief.

"I need to check with our insurance company…" Dave said despairingly.

****

Leofric found himself back in the chill of the night at the base of the sentinel mound. They had spilled forward through the wall to attack the witches' minions and instead tumbled clumsily onto the damp earth that they had started upon. The strange apparitions had vanished along with their keep and the screaming shade that summoned them. He climbed to his feet and sniffed the air; his breath clouded in front of him.

The night was clam and silent as it was before she had appeared.

"Where did they go?" Ed growled beside him, still panting, grabbing for his axe.

"Perhaps they were dragged back to hell by their mistress," Leofric said, grasping for an answer.

"Queer things have happened this night," Ed sighed.

"Indeed, and we must be vigilant," Æthelflæd said assertively, "You fought bravely, as I have come to expect." Sheathing her sword, she commanded, "We need to rest now, if we can. We finish our fortification in the morning."

Next to them the small group Danes gathered their won senses, and weapons. Leofric and the soldiers turned to face them expecting combat, but instead of renewing hostilities the leader – a fierce looking man with a rough, round beard and a shaved head, simply nodded his head in acknowledgement.

The Danes around him muttered their assent and they trudged off into the night in the direction of their encampment, gripped as one in a kind of numb shock at the return to normal.

"Perhaps our shared war on darkness is war enough tonight," Æthelflæd said as she watched them leave.

"Aye, my Lady, though I'd never speak of what we have seen – lest folk think we've lost our senses," Leofric shook his head and smiled wryly.

"It was well that I accompanied you, I would say."

"Indeed it was … though I still rue the threat to your safety. But … to you do we owe the peace we have now." He did a quick glance to either shoulder. "However, I would not want to press the issue. By your leave, may we escort your back? Before any other demons erupt from hell to face us?"

"That seems sensible," Æthelflæd agreed, slapping him roughly on the back, "But I'll need a drink before rest."

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The TARDIS sat on the gravel yard inside the thick walls that surrounded Tamworth Castle, the first rays of dawn bathing its blue exterior. The drives' hums diminished as the poor time vessel recovered from the exertions of its latest trip and having to go so close to a fissure.

Inside the control room, with harmony restored to space and time, the Doctor checked up on his two patients. Dina had regained consciousness but could remember nothing from the point when they encountered the Lady in Black on the stairs. For a time she was pacing the room with animated nerves, but now she sat on the floor of the control room, her knees drawn up to her chest looking dazed.

"And you can't remember anything else?" Maggie asked Dina.

"No love, I was with you all in the castle, then suddenly there she was – the ghost … then the lights went out, and then …" She blinked at some tantalising yet terrifying memories that lay out of reach. But they remained so. The only impression that really remained was a feeling—a visceral, prolonged sensation of being smothered. She smiled at the kindly face of Maggie. "And then I was here, wherever here is." She blinked in a daze and looked around to get her bearings.

"Well, I was conscious through it all, and I couldn't tell you any more about what happened." Matt ruffled his hair and gave a wry chuckle. "Doctor Alderman, Maggie, thank you both for getting us out of there. And thanks for getting us back safely, that was a wild night!"

"And thank you for carrying those R.E.M. pods," the Time Lord called over.

He was over in the ante-room. There in that cosy space, their mysterious new guest remained flat out in the armchair, still out cold. The Doctor adjusted the overstuffed pillows around her in an effort to make her as comfortable as possible.

"Who do you think she is?" Matt asked. "Looking at that get-up, she's clearly not a witch."

The woman was roughly five feet ten inches, with a slender build. Her face was serene and untroubled as she lay with her eyes closed, in stark contrast to the horrors she had experienced. Her long hair was matted to her head in sweat, and she wore what looked like an obsidian-coloured compression suit with blue accents, and some trailing strands of wires sprouting from the shoulder that looked like fibre-optic cables to be plugged into some larger structure. The Doctor, checking her forehead and satisfied she was not feverish, placed a blanket over her whilst she slept.

"I've no idea," the Doctor said. "The material of her uniform and this technology doesn't look familiar to me, and as for her cellular structure, I'll have to run some scans. Hopefully she'll

be able to tell me when she wakes up. Wherever she's from she's made of stern stuff. It's incredible that she's even alive – she was caught between two points in time, she has been in unimaginable pain, but for her it could have seemed like an instant or an eternity. No one could have lived through it except …" He left the sentence unfinished—*except a Time Lord*, he thought. But the prospect that this stranger was one of his people was inconceivable. There was an aura about one of his countryfolk, which shone through even the barriers of different faces and regenerations, which he could sense even in someone he had never met before. She was a true unknown.

"Let's hope it was an instant then," Maggie said with a shake of her head.

He looked away, guiltily; did she know him well enough to follow this train of thought?

"Should we get her to the hospital, do you think?" Matt asked in concern.

"I'll take care of her, and if she needs help, I'll make sure she gets it," the Doctor said with a nod.

"I didn't think you were that kind of doctor." Matt arched an eyebrow.

"I have a great many talents," the Doctor smiled warmly with another convivial clap on his back.

"And just so I'm clear, *none* of the things we caught on tape were ghosts then? They were overlapping points in time – and this lady's psychic projection of herself?" Matt looked a little disappointed.

"Correct." The Doctor gave a nod.

"And what about Æthelflæd?" Maggie interjected.

"When we yanked our not-witch-or-ghost out of time and closed the fissure in the continuum, things righted themselves in her time, i.e. your past. Thus, the after-effects we all experienced here in 2004 did not take place, even though we remember them, being at the heart of the time anomaly and all. The world didn't end here or there, and everything…" The Doctor sidestepped to check the nearest monitor on the console, just to be certain. "…looks good," he concluded with satisfied nod.

The Doctor dusted his hands off as if to draw a line under things: "There doesn't seem to be a chamber in the mound anymore, so they never buried our friend here alive, anyway. A slight change to history." He darted a sheepish side-glance to Maggie.

"Sometimes two wrongs make a right, with time travel," she assured him. "And I bet they never taught you that in Time Travel School 101."

"They certainly didn't, Professor Weitz. I bow to your superior knowledge."

Matt looked between the time travellers, sharing a glance with a similarly befuddled Dina. "Tell it to me straight. You two aren't from the Koestler Unit, are you? I mean, it's obvious neither of you are Scottish …"

"I used to be Scottish," the Doctor interrupted unhelpfully.

"But …" continued Matt, taking another look at the majestic depths of the console room, "where *are* you from?"

The Doctor remained silent, looking to Maggie. She beamed at Matt and Dina. "Everywhere, I guess."

"Right," Matt nodded, feeling no further explanation was forthcoming.

Dina stretched herself out and rose to her feet. Matt rushed across and gallantly helped her as she swayed slightly. She brushed at her once-smart blazer and skirt, both of which looked

like encrusted with a lifetime of grime. "I don't know about anyone else, but I'm off to get some fresh air." She freed her arm from Matt's grip and tottered toward the doors whirring open.

"Will Dina be OK?" Matt asked the Doctor.

"Thankfully she has a fierce, strong will. She should be quite all right in time, she's had quite a nasty psychic experience, so she'll feel a little disoriented for a while. The full memory of the events might stay a little fuzzy, but medically she's all right – I think. Oh, Dina?" Dina had reached the doorway, and turned back. He fixed her in the eyes. "I hope you do remember that … I apologise for calling you a fraud. You were in fact, extraordinarily brave, and only your *genuine* ability helped you withstand that connection with this poor unfortunate."

"Let's make sure you see an actual doctor," Matt said gently as he helped Dina through the TARDIS doors.

As they crossed the threshold of the TARDIS out to the gravel, he paused and looked back at them. He had to know one last thing. "Will I ever know who she is? Our 'lady in black'?"

"I tell you what, when I find out, I'll be sure to let you know," the Doctor replied.

"Please – I've always enjoyed mysteries, but just sometimes I like them to be solved."

"Indeed, so do I," the Doctor said.

As they walked onto the gravel yard the stones crunched underfoot, Matt felt relieved to see the light of the morning. A relief that was matched by Crystal and the crew streaming out into the courtyard to greet them.

"Matt! Dina! You're OK!" Crystal ran to them and wrapped an arm around each of them in a hug. "Where were you? You'll never believe what happened!"

"Well, I just might," Matt chuckled. "If you promise to believe what happened to us!"

Producer Dave paced back and forth rapidly talking on the phone, his free arm windmilling as the dread over surviving the night subsided and his stress over administrative matters rose. Crystal glanced over at him and said sheepishly, "I don't know how we are going to explain the damage, but we've received word from W.T.V.!" She flashed a wide smile. "Sounds like the live show was eventually a hit, so there's that!"

"Damage?!" Matt enquired.

"Oh yes." Crystal sucked air in through her teeth, looking back at the castle. "Not everything vanished into thin air like those Norse attackers …"

They were interrupted by the sudden wheeze of the TARDIS.

"What in the world?!" Crystal stood, suspended in amazement.

"Right?!" Matt laughed.

The sound faded as the blinking light on the top of the box followed suit and vanished into thin air.

"He didn't even say goodbye," Crystal said sadly.

"He has … other matters to take care of." Matt considered explaining the time anomaly business. But instead he simply told her: "He's got a ghost to nurse back to health." For now, he was sure, that explanation would suffice.

Crystal nodded with satisfaction. "If anyone can manage it, it's the Doctor."

In the empty space the TARDIS had vacated, a bespectacled bearded gentleman of about seventy in a hairy tweed suit, topped off with a bowtie and weather-beaten bucket hat, carrying an overcoat and mottled leather grip, marched through the large arch into the courtyard. He paid

the dematerialisation no mind, his eyes set sternly in a single fixity of purpose. In accordance with his military swagger, he was waving in their direction with the castle's site manager.

"I say," he said with a slight Scottish brogue, "Are you that lass Crystal Forrester I spoke with on the phone t'other day?"

"Crystal, yes," she said as he shook her hand in confusion. Matt had a feeling what this man would say next.

"Lovely to meet you, I'm Doctor Bruce Alderman – from the Koestler Unit in Edinburgh, I'm so sorry I'm late – these bloody trains! I think one of the devils you people are looking for must be in charge of that lot." He beamed and held up his hands in apology. "I assume, alas, I missed the show? I know I said a few harsh words about your investigative calibre, but I had hoped to drop in and surprise ye …" Crystal's confused expression stopped his monologue. "Oh dear, lass, are ye all right?"

"I'm sorry, if you're Doctor Alderman, then who was …?" She pointed to the empty space, and Doctor Alderman followed her direction.

He looked from her to the thin air she indicated, and back with a puzzled frown. "Who?"

Matt Thorne's deep laugh boomed out into the open air and he turned and walked Dina towards the trailer.

"What a bloody night!" he exclaimed.

Epilogue

Presence /ˈprezn(t)s/ [noun]
The fact or condition of being in a specific place at a given time.

Serenity had returned to the timeless depths of the TARDIS, and the infirmary was particularly tranquil, lying as it did deep in the recesses of the Ship's ever-shifting internal architecture. The Doctor studied a large screen over the floating observation bed (which looked to Maggie a little like a hi-tech operating table), on which the strange ghostly woman lay, still asleep. The screen displayed her vital signs, showed an X-ray-like graphic of her internal organs, and somehow the bed itself monitored her health. She hadn't yet regained consciousness, but Maggie could see from the twin lines that her pulses were steady – well, as far as she could tell based on the startling data that had been presented to them.

The corrugations on the Doctor's brow furrowed deeper. His face had been set with concern ever since he had checked the first readings; he had rolled the long sleeves of his Breton shirt back to the elbow, and Maggie was almost certain she heard his teeth grinding (and even more certain that it sounded like the grinding of the TARDIS engines).

Maggie could tell little about the woman. She looked to be in her late thirties, she was striking with a classically beautiful face and a bone structure she couldn't help slightly envying, and she had ash-blonde hair that cascaded out over the pillow.

The top of the woman's compression suit and been loosened slightly, and they had noticed for the first time the symbols inscribed on the upper right breast of her suit, which the Doctor identified as writing of a 'derived dialect'.

She could not read the symbols. "What does it say?"

"Her name, I imagine … 'Azrael'."

Maggie was unsure if she could break the Doctor's concentration, but she indicated the internal organs displayed. She had to ask: "So, I'm not an expert Doctor, obviously, but …" She tapped the two hearts, and the twin lines of the pulse. "Does that mean she is – is, like, *you*?"

The Doctor, who had remained rooted to the spot staring up at that display, winced slightly, but he didn't respond.

"Doctor?!" Maggie prompted.

"Yes … and no," He was clearly dissatisfied with this answer, and shook his head.

"Meaning?" Maggie pushed further.

"Meaning, she is almost like me … but a little like you too." He turned and looked up at her, she could see concern on his face.

"Like, a hybrid?" She wasn't sure that was the right term, and half-expected one of the Doctor's strong corrections.

Instead, he nodded slowly. "Exactly."

There were many questions that arose from this. Could Time Lords and other species produce offspring? Or was she genetically engineered? And whatever her origin, how and why had she found herself inside a rupture in space-time? How, why, when, where, who … The question Maggie finally decided to ask, as she approached the bedside and looked at the sleeping figure maternally, was: "Where did she come from?"

"No idea," he said. "Other than that single word on her clothing, there are no other insignias or markers. I don't even know who her tailor is." He smiled feebly, still absorbed in the questions. "And there is no other obvious way of tracing her origins without … well, asking her."

"And how did she end up as a ghost?"

"From the data the TARDIS recorded in the chamber, and the data we have gathered from her so far, she appears to have been … launched, fired, really … through a hole in time and space that smashed the fabric of the universe. Caught between Point 'A' in the eleventh century, Point 'B' in the twenty-first century, and Point 'C', which I have no idea of knowing where it is, or when. But such was the folly of the technology used to transport her that her very presence threatened to squish Points 'A' and 'B' on top of each other …"

"Melting-rubber-band-style, I got that."

He flailed as the firm facts ran out. "But even that data remain incomplete."

"You said earlier that you don't know how she survived." Maggie sensed there was an answer, even if the Doctor was so disturbed by her origin that he couldn't contemplate it. So, she risked angering him by pushing him further.

"Yes – yes, you see the energy I detected down in the chamber was, well – regeneration energy to put it simply, her cells were regenerating as fast as they were dying." He ran his hand across his face. "It stopped her from being obliterated as she was effectively used as a cannonball blasted through time." He held a loose flap of her compression suit between his thumb and forefinger. "And as far as I can tell, this remarkable fabric is made to do the same. Not unlike the shell of this old girl, run through a sewing machine."

He seemed trapped in a loop, looking over and over, from one to the other and back again.

"There are easier ways to travel through time without a TARDIS, Time Rings and time corridors, and handheld vortex manipulators, holding hands with a Tharil, and the like." He grimaced at the thought. "So, who would shoot someone through time like this? And why?"

"I was really hoping someone would tell *me*." The third voice in the room was deep and smooth if not a little tired.

Maggie gave a small, startled yelp as she looked down and saw the woman's grey eyes sparkling up at her from the bed. After that night, her knee-jerk inclination was still to consider her a ghost. After all, she was the Lady in Black, wasn't she? But it was clear, the whole haunting business was a result of this Point A/B/C collision of time and space … not only was she innocent, but Maggie also reminded herself, she was the victim.

The Doctor padded slowly towards her on the balls of his feet, with reservation, almost wary of her. The woman started to sit up slowly and groaned a little with the effort. She held her head against the pain that shot through it.

"You've been through quite a lot, Miss…" he probed.

"Miss?!" she responded with a question. She looked right and then left before returning to the pair. "Am I Miss?"

"We were hoping you knew the answer to that question." Maggie smiled awkwardly.

The woman turned and whilst supporting her weight with her arms, she swung her long, slender legs over the side of the bed, letting them dangle while stretching out her back and flexing her shoulder muscles.

"You were hoping for what?" the woman asked.

"You could tell us your name? Who you are? Where you're from?" Maggie asked as the Doctor withdrew a step to observe.

"I don't know who *you* are, or where *I* am!" she snapped back, suddenly gruff.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Maggie, Maggie Weitz, and this is the Doctor."

Her tone lightened. "Well, nice to meet you Maggie-Maggie-Weitz, and Doctor …?"

"Just the Doctor," he said flatly. He was scanning her face for some recognition: the fact that there was none confirmed his innate feeling that she could not be a Time Lord. A little vain it may be, but it was a simple fact: what Time Lord hadn't heard of the Doctor?

She held his gaze long enough for him to grow impatient at the silence, and Maggie prompted, "So that's us. And you are?"

"Oh, that's easy!" Her voice brightened, and she looked up at them with her big grey eyes and smiled with childish glee. "I have absolutely no idea!"

She flicked her tousled hair and kicked her legs slightly.

The Doctor looked to Maggie, and she looked back at him. Another mystery beckoned.

"Is anyone else hungry?" their new passenger asked.

On Halloween night, a live broadcast from haunted Tamworth Castle descends into chaos. Ghosts walk, Viking warriors storm the grounds, and psychic medium Dina Ancona vanishes before the cameras—only to be seen elsewhere at the very same moment. For the Doctor and Maggie, the haunting is no illusion: time itself is coming apart.

As figures from centuries past invade the present, Dina becomes the unwilling vessel of the terrifying Lady in Black. Beneath the castle lies a prisoner entombed for a thousand years, trapped between moments in time and projecting her agony through earth and stone. Every cry creates chaos—and every passing second draws Tamworth closer to catastrophe.

With the television crew hunted through the darkened castle and the fabric of history beginning to fray, the Doctor must uncover who—or what—the so-called witch truly is. But freeing her may be the only way to save Dina… and it could tear the fabric of the universe wide open.

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