

THE RIDDLE

PROLOGUE

London: August 3. 1998

15:23

She sat in the room, quietly waiting. She knew what was going to happen, and she knew exactly what she was going to be asked. And she knew all the reasons why she couldn't answer even one of them. She'd been here before, more than once.

The door opened, and Brigadier Bambara paced in.

She looked like she hadn't slept in a couple of days, which was probably the case. Her uniform was – as ever – immaculate, but there were rings under her dark eyes, and her face was set sterner than usual. She looked down at the woman in black before her, not expecting a salute. She wasn't disappointed.

'We've gone over this Manchester event with a fine tooth comb,' she

said, sounding for all the world as if she was reading from a prepared speech.

She knew the drill, too.

‘And?’ the woman in black said, already knowing the answer.

‘D-Division say its got all the symptoms of a classic Police Box Incident.’

The woman nodded, said: ‘Lot’s of dead bodies and nobody knows exactly what happened.’

Bambera took off her hat, ran a hand through tight black curls. There was a touch of grey starting to show at the temples – the lifestyle getting to her at last. The light glistened off the wedding ring she wore, reflected in the woman’s eyes. She didn’t look her commander in the face, concentrating instead on the threads in her own black overcoat. She knew what was coming.

‘Geneva’re worried,’ Bambera said quietly, ‘We’ve got ourselves a highly motivated, highly organised, well equipped team that say they’re UNIT, and nobody anywhere have heard of. We’ve got a lot of dead bodies, and the Doctor’s involved somehow. It wasn’t that long ago they shut UNIT down, for less than this. We’re only here on sufferance. And we’ve got this phone call from –’

‘From Ace,’ the woman interrupted.

Bambera sat right in front of her, demanding her attention.

‘We were thinking you might be able to shed some light on it.’

The woman shook her head slowly.

‘Sorry,’ she said, and meant it. ‘We went through all this with the

Broken Arrow. I can't tell you anything.'

'Not even a hint?'

'Only what you'd do anyway,' she smiled apologetically. 'Stay on alert. Have a team ready to move in. Eyes and ears.'

'And you're still off active duty? Both of you?'

The woman in black nodded, resolute.

'Shame,' breathed Bambera.

And from somewhere below them, the soft sound of purring filled the air.

ONE

'For many years, the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce protected the world from alien invasion, and set the foundations for our own FHD divisions. But for all these battles, it was not an alien threat that signalled the end of UNIT: it was the enemy within that destroyed them.'

The Zen Military

Kadiatu Lethbridge-Stewart

Little Sarfield: August 9. 1998

16:21

The Doctor sat cross-legged on the lawn, his back to the House and the sun on his face. His eyes were closed, his attention focused deep inside himself. It had been a long time since he had meditated this deeply: perhaps since he was trying to force the anger at his exile away, or back before then, as he perched on the side of Mount Lung and tried to please his master. Now,

he had no choice. He was fighting to claw his life back.

He tried to ignore how good the sun felt on his skin, tried to ignore the urge to stretch out and curl into sleep. Tried to ignore the urge to leap up, and run forever, and to feel the blood rushing in his ears, smell blood set free on the wind. He tried to focus on what made him him, tried to remember the thoughts he had before they were invaded by pictures of prey fleeing across the plains. It was getting harder, his self becoming obscured by a red mist.

His eyes flicked open, and he reached for the guilt-edged mirror at his side. He glanced briefly at the face he saw, and let it slip from his fingers again. His eyes still burned a vicious yellow. As they had for the past week or more.

Somewhere, a raven cawed. It sounded like laughter.

Scratch meditation. He hadn't had much faith in it working – if it was that easy, the Master wouldn't be dead now. He would have tried that – he would have tried most things the Doctor could think of. He would have tried *everything* the Doctor could think of. There was no escape, except the route the Master had taken. And he wouldn't have chosen that if he could have seen another. Perhaps it was best just to give in, sit back and let it take him. At least the he wouldn't know when . . .

A dark shape in the sky, flapping up from the village down below.

No, that was not the way to think. There was another way out. All he had to do was to find it. Perhaps if he could isolate the invading virus, he could extract it from his system, give himself a spring clean. He was sure there was something in the TARDIS that could do it for him. But the TARDIS was in Manchester, and he couldn't bring himself to go back there just yet. Not

after Ace.

Flying up and out of the valley, away from the small cottages of Little Sarfield, clearing the trees that separated them from the world outside, the dark bird gathered speed.

No, that wouldn't work anyway. The Cheetah Virus was now firmly bonded with his adrenal glands – or their Time Lord equivalent. If he tried to extract the virus that way, he'd take half his sympathetic nervous system with it. Of course, there was always the possibility that he'd grow another. In fact, that was the one option that the Master hadn't had open to him. A regeneration would completely rewrite his DNA, and an outsider like the virus might find itself left out of the equation. And that would have the advantage of relieving him of the crushing burden he was starting to feel, the terrible weight of history. He was getting so tired.

The raven was moving fast now – it had already crested the brink of the valley, and passed the road that twisted its way through the trees back down to the village. Now it was flapping its steady way over the small cottage at the beginning of the House's grounds: the caretaker's cottage, empty for the last eight years. And still the Doctor failed to notice it.

No. Giving up was not the way. Especially if he wasn't sure it would work – the Virus was so ingrained in his genetic make-up, there was a chance the nanosubs in his blood would just think it was part of him. One regeneration wasted, and still infected. No, he was running short of new bodies as it was. There had to be another way. Had to be. But all he could think of was the Master, and the way out he had been forced into.

And then instinct kicked in. His hearts started pounding before he even

knew why, his pupils closing to two small slits in his glowing yellow eyes. He felt fangs push his mouth into a snarl, and his fingers tensed as he tried to extend claws that weren't there. Not yet, anyway. And still he had no idea what had sparked it off, until his eyes lifted to the sky. The raven was nearly on him, hovering over him like a shadow, blocking out the warming sun. Without even thinking, he brought himself into a crouch as the bird dived passed his head, nearly taking his hat with it.

As he spun around, the bird was gone. Instead, he found himself staring at a tall, shaven-headed man dressed entirely in black. He wore a pair of small black shades, given the Doctor the impression that he had no eyes, just two black shining holes drinking him in. His hook nose bore an uncanny resemblance to a bird's curved beak.

'Doctor?' he asked, matter-of-factly.

It was all the Doctor could do not to pounce on the stranger, tear his throat out with his new sharp fangs. He just stayed crouched on the ground, staring up at him as he stared down.

'Well?' the stranger snapped.

The Doctor nodded slowly, fighting to regain control. To no avail: he could feel the hairs on the back of his neck starting to rise.

'Good,' the stranger said, and pushed a needle into the Doctor's neck.

He was still cursing his reflexes as everything went dark.

TWO

The Sarfield Dales: August 10. 1998

03:45

In the moors of the Sarfield Dales, there is a petrol station. Barely a car a day goes by, but whenever one does the driver sees the same thing: the young owner of the station sitting on his chair, waiting for customers. The stations two pumps are spanking clean, and the prices are off-puttingly high, but the competition is non-existent and he has to make a living.

Sometimes, such as now, a large unmarked van winds its way up from the valleys and pulls into the station. No matter how often the owner sees that van, his hand always drops down behind his chair, fingering something unseen.

'Mind if I smoke?' the driver asks.

'Can't smoke here. You'll blow us all up,' answers the owner.

The driver nods.

'Can I smoke round the back?' he asks.

The owner nods - his hand rising away from the back of his chair, relaxed - and the driver and his companion climb out of the van, heading round the back. Normally. This morning, the driver adds:

'Got a delivery for you. Give us a hand?'

Again, the owner nods, and helps carry a large box inside his station: a long and coffin shaped box. This done, the driver and his companion climb back into their lorry and, without a thought for the cigarette they never smoke, they drive off again.

The owner relaxes back into his seat, his eyes on the road. Tomorrow, another lorry will come, with a different driver, but it doesn't concern him. Tomorrow, there will be another owner.

The Sarfield Dales: August 11. 1998

09:32

When the Doctor woke, he decided it would be best to keep his eyes shut until he knew more about his situation. Some feline instinct raged at that. If there was danger, he should face it head on, eyes wide open, not try to hide from it like some cowering kitten. He held it in check though – noting with no slight pleasure that the teeth in his mouth were no longer fangs (although, a small part of his mind whispered, he could guarantee his eyes were still glowing). He put the thought to the back of his mind, and went through his

standard abduction check list.

Check One: he was still in the same physical condition in which he'd been kidnapped – no missing limbs, no mystery drugs floating around his system. Good.

Check Two: he was naked. Not good. There were some very useful things for escaping from most situations in his pockets, and a naked man was easier to spot than a clothed one. He'd have to steal some kind of uniform when he escaped. He hoped that his hat was alright – it had been a gift from an old friend. He'd have to find it, later.

Check Three: he was in a confined space. He could feel it in the air. And the floor was made out of some kind of glass.

'Hello, again, Doctor Smith,' said a measured voice that made the Doctor's hackles rise. 'How are you feeling?'

The Doctor opened his eyes – no need to pretend he was unconscious any more. He saw that his first impression was right. He was trapped, locked inside a six foot glass globe, perfectly smooth in every direction. Which was worrying – was fresh air getting pumped in somehow, or did he have to conserve oxygen? He couldn't see any air vents, so thought it best to start slowing his metabolism down. The virus inside him fought against that, too – it was busy trying to raise his heart rate, get him ready to fight his way out.

Not yet, he thought.

Looking passed the glass, he could see he was in a basement somewhere – an underground base, perhaps? Definitely military, or a specific branch of the military. UNIT. He didn't need to work very hard to deduce that. Standing right at the edge of the glass, was a tall figure glaring down at the

Doctor. Despite the curve of the glass, the Doctor could make out the uniform, and the blue beret. But he could make out much more than that. The broad shoulders, the neatly shaved flame red hair, the brilliant blue eyes.

‘Captain Jötunson,’ the Doctor said, surprised at how little his voice echoed in the cage.

‘You remember me,’ he beamed. ‘I’m touched.’

He doubted he would ever forget. But things were going awry – last time they’d met, the Captain had been helping him. Now he him captive. Why the change? Too many questions. What he needed was more information, time to find out what Jötunson was planning. Once he knew his plan, he could find the flaw in it and defeat him. It never occurred to him that their might not be a flaw, or that he might not prevail. He was the Doctor – that was what he did.

‘Well, Doctor Smith –’

‘Just Doctor,’ the Doctor interrupted.

‘I’m sorry?’

The Doctor stared at Jötunson through the glass. Where was this going?

‘I prefer just the Doctor.’

Jötunson looked confused – real, or feigned? With the glass in between them, the Doctor had no way of knowing.

‘But Doctor Smith is your name, isn’t it? Doctor John Smith?’

And just for a moment, the Doctor caught the glint in Jötunson blazing blue eyes. A glint that said he knew damn well it wasn’t the Doctor’s real

name. A glint that dared him to deny it.

Blank faced, the Doctor said:

‘Of course.’

And Jötunson merely nodded, and left the room.

Manchester: August 9. 1998

14:56

As Ace slid back into consciousness, her senses were overwhelmed by the smell of fish. Haddock, possibly Hake. Then her ears were assaulted by a thunderous rumbling, and all she could think of was Ben Hurr rowing his warship up to ramming speed. Then – gently, ever so gently – she felt a velvet tap at the very top of her skull. A well chosen spot, probably the only place on her entire body that wasn't blazing with pain. But then the creature who'd chosen that spot would know that.

Her eyes flicked open, and she was greeted with the sight of a black kitten perched on the side of her bed, carefully avoiding the drips coming from his Sister's arms, practically grinning all over his face. His whiskers twitched as he sat back. She'd reach up to stroke him, but she just didn't have the strength.

‘Hello, Wolsey,’ she croaked, and that set the purring off again.

This was what her life had degenerated into over the last week. A nurse would wander into the room, give her some pain killers. Sometimes she'd take them, sometimes she fake it. Either way, within an hour she'd be

asleep. When she took the drugs, she didn't dream: that was the one thing they had in their favour. Then, some time in the afternoon, Wolsey would appear and wake her up, usually smelling of whatever dinner he'd been able to catch that day. She'd say this for the kitling – she never once had to buy him a tin of Whiskas. Not that he'd eat it if she did, for much the same reasons as Ace herself had for going vegetarian. Processed meat tasted nothing like the real thing.

She sent a wave of gratitude towards the kitling, and felt it reflected right back. She had a lot to thank Wolsey for – without the ability to watch the outside world through his eyes, she'd be climbing the walls by now. Even as it was, her muscles ached for activity, and every little thing could get the adrenaline flowing, her heart racing. But even then, the pain was always with her – they assured her it would pass with time, that she was passed the worst of it, but still . . . She should be grateful the UNIT troops got her to the hospital in time – another half an hour and she might have been dead.

A picture of the Master, claws out, fangs bared, coming for her.

And then she remembered – not UNIT troops. UNIT knew nothing about them, or their commander, Captain Jötunson. These soldiers were impostors. Even if they had saved her life, even if they had tried to stop the Master, even if they had helped the Doctor. And they were still out there somewhere. Manchester, England, the world. They could be anywhere. She hadn't seen hide nor hair of any of them.

Wolsey twitched on the bed, then in the blink of an eye jumped off and away. She could feel him in her head, arriving somewhere in Moss Side, hissing at the local strays. Then she was distracted, as the door to her room

swung open. It's him, she thought. He's turned up at last. About time too.

A nurse wearing a starched uniform and a frown bustled into the room with Ace's dinner. Her heart fell. It wasn't him. Again.

'Dinner, Miss McShane,' Ace winced. 'You missed it when everyone else had theirs.'

Ace did her best not to struggle as the tray was placed over her legs and her bed was hoiked up into a sitting position. The nurse took the opportunity to cast a critical eye over Ace's wounds – she didn't seem too disappointed with them. And she never once asked how she'd managed to get mauled by a big cat in the middle of Fallowfield. Not that Ace was particularly feeling like going through the whole story again. She'd told the soldiers what had happened, and Jötunson had taken it from there – even going so far as to explain the colour of her eyes to the hospital, and tell them not to think too much about it. Another mark to the impostors.

'The doctor'll be doing his rounds in a few moments,' the nurse said, and stupidly Ace felt her heart skip. 'I'm sure he'll be happy with your progress.'

Then her face changed. A look of half confusion, half disgust appeared, as her hands fumbled with Ace's pillows. She withdrew a dainty gloved hand, holding the still struggling remains of a half pawed mouse. The nurse looked for all the world as if she was about to faint – despite the fact that Ace had looked far worse than the mouse when she'd been brought in. Wolsey, Ace thought, and tried not to smile.

'What?' Ace croaked. 'You let other patients have flowers.'

The nurse had still been frowning as she'd bustled out again, leaving

Ace to wonder what had happened to *her* Doctor. When would *he* come visiting, on his rounds? Would he ever?

Sarfield Dales: August 11. 1998

21:32

The Doctor was impressed with Jötunson precision: exactly twelve hours later, he marched back into the room. The Doctor knew it was exactly twelve hours. He'd counted every second of them. There wasn't much else to do.

'Doctor Smith,' Jötunson nodded.

The Doctor said nothing this time, his favourite trick. Most captors liked the sound of their own voices, and if they had a plan they just couldn't help blurting it out. In his considerable experience, that was. Never mind that the virus was clawing at the back of his mind, begging to take over. Never mind that it swore it could smell something different about this one, that his captor had no scent. It struggled with the Doctor, desperate for him to make a leap for the Captain's throat while he still had the strength. But still the Doctor remained silent.

'I see,' said Jötunson, making for the exit.

Scratch one plan, thought the Doctor.

'Wait,' he called. Jötunson paused in the doorway. 'Aren't you going to ask me anything? No impossible demands, no goading? No boasting that at last you have me right where you want me?'

Jötunson turned around, a smile spreading across his pale face. A smile that under other circumstances might be considered charming.

‘Is that what you’re used to, Doctor? You’ve been working too hard – you’ve rid the universe of all but the most clichéd villains.’

That surprised the Doctor, although he couldn’t pin down why. Was it the way he said “universe” instead of world, or was it the plain acknowledgement of his villainy?

‘What is it you want?’

‘Just one thing, Doctor,’ Jötunson said, leaning in until his nose touched the glass cage. ‘The answer to a simple question. Is John Smith your name?’

And again the glint was there in his eye. Even though he couldn’t see the harm in the question, the Doctor knew he couldn’t tell him the truth. Not if he ever wanted to escape his cage alive. There would be another way. He would find it. It was what he did.

‘Absolutely,’ the Doctor said, avoiding the Captain’s eye.

‘I see you’ll need some time to think it over,’ said Jötunson, heading again for the door.

‘Wait,’ called the Doctor. ‘Aren’t you even going to feed me?’

But Jötunson had already gone.

THREE

The Sarfield Dales: August 23. 1998

05:32

Time Passed.

The Sarfield Dales: August 26. 1998

17:01

The Doctor thought.

BACK FROM THE DEAD: THE RIDDLE

Manchester: August 27. 1998

13:00

Ace started to feel better.

The Sarfield Dales: September 2. 1998

01:13

The Doctor starved.

FOUR

The Sarfield Dales: September 5. 1998

14:32

The Doctor felt quite well, considering. His skin was turning a pale shade of grey, and looked thin as parchment, while his wiry black hair was falling out in chunks. It covered the glass floor of his cage, crept into his mouth when he slept – or, more accurately, when he lapsed into unconsciousness. His ribs were pushing tight against his flesh, his entire body little more than a carcass, skin stretched tight over fragile bones. His clear grey eyes were slowly turning into dried, rheumy balls. Yes, considering he'd had neither food nor water for longer than he could remember, he felt quite well.

'Doctor Smith?' said the Private, sitting with his back against the far wall, his eyes everywhere but on the Doctor. He was the latest in a long line of soldiers: many different faces, always the same question.

And all the time, the voice nagged in the back of his mind, clawing at his control. This was no way for a hunter to die. A hunter should die with his enemies' blood on his lips, racing across the plains after his prey. A hunter should *live* as it died, one last burst of wild freedom. Not trapped in a cage, pawed at by a thousand people, treated like an animal, not a hunter. The urge to throw himself at his attackers was overwhelming, but still the Doctor sat patiently cross-legged, saying nothing.

Out of his line of sight, a door opened. There were a few measured steps, and Jötunson face loomed at the glass.

'How's our guest?' he asked.

The Private looked awkward, avoiding his Captain's eyes.

'In a bad way, sir,' he mumbled. 'Perhaps we could get a doctor —'

Jötunson interrupted:

'Has he said anything?'

The Private shook his head, went back to staring at the walls. Jötunson shook his head slowly, then leant his head against the glass. For a moment, the Doctor gazed deep into his tormentor's deep blue eyes and saw . . . something. Half a memory jogged, but refused to take shape. Then Jötunson blinked, and the moment was gone. All he could see was his own blazing yellow eyes reflected back at him, and the blood pumping through his prey's body.

'You're not thinking, Doctor,' Jötunson spoke softly, so that only the Doctor could hear. His voice travelled easily through the thick glass. 'You're the only one here who knows how long you can last. To be honest, we all

expected you to die last week. We're flying in the dark here: we just assume you won't let yourself die, but if you do . . . '

Jötunson shrugged, and turned away. The Doctor's eyes stayed fixed, staring straight ahead.

'Let me know if anything changes, Private,' Jötunson barked, heading for the door. 'Goodbye, Dr Smith.'

Half a sound, nearly a word. The sound of a bone dry throat trying to force out words. Jötunson turned.

'I'm sorry?'

The Doctor coughed, clearing his throat. His voice cracked, and he winced at the pain, but still he forced the words out. He knew he had no other choice: he'd wasted too much time already.

'That isn't my name,' he said.

Jötunson smiled. Now they were getting somewhere.

'Then what is your name?'

The Doctor stared into his eyes, a challenge: 'You wouldn't be able to pronounce it.'

'Why not?'

There was a catch in the Captain's voice. The Private's attention was fully on the shattered remains of the creature in the cage. This was what they'd been waiting for. This was what they wanted. Now let's see what they'd do with it.

'It's not a human name,' he said. Jötunson merely nodded.

He turned to the Private, who had leapt out of his chair in triumph,

barely restraining himself from clapping his Captain on the back. Jötunson was, however, calm as ever. His eyes sparkled, but the rest of his face betrayed no sign of emotion.

‘Go and inform the Sergeant that the prisoner has identified himself as a non-human being,’ the Private saluted and hurried out of the room. Jötunson turned to the Doctor and said, almost sympathetically: ‘Now the kid gloves come off.’

The Doctor said: ‘Why are you doing this?’

And for a moment, the mask fell. Jötunson lowered himself to the floor, his eyes locked on the Doctor’s. He put a hand up to his shorn head, and asked softly:

‘How much have you worked out?’

Silence. The Doctor considered carefully.

‘You’re not part of them,’ he said. ‘You don’t want the same thing. They want me, you want something from me. You . . .’

The Doctor’s voice cracked, and he stopped, leaning his back against the glass wall. He was exhausted, and even he couldn’t be sure how much longer he could last. He was pinning all his hopes on Jötunson wanting him alive, but a true hunter should never need to gamble that way. He should risk all in the hunt, not in captivity.

‘You’ve hardly got any of it,’ Jötunson said, sympathetically, and reached into his pocket.

His eyes stayed locked on the Doctor’s as he withdrew his hand, clutching something the Doctor nearly remembered. A large, over-sized

playing card, with a patterned back. He felt something shift in his head, and felt snow against his face. With a swift flick of the wrist, the Captain sent the card spinning towards the glass of the cage. Just as it should strike and bounce away, somehow it fluttered through, landing in the Doctor's lap. He looked at Jötunson, unable to ask.

'Breathable glass,' the Captain explained. 'It keeps its structure only as long as I want it to. A bit of an anachronism, but I was hoping no-one would notice.'

The Doctor looked down at the card in his lap. A picture of a one-legged man, hanging upside down from a tree. He was struggling to get out of a straight-jacket, a magician of some sort. In his hand, he carried an umbrella with a handle that was a red question mark. *The Hanged Man* from a Tarot deck. The symbol of regeneration. The Doctor looked up at Jötunson, and finally the memory came back to him.

'Good, you remember. I thought you never would.'

'I didn't expect such a slow promotion,' the Doctor croaked. 'Thirty years?'

'Time is relative, Doctor.'

The Doctor leaned forward in his cage, nearly collapsing with the effort. He whispered softly, but the sound still carried.

'Why are you doing this?'

Jötunson stood, brushing down his uniform, and smiled. All compassion was gone from his face, the mask slipping back into place.

'I'll tell you what, Doctor. I like a good game, so why don't we make a

challenge of it? You answer my riddle and I'll let you out of the cage, free to go. How does that sound?'

The Doctor nodded, eyes on eyes. Jötunson leaned in again, forehead to glass.

'Why am I doing this?' he asked.

The Doctor's head dropped, and Jötunson smiled.

'Think about it,' he said, and marched out of the room.

Moments later, the Private returned, armed with more questions for the Doctor to ignore. His mind was elsewhere, now. He had a riddle to solve.

Manchester: September 5. 1998

13:21

There was a loud tick, and another second passed.

Ace watched the other patients from behind her sunglasses. Every half-hour or so, one of them would get called away – directed to the doctors' rooms or wheeled down to radiography. Nothing exciting enough to be called an event. Sometimes one of the patients would look at her – cautious but friendly glances, wondering who she was waiting for, what was wrong with her: if they could see the bandages beneath her badge-covered jacket, they wouldn't need to wonder. Whether because they couldn't see eyes under the sunglasses, or because of something in the way she sat – poised, impatient, tense – nobody spoke to her.

From the outside, the hospital was an old fashioned kind of place – all

square windows and marble columns. It looked like the designer's intention had been to scare disease out of those weak-willed enough to succumb. From the inside, it looked much like any other hospital: antiseptic white and full of tired eyed people, waiting for the worst. She saw a young girl, probably the same age as her, hand in hand with her small boy. It made her think of Wolsey.

Another tick, and another second past.

The kitling was prowling again, in some overgrown back garden down Longsight way. There was a female cat with him that held a new fascination for him – he was growing up fast, losing the layer of fat that kept him warm when he was a kitten. His body was growing leaner by the day, his eyes growing keener. And he was starting to want his privacy: Ace backed out of his mind, sending a wave of apology.

Not that the kitling wasn't concerned for her – he often joined her on her vigil – he despised the waiting. The inaction tore at every fibre of his being, leaving him desperate to escape, to hunt, to live. Not that it was doing much for Ace, either.

A tick, a second, gone.

How dare he do this to her. Her, of all people. Leave her stranded like this, miles from anywhere and anyone she knew. Miles and decades. If it wasn't for the credit card Jötunson had left for her, she would have been out on the streets. Another point to the impostors.

She knew what had happened – he'd got too involved dealing with the Master, perhaps even Jötunson and his team too. He'd forgotten all about her for the time being, lying recovering, useless, in a hospital bed. So what if he

hadn't done it before – it was just another sign of how distracted he'd grown recently. Planning something big, no doubt.

Any moment now he'd waltz in through the waiting room doors, twirling that bloody umbrella of his, grinning that inane grin. And when he did, Ace would give him the hug of his lives. Then she'd kill him.

Tick.

A nurse spotted her from the other end of the room – perhaps the same one who'd looked after her before? It was hard to say: the time she'd spent in her private room remained a haze in her mind, a mixture of drugs, fatigue and boredom. Either way, she seemed to recognise Ace. A little sigh, putting down her clipboard, pacing over to Ace's little plastic sheet. The young woman did her best to ignore her, pushing her sunglasses further up her nose.

'Miss McShane?'

'Ace,' she growled.

The nurse put her hands on her hips and cocked her head to one side. Yes, she was the same one: that particular gesture stuck in Ace's mind. She'd seen it often enough.

'Didn't we discharge you last week?'

Ace didn't catch her eyes, just tried to sound resolute.

'I'm waiting for someone.'

'The same someone you were waiting for yesterday? And the day before that? And –'

'Yes,' Ace interrupted, hoping to suggest that that was the end of it.

'Isn't there somewhere else you can wait? We need to keep this area

clear for patients.'

Ace looked up at her, wondering if she could see the glow behind her dark glasses. She tried to keep the snarl off her face, but not too hard.

'He'll be expecting me here,' she said.

'Have you ever thought that he might not be coming?' the nurse asked, not too unkindly. Ace said nothing.

With a final entreaty to her covered eyes, the nurse wandered away, said something to the receptionist. Ace didn't care. She settled back in her chair, to wait, willing to wait until she qualified for a pension if that's what it took. The Doctor would be coming for her, and she had to be here when he did.

A tick, and time passed.

The Sarfield Dales: September 5. 1998

15:34

Time passed.

Every ten minutes or so a new soldier would enter the room and ask him a long list of questions: how did they get into his TARDIS, how did they fly it, what was he doing on Earth, where were the rest of his people, when would the invasion begin, so on and so on. Ten minutes later, and a new soldier would enter, the old one leaving without a word, and without an answer.

The Doctor sat in a tired lotus, his eyes closed, trying to concentrate. He ignored every outside distraction – the relentless drone of questions, the

way his skin was starting to tear and bleed. He'd lost a tooth not half an hour ago, and felt a pang of guilt at how good the blood felt throbbing down his dry throat. The trickle had soon stopped, that well nearly dry. Only you know how long you can last, Jötunson had said, but it wasn't true. The Doctor had long ago passed the point where he could judge his own chances.

It didn't matter. He had to focus all his energies on solving the Captain's riddle. Something in the way Jötunson had offered him that small hope made the Doctor realise it was the key to everything: his capture, his starvation, his infection, everything.

Given time, he was sure he could solve it. Given time, and a clear head. Even now, the insidious voice of the Cheetah in him pleaded. It begged him to fight, to die with dignity and freedom. It howled to feel flesh between its teeth, to have its thirst slaked by somebody else's blood. It demanded Jötunson, fleeing for his life across the plains, all in vain. It interrupted every thought the Doctor had now, stopping him from making the connections he needed, stopping him from planning. There was something bigger here than UNIT, bigger than him, and Jötunson was the key. Jötunson was . . . what was Jötunson?

The Doctor knew he had to find the answer, but all he could see was himself, tearing at Jötunson throat with a Cheetah's teeth.

He settled back, and time passed.

FIVE

Manchester: September 6. 1998

08:15

Ace sat, watching a small knot of patients slowly build into a sea. She had been there since seven now, and still the numbers were growing. They'd reach a lull by the afternoon, ready to build again by evening. Once the pubs closed, they'd reach a peak – both physically and vocally – and Ace would take that as a sign to pack up and go to her hotel. Six hours sleep and then back to the hospital again. The first routine she'd had in nearly four years.

She could see the receptionist eyeing her – an old woman with a bouffant of white hair piled up on her head. There was a look on her face that Ace couldn't read, something that softened her eyes and loosened her jaw whenever she looked her way. Ace tried to ignore it. Instead, she kept her eyes firmly focused on the door, while the eyes in her head stayed fixed on

the road outside.

It was a rare moment of stillness for Wolsey – perched cautiously on a chair outside the new pub. It was mostly frequented by students, and a couple of doctors, but it afforded a perfect view of Oxford Road. If the Doctor walked that way to the hospital, Wolsey would spot him and Ace would be out there in a second. But he hadn't walked by yet, and Ace could feel Wolsey's muscles starting to ache for a bit of excitement. But still the kitling stayed motionless, green eyes on the passing world.

'I thought you might like this,' said the receptionist, suddenly blocking Ace's view of the door.

She was stood right in front of her, that look on her face again, holding a cup of tea right under Ace's nose. She could smell powdered tea, powdered milk, fluorides in the water. Fighting back the urge to hiss that the surprises gave her, Ace nodded and took the cup gingerly. She didn't dare let herself smile, in case she was showing more tooth than she should, but did manage a cheerful grin. At least, it seemed cheerful from her side of it. Whatever, it seemed to please the receptionist, who beamed back in response.

'I shouldn't worry, love,' she said. 'He'll turn up in the end.'

Of course he will, Ace didn't say, merely nodding.

'Not a man on this earth that likes visiting hospitals.'

And at least one not from this Earth with a similar reticence. She took a sip from her tea, risking a broad smile. No screams, thank God.

'Just let me know if there's anything else I can do,' the receptionist said, a hand on Ace's shoulder. For a moment, she looked surprised by how

firm the muscle was under the nylon jacket.

‘Thanks,’ Ace said, and was surprised to find she meant it.

But she didn’t say another word to the receptionist for the rest of the day.

Manchester: September 6. 1998

09:30

‘Ace, forgive me,’ Jötunson said in his unidentifiable accent. ‘I . . . well, I’ve put this off too long.’

He stood, ramrod straight in his blue naval uniform, just like the first time she’d seen him, cap under his arm at the Brigadier’s funeral. He had marched through the waiting room doors just a few seconds ago and, with a quick nod to the receptionist, had strode straight over to Ace. Almost as if he’d known exactly where she’d be.

Ace tried to keep herself calm, barely batting an eyelid as she called Wolsey to her. A pause, and then the kitling was crouched by her legs, waiting to leap up at the Captain. She could tell he was spoiling for a fight, glad of some action after a morning watching people hurry by. Even so, he’d managed to miss Jötunson – perhaps he came in through the A&E department on Upper Brook Street. Or perhaps Wolsey wasn’t as vigilant as he should’ve been.

A quick flash of shame from the kitling, but all the same he was defiant: if the Captain had approached passed him, he would have seen him.

'I know who you are,' Ace said. She could feel her heart racing, her eyes turning. There was a part of her that wanted Jötunson to react badly, just so she could pounce. Wolsey wasn't the only one who wanted to shake off a few cobwebs.

A slight twitch from the Captain, that was all.

'I beg your pardon?'

Time to hit him with the big guns.

'I rang UNIT. They've never heard of you.'

'Ah,' said Jötunson, looking nervously around him. 'Do you mind if we discuss this somewhere a bit more . . . private?'

So they'd adjourned to the pub. They sat in the upstairs area – the smoke downstairs offended Ace's delicate sense of smell – Jötunson with his back to the emergency exit, Ace carefully positioned with her eyes on the road outside, and the main stairs on one side. If need be, she could be out of there in ten seconds. Not that she showed it – she sat relaxed, a glass of water on the table and a sleeping Wolsey sitting on her lap. As she spoke, she absent-mindedly stroked his soft black fur. He purred slightly, but never once stopped watching Jötunson slit-eyed.

'Well?' she asked.

Jötunson took a sip of his drink – some Germanic beer or other. Ace could never get used to the taste, even before Wolsey. He put it down, and fanned his hands out on the table in front of him. It was a strangely disarming gesture.

'I am connected to UNIT,' he said, carrying on swiftly as Ace raised an

eyebrow, 'but most of the British HQ wouldn't know it. I'm the head of a special force, set up by Geneva, and to take orders only directly from them. Foreign Hazard Duty division – FHD. We look out for hostile aliens and we neutralise them.'

'I thought that was UNIT's job,' Ace said archly.

'Sort of, yes,' he admitted. 'But we've got authorisation to use slightly more . . . specialised techniques.'

'Like using the Doctor to hunt down the Master?'

'Ace, there's something you need to know.'

'Where *is* the Doctor? Has he sent you to pick me up?'

Jötunson face fell, and Ace knew. She could tell in the way he looked into his beer, danced the glass around the table. Wolsey pricked him ears up, hearing his Sister's heart skip a beat. He could feel the lump forming in her throat, the sting in her yellow eyes. She knew already, but even so she refused to believe it.

'We managed to corner the Master, after we found you,' Jötunson was saying. 'The Doctor was very upset – he cared for you a great deal.'

'Cares,' Ace heard herself saying, from the end of a long corridor. 'He cares for me.'

'There was a fight. A big one. There was nothing we could do, Ace. They were both . . .'

Jötunson trailed off, but Ace wasn't listening. She was too busy watching her world crumbling around her ears.

Manchester: September 6. 1998

13:15

Ace sat on a bench in Whitworth Park, Wolsey at her feet – alternately looking up at her, and glaring at any passer-bys who got too close – and her back to the art gallery. There was a blank look on her face as her sunglasses stared out of the giant grey statue in front of her. Pigeons danced on his shoulders, not caring who he was, or how important he'd been. In her hand, there was a key.

'I have to get back to London,' Jötunson had said. 'Make a report to HQ, then Geneva. You could come, if you'd like.'

The whole pub had stared at her, silence dropping over them like a net. Their drinks had shattered on the floor as she dived across the table to get at his throat. Her vision had been clouded red, adrenaline coursing through her veins. She'd hissed, she'd bared razor sharp canines, her sunglasses falling from her face, as she'd threatened to kill him for lying, for not telling her, for letting it happened. Then there'd been tears, and he'd wrapped strong arms around her, taking her head to his chest. His cold blue stare had embarrassed the entire pub into turning away.

'I want to be alone,' she'd said, fragile.

Jötunson had nodded, understanding.

'You've still got the credit card?' she'd nodded. 'Use it to pay for a hotel – any price. We'll find you that way.'

And then she'd come here, to the park, to be alone. And alone she was.

Wolsey had tried his best to comfort her, trotting quickly after her, running in and out of her legs, trying to trip her up. He'd lay on his back at batted at her bootlaces in that way that she had enjoyed when he was just a little kitten, but still she wouldn't respond. Instead, he'd settled back to guard her – sensing the overwhelming desire not to be troubled emanating from her. Birds sang in the trees, but he didn't go to chase them. Children played in front of him, but he didn't hiss, not unless they got too close. Despite days spent doing nothing, despite the desire to stretch the last week's waiting out of his legs, Wolsey sat motionless, and waited for his Sister to make her move.

'Take care of her,' Jötunson had said as he left, bending down to try and stroke Wolsey. The kitling had hissed, trying to catch the Captain with a claw, but he pulled back too fast. Ace paid it no attention, perhaps assuming he was confused by the grief pouring out of her, perhaps not caring. 'Take care of yourself.'

It wasn't a warm day, and Ace hadn't eaten. Her arms were a mass of Goosebumps and her stomach complained. She didn't notice. The world around her watched itself reflected back in her sunglasses, never making a move towards her, those that did quickly retreating in the face of tooth, claw and fur. In the end, they all left her alone. All alone.

Manchester: September 6. 1998

19:59

Ace sat, motionless, Wolsey sat at her feet watching the night.

The evening had come and gone without event, the sky gradually shifted from blue, to red, to black in what seemed like seconds. Despite the darkness, Ace still wore her glasses, still clutched at the key in her hand. She didn't notice the moon rising high in the sky, or Wolsey's frequent bursts of worry as the night got colder. He could keep away any attackers, but the cold was a prey he couldn't defeat, try as he might. He was just beginning to plan desperate action, when it happened.

Ace's eyes glowed bright, burning even through her sunglasses, and it *hit*.

Without realising, she was on her knees, her mouth pushed into a snarl by the extended canines now resting there. Her heart pounded hard, ringing in her ears and making her stomach somersault. Her body flooded with adrenaline, making her muscles scream to race to the other side of the world. It felt like she was dying, like she was flying, like she was alive at last. And when she opened her eyes, she could see somewhere else.

Her world was six feet round, enclosed in glass that turned everything else into vague swirls of colour. It was dark, almost impenetrably so, but she knew that was more to do with the condition of her eyes than anything else. She felt weak, her mouth dry, felt trapped, felt the urge to fight her way out of her cage. But where would she go? How could she escape? Fear and doubt gnawed at her mind, whilst the urge to hunt burnt in her soul.

'Ace,' she felt his dry throat rasp, tearing itself to blood.

‘Doctor,’ she whispered back.

She felt a wave a relief, although whether it came from him or her, she could never tell. Then, as suddenly as it had come, the vision was gone, and she was alone again. But not forever.

Realising the strength of the vision had knocked her to the ground – how long had it been since they had done that? – Ace jumped to her feet. She was already running when she sent a wave of urgency to Wolsey.

Find him!

And within a second, the park was empty.

Edale: September 6. 1998

21:03

Ace couldn't sit in a seat, so instead waited by the doors, pacing up and down. The train was nearly empty – nobody travelled down to London at this time of night, they were all busy coming back – but she still managed to get a couple of strange looks whenever the buffet trolley went by. There were only five minutes until the train hit the station, but each second of them seemed like a lifetime. She wished, not for the first time, that she could've jumped in with Wolsey, but that would only leave her trapped in the same cage as the Doctor. Wolsey couldn't even jump the Doctor away – he wasn't prey, he was hunter and he needed his own kitling to do that. So as it was, all Wolsey could do was watch.

She could feel him, in the back of her mind, his eyes on the Doctor, on

the soldier barking questions at them. He used the Doctor as a shield to stop the soldiers seeing him – he was growing more cunning with every day – but even so, he had to keep perfectly still. He could practically feel the Doctor's hearts beating through his paper-thin skin. The Doctor might not be dead, but he was very close to it. Every second would count.

'So how are we feeling?' she heard a voice say, and it took her a couple of seconds to realise it was actually Wolsey who had heard it.

The Doctor didn't move, just sat breathing heavily, his hearts pounding hard. Ace couldn't see, but she guessed that his eyes were closed. She willed Wolsey to move where he could get a view of the speaker, and the kitling tried his best. There was something in the voice she recognised.

'How much longer are you going to keep this up?' Jötunson. It was starting to make sense now. 'There's still time for us to save you, if you'll be reasonable and answer our questions.'

Still the Doctor remained silent. There was a sickly grey sheen to his skin that worried Ace. She wondered what they'd done to him, wanted to tell Jötunson that every inch of pain the Doctor had felt would be revisited on him. And she wondered why the Doctor didn't do anything, had let himself get into this state.

Through Wolsey's eyes, Ace could see that Jötunson was smiling. The soldier behind him, however, could only see his back.

'You can't keep it from us forever, Doctor,' Jötunson said. 'We'll find your invasion force, and we'll defeat them. You might as well tell us.'

Invasion force? What was he talking about?

Jötunson leaned in: 'Come on, Doctor. Cat got your tongue?'

And then the train pulled into the station, and Ace was out of the doors as soon as they would open. Because she was paying attention to where she was going, she completely missed Jötunson dropping a large wink for only Wolsey to see.

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

21:29

Ace saw the fence, judged how easily she could slip over it. She saw the gravel on the other side, considering how much damage it would do when she landed. And she saw the guard, pacing up and down, rifle in hands, and called Wolsey to her. Time to get to work.

He appeared quickly, his mind on the job in hand. Ace barely had to tell him what to do: he already knew. As he slunk towards the guard, Ace tensed her legs, testing her strength. The grass under her feet was slightly damp, but she knew she wouldn't slip. A sky full of stars watched down at her as she gazed down the hill at the base. It was the only thing in the surrounding countryside, the hills and valleys almost designed to hide it from view. It had the look of an old fifties base – and Ace had seen plenty of those in her time – that had been left to rot, out where no-one could see it. But now lights burned in nearly every window, and the filth of forty years neglect was slowly starting to be cleaned away.

Wolsey had already scouted the area for her – she knew the base in

front of her was just the tip of the iceberg. Below ground, there was more – huge workshops (in one of which sat the TARDIS and a team of scientists), barracks, armouries and the Doctor's cell. Above ground was where Jötunson office was located. Ace had a choice: rush down to the Doctor, see what she could do; get hold of Jötunson and force him to set the Doctor free. She thought she knew which she would do.

The soldier spotted Wolsey, looked around to see if anyone was looking, and tutted him over. Ace was off.

She barrelled down the hillside at an amazing speed, her heart barely ticking over, her legs feeling like they'd been meant to do this all her life. As Wolsey sauntered over to the soldier, he crouched down and started to scratch behind the kitling's ears. The fence started to loom up on Ace. Wolsey started to purr, and Ace prayed the soldier couldn't hear how fake it sounded. The kitling rolled over onto its back as the soldier started rubbing its stomach. With a minute effort, Ace pushed and soared into the air, clearing the fence and rolling without a sound to her feet on the other side.

Looking quickly left and right, Ace hurried towards Jötunson office. With a quick turn, Wolsey was on his feet and striking out with a well timed claw. As he bolted off into the darkness, the soldier screeched and pulled his hand back, sucking the blood from his palm. Looking around, he couldn't see the cat, nor its owner, bolting away silent and sure-footed.

Picking up his rifle, he went back to his patrol.

22:01

With a soft kick, Ace managed to get the door to Jötunson office open first try. Wolsey followed close behind as she padded into the opulence.

The walls were panelled with dark oak, and every chair was leather. There were row after row of books on the walls – Ace pulled a couple out and saw texts on the Norse Eddas and quantum engineering. The carpet was rich and plush, a deep claret on spoiled by a shattered glass at one end, a drying burgundy stain spreading slowly out. The desk at one end of the room was spotless, except for a telephone on one corner and an ornate chessboard on the other. Studying them, Ace noticed that the pieces were characters from Norse mythology. The black king was missing. Beside the desk, there was a door which Ace hoped lead to a bathroom – the Doctor would need water when he was set free – but seemed to lead nowhere.

Without pausing to be puzzled by this, Ace tried all of the drawers in the desk, and finally found a half drunk bottle of Evian and a Mars bar. Pocketing these for later, Ace started investigating further. She was just running through the filing cabinet, when she heard Wolsey starting to hiss, his ears pricked up. Ace listened carefully. She could hear footsteps approaching, slow measured steps. Jötunson.

It was time to get started.

SIX

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

8:15

Jötunson sat behind his desk, a pile of papers sitting on the table in front of him. Various reports to be passed on to his backer, requests for more staffing, more funding. He wasn't really paying attention to it: today was the last day for his little venture. By this time tomorrow, UNIT would have found out and the gig would be up. The resulting investigation would lead to UNIT being disbanded, for the second and final time. Ironically enough, Jötunson own actions would prove beyond all doubt that the threat of foreign activity was serious, however, and most of UNIT's staff would be commandeered when the FHD division were set up for real. Everybody was happy, except for his backer of course. But he was sure he'd grow used to prison food eventually.

No, things were growing to a head, exactly as planned.

But there was still work to do – the Doctor's companion, for example, had to be talked to. By rights, he should be just catching the train up to Manchester now, in time for their meeting, but he just couldn't see the point. Since it was the last day, he could afford to let the mask slip a little. So he'd made other arrangements. His eyes slipped to the heavy wooden door in the corner of the room, carefully shut, carefully locked.

Which gave him a little extra time to himself to relax, as best he could. With a quick flourish, he signed all of the papers in front of him – one of them, perhaps a joke, perhaps not, he signed with his real name. He didn't smile: he rarely had any facial expression when he was alone. Instead he settled back in his leather chair and put his arms behind his head. Deep inside his blue eyes, universes were being born.

Manchester: September 6. 1998

09:30

'Well?' Ace asked.

They were sat in one of the city's many pubs – relatively new, looking like it had just dropped onto the road by the hospital. Jötunson had sat facing the bar at one of the tables by the window, knowing how relaxed Ace would feel if she could watch the exits, keep an eye out for an ambush. She wouldn't expect a one man assault. Jötunson took a sip of his drink – a German beer he had developed a taste for in . . . how many years ago? He put it down, and

fanned his hands out on the table in front of him: a carefully planned disarming gesture.

'I am connected to UNIT,' he said, carrying on swiftly as Ace raised an eyebrow, 'but most of the British HQ wouldn't know it. I'm the head of a special force, set up by Geneva, and to take orders only directly from them. Foreign Hazard Duty division – FHD. We look out for hostile aliens and we neutralise them.'

A slight lie: he supposed he could have said 'The idiot I've managed to convince I'm right works for UNIT' but he doubted it would have the same effect. And as for the truth . . .

'I thought that was UNIT's job,' Ace said archly.

'Sort of, yes,' he admitted. 'But we've got authorisation to use slightly more . . . specialised techniques.'

'Like using the Doctor to hunt down the Master?'

He took a sigh, and looked into Ace's eyes. Here it comes.

'Ace, there's something you need to know.'

'Where *is* the Doctor? Has he sent you to pick me up?'

And he said what he knew he had to say, another line in the script over with:

'We managed to corner the Master, after we found you,' Jötunson was saying. 'The Doctor was very upset – he cared for you a great deal.'

'Cares,' Ace said, her hands obsessively running through her kitling's fur. 'He cares for me.'

'There was a fight. A big one. There was nothing we could do, Ace.'

They were both killed. I'm sorry.'

She sat looking at him, shaking her head. He could see her muscles tensing, knew what was coming next. He put his beer down carefully, his own muscles starting to dance beneath his blue uniform.

'No,' she said.

'I'm sorry, Ace. The Doctor's dead.'

And her kitling dropped from her lap as she exploded forward, over the table in a second, the drinks crashing to the floor. Her eyes burned yellow, and he held their stare. He saw the fangs in his mouth as she hissed at him, and knew they could easily cut through the flesh of his neck, leaving him gasping for breath and dying. She slammed into him, and he held her easily, swaying back slightly to make it look like she was overpowering him. Another second, and the rush of the attack was gone, and there were tears streaming down her face. He put an arm around her.

'He can't be dead,' she said softly. 'He can't.'

He said nothing, holding her to his chest until the tears dried up. All the time, his eyes were on the little kitling, still climbing on Ace's vacated chair. His eyes burned a vicious green, and his claws were out, ready to strike. Jötunson manoeuvred Ace in between him and the mass of tooth, claw and fur. Carefully, he reached into his pocket, pulling out a small key.

'Here, Ace,' he said firmly. 'The Doctor had made some arrangements. He wanted you to have this.'

Ace pulled back, fought to stop the tears. Her eyes were a clear dark brown, red around the edges.

‘What is it?’

‘The key to a flat,’ Jötunson said, pressing the key into her hand. ‘In Perivale.’

Ace looked at the key in her hand, and burst into tears again. Jötunson took her in his arms again, but this time his eyes were on a heavy wooden door in the side wall of the hospital. Just a few more minutes, he thought, and turned to catch the kitling glaring at him still. Feeling brave, he stuck his tongue out at it.

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

12:30

Jötunson sat at his desk, slowly picking at the plate in front of him: chicken, salad, a white wine and grape sauce, and a glass of burgundy by his elbow. He knew it went against etiquette, but he preferred the dark, dry taste of a red to the airy, vaguely fruit taste of a white. And after all, they were his taste buds. As he dropped fragments of the food into his mouth with his fingers – he’d spent so many years without cutlery, it was an effort to use it these days – his eyes were on the chessboard at the corner of his desk.

White was winning, having moved black into a position where, although he was still active, he couldn’t hope to win. He’d lost all of his knights though, and that was a worry. But not too much, though: he had a pawn waiting at the other end of the board, one move away from being a knight reborn. As he reached across to pluck the black king – Odin, Allfather of the Æsir – his elbow

nudged the glass of wine from his desk. It hit the carpet, finding something hard there, shattered. The deep red wine soaked into the carpet, staining it blood red.

Best leave it, thought Jötunson. Don't want to get my hands dirty.

There was a knock at the door, and Private Hicks hesitantly entered the room.

'Yes, Hicks?'

He looked nervous, bless him. Who'd have thought such a quiet little boy could bring down such a grand scheme as his? But only with the right guidance, of course.

'It's about the house guest, sir,' Hicks stuttered.

'Is he alright?'

A glint appeared in Hicks' eye, and for the first time Jötunson could truly believe this was the man who would inform UNIT, throwing his career onto its spear for the sake of one man.

'No, sir. I think he's dying. I thought perhaps we could get some food to him?'

'No, Private,' Jötunson said, dropping a morsel of chicken into his own mouth. 'I don't think we could.'

'We won't find anything from him if he's dead, sir,' Hicks snapped.

Jötunson leant carefully back in his chair, giving a grin that was nearly a snarl.

'Are you questioning my command, Private?'

And for a full thirty seconds, Hicks stared deep into his Captain's eyes.

Only he alone knew what he saw there.

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

20:42

‘What in God’s name do you think you’re doing?’

Jötunson flinched at the sheer volume of the General’s voice: a thousand decibels at least, fed directly into his ear by the telephone. He leant back in his leather chair, nestling the receiver into the nape of his neck. With a practised gesture, he kicked both legs up onto his desk, the one on the other. He let his eyes wander as he lowered his tone of voice: placating with an edge of fear – let the General think he had him.

‘I’m sorry, sir,’ he said, ‘but I thought this was what we wanted?’

He could practically hear the General’s face turning purple.

‘What I want, *Captain*,’ he spat the word out, letting it rest in the air for a second. ‘What I want is proof of an alien conspiracy. We want this creature to talk.’

‘We’ve already got the documentation, sir. A self-confessed alien, amazing powers, advanced technology, the whole she-bang. And for nearly a decade he’s been infiltrating UNIT, right under your nose, sir.’

He tried not to smile. He needed the General just annoyed enough to question his motives, just what exactly he was doing.

‘And the rest of it?’ barked the General. ‘How am I supposed to take the FHD idea to Geneva without an imminent invasion to force their hands?’

Jötunson beamed broadly, the smile drawing only a confused look from his dark companion, standing by the bookcase, silent as the grave.

'I guarantee you, General, the FHD division *will* be operation by next year,' Jötunson placated, failing to add: 'With Brigadier Bambera at its head.'

'With no confession from our Guest, Captain?'

'You'll get your confession,' snapped Jötunson, his voice growing hard.

'That's not what I hear, Captain,' Jötunson motioned to his dark companion to fill his glass. A little more burgundy before the final act. 'What I hear is that your starving our guest to death. He could go at any moment, and you're no closer to the truth.'

And neither are you, General, the Captain failed to say, sipping instead from his wine.

'The way I hear it, you *want* our guest to die.'

Jötunson snapped back fiercely, never once moving from his reclining position. The hook nosed figure at the other end of the room watched him blank faced, perhaps enjoying the performance, perhaps admiring his composure.

'Don't be stupid, sir. I want our guest alive as much as you. But he's a dangerous creature – we have to break him first,' a delicate pause, a sip of wine, then: 'if you think you can do better, you can come and relieve me of duty.'

With a flourish, he hung up the telephone. Down in London, he knew, the General would be sitting, head in his hands, muttering 'What have I done?' When the MPs came to question him in – he checked his watch – ten minutes,

they would get a full confession, and UNIT would be mobilised. He drained his glass, and looked to the dark figure at the end of the room. He started to clap, slowly.

Jötunson stood, and took his bow.

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

21:03

‘How much longer are you going to keep this up? There’s still time for us to save you, if you’ll be reasonable and answer our questions.’

Jötunson stood at the edge of the globe, looking in. The breathable glass distorted the Doctor’s pale form, but not as much as it should have. He was in a bad way: his skin starting to peel away from his body, thin blood leaking out. His hair had completely gone now, save for a few thick yellow hairs starting to poke their way up all over his body. They were the same vivid yellow as the Doctor’s eyes when he gave the Captain a tired look. Jötunson smiled back, the gesture hidden from the soldier sitting anxiously behind him.

‘You can’t keep it from us forever, Doctor,’ Jötunson said, for the benefit of the Sergeant. ‘We’ll find your invasion force, and we’ll defeat them. You might as well tell us.’

The Doctor closed his eyes, turned his head.

Jötunson leaned in: ‘Come on, Doctor. Cat got your tongue?’

And he gave Ace’s kitling a large wink, the creature’s face just poking out from behind the Doctor’s greying back. He wondered if Ace was watching.

Leaning in closer, so that the Private couldn't hear, Jötunson whispered:

'Doctor?'

The Time Lord's yellow eyes flicked open, and he regarded the Captain suspiciously.

'Thought any more on that riddle?' he asked. 'Got an answer for me?'

The Doctor was silent.

'You'd better hurry. You can't have much longer left.'

And leaning back, Jötunson let out a loud chuckle. Somewhere, an audience were applauding their hearts out. He resisted the urge to take a bow.

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

21:24

Jötunson was back at his desk, flicking through the paper work. It didn't bore him – nothing bored him, as such. He merely signed it with a flick of his wrist, tidied it into a neat pile, and set it to one side. Then he turned to his silent companion, locking his blue eyes onto his two black holes and smiled.

'Something wrong, Munin?' he asked.

His companion said nothing, merely standing watching him with two eyes that were all pupil, no whites. His hook nose cast a shadow over his mouth, leaving his face looking like it was built more out of shadow than flesh and bone. His shaven head reflected the light, accentuating the shadow. The

dark coat he wrapped himself in completed the impression of some dark demon, carved out of night and waiting for a master to instruct him. The same dark demon that had captured the Doctor in the first place.

‘Come on,’ Jötunson said. ‘Out with it.’

And Munin spoke, a low, grave voice, husky from lack of practise.

‘How much longer do we stay here, Loki?’

Jötunson tutted, shook his head.

‘Not Loki, not here. Jötunson.’

Munin shrugged: ‘Loki, Jötun’s son, it’s all one to me. When do we go?’

‘We go when we go. Not a moment before.’

‘We’ve stayed here too long. Wasted too much time on distractions.’

‘I decide what’s important, or not. Understand?’

Munin shrugged, solemn. Jötunson motioned to the door by the desk.

‘Go on, get out. You can’t be here when she arrives.’

And without a word, Munin marched over to the door and pulled it open. It came easily on well-oiled hinges. Outside, there was a view of perfection: green rolling hills, blue crystal lakes, birds singing in the trees and the mid-afternoon sun beating down. Munin looked out of the office window, and if he felt any surprise at seeing night fast taking hold outside, he didn’t show it. Spreading his coat wide, two great wings unfolding, he took a hop and took to the air.

As Jötunson, Loki, closed the door, he took a moment to watch the great black raven flapping casually across the afternoon sky. He smiled, and closed the door. Night settled. Time Passed.

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22:15

‘Move away from the door,’ Ace growled.

Obligingly, Jötunson raised his hands, pausing only to flick the light on. He stepped away from the door, cautiously glaring at the seething mass of fur at his feet. The kitling had taken an instant dislike to him – he had no idea why – but it worried him. He got the feeling that at any moment, the little creature would snap and launch itself at his face. Even though he knew it wouldn’t happen, it unnerved him. Despite that, he gave Ace a disarming grin.

‘Decided against London, did you?’ Jötunson asked casually.

‘You too?’ Ace asked.

He shrugged: ‘You know how it is.’

Ace crouched on the edge of the desk, tensing to pounce. All that power, waiting to be unleashed. He was treading a delicate line.

‘No,’ she said, her eyes blazing yellow, ‘but I’m starting to get the picture. Why don’t you fill the rest of it in?’

‘Where would you like me to start? I was born in a big house in the country –’

Ace snarled, rocking slightly in her stance. The Captain got the message.

‘What’re you doing to the Doctor?’

Jötunson looked at her, for a moment letting the mask slip. Perhaps she saw the fatigue deep in his eyes, the endless sense of his place in the world, the tireless play-acting. Perhaps she didn’t.

‘You’re asking the wrong questions,’ he said softly. ‘Don’t you want to be there?’

‘Where?’ Ace asked, taken aback.

‘When,’ Jötunson corrected.

‘When what?’

There was a knock on the door. With his eyes on Ace, Jötunson called a reply.

‘You’d better come, sir,’ the Sergeant called through the heavy wood.

‘What is it?’ he asked, ignoring a warning glance from Ace.

‘It’s the house guest, sir. He’s dying.’

Jötunson directed a look at Ace. Her face went stone hard.

‘Take me to him.’

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22:35

Jötunson stood back, letting the blood trickle down his face unheeded.

Shattered glass lay all over the floor, soldiers crowding round the only door in, all of them looking at the same spot. Sat not two feet from Jötunson feet was Ace, blood soaking into her clothes, a single tear falling down her face and she whispered silently. Resting on her lap was the Doctor's greying naked body. Jagged glass had ripped in to it, one long piece spearing his primary heart. His thin blood was pooled all around him, and his deep grey eyes were closed. He didn't breathe, and his hearts didn't beat. They had stopped not one minute since.

Looking down at the Doctor's dead body, and his companion clutching to it, hoping to force life back into it, Jötunson felt something tug at his heart. He checked the time. Half an hour and UNIT would be here. He had to make sure he wasn't. But still he didn't move, his eyes on Ace's back, the Doctor's face. It looked peaceful at last.

'It's all over, sir,' the Sergeant said at his elbow.

Jötunson shook his head slowly:

'No, not now,' he said. 'It's only just beginning, now.'

And they stood and listened to Wolsey howl.

SEVEN

Sarfield Dales: September 6. 1998

08:15

‘How do we get into your TARDIS?’ the Private asked, solemn.

The Doctor sat in his cage, cross-legged, trying to remember who he was, to block out all distractions. It grew harder every second. All he could hear were the insistent voices, forever questioning: why do you just sit; why am I doing this; where are your invasion forces; why won't you fight. He could feel it slipping away from him, knew he didn't have long left.

‘When does the invasion start?’

He opened his eyes, looked at the Private. He was young: blond haired and blue eyed, too young for the job he was doing. He had a nervous look about his mouth. As if he expected the Doctor to leap for his throat at any second. So why disappoint him? Because there was a better way. Better than

the taste of fresh blood in your mouth? Much better, much better. He hoped.

‘Where are your forces?’

‘What’s your name?’ croaked the Doctor.

The Private looked left, looked right, as if expecting his superiors to leap out and demote him for hearing this. The Doctor repeated himself, and the Private tried to meet his eyes. Tried, and failed.

‘Private Hicks. Tom.’

The Doctor nodded as if this was what he was expecting, as if his head was suddenly heavy.

‘Why are you doing this, Tom?’

Tom looked away.

‘I’m just following orders.’

The Doctor tried hard to keep his gaze, tried to bring that old timbre to his voice. To his ears, it sounded like someone doing a bad impression of him, him at his peak, when the Universe danced to his tune.

‘I’m going to die here. Is that what your orders tell you? To sit there and watch me while I die, to see me take my last breath and die?’

Tom paused, and the Doctor felt a surge of hope.

‘Are you here to watch me die?’ he asked, his voice sounding strong.

‘No,’ said Tom, firmly.

The Doctor nodded, breaking the gaze. He felt tired, so tired.

‘What can I do?’

‘I need water,’ he said, ‘maybe food.’

Hicks stood, sounding unsure:

‘I’ll see what I can do.’

And, perhaps feeling sheepish, perhaps for want of something better to do, the Private saluted. He waited for a second to see if the Doctor would return it, but he just felt too tired. Instead, the Private marched quickly out of the door.

The Doctor wouldn’t see him again.

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12:30

Time passed.

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19:58

The Doctor could feel his heartbeats starting to race. He tried to fight it, but the beast wouldn’t be silenced. He could feel the glass walls of his cage closing in on him, and knew that high above him the sun was starting to fade. He could smell the people outside the room, every one of them a living breathing bag of life that he could take and eat to revive him. All he needed to do was succumb and escape, ready for the hunt again. He let out a snarl, then choked it back.

‘No,’ he said. ‘No, no, no.’

But it was no use, the beast was cornered, it wouldn't be beaten, wouldn't be held back. It was frightened: it could smell its own death heavy in the air. And he was afraid too, his own fear feeding the beast as his adrenaline started to pump. He could feel claws pushing their way out of his fingers, painfully tearing through the weakened flesh, his teeth growing in his mouth, cutting at the gums. He let out a cry of pain, but it turned into a bestial howl.

And then it came, the pain of the vision draining him immediately. He dropped to all fours, his head dangling limp, his entire body aflame. And then he opened his eyes.

He was out in the open, a grey giant towering in front of him, hear the rustling as the wind whipped through the trees, tore at his arms. The kitling was at his feet, ready to die for him, and he could see through his eyes too – the park brilliant in a yellow glow. He could smell everything on the wind: the road, the grass, the student houses behind him, the food cooking in their kitchens, rotting in their bins. It drove him wild as it tore through him.

He'd been such a fool.

'Ace,' his voice croaked.

'Doctor,' he felt her voice echo back.

And he knew what he had to do. He fought the beast down, slowed his heartbeats, flushed the adrenaline from his system. He felt his teeth shrink back to normal, leaving his gums bloody and tattered. He felt his claws retract, leaving pinpoints of blood on the balls of each finger. He felt his eyes burning in his head, but try as he might, he couldn't turn them back. The vision faded, and he was alone again.

He'd been such a fool. Jötunson had told him Ace was dead, and he'd believed him. Jötunson, the same man who's trapped him here. The same man who's riddle he had to solve to escape. But now he had hope. Ace was alive, and she knew where he was. He knew she would come, knew she could save him. All he had to do was stay himself while she did. He had to focus on that, and nothing else.

He felt a slight heat behind him, and then the sudden appearance of fur, pressed against his back. He heard Wolsey purr in greeting. It gave him the strength to go on.

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21:03

'You can't keep it from us forever, Doctor,' Jötunson said, purely for the benefit of the Sergeant behind him. 'We'll find your invasion force, and we'll defeat them. You might as well tell us.'

The Doctor closed his eyes, turned his head. He had to remain focused. He could feel the beast gnawing at the edges of his defences, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

'Come on, Doctor,' he heard Jötunson say. 'Cat got your tongue?'

He felt Wolsey stir behind him, but forced himself to focus. Despite the fact he'd felt a thrill as he thought the kitling was preparing to strike.

'Doctor?'

He opened his eyes, glaring at Jötunson suspiciously. The Captain was

leaning in, his back masking what he said from the guard behind him.

‘Thought any more on that riddle?’ he asked. ‘Got an answer for me?’

The Doctor was silent, tried to focus. Ace was his way out now.

‘You’d better hurry. You can’t have much longer left.’

And leaning back, Jötunson let out a loud chuckle. Something in the Doctor flared, try as he might to control it. The beast leapt forward, and he let out a savage growl at Jötunson. The Captain stopped dead, looking shocked, then spun on his heel and marched out.

The Doctor settled back, contented. For the moment.

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22:01

‘Where is your TARDIS?’ asked the Sergeant.

The Doctor ignored him. He had problems of his own.

He couldn’t have long left without water. As it was he was existing on the adrenaline that was flooding his system, and that had a price. He could feel the yellow fur pushing its way up through his skin - it was maddeningly itchy. The mental barriers he had put in place to keep the Cheetah virus at bay were crumbling. The beast was waiting at the edge of his mind, and it never tired.

We should not be caged, it told him. We are hunter, we should run free, feel the wind on our faces, smell the blood of our prey. We should not sit here. We should attack.

He tried to think of Tom Hicks. He must have made some kind of complaint by now. For all he knew the troops could be waiting outside the door to free him. He knew they weren't - he could hear outside the door. All there was were the Captain, and his troops. But there was Ace – Wolsey had joined her now, so she must surely be nearby. And there was the riddle. If he could think of the answer - if Jötunson kept his word - he would go free.

He laughed at his own stupidity. There would be no escape that he didn't make himself, with his own claws and teeth.

No, he couldn't resort to mindless violence. He'd never escape that way.

That was the only way he'd escape.

The glass was too strong.

He could break it. He knew he could.

He had to think his way out. He wouldn't resort to violence, to bloodlust. If he did that, he'd already lost.

If he didn't, he was dead. And he wasn't going to die. He was a hunter - he died because his prey was just too strong, or because a scavenger fancied its luck. He didn't die lying on his side in a cage. He died because his teeth and claws weren't fast enough. He died with his enemies' blood in his mouth. And his enemies were all around him, waiting for him to fall. He was a beast, a hunter, and he wouldn't let them prevail.

No. The Doctor gave a final burst of will, dredging up whatever reserves of strength he had left. But he had waited too long, been kept too long. He was weak, and the beast could sense it. It leapt forward, teeth

flashing, claws tearing, and slashed its way through the Doctor's defences. He held up his arms, but its claws bit deep into his flesh. He let out a savage howl of pain, and anger.

At that moment, whatever had been the Doctor died.

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22:30

The creature that was the Doctor heard as the Sergeant hustled the Captain into the room, Ace quickly following at their heels, her eyes blazing yellow. Behind her, Wolsey ran to keep up as the group raced into the darkened cell room. It didn't take them long to see what was the problem.

The creature knew what it looked like, knew they expected to see the grey naked Doctor. Instead, there was now a fur covered creature with burning yellow eyes, razor sharp teeth and pencil thin claws. It threw itself at the glass with renewed vigour, hit with a sickening thud and bounced back to the floor of the cage. Then it picked itself up and did it again.

'Doctor,' Ace breathed, but the creature paid her no heed. It just threw itself back against the glass.

'I take it you didn't find the answer to the riddle?' the Captain said casually.

The creature hissed at him. The Sergeant put a firm hand on his superior's arm, pulling him back.

'Sir . . .'

'It's alright, Sergeant. He can't break the glass. Look at him. He's half dead as it is.'

'Do you bleed?' the creature asked, stopping its relentless charge. 'If you bleed, I will escape this cage. I will do anything to see you bleed.'

'Yes,' whispered Jötunson. 'I think you would.'

Thud.

The creature began throwing itself at the glass. Ace gasped, stepping towards the cage. A group of soldiers appeared and pulled her back. As much as she struggled, she didn't break free. None of the soldiers were entirely convinced that was due to them. Thud. With a loud crack, the glass started to shatter.

'Oh,' said the Jötunson, moving closer as the Sergeant ducked back.

Then everything happened at once.

With a loud crack, the glass globe shattered, shards flying out everywhere. The creature could taste freedom at last. It saw the glass flying through the air through clouded eyes, and felt it bury itself deep into the creature's own flesh. There was a burst of pain as it felt its primary heart punctured, but also a fresh burst of life giving adrenaline set coursing. It moved like a blur, tensing in a second, then leaping. It was breathing heavy and ragged as it landed full in Jötunson arms, its claws biting deep. The Captain barely even flinched beneath the weight.

'Come on then,' he whispered.

The creature drew its arm back in a second, and swiped. The razor claws bit deep, leaving three vivid red lines across the Captain's face. He

closed his eyes, breathed into the pain, but despite that said nothing. The creature was disappointed – it had wanted its prey to cry out in pain, pain for all the pain he had caused it. But nothing. It tried another swipe, but its weakened knees gave way and it collapsed on the floor, its life-blood pouring away.

In its body, it could feel microscopic creatures speeding around trying desperately to repair the damage done by disease, glass, starvation and dehydration. They struggled to stir the dying cells into renewed life, regenerating them afresh. The ravages of the last month had taken their toll, however, and the nanosubs died even as they tried to save him.

As it lay there slowly panting, the creature that had been the Doctor slowly died.

The fur fell from his body, leaving once again the Doctor lying there, punctured by glass, blood flowing away. For one last moment, he could feel his mind clear, his again. He looked up and saw Jötunson standing over him, three blood tears running down his cheeks. At last, he felt free. He wished he could thank the Captain for a moment, but instead with his last breath whispered.

‘I know why,’ he stopped, coughing up blood. ‘Because you could.’

Jötunson shook his head, his deep blue eyes suddenly aeons old.

‘No,’ he said softly, so the Doctor alone could hear. ‘Because I had to.’

And by the time Ace came to hold him in her arms, the Doctor was dead.