

MILLENNIUM

Earth: 400,000,000 BCE

Sunday

The Earth was, at the moment, a coiled spring, waiting. All seemed dead, a fine grey desert of sand and dust and ash, but all around were signs of life: a thick cloud of black smoke rose out of the hills in the background, contributing to the heady stench of sulphur in the air; the air crackled with fierce electrical energy, just waiting to be released; tiny pools of thick glutinous liquid bubbled quietly to themselves.

‘Primordial soup,’ the dark stranger said, dipping his hand into the pool, letting the viscous jelly coat his glove.

‘Marvellous,’ sparked his companion. ‘And now its all over your hand.’

The dark man looked up, a mischievous glint in his slate grey eyes. He looked completely at home in his bizarre environment, despite his clean black

clothes and neat Devil's beard. His calm neatness seemed to act as natural contrast to the pensive mood of the Earth, which was more than could be said for his companion. His light blue eyes were constantly darting across the dead landscape, the dust invading his cool brown clothes and light blond hair. The electricity in the air seemed to ground itself in him, infecting him with a nervous humour.

'Isn't it beautiful?' the calm stranger said, his arms encircling the blank vista.

'Beautiful,' his friend echoed, nervously. 'Are you sure we should be doing this?'

'Quite.'

'But what about the Academy?' he asked, looking over his shoulder as if naming the devil would make it appear. 'What about Bruiser? You know what he did to Drax.'

The bearded man laughed, short and clipped.

'Drax landed on a class five planet and declared himself a god. We were sent here to study the area. There is something of a difference, yes?'

'What about the law of non-intervention?'

The dark stranger stood, wiping his gloves on his long black robe. He gave his companion a solemn look.

'We're not intervening,' he said firmly. 'We're . . . mingling. Come on, let's see how it all turns out.'

'Hmm,' said his companion.

Lightning crackled as the two strangers paced off towards the hills, one

following in the steady strides of the other. A fierce wind dragged the dry dust across the plains, and the pits bubbled happily to themselves. A fierce, elephantine howl filled the air, coming seemingly from everywhere at once. Within seconds, it died away and the planet was alone with its thoughts again.

Then came the explosion, and the spring began, slowly, to uncoil.

Earth: 65,000,000 BCE

Monday

Three hundred million years passed without much of note occurring. The first life evolved on the planet, starting out as simple plant life, then growing until it had become the thick, lush woodland that covered most of the planet. Some plant life had considered forests simply not mobile enough for them and had developed into fishes, then toyed briefly with the idea of amphibian life, before settling into mammalian form. Besides that, things remained pretty much the same.

In the undergrowth, something rustled. The dense green leaves parted and something small and fur covered poked its nose out. It sniffed the air, cautiously. Then it cast a panic-stricken look back over its shoulder and scurried off.

'Now even you have to be impressed by this, Alpha,' said the dark stranger as he pushed his way through the forest.

'I am impressed,' answered his companion testily. 'I'm just not sure the Academy would approve. We *were* only meant to stay in the one time zone.'

The bearded man gave Alpha a cold, grey stare.

‘There’s more to life than the academy,’ he said evenly.

‘We’ve got to get a decent grade if we want to get anywhere in life,’ he friend said firmly, as if reciting from rote. ‘It’s not enough just to be a Prydonian, you know.’

‘If we want to get anywhere on Gallifrey,’ his friend corrected.

‘Where else is there?’

The dark stranger looked as if he was about to answer when something in the sky caught his eye. He shielded his eyes to try and get a better view. His friend looked up as well, but could only see a small black dot creeping slowly across the blue canvas. He looked to his friend and asked:

‘What is it?’

The bearded man considered.

‘It looks like a space freighter, circa twenty-sixth century Earth, I’d say.’

‘What’s it doing here?’

‘Crashing,’ the dark stranger said, grimly.

‘Oh dear. Near here?’ Alpha asked nervously.

‘Fairly. Around Mexico, I’d say. Should kick up quite a dust cloud,’ the grey eyed man ran a thick leaf idly through his hands. A thin trail of slime rubbed off onto one of the leaves. ‘Not much of the greenery will survive that. Bad news for the indigenous life.’

‘Yes, well that doesn’t concern us, does it?’ his friend said, coldly.

‘No,’ agreed the stranger. ‘The fire ball will kill us long before we get to starve.’

'Oh,' said Alpha.

The bearded stranger dropped the leaf he was holding and clapped his hands decisively.

'Time we were off,' he said.

'Yes,' Alpha agreed readily. 'Back to the academy.'

The dark stranger shook his head, grinning in bemusement.

'I really can't see why you're so devoted to that place.'

'I'd like to see what you say in a thousand years when you've failed your finals,' Alpha retorted.

The bearded man stopped dead, grinning an infectious grin. He nodded happily:

'Alright then. A thousand years.'

'Alright,' Alpha agreed venomously. 'Where?'

'Somewhere we can get a decent cup of tea. Say, the eighteenth century?'

'What, here?'

'Why not?'

'But . . .' began Alpha

'That's settled then,' the bearded man interrupted and strode off, leaving Alpha to scurry in his footsteps.

For the first time in over three hundred million years, a loud elephantine roar filled the air. A few moments later, for the second time in just as long, there was an explosion.

France, Earth: 1792 CE

Tuesday

The tavern was badly lit, shadows creeping around the rafters, sometimes finding the courage to creep down and devour the men seated around the rough wooden tables. The air was thick with smoke from the pipes in many of the men's mouths, and filled with the pungent odour of burning tobacco. Women dressed in lacy tops and large skirts scurried from table to table, carrying trays piled with jugs of a dark, strong ale. A large fire burned angrily in its hearth, spitting, cracking and taking the January chill out of the air.

He sat in one of the tavern's upstairs rooms sipping tea from a china cup, dressed in the finest clothes the time could provide. Time had changed him, but not nearly as much as it should have. His face had thinned out, and his beard had long disappeared. His eyes, though, were still that same slate grey, and they watched the doorway without blinking. An outside observer would have put him down as a middle-aged business man waiting for a guest, perhaps an important client. He had been waiting a long time.

The door opened slowly, and a plump, middle-aged woman poked her head around it.

'Mr Smith? Your guest's here, sir.'

'Thank you, Mrs Briggs. Please show him in.'

'Very good, sir.'

She began to disappear, withdrawing her head, when "Mr Smith" called her back.

‘Mrs Briggs? Happy new year.’

‘Thank you, sir. And the same to you. It can’t be any worse than the last one, can it now?’ she smiled kindly, and then added: ‘Still, who knows what the future holds, eh?’

‘I do,’ announced the tall guest who strode in through the door as if the room, and in fact the entire tavern, was his alone.

He took his three corner hat from his head and smoothed down his fine clothes. They were almost identical to Smith’s, the only addition being a ring on his forefinger with a large blue stone. He ran a hand across his dark brown beard, smoothing its neat hairs.

‘By the end of the year, the French peasants will have revolted, and Robespierre will be as dead as a doornail,’ he treated the plump landlady to one of his charming smiles.

‘Really, sir?’ she replied, and left the room.

The bearded traveller laughed a booming laugh and sat down in the comfortable chair facing his old Academy friend. Time had been kind to him, too: he had filled out into a proud, dark haired man, almost a mirror to his old friend. Mr Smith smiled at him.

‘I like the beard,’ he said.

‘I always admired it on you, “Mr Smith”.’

Smith shuffled in his seat, embarrassed.

‘Ah, yes. Well, I had to tell her something. I couldn’t very well tell her my real name.’

‘She’d never be able to pronounce it.’

‘Exactly,’ Smith paused and sipped at his tea. His guest followed suit. ‘I didn’t think you’d come.’

‘A deal’s a deal, although . . .’ he took the opportunity to pour himself a cup of tea, ‘although I already have my answer.’

‘Really?’

‘I don’t think we need to pretend, do you?’ he said bluntly. ‘We both know what business we’re in.’

‘Ah, no,’ Smith admitted.

Alpha picked up the sugar and slowly, deliberately stirred two spoons into his tea. He sipped again, then said:

‘I think in our line of work we do show a certain . . . loyalty to Gallifrey. Don’t you agree?’

‘I’m not so sure,’ Smith said quietly.

Alpha pricked up his ears.

‘I’m sorry?’ he said.

‘I’m not sure I am so loyal any more,’ Smith admitted.

Alpha looked surprise, practically dropping his tea.

‘But I’ve seen your record - you were commended on that Miniscope business.’

‘But that’s just it! All those years of teaching us that it’s impossible to change the time-lines, and now . . . but what do we change? Take this revolution that’s going to happen here. With just a few simple actions, we could change it. Thousands of people could be saved, but history would still take the same course. I’ve checked it with the Matrix. But will they let me?’

'No, of course they won't. We have our own power, and they're too busy just trying to keep hold of it to bother with other planets. Why should we?'

'To help all those people.'

'They're primitives!'

'They're still people.'

'You've been spending too much time with that old hermit of yours. Believe me, we've got better things to worry about on Gallifrey than the fate of aliens.'

Smith stared at his guest for a few moments, and then pulled a pocket watch from his waistcoat. He glanced at the digital display, and then dropped it back into his pocket.

'You'd better go.'

'So soon?'

'I have work to do,' he said grimly.

'Ah,' Alpha said solemnly. 'Another guest?'

'A local,' Smith said. 'Goes by the name of Walker.'

Alpha raised an eyebrow:

'Not like us to use a local,' he said archly.

'This one's something special,' Smith looked into the fire, the light dancing in his eyes. 'He's been working for me for the last hundred years, not aged a day yet. I've got a personal project for him.'

'Then I'll leave you to it,' he said, rising.

'Goodbye, Alpha,' Smith said.

The bearded man smiled at the use of his old Academy nick-name, and answered using Smith's real Time-Lord name.

'Yes?'

'Another thousand years?'

'Why? I thought you had more important things to worry about on Gallifrey.'

'Let's say you've intrigued me,' smiled Alpha.

Smith thought for a moment, before saying: 'Yes, alright. Where?'

'Twentieth century?' Alpha suggested.

Smith nodded, and left, and time passed.

Shoreditch, Earth: 1963 CE

Wednesday

They sat, facing each other. This time, the table was empty of any drinks. This time, their clothes did not seem identical: Smith wore a dark suit hidden by a long, flowing cape, while his guest wore a light blue suit of the finest quality, with a small bow tie around his neck. Time seemed to have caught them both up.

Smith's hair was now shock white and flowing down his neck, but his eyes were still grey. He looked at his guest with a friendly smile, but there was an air of pomposity around him. Alpha, however, was more greatly changed. He was a plump, balding man with a few missing teeth and a completely different face. There had been an accident, and he had been forced into his

first regeneration. It didn't matter: Smith could still recognise him.

'Is it still Smith?' Alpha asked.

'I'm known as "The Doctor", nowadays.'

'Ah yes, I had heard. It seems you left in quite a hurry.'

'I had no choice,' the Doctor answered sadly.

Alpha looked down awkwardly at his blue ring. It glistened in the tavern's gas lighting.

'Yes,' he said. 'I heard about your family. I don't suppose you can stay long?'

'No. Susan is waiting in the ship.'

'You took your cousin?'

The old man's grey eyes flared fire, and he said firmly:

'Susan is my granddaughter, and always will be.'

The old students lapsed into an awkward silence. Alpha broke it first, eventually.

'Andromeda followed your example, you know. Do you remember her, Thete?'

'Yes, a lovely young woman. She always seemed too bright to stay on Gallifrey.'

'She calls herself "Rani" now. It means Queen, apparently.'

'Hmm?'

'Yes.'

The silence reigned again. Eventually, the old man who called himself

Doctor rose.

'Going already?'

'Yes. Goodbye, my boy.'

'Goodbye. 'Till next time? Same place?'

'Hmm? What?'

The Doctor wandered over to the door, but Alpha called him back, as he had before.

'Yes?'

'Here. Have this, you'll need it more than me.'

Alpha threw his ring into the Doctor's aged hand. The white-haired Time-Lord slipped it carefully onto his finger.

'Thank you,' he said, and left.

Alpha watched him go, thinking.

Shoreditch, Earth: 1963 CE

Thursday

The Doctor sat in the cafe, quietly sipping at his tea. It was cold and bitter, with no sugar. He didn't care - his mind was elsewhere. It had been a long time, exactly a thousand years, to be precise. A lot had changed, and not just with the old tavern. Over a thousand years floating through Time and Space. And now, nearly a whole day spent sitting in a cafe in London, when he had much more important things to do. Did he really expect him to arrive? After-all, they hadn't even fixed a date after last time. And he wasn't sure that he would come even if they had.

A shadow fell over the small, dark-haired Time-Lord. He looked up, and smiled.

'I didn't think you'd come,' he said to the figure in black.

'My dear Doctor,' the Master said, smiling, 'I wouldn't miss this for the universe. Would you like a drink?'