

## The First Christmas on Gallifrey

by Addison Cort

Koschei tapped the side of the beaker gently. His eyes coldly peered at the murky yet coloured liquid inside. He watched as it changed colour. A smile crossed his face.

“Ah, perfect. My solution is responding as expected.” He swished the solution by twisting his wrist. He nodded and turned his head to look around the lab.

It was filled with rows of wooden desks, littered with papers and equipment. Equipment as basic as metal bars and beakers, to temporal technology currently beyond the capacity of human science.

He dragged over a note book and flipped it open and peered at the pages. He fumbled it to the last page and then he clawed at a mechanical pen, similar in style to a quill, and began scrawling a repeating circular pattern inside.

He looked up from his drawings around the room. On his row, a stern woman, around his age, studied a complex molecule structure suspended in mid-air. She was leant forward examining the molecule with her arms tightly crossed around the back of her lab coat. Parts of the structure folded and disappeared into a flare of light and emerged at some other point in an equal flare and re-engaged with the rest of the structure.

Fourth dimensional chemistry had never been Koschei’s strong point. Chemistry to him had always been a bit boring. You could only go so far with these materials, unless they had some unearthly property, so they never were too useful.

Yes, he was currently doing chemistry himself. But it was boring, and he didn’t like it. No one apart from Ushas over there liked it.

And that’s why he wanted to achieve a breakthrough in the field.

“I think, in time, my project-” He turned his attention around the room. He stabbed at everyone in the room with his eyes as he geared around.

“-will finally be able to kick start the bioregenerative process stably-”

He caught a glimpse of a little man at the far edge of the table studying a small see-through box filled with a blue gel. The man’s eyes intensely bore down on the gel, as small black ants carved and marched their way around in it.

“-without any anomalies and impurities.”

Another man, short and rounded, prodded and scribbled at a black board. Carving equations and complex symbols onto its surface.

“Could you imagine the potential?”

He stopped and looked over to a desk at the end of the lab. It was littered with ancient books spliced with yellow post it notes. Old time pieces ticked and whirred on its surface next to the latest in temporal navigation systems.

Koschei examined the space.

The Round man at the board scratched loudly.

Koschei’s face became a frown. “But... where are you?”

He leant forward and tilted to the side slightly to examine the area.

Ushas' eyes flicked to their corners and she watched Koschei with distance.

Koschei sighed, he placed the beaker back on the rack, and half stomped his way down the aisle between tables.

“Thete, for the sake of the gods, man. I’m trying to start a philosophical discussion with you.” He reached the end of the desk and stopped.

His eyebrows flicked up; what was that scratching noise at his feet? He looked down. A box moved underneath the table.

He rolled his eyes. He leaned down to peer underneath. “What are you doing-“

A man burst out from the dark underneath the table and shot past Koschei.

Koschei stumbled back in surprise and slowly pivoted around to follow Thete’s path.

Thete was covered in long colourful roping. Their edges were frayed and splayed out in strange hair like forms. They draped over his shoulders and he clutched them with his bony fingers. Some even rested on his head.

“Not now, Koschei. I’m a bit busy.” Thete grabbed the end of the coloured roping and hurled it up onto some banisters. He pirouetted around and began to pace the sides of the room.

“Come on, I need to discuss my new bioregenerative formula idea. I’ve had a breakthrough on the prototype. This is going to change how we do things. I can smell it!” He clapped his hands and rubbed them together furiously. A smile twitched at his lips and a glint caught his eye.

“And of course, the council will love it. I want to discuss potential applications, such as-“

“Militarisation?” Theta shot a glance over his shoulder at Koschei. He then smiled and held out a hand and laid some of the rope along the sides of the room, along some cupboards, and continued pacing.

“Not just that. Defence, medicine...anything. That’s what I want to discuss.”

“Not now, I’m a bit busy with my own project.” He stopped and lifted up two ropes of different colours and compared them.

“You know we work brilliantly together,” Koschei started. “We work quite well as a team. And you crave our ponderings.”

Theta waved Koschei down. “Later, later.” He withdrew his hand and scooped up another rope. He lifted the two ropes up and down slowly, as if comparing the weights.

Koschei tensed. “Damn it, man. You’re the only one here who can spar with me with ideas on my own level!”

“I will try and not be insulted by that.” Ushas' voice oozed over like icy sludge.

“I don’t mean that Ushas. Well, I do. You’re brilliant, but you’re not exactly creative. You’re a genius in other areas. Theoretical Sociological discussion-”

She nodded her head slightly. “-is of no interest to me. I will agree with your conclusion. I will let that insult ‘slide’.” She twisted around and continued with her work.

“And um...” Koschei touched his chin. “And I don’t mean that to you two either. I guess.”

The little man at the plastic box gave a slight smile, his cheeks red. He picked up a box of equally red ants and began to place them in the box.

The round man at the black board murmured numbers to himself, increasing them audibly when Koschei spoke.

Koschei turned his attention back to Theta.

“Theta.”

Theta turned to Koschei. “Which do you think is better; gold or silver?”

“What... the...” Koschei balled his fists. “I just want to have your complete attention-“

“Because I’ve had three gold so far and-“

Koschei snatched the two ropes up and threw them to the ground. He slammed his black shoes into them with a sharp stomp. He pointed a finger at Theta. "We need to discuss this. Now. They won't continue our funding if we don't deliver. We need that to buy our equipment."

Theta gave Koschei a cold stare. They locked glares for a moment.

Ushas peered over again.

Theta hooked up the ropes. He tugged them, but they were lodged under Koschei's foot. "Do you mind?" He didn't look up.

Koschei glared down at Theta some more, then turned and walked slowly sharply back to his desk.

Theta brought up the ropes and began pacing the room again.

Koschei picked up each of his beakers in turn and examined them. He put them down and made a "Hmm" of agreement.

As he swayed around the room, Theta began to hum out a tune in short bursts.

Koschei watched Theta do this, then looked back down to his notes.

He looked at Ushas. "What do you think of the idea of a bioregenerative chemical?"

She did not look back to him. "I could imagine applications in regeneration beyond full body death capacity."

"Yes, yes. As did I. What else?"

"I do not have much else. I am not creative."

Koschei stared at her, then ground his teeth. "Fine."

He looked back down at his writings. He shifted the papers around and re-examined his notes.

His eyes clicked up and looked at Theta running some of the rope along the top of the black board.

Theta stood on tip toes to reach the top. He turned and peered down to the round man.

"Please excuse me, Mortimus."

"Oh yes, of course". He stood back and let Theta work.

Theta tiptoed past, laying the rope on the top of the board, then reach the end and dropped himself down again.

“Thank you” He gave Mortimus a soft pat on the back then began his mission around the room again.

Koschei had watched this. He then closed his eyes and let out a small sigh. He frowned down hard.

He turned to Ushas, a smile now on his face.

“So then. How is that fourth dimensional chemistry going?”

She stopped and looked at him now.

“It is of great interest to me. I have altered the very edge outer lying proteins in the structure to emit low level artronic energy to transmute the inner atoms into the fourth dimension. There is an alternate method by having outer atoms decay to release chronon particles, and although that method is highly developed-“

Koschei had drifted his gaze to the structure to try and help keep concentration.

“-it does not match certain needs of the molecule. Therefore I have run certain tests in an attempt to transfer some of the advanced structure-“

Theta hobbled past behind Ushas.

“- of the original method, to my new alternative. I find-“

Koschei kept his gaze on the floating structure.

Theta placed a final rope up on the side. He reached into his pocket and fished out a small coloured ball.

“-doing this can be time consuming, but it means I do not have to reinvent the core concepts each time I push forward-“

Theta hooked the small ball onto a coat hanger.

Koschei tightened his fist.

“-so I can increase development by figuratively standing on the shoulders-“

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, man! What in god’s name are you doing?”

Ushas promptly stopped talking, she waited mid-sentence.

Theta turned.

“I’m putting up Christmas decorations.”

Koschei stared at him. Then twitched. He closed his eyes. “What, in good heavens, is Christmas?”

Theta pulled out a handful of the coloured balls. He began placing them on more areas of the walls.

“It is a holiday designed to celebrate togetherness and family.”

Koschei turned away, “Bloody hell. Not togetherness and family.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Everything.”

Theta looked at Koschei, his jaw hung open. He stuttered, “What? What would make you say that? Connections are important to everyone. This day celebrates it. It gives back to it.”

Ushas returned to her work. She placed her nose on a microscope and examined a small glass plate with her new chemical on.

Koschei’s expression changed, then he turned back to Theta “Gives back to it?”

“Well, I suppose it’s the thing children like the most. So I suppose you will like it too. Some people give gifts to others.”

Koschei smiled. “Gifts.” A small laugh kicked out of him. “I do like the sound of that.”

“It’s about thanking others for being there. It reaffirms bonds.” He looked down and rolled some of the balls in his hands. “It’s quite nice really. I...I like the look of it. I think we should try and get that into our society a bit more.”

He looked up again to Koschei. Koschei stared at him blankly for a moment.

“What kind of gifts?”

Theta huffed and rolled his eyes. “Action figures to car parts, to food and clothes. Anything another person wants and that will make them happy.”

Ushas eyes flicked up to them from the microscope. “Quiet will make me happy.”

Koschei continued talking, lost in thought. “Some of these things I do like the idea of. Gifts, presents. Not that family nonsense though.”

Theta grumbled and began circling the room again. He reached into his pocket and plucked out more of the coloured balls like some overly successful arcade machine. “Well

the family aspect is the main part, you know. It sits right at the centre. It's the reasoning behind it. Having all these connections makes Christmas special."

In his over excitement Theta dropped some of the balls. He bent down to pick them up again.

Koschei thought to himself and tentatively touched his chin.

Theta stood up and looked around and counted the balls in his hand. He seemed to be missing some. He shrugged and placed a ball onto a nearby tripod. He then watched Koschei.

Koschei rapped his fingers against his jaw bone. "Like a sort of..."

"Yes, that's right. A celebration. Of togetherness!"

"-sacrifice to a god."

"Oh, for heaven's sake. You manage to take the fun out of everything!" Theta launched off pacing again.

"Think of it more as extracting it for isolation and enhancement," Koschei said. "When you isolate the good bits, you can concentrate on them all the more." He growled the last part, a sneer crossing his face.

"Well, I think" Theta stretched and adjusted some of the rope by his desk. "That's a bad idea. Takes away the excitement. You need to have the same things around it each time so that it builds memories. They have parades and songs, and films about it you know. Not all brilliant but each one loved because of their consistency in appearing year in and year out. They're memories. Songs that might not even be about Christmas, that might be about war or hope or charity and they get associated with it because of their message."

He turned around to look at Koschei, he watched his reaction. "Thoughts, philosophical sparring partner?"

Koschei stood for a moment, then lumbered around and unfolded his arms. "Is this one of those Earth things again?"

Theta's eyes flipped from Ushas, to Koschei, to the beaker, then back around again.

"No."

Both Koschei and Ushas fell back, their arms dropping down by their sides. They both let out a tremendous dull tone that made Mortimus turn around and the small man look up.

"Not Earth again!" Koschei wailed.

"Do you ever move onto another planet of interest?" Ushas added.

Theta stood back slightly. He caught both their gazes, then puffed out his chest. "There's nothing wrong with liking Earth."

"There is when you go on about it *all the time!*"

"I don't go on about it all the time. Just a little. It's fascinating! Don't you ever find the culture of other planets interesting? Koschei, you study planets all the time."

"Yes, and that's the key aspect here. PlanetS. Plural. More than one. I have a much better habit of moving on. Being able to hunt out interesting aspects of multiple worlds, not having to drag up dirt from the same place. I move on!"

"You abandon more like. There is always interesting things to be found. You just have to look hard enough."

Koschei rolled his eyes and peered over his notes.

Ushas leaned back past him and looked at Theta. "I must say Theta, I find your overt Terraphilia most frustrating. And I don't usually get frustrated."

Koschei snapped his eyes to her. "Only when your lab rats don't finish the course fast enough."

Ushas implanted her fists into her hips. "It's not my fault they didn't react well to the chemical. The Neuroenhancers were working fine."

"Then explain the spontaneous self-combustion?"

"The Lab Rats were of poor quality!" She fidgeted. "We shouldn't be trying to cut corners. It affects our results. It holds us back! Not just in limiting our success but also our time. I spent several hours terminating that batch of specimens after the test group's failure."

Theta breathed out through his mouth quietly. He cut his eyes down to the floor. "Yes, no need to remind us."

A shot rang out though out the room. A deep thud clanged out into stone walls as the large door swung open. A wispy figure entered. He was old and thin, his hair greying. His robes glided across the floor and picked up dust efficiently, this had been noted by Koschei.

The man stopped in front of the desks. He placed his fists, wrapped in white leather gloves, onto the surface of the table.

"Greetings, Gentlemen." His voice resonated out deep from his chest. He panned the room with his eyes, and then laid them to rest on Ushas. "And Lady"

Ushas replied with a sharp nod.



The man whipped up his arms and covered them with his robe. He started a slow walk around the room in the opposite direction Theta had been walking.

“I have come here to bring up a matter of great importance to me. Primarily, the budget.”

Ushsas nodded. “We were just discussing this. I had noted that the reduction in spending had resulted in failure in experiments.”

The man stopped and looked over to her. “Dear, Dear, Dear. That’s no good. You are failing at the first hurdle. Spending wisely is a challenge. One you seem not to be rising too. If anyone can work out how to spend efficiently, it’s the Deca. The greatest young ‘think tank’ of the modern era.” He raised his hand and drifted it to Theta. “That was the strange word you used the other day?”

Theta twitched a nod, his eyes wide. “Er, yes, Borusa, sir. It was.”

Borusa gave a big slow nod, and began to pace the room again. “Which means a good think-tank like yourselves should be able to solve economic problems like budgeting quite easily.”

Koschei stepped forward slightly. “To be fair, sir, economics is not any of our strong points. If I were in charge I would just have it deleted. I prefer areas of interest - of progress. Where we can change the world. Concentrate on enhancement not get lost in dusty accounts.”

“Koschei, when the council asked the Deca to investigate the technology behind interdimensional travel none of you had any idea what the void was.”

“That’s not entirely true-“

“But what is true is that you learnt. You adapted. You became experts in a new field. And right now, that’s what I need you to do. I need you to focus and improve your spending. Gone are the days where you could rent out entire cathedrals for rain experiments.”

“It was a snow experiment.” Theta added.

“Gone are the days where you could just pay a thousand or two lesser Gallifreyans to be test subjects. Now we need to cut down. Cut back.”

The room fell silent. Even the squawking of Mortimus’s chalk had stopped. The only thing that moved was the hologram of Ushas' molecule.

“Very well. If it is so hard, let me give you a head start. If there are two options, go for the less expensive one. If there is a challenge, think your way out of it, don’t buy your

way out of it. And finally.” He leaned in to the group. “Don’t spend money on things that aren’t necessary.”

He turned around and headed to the door. He put one stepped forward-

There was a loud crunch that echoed the silent room.

Theta closed his eyes.

Borusa stared at each one in turn. His eyes migrated across the tables down to himself, then he peered down at his feet. He bent down and picked something up from the floor. He lifted it and raised it to the light. It twinkled red as he turned it in his fingers.

“What on earth is this?”

There was a moment’s silence.

“That er....” Theta began. “That’s a er... that *was* a bauble, sir.”

Borusa glared at him.

“And what is a bauble?”

“It’s a err...” Theta adjusted his clothes. “It’s a decoration, sir. For holidays.”

Borusa stood up. He looked around and held out his arms from his sides. “It’s not a holiday, Theta.”

“Not at the moment. But I want to introduce a new one.”

Borusa studied Theta. “What?”

“One called Christmas. It’s from Earth. It’s very important, I think, and I feel we should try experiencing it here on Gallifrey so as to improve our lives. Possibly our happiness.”

Borusa stared at him for a moment.

It was Koschei’s turn to close his eyes.

Borusa turned the shard over in his hand. “Decorations?”

He looked up and waved his hand at the ropes dangling the walls. “And these are also ‘Baubles’?”

“No, Sir. They come under the classification of Christmas Decorations not Baubles. Baubles is the name of the individual decoration.”

“And what is that?”

“That’s tinsel. You can put it on things like trees.”

Borusa looked at the Tinsel, and then back to Theta.

“What did I just tell you, Theta?”

“Well, to be fair, sir. I purchased this before you said that.”

Borusa turned to the others.

“See? This is a fine example. Don’t go over spending on things you don’t need. This is why you’re all a team, so that you cancel each other out, you remove the outliers.”

Theta frowned. “Outliers?”

“You work together to remove the anomalies and make yourselves presentable. You deal with your quirks and nutty habits and you only focus on things that matter.”

“Hey! This matters! This is really important!” Theta yelled.

The other Deca member’s muscles tightened.

Borusa craned around. “Important? You’re putting up coloured materials on walls. How can this possibly be of any importance to anyone in the universe?”

“Quite simply! Because of what it signifies! It means togetherness and celebrating you’re time with friends and love ones. It goes beyond material objects, to what it means in the mind.”

“What a load of rubbish.”

“The only rubbish here is your stubbornness.”

Koschei and Ushas whipped around from the two arguing people. Their bodies locked with fright, yet their faces were being tugged at by the claws of laughter. Like teenagers often are in such situations.

“Stubborn? Watch your tongue, Theta.”

“I wouldn’t have to if you didn’t have to stick your nose into everything. Why do you have to interfere in everything?”

“We Time Lords have to maintain a strict order-“

“You maintain normality and simplicity. And you only do that as it’s easy for you. You don’t attempt to harbour improvement in any way. You want us to change but won’t change yourself. We can change and improve, you know. Not everything different is wrong.” Theta waved his hand about as he spoke.

“By stopping stupid acts like this we protect our society-“

“I seem to remember the Time Lords having a non-interference policy.”

“I seem to remember you having a modicum of intelligence, Theta. It is not wise to aggravate your teacher.”

“It’s wise, however, to stand up for what you believe in.”

Borusa jabbed a finger at Theta. “Or in other words, acting stubbornly. The only difference between me and you is that I am protecting something old and you are protecting something new that plans to replace mine. We are similar. Bar the experience and intelligence. But we are similar.”

“Well...no! Because...back me up, Koschei, Ushas”

Koschei and Ushas looked up at Theta, their faces red, struggling to hold back smiles. Their bodies were contorted into odd shapes

“We don’t. What can?” A laugh forced itself from Koschei’s mouth and the two hobbled over behind a desk. Ushas used her hand to cover her smiling mouth.

“Oh grow up!” Theta yelled to them.

He turned to the Small man working away at his see-through box as if nothing was happening. “Magnus, back me up here!”

Magnus held up his hands but did not look away from his work. “Please, I’m just trying to work here. Don’t include me.”

Theta looked around to Mortimus, who shook his head and averted his gaze.

Borusa stood up tall and reaimed his finger at the tinsel.

“Take this down.”

Theta thought to himself, then straightened his back. His lip quivered slightly. “No.”

“Theta, I said take this down. Now!”

“No, I won’t. It needs to stay up. It’s good.”

“I don’t care. It’s distracting and utterly pointless! It comes down now.”

Theta looked around the room. He tried to catch the gaze of his colleagues, but got no response. He sighed.

“Very well”. He turned around and started the command. His shoulders drooped as he did so, his face dropped as he clawed and hooked at the tinsel.

Borusa studied Theta's activities. He placed his hand on his sides and he watched, while occasionally indicating Theta in his removal procedure.

Mortimus turned and began scratching at the board again.

Magnus continued as if nothing had happened.

Ushas adjusted her clothes and began attending her molecule again. She made slight coughing noises as she did.

Unceremoniously, Theta held the all the tinsel in his arms, and dropped it in a whump to the ground.

Borusa nodded slightly. "Good. Good. Much better. Organised, ready for learning. Efficient. It looks much better, thank you."

Theta stared at the floor. He began a slow pace to the door.

As he walked by, Borusa held his hand down on his shoulder. "You will thank me later, boy, when your academic achievements have put you among the highest members of the council."

Theta did nothing. Then he turned and stared coldly into Borusas eyes.

"Some victory."

He brushed Borusa's hand off of him and shifted out of the room.

The room fell silent again. Borusa looked around at the other students. He dusted himself down and adjusted his robes.

"Hmm, yes. Keep up the good work."

With that he span around and drifted out.

Ushas and Koschei stared at the door and watched it wind closed.

Koschei twitched his head from side to side. "Stubborn fool."

Ushas craned her head to him. "Which one?"

Koschei turned to her, an arrogant smile twisted at the corner of his mouth "Both."

Ushas smiled too.

Then a small laugh came out of both of them.

"Such an idiot. He should have known Borusa wouldn't take this idea well."

“And perhaps Borusa should have known Theta Sigma would never have backed down so easily. They were discussing Earth after all.”

Koschei rubbed his chin. “He never does stop. Ever since I’ve known him and he always went on about Earth. The amount of Earth games he would suggest was unheard of. We played all sorts of strange games on the edges of on my Father’s estates. We played around the spires of the Epiphany. Even as a child I was annoyed by it. But I suppose Children are always rude.”

“Children have not been alive long enough to gather social bounds and limitations.”

Koschei nodded. “That’s true. That’s true. Especially the one about boring people to death by talking about the same thing over and over.”

Koschei returned to his desk and checked his chemicals.

Ushas leaned forward on the desk. “Previously, before I moved my Needs relationship to yourself, I had used Theta to improve my concentration by removing my natural animalistic desire and need to procreate.”

Magnus yelped and dropped a box. Blue goo oozed out and ants scattered everywhere. His face reddened and he bent down and began pawing at the goo with a cloth.

Ushas and Koschei looked over their shoulder at him, then slowly turned back to each other.

“Purely business, of course” She added.

Koschei nodded. “I know. It always is.”

Ushas took in a sharp breath. “However he did not see it that way. His obsessions with Earth culture had left him blinded. One night, for no particular reason, he took me to the edges of Mountain Solace and Solitude where he had set up a small feast and lounging area where upon we studied the stars and a meteor shower as it occurred. I was confused, and as I did not wish to break our contract as I still needed him, I went along with his bizarre activities. Sometime later he confided in me that it was something to do with a “Valentine’s day”. He said it was a festival to celebrate romantic involvement. I laughed at him, of course, and not long later we separated our contract.”

Koschei sneered at the use of the word Contract. When Ushas finished he gave a nod then stared off into nothing.

“Stubborn fool.”

“Stubborn fools,” Theta growled. He dropped his glass down onto the dark red wood and stared down into his drink, his face like the formation of an icicle. “It won’t be Christmas if they won’t join in. It needs as many people as possible to make it special.”

He rolled the glass around on its base and watched the froth swish and swirl. “They just don’t understand. Children understand it on earth. Why can’t adults understand it here?”

He stopped and he frowned in thought. He then sniffed, the waft of ale and sweat filled his nostrils.

By his side, a hulk of a man was draped over the end of the bar, his vast meaty hands wrapped around his glass. He lifted his thick tree branch arms up and took a swig, then dropped them down again.

Theta did not move from his eternal gaze to see this.

The man scratched the tops of his arms, his hands and forearms brown from the sun, but his upper arms were pale, flittered with red dots and spots. He moved his hands to his face and dug at his chin through his spiky facial hair.

“I don’t understand” He droned.

Theta look over at him, then blinked as if just waking up. “What part?”

The man held his hands out as he spoke. “Well, I get the family part, but I don’t quite get it. Which one is the God of Christmas?”

Theta stared blankly. He cocked his head to the side. “What do you mean?”

“Is it the red one or the white one?”

Theta looked over to the opposite end of the bar and then back again. He blinked twice. “You mean Father Christmas or Jesus?”

“Yeah. Is that their names?”

Theta downed a bit of his drink, clanked it down, then pushed it away. He pulled a face as he swallowed. “Neither of them are the God of Christmas. There is no God of Christmas. There is only one God in their religion. Jesus is his Son, who was born 0 BC...er... or 0 AD, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. Or thereabouts. Christmas celebrates his birth. He was given gifts by wise men, and that’s where we get the gift giving from. And that’s where we get the name! Christmas! Christ-...Um...Mas. I’m not sure where that last part comes from.” He pointed with a thin finger. “But it is probably important.”

“And the other one?”

“Hmm? Oh, Father Christmas. He was a Saint who gave gifts to Children and has now been associated with Christmas. I’m not too sure on the full origins, it is different in every culture across the globe.”

“So he isn’t the God of Christmas either?”

“No.”

There was a clank of glass and jeer from a nearby table in the corner of the room. Shobogans laughed and grimaced at each other about some inappropriate joke.

Theta craned his head around to them, he glared at them, his face hawk like, then he returned to his company.

The Man’s eyes turned from the same crowd and caught Theta’s. “But it’s in his name.”

“Yes, but he isn’t the God of it. And Christ is in Christmas as well. ”

The man stared at Theta. “But...I...”

He leaned back and blew air out from his lips. “All this is way over my head, I’m afraid.”

“That’s exactly my point!” Theta cemented the point by moving his hand in a karate chop like action. “We as a society become too rigid in our ways. And we teach this to our next generations, locking them in the same trap as well. Someone as clever as you, Corsair, can’t gather the basics of a simple level 5 religion.”

“Hardly simple”

“Level 5 planet children can understand it.”

The Corsair leaned forward. “Ah, but they’re children, Theta. They don’t have the boundaries us Time Lords do. They have freedom of thought and ideology. We are very restricted in comparison.”

Theta sighed. “Well, I suppose it doesn’t truly matter anyway. What matters is, do you agree with me? What do you think?”

The Corsair drummed his sausage like fingers on the bar for a moment. He screwed his lips up into the corner of his mouth, he frowned intensely.

“Families?”

“That’s right.”

“They come together?”



“Yep”

“To celebrate having each other?”

“Hm.”

“Sounds like a pain in the back side.”

“No!” Theta roared and thrust out his arm knocking his drink.

The Corsair jerked backwards slightly and stared at Theta wide eyed.

Theta stopped. He tentatively dusted at his forehead with his fingers. “Sorry. I must still be wound up from this morning. Sorry, Corsair. It won’t happen again.”

“You need to unwind a bit, mate.”

Theta rested his head in his hand, his arm propped up on the bar, and he sighed. “Probably”.

The Corsair looked at him, and then he adjusted his focus to beyond Theta. A smile crept onto his face. “Aye aye, here comes trouble.”

Theta looked up and watched the Corsair stare. He started to turn around.

A large mass hit into his back, two thin arms sprawled over his shoulders like a scarf.

“Hiya Thete, how ya doing?” A smooth feminine voice.

Theta grumbled and pattered his arm against hers. “Kindly unhand me, Ruath. I’m not in the mood.”

Ruath let go and took a large stride back and stood next to the Corsair. “Ooo-ooo-ooo. Someone’s tetchy. Woke up on the wrong side of the bed, did we?”

“I did not wake up on the wrong side of the bed. I woke up on the right side of the bed, it’s just people have annoyed me to the point of practically being on the wrong side.”

Ruath and the Corsair shared a look.

Ruath leapt on a bar stool and swung around. “Still, you’re not going to ruin my good mood.” She waved her hand up. “A Krafayis Claw here.”

The bar man gave a disgruntled nod, and then wandered off.

“So then, big boy, what’s got your knickers in a twist?”

Theta rolled his eyes. “The Deca.”

“As always! Do you ever get along with them?”

Theta scratched absentmindedly at the bar. "Sometimes some of them can be pleasurable."

Ruath shook her head. "Alright then, what have they done?"

"They won't listen to my idea." Theta said in a groan like voice.

Ruath nodded. "All right, go on then."

The Corsair held up his hand. "Actually, it's quite long and I still don't get it."

Ruath stared at him for a moment, then whipped her head back around to Theta. "Very well. Short, snappy, Layman's terms."

Theta's eyes darted from one to the other. "But...but!"

Ruath reapplied her stare.

Thetas body dropped slightly, he let out an audible sigh. "If I must. You'll miss out on a lot of the raw charm and emotion however."

Ruath shrugged. "Meh, you can always fill me in later if I like the sound of it."

Theta adjusted himself in preparation. "Well, you see Christmas is about-"

"Hold on, what's a Christmas?"

"It's a holiday. From Earth"

"Oh, I see. I thought this was going to be a new technological idea. All right, I see." She settled back down. She propped up her arms on the bar and then rested her head in them. "Continue."

"So Christmas is a celebration of togetherness. It celebrates having all the people you love by your side and-"

The barman approached. He slid a tall Martini glass, filled with an eerie green drink, to Ruath. "Here you are; One Krafayis Claw."

She nodded and took the drink. "Cheers!" She hauled it up and took a swig.

Theta frowned at her; she didn't notice.

Ruath coughed slightly, and then used her sleeve to wipe some drink away from her lips.

She set the drink down and twirled her wrist quickly at Theta. "Yeah, sorry. Go on."

“Yes, anyway. It’s about the connections you have and celebrating having them. People come together in the cold and dark and give each other gifts. They are friendly and kind to one another. Holiday kindness. That sort of thing.”

“Ah, so it’s a holiday. Who’s the God?”

Theta made a disappointed sigh. “It hasn’t got anything to do with a God. Not really. Well, it does.”

The Corsair piped up. “Hey, you said it didn’t.”

“Well, yes. But that’s not the point. Not really. That’s just how it starts. Now it has Father Christmas and Elves and Reindeer. I’m not fond too much of that part. I like the together aspect. Having as many people as possible that care about you. A bit like a big family.”

Ruath lifted her drink to indicate at Theta. “Well there’s your problem. Family. The Deca aren’t your family. They’re friends. No. Colleagues. No. Acquaintances. No. More like pains in the butt.”

“Yeah, I get the picture.”

“And what about your family? Do they like the sound of it?”

Theta scratched the top of his head. “Well, they’re too far away really. And I’m not sure Brax would be into that sort of thing.”

The Corsair huffed. “Heh, yeah. I can see your point. I reckon he would sneer down at you over his glasses. You know, in his way.”

Theta rocked his head from side to side, weighing it up.

“He would tear you to shreds.”

Theta let out a sigh, he rubbed his forehead. A sad expression crossed his face. “I think you’re right. It’s hopeless really.”

Ruath sat up. “Now, now. It’s not all lost. Maybe you can spend some of this Christmas with me and the Corsair. Would you be up for that?”

The Corsair nodded.

Ruath turned back to Theta. “See? Just pick the part of Christmas you think we’d like.”

Theta frowned and stared off. “I...I don’t really know what part you’d like.”

Ruath rocked back, mock surprise on her face. "My gods! You should know us by now. What part can you imagine us telling you about?"

They all fell silent. Theta peered down at the bottom of his glass. Every so often his eyes flittered to look at a new circle on the coaster underneath.

He looked up and caught Ruath and the Corsair staring at him expectedly. Large smiles covered their faces. Thetas eyes widened, "Er..."

They were in more silence between them.

A Shobogan made a noise somewhere in the bar and Theta scratched at his ear.

"Um... they have advent calendars."

The other two stared blankly. Ruath moved her head up and down slowly, driving Theta to continue.

"They have chocolate or pictures in, and you open them each day of December leading up to Christmas."

Ruath cocked her head to the side. "Chocolate, you say?"

The Corsair leaned back and crossed his arms. "I don't know. We haven't really got anything set up. We haven't got any chocolate. And what day of December is it anyway?"

Theta reached into his pocket and pulled out a watch. It was a pocket watch, fused with circuitry.

"I have been working on this. I made it. It beeps when it's Christmas day."

They stared at him uninterested. "Well?"

"We are on Christmas Eve".

"See? It's too late then."

"No, but wait." He pocketed the watch. "They sometimes have Calendars that go on till New Year."

The Corsair scratched at his chin. "And how long is that?"

"Erm, let's see. Converting the calendars..." Theta held out his fingers. He prodded them individually, and mumbled to himself. "...not counting today...small amounts...new year's eve... About a week."

The Corsair made a disapproving Hmmm.

Ruath held up her hand between them. "I think the Corsair is right. We need something bigger. Something larger. With a lot more flare to it."

Theta scratched at his chin. "Hmm. A parade?"

Ruath stared at him. "A parade? Maybe not something *that* big."

"Christmas Cards?"

"Bigger"

"Christmas Carolling?"

"Now I like that. Going out and doing something. Give me more of that."

"Um..."

"With more..."

She held her hands out and stared off into the ceiling. She moved her two hands out in a wave.

"Panache!"

"I...er...what do you mean?"

She growled and looked back down. "Something fun. That we'd like. With an extra edge to it. A reckless edge."

"The opposite of panache then?"

"Oh you know what I mean"

"Very well" He straightened his back. "Reckless edge. Reckless edge. Reckless edge... A Christmas party?"

She snapped her fingers. "Bingo! A Christmas party! What is one of those like? How do they happen?"

"Well...often at works. Like offices."

"Oh ho! I see where this is going. Locked in tension, not used to each other in social environments, throw in alcohol, the catalyst for chaos, and bam! A hell of a good time! A night to remember and to forget. Am I right?"

"Er...I guess so."

"That's perfect then!" With that she leapt up.

The Corsair rubbed his hands together and stood up. He picked his coat up from underneath him on his stool.

Theta held up his hands and flitted his eyes between them. "Whoa whoa whoa. Hold on. What are we doing?"

Ruath bounced up and down. "Off for a party! That's my kind of Christmas!"

Theta shooked his head. "But that's not what Christmas is about."

"Does it happen at Christmas?"

"Yes."

"Is it for Christmas?"

"Well..."

"Is it called a *Christmas* party?"

"Um..."

"And most importantly" She leaned in. "Is it a type of party?"

"Well, yes."

"Perfect!" She grabbed Theta by the arm and hauled him up.

She put an arm around him.

"Actually, I think I would rather we--"

The Corsair also put an arm around him.

"OK, never mind."

They let go and stood back. Ruath nudged him with her glass. "Come on, Thete. Cheer up. We're celebrating Christmas, aren't we? Who else here on Gallifrey will celebrate Christmas with you if not for your best pals?"

"Well... I suppose."

"Exactly!" She raised her glass. "To Christmas!"

Ruath and the Corsair downed their drinks. It took them a while.

While they drank, Theta thought. As he rubbed the back of one hand with the fingertips of the other he studied them intensely. A smile crept across his face. "You're right. You know what? You're right!"

He looked up to them both.

They dropped their drinks from their mouths and wiped their faces. "What?"

"We should party! I mean, we're celebrating Christmas, aren't we? We are getting into the spirit of it! The full human spirit of Christmas."

"Now you're talking!"

The Corsair placed his empty glass on the counter. "Right! Let's go hit the bars!"

"And stay out!" With that, three figures flew through the air. They yelped, their hands held out in front of them, as they arced across the street on to the cobbled ground. The three had differing arcs and landed at different times.

The bouncers for each one nodded their heads in turn and rubbed their hands together on a job well done. They turned and strode their ways back into the bar, sticking out their chests to the people queuing to get in.

The mass of limbs on the ground groaned and complained. There was a heave and flail, and one form disentangled itself from the others.

The figure zipped straight upwards. Stopped, looked around like a meerkat, and then smartened his clothes. "Well, that was very clever. Well done."

A large hand clawed at the air from the ground. Theta turned and spotted it, then walked over to help the Corsair up.

With a noise that cannot be described and words that could not be understood, Theta dragged the Corsair to his feet.

They stopped and the Corsair rested on Theta, his arm over Theta. He struggled to catch his breath.

Theta watched the Corsair and attempted to get him off. He wouldn't move however, and every nudge made him fall back down again. The larger the push, the heavier the fall.

Theta sighed then rubbed his eyes. "I'm getting a bit tired now, guys."

He looked down at the last figure laying face first on the ground. He rolled his eyes and made to help Ruath up. He was caught by the Corsair's hug however. He shimmied them both to the side, and then leaned the Corsair against a Street lamp.

He slowly stepped back, holding his arms out to near the Corsair so he could catch him if he fell. Satisfied that the Corsair wouldn't topple over, Theta stepped back and turned to help Ruath up.

He reached down to hook onto her arm, but she quickly leapt up, pushing him out of the way.

Theta jumped back and watched her.

She stood staring into the distance. She swayed slightly, the bottle in her hand swooping all over the place. She blinked heavily and then stood up straight. She took a swig from the bottle.

"Right, I'm good to go."

Theta shook his head. "I don't think that's-" A strange noise escaped his mouth and he clutched at his stomach. He screwed up his face. "Oh dear. Not reacting too well to that."

Ruath waved her hand down at him as if trying to fan away the problem, she stumbled as she did it. "You've got to get more in you, that's all. Just get a bit of food down ya, some more beer, and you'll be good to go."

Theta frowned to this at first, then smiled and shrugged. "Makes sense."

He turned around and picked up the Corsair. "Come on. We're going to get some food, get us ready to go again."

A strange smile appeared on the Corsair's face. "Food, eh? Sounds...sounds..." He made a tremendous belching noise from his mouth that made Theta feel a bit self-conscious about his own.

Theta thought about that for a moment, remembered that burping wasn't something he had any interest in, and then blamed his self-consciousness on the alcohol.

The Corsair adjusted his mouth with a horrid slurping noise. "Where are we going?"

Theta looked up to Ruath. But she was nowhere to be seen.

He cranked his head from side to side. "Ruath."

"Yeah, yeah! Over here!"

They turned and saw Ruath come from around a street corner. She stumbled as she walked. She turned and glared at the pavement tile as if that had caused it.

She faced them and adjusted her skirt. "There is bar with food just around this corner."



“Does this bar with food serve beer?” The Corsair asked.

“Well it is bar. That’s their primary concern.”

Theta hoicked the Corsair up. “Will it be open? I mean, at this hour?”

Ruath shrugged. “I guess so. Should be open all the time really.”

Theta tried to reaching into his pocket. The lumbering mass of the Corsair prevented him from continuing. “I have a watch in my pocket here.”

Ruath fell forward and plunged her hand into Theta’s pocket.

He yelped and squirmed. “I said pocket!”

“That is your, oh no, sorry.”

After several more attempts and several more girl-like yelps, Ruath plucked out the watch.

“Er why is this beeping?”

“Oh, it’s past midnight. It’s Christmas day now.”

“Oh.”

“Merry Christmas.”

“Oh yeah, Merry Christmas.” Ruath remained fixated on the watch however. “Right, anyway. It’s twenty past.”

“What?”

“Four.”

“Oh, will they be open?”

“Definitely. It’s Christmas. We need to eat.” Ruath dropped the watch and swung around and began to march off around the corner.

Theta grumbled and tried to pick up his watch but couldn’t manage it.

“Theta Sigma!”

Theta stood up straight with his eyes wide. He looked at the Corsair, whose eyes were half closed and whose mouth was in a delirious smile. “Was that you?” He asked him

“What are you doing out here?”

An arm reached between his legs and scooped up the watch.

Theta jumped around to avoid the arms.

A figure swept around in front of him.

A young woman, his age, with long brown hair. A green dress with a large jumper wrapped around her.

“And you dropped this.” She frowned and slipped the watch into Theta’s pocket; the correct one first time.

“What are you doing out here? It’s freezing. Why would you go out and get drunk like this? It’s four in the morning. I was worried sick.”

Theta squinted. “Romana?”

“By the Gods, how many have you had? Way over your dose. You can’t even recognise me properly.”

“Oh I could, I just couldn’t make you out in between all these other women. They’re swarming me.”

Romana looked around her. She was standing by herself. “It’s just me. You’re seeing double.”

Ruath stormed around the corner. “Where are you two?” She marched up to them. “Come on! We’ve got places to go!”

Theta leaped back. “Ah! They’re multiplying!”

Romana sighed. “Oh for heaven’s sake.”

Romana jumped forward and took the Corsair off of Theta. She twisted around and dumped him on Ruath.

“Wha?” She stumbled, but managed to hold the weight. “What are you doing?”

“Theta is coming home. He’s had too much to drink. In fact-“ She used her finger to indicate the Corsair. “- he’s had too much to drink too. You should take him home.”

Ruath stared at her, and then growled. “Stop ruining the mood. We’re just trying to have fun.”

“Have fun but play it safe. It’s this sort of fun that ends up with people getting so ill they die in a gutter and are so inebriated that they can’t regenerate. Or worse, they can and then have to tell everyone that’s how they died.”

“Meh, whatever.” Ruath turned around and dragged the Corsair with her. “Come on, It’s open. We can get some food ourselves.”

They stumbled off around the corner.

Romana turned around to Theta. She began to adjust his clothes and wrap him up.

Theta swayed slightly, his eyes not focusing on anything in particular.

“Look at you. You must be freezing.”

“Nah” He wobbled his head. “I feel fine.”

“You don’t, you just don’t care right now.”

She finished adjusting his clothes. “I was worried sick, you know. Why did you come out here?”

“We decided to celebrate Christmas.”

Romana stopped and stared at him. “What do you mean?”

“Christmas. It’s a holiday.”

She closed her eyes and shook her head. “Yeah, I know that”

“No one wanted to celebrate it with me. You need to spend Christmas with as many people as possible for it to be right. And no one would. The Deca, family. No one. What’s the point in celebrating Christmas if you haven’t got all your friends to celebrate it with?”

Romana’s forehead contorted into a harsh frown. “There is a point. Stop being so naïve and childish.”

Theta stumbled back and blinked his eyes. “Sorry, what?”

“It’s not about how many connections. It’s about the quality of them. You can spend Christmas with one person you love and it can be as meaning full as spending it with a hundred. Maybe more so.”

“Rubbish. It has to be all of them. A big celebration.”

“Big is relative,” she snapped. She then stared at the ground.

There was a silence between them.

She looked up. Her eyes reflected the lights in the air. A small smile crossed her face. “You’re celebrating having those connections. You’re showing you appreciate them. And... you appreciate them all the more when they are all you have.”

Theta stared at her.

Romana looked around at the street corner. "Look at them. Middle of the night. Making you ill to celebrate. That's not very appreciative. And now you're ill they ignore you to carry on their fun. It's selfish."

She turned around to face him again. "It's not very Christmassy. It's about being thankful for true friends and family. People who look out for you."

"Like you."

Romana eyes widened. "Well...I guess. Yeah." She blushed. "Yeah, like me."

"Oh god." Theta looked down. "I forgot, I completely forgot. We were going to spend Christmas together. Weren't we?"

Romana avoided his gaze and remained silent.

Theta growled to himself and looked down. "I forgot. This evening. I missed it. I completely forgot. I got so annoyed earlier today with the Deca. I...well, it's my fault really. There's no one to blame but myself."

He looked up again. "I'm so so sorry."

She rested her hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry. I'm happy to know you're safe."

She shook slightly and hugged her jumper. "Brr, it's cold out here." She laughed a little.

Theta blew white air from his mouth. "Yeah, you're right, it's freezing."

She smiled. "I'm always right."

He smiled back.

"Come on then" She helped Theta get his arm over her shoulder. "Let's get you back."

They started to walk down the street. They stumbled slightly as they went. Theta slipped and Romana helped him back up again several times.

"Sorry about missing it." He said as they walked.

"That's all right. I'll get fully annoyed with you tomorrow after we sober you up."

"Sorry."

"I was just joking. I said that's all right."

"No, I mean I'm sorry."

She laughed. "I know that, you said. It's fine."

They began to turn around the corner.

"Did I say I was sorry?"

"I'm so so sorry."

The Doctor waited for a response.

But there was nothing.

He opened his eyes. It was dark. He blinked multiple times, no change.

He heaved and adjusted himself up. He lifted his arm up and patted at the wall. He found a dial and pinched it between his fingers and twisted it.

A light slowly began to emanate out from the walls. Wooden cupboards and ornate decks came into view as the black walls became a soft grey.

He looked around the room. He stared out at nothing in particular, collecting his thoughts.

He heard something. Noise from the desks.

He frowned and began to move. He pulled the covers off of himself and placed his feet over the edge of the bed.

He placed his hands on one of the posters of his bed to help himself up. He saw his hand, jumped slightly.

But it was normal. He stared at it for a moment. It was normal. But for a moment he had thought it was old. It was old. But...why did that concern him?

A brief flicker of his dream returned to him. A moment, a picture of an instant, a blur that made only little sense.

He was young in his dream. How that had changed now. He smiled at the odd experience of remembering his entire life back into existence. He had awoken feeling like his younger self. Now, as he thought, more memories and experiences popped back into his mind, back into place. He became himself again.

He hauled himself up and stumbled to his desk. He ran his hand along the wood lip along the side, and found a draw; one he thought the sound was coming from. He palmed the handle; he studied his old hand for a moment, and then pulled open the draw.

Inside were books and papers. Ancient texts and tomes littered with sticky notes, scrawled with circular text.

He ran his fingers across the old surface. The dust built up as he did. He moved one book, and shifted another.

At the bottom an old watch, fused with circuitry, beeped and flashed.

He picked it up and cupped it in his hands. He stared at it for a moment, trying to remember how it worked.

He reached down and rubbed dust away from it. He held his finger underneath and tweaked a button. The watch stopped beeping.

The room was silent.

“Christmas day.”

He looked over his shoulder at his bed but he then turned to face the door.

He walked over and grabbed a dressing gown and wrapped it around himself. He tugged at the rope until it was secure.

He approached the door and pushed it open. He walked out into the grey corridors outside.

He looked around.

All was calm. The Ship was still asleep.

He headed down along a path, over time making his way down one corridor to the next.

Minutes later he emerged in the control room. It was quite within.

He slowly shifted himself to the console and stood by its side.

He noted the stands and displays took on a different look in the serenity and dark of the night.

He looked down at the controls. He brushed his hands against the console.

The light in the centre began to grow, the dim of the room lifted.

“No no. Go back to sleep.” The increase of light stopped.

The Doctor looked up at the ceiling. “Go back to dreaming.”

Slowly, the room darkened again and returned to the serene, calm grey.

The Doctor smiled to himself, and headed back into the depths of the corridors.

He found a door after a while. He placed his hand on it.

He unlocked it with his other arm and gently moved it to ajar.

He peered in.

The crack of light revealed a carpeted floor, the odd bit of clothing draped across it. He saw a wall, posters and images covered it, showing peoples and promoting ideologies.

It showed a large bed; like his own. Inside, cuddled up like a cocoon, was a young girl.

The Doctor observed her sleep for a moment, keeping himself quiet. She hardly breathed at all. She slept quietly and peacefully.

He lifted his hand from the door and slipped inside, careful to remain quiet.

He reached the bed and studied her sleep.

He smiled.

He was so proud of her. Who she was, how thoughtful and selfless she was. She was as clever as him and as stubborn too. Sometimes she never seemed to know when to back down. But, he agreed with her on more than one occasion that he never seemed to know either.

He was proud that she was brave. She had lost everything. She did not complain, she was strong and stayed with him when they had to leave. No friends, no family, no protection. They were alone. And she smiled and played and enjoyed herself. He had been so caught up with protecting her he missed being with her.

He was proud that she inspired him. He knew she was braver than he was. That drove him to be strong for her.

They were alone now. All they had was each other.

And he truly appreciated her.

He leant down and brushed her hair away. He kissed her softly on her forehead.

“Merry Christmas, Susan.”