

"I have to warn you, it's a pretty strange story," I tell the professor, but he's eager to hear it.

"You can just replay your thoughts," he says, "from any point in your life?"

"Yeah, sort of. It's more of a diary. And it's not, you know, exact. Sometimes I get bored and mess around. I edit a lot. I've got 1,894 years of material to play with."

He says, "It staggers me that you aren't insane after all this time, really."

"Eh," I say, "I guess I'm easily amused?" I tap my head. "Or, maybe I just edited those parts out. Anyway, where were we?"

He thinks. "You had just freed the Doctor from the Pandorica and he was on his way to the future..."

"Right. So, I go and stand guard on the Pandorica..."

My 2000-Year Diary by Rory Williams (Plastic)

by Al B Dickerson

102 A.D. Stonehenge, the House of Fun

Well, here I am.

The Doctor said, "The universe is big. It's vast and complicated and ridiculous and sometimes, very rarely, impossible things just happen and we call them miracles... and that's a theory. Nine hundred years and I've never seen one yet, but this will do me."

Amy remembered me.

If I stand at the door, she is only a meter away.

45 years later. 147 A.D. Rome. Skulking about Antoninus's palace

This is me talking to myself. I tried to write, but had no biro or, it being antiquity, no paper. I got on better with the reed than the goose feather but don't like either. There is papyrus. It turns my fingers yellow. And there is parchment... it bothers me, writing on skin, using plastic fingers. No, I will talk to myself. I've had practice. And I've discovered, if I don't want to forget something, I don't forget. I suppose I am making a... file? Do I have a RAM limit? Probably.

Also, about the writing... it isn't me. I tried to keep a journal, but reading it back put me off. Put me at a distance, sort of? Like I was reading about someone else. This way is better. I can hear it in my ears. If I don't like it, I can make it go away. I can forget anything I want to forget. The benefits of a plastic head. When it's all over, then maybe I'll write it down.

Someone coming... "Ave", "Ave"... Oh, did I mention? I have two sets of memories. Had. Had two sets of memories.

My Roman memories were fake. When they took Amy to Rome I checked around. The surgeon Rexrubius never existed. Ergo, he had no son. His shop was a novelty bakery. He was not erased from history, like someone I could mention. He was a phoney, so I made him go away. I can do that, too. Delete a file. I took my Roman boyhood and made it go away.

My other memories are of Amy and Leadworth and the Doctor. My Leadworth memories are real. I was there, they happened. But the Doctor said the crack in Amy's wall ate a lot of things and people in Leadworth -- but not Amy, which is strange but agreeable -- and also he said that, as the universe has inconveniently exploded, the future I am waiting for is only a version of my time, so I guess those things didn't happen, either.

There's a crack in my head. Filled with fictions.

86 years later. 233 A.D. Rome. In which I prove bad at taking advice

The Doctor said, "Listen to me. This is the last bit of advice you're going to get in a very long time. You're living plastic but you're not immortal. I have no idea how long you'll last. And you're not indestructible. Stay away from heat. And radio signals when they come along. You can't heal or repair yourself. Any damage is permanent. So for God's sake, however bored you get, stay out of—"

Have I mentioned I really hate the Doctor sometimes? What was he going to say? Out of the Sun? Out of the water? Out of brothels? Out of sight? Out of trouble?

The Sun doesn't bother me. I get shiny if I'm out too long but it fades.

Water? I'm a fantastic swimmer now. Been looting shipwrecks. Bobbing for bob.

Brothels? Amy would know. Also, plastic. Not keen on experimenting. But Amy would know. And kill me. Luckily, not interested.

Keeping out of sight. Eh... I haven't done very well. People notice, more than you'd think. Here's this handsome young man who heroically kills the boar attacking you when you are a little boy, and here he is again when you are a doddering old pensioner. Claiming to be a grandson. No one ever believes that. Or fails to see through my Blind Pew routine.

Or, more to the point, here's me, mysterious protector of the Pandorica, telling that fool Atticus that it won't matter how many Greeks and elephants he has -- the Pandorica will not open. Or Esclapides with his pulleys and bloody huge mill stones. Or Marcus the stoic, with his 'biggest chisel ever'. Nope. Had to set them straight. Dig up the old uniform and do the Batman. Also, in the case of Atticus, turning Amy right side up. Idiot. And do any of them heed my dire, dramatic warnings to 'tell no one'? On implication of dire circumstances? Nope.

Now there are stories about me. They call me the 'Lone Centurion'. Which is actually pretty cool. But if the Doctor meant to say, 'Stay out of trouble', then I have done poorly.

89 years later. 322 B.C. Rome "My God, it's full of stars"

The Doctor said I was made of Amy's memories. Amy must have remembered me paying better attention in History than I did in reality. Because I know a lot more history than I should and I notice things are very... strange, here. Stars, you know. As in, no stars. There's no astrologers. Well there are, but it's all based on Moon phases and Sun positions and only silly people buy into it. Ships hug the shores. No sextant. There are beacons and forts every few kilometers on the coasts. And the Emperors have gone off program. But somehow, sort of, it's running on schedule. Don't know how.

Big development. I've started a religion. Not on purpose. Not at first. Got bored at Saturnalia last year and started talking Christmas with a man, new in town, named Sam. He was a Jew, a philosopher. Didn't know that at first, of course.

He was on about the Christians. "Have you read their writings?", he asked, "They believe Yeshua was born on this date."

"Sure," I said, "Star of Bethlehem, choirs of angels, three wise men, born in a manger."

"My friend," said Sam, "What is this 'star of Bethlehem' you speak of?"

Oh, what was the harm? And, bored. Over 200 years old, repetition sets in.

"Come and walk with me, Sam", I said, and we strolled to the Temple of the Pandorica. Sam was awed; he had heard of it, of course, everyone knew about the Pandorica and the Lone Centurion.

He took my arm. "Is this safe, friend? It is said that this place is guarded by a fearsome demon."

"Safe enough with me here," I said, "Now look up."

I'd been sneaking in there for years, playing Michaelangelo. Being proud owner of a 'stun' setting, I'd never been caught. There was a spotter group. I was treasurer.

I'd painted the sky. By the way -- all those classy marble statues and palaces you see in books about Rome? Not classy in real life. Everything painted. In tacky, bright colors. Anyway -- I'd painted the ceiling black and added stars.

"But what are they, those many bright points?" asked Sam, and I told him. Other suns, trillions of miles away.

"But Eratosthenes has measured the Sun, Spartacus, and our rabbis have confirmed his data. It orbits us, beyond the Moon, twenty-three million miles away. Its diameter is two hundred and twenty-five thousand miles. Surely, at the distances you claim, we could not see these other suns you speak of? It is a compelling idea, but all men of learning agree, we are alone in the universe, save for God and His angels."

I didn't have the heart to tell him his figures were off by three quarters. Instead, I made a silly decision.

I stood at the door of the Pandorica, Amy sleeping a meter away. "Ask yourself, Sam. Looking at the sky at night, do you get a nagging... sensation? Does it feel wrong to you? Empty? Or, when you sleep, do you dream of a sky full of lights?" He nodded, thoughtful. I knew he would. People were strange about the sky, as if some part of them remembered, like Amy remembered me.

"Once, Sam, the sky was full of stars. Red Dwarfs... Green Giants... billions of lights, all with names. Sailors navigated by them. Astrologers studied them, grouped them, called the groups 'constellations'. Those there, that constellation is called the Great Bear. That one there is the Little Bear. Or, 'Rupert'. And that's the Spider from Mars. And this, the most beautiful, brightest constellation, is Amy. See her belt and her little sword?"

Sam looked like he'd been hit by a chariot. "How do you know all this?" he asked.

In for a penny. "Because, my friend, I am the Lone Centurion. And I remember the stars. And there, inside the impregnable Pandorica, sealed by the... Great Physician himself, is..." I had to ponder a bit. "Here are all the stars, kept safe from the ravenous bug- no, sorry, scratch that, kept safe for future man. When the Pandorica – which is impregnable – is finally opened, all will be set back the way it should be." Damned well better be. "All those stars and all their worlds will be there for man to claim as his own!" The moment seemed to call for it, so I gave a 'Huzzah!' and shook a fist.

And then, watching Sam marvel, I had a brilliant idea. After proving to him my identity (well, showing off my superpowers), I swore him to secrecy about me, and he eagerly agreed to help me protect the Pandorica. He and his friends will form a secret society, he said, dedicated to her preservation.

I'll make them memorize a vow :

"I, [insert name here], swear, by the Lady of Mystery and the Doctor of Time, to protect the Pandorica, Vessel of Stars, to the best of my ability, to the end of my days, and above all else. Let no man, god, creed, spirit or hardship sway me from my duty. Let this vow never be broken by any man down through the centuries of time in the history of this sacred organization."

In return, I will meet them, in secret, and teach them things. Science, history and stuff. It'll be good. Between us, by the time the Doctor opens the Pandorica, there will be a world good enough for Amy to live in.

98 years later. 420 A.D. France. Not for sale by new owners

Had a very bad idea. Convinced the cult to spread rumors that the Pandorica was a curse on Rome and had to be returned to Britannica and Stonehenge. Yeah... sounded good in theory. It would have worked, too, if not for those meddling Franks.

I detest living in the forest but those swords look sharp. The Franks think I'm a ghost.

56 years later. 476 A.D. France. Veni, Vidi, Vicious

Rome just fell. Sort of. I always imagined huge disasters and millions slaughtered and an instant collapse into the Dark Ages, but it was more like a very rude change of ownership. Still, I got out

just in time. Odoacer was reportedly really mad; he wanted the box. He broke a few things.

Meanwhile, Amy, myself and the cult are safe in a big French cave west of the Alps.

Working on guns for the cult. Have a crew mixing powder now.

379 years later. 855 A.D. K'Thorxes. Boom Boom Acka Lacka Boom

In my list of things I consider unpleasant and thoroughly unnecessary, being trapped after a cave-in for almost 400 years is ranked just below:

- 1) Being turned to plastic,
- 2) Being erased from history,
- 3) Being out-cooled by a manic alien,
- 4) Having my fiancée run away to outer space with the fore-referenced manic alien and,
- 5) Being forced to watch Britain's Got Talent with the fore-referenced fiancée.

Well off the list and on a level of its own is hearing rescuers digging you out, getting your hopes up, and then realizing they are digging from below.

3 years later. 858 A.D. K'Thorxes. Everybody walk the dinosaur

I like these Silurians. They have big dinosaur heads, like the masks Restac's troops wore, but not masks. Once we cracked the language barrier I discovered they were part of an isolationist society and didn't want to live on the surface. "You can have it," they said, "Pass the mushrooms".

151 years later. 1009 A.D. Constantinople. Who's the cool old guy, now?

I have just realized that I am now older than the Doctor. Unless he lies about his age. Probably.

111 years later. 1231 A.D. Rome. ...and don't call me Baphomet

I am now officially a big liar. And a Roman again, because of it.

With what was left of old Sam's star cult dead or scattered, it was time for a new posse.

Having had another great idea, the Lone Centurion visited Hugues de Payens and Godfrey de Saint-Omer. After revealing that the Pandorica contained the Holy Grail, the Crown of Thorns and quite an exceptional amount of gold, I convinced them I was the Wandering Jew (not as clever as I thought - they'd never heard of him) and became the secret figure behind Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon. That is, the Knights Templar.

All was well, if not rife with Crusaders, for a couple centuries. Now Amy & I are back in Rome, in a vault under Vatican Hill. Forgotten, hopefully.

69 years later. 1300 A.D. Venice. Actually, he screamed like a little girl

MARCO POLO: Do I know you, sir? You bring to mind a beggar I met under curious circumstances while in Rome. There I was, enjoying the gracious hospitality of His Holiness and browsing the treasure vaults in search of curios and curiosities when lo and behold, I beheld the object of your interest, the fabled Pandorica, said to contain the Grail, the Crown and, I'm led to believe, quite an exceptional amount of gold. Massive it was, wrought of cold iron, though curiously light, as later events revealed.

CLINT EASTWOOD, FLEMISH MERCHANT: ...No?

MARCO POLO: Oh, but my heart sang, sir, at the sight of the magnificence looming majestically before me! The history! The fable! The mystery! Stranger than the riddles of old Cathay, hoarier than the crumbling tombs and flightless birds of dreaming Egypt! There I stood enrapt, my soul aflame with discovery, when a decrepit beggar loomed from the pellucid darkness behind a decorative urn from the court of the Pharaoh!

CLINT: Wow.

MARCO POLO: Resolutely I challenged the intruder in this most sacred archive of treasures, and in a commanding voice demanded to know his business! He cowered before me, claiming some harmless beggar's errand, but I saw through his duplicity. Rushing to His Holiness, I begged of him to make of the Holy Pandorica a gift, to me, his humblest servant, for its safekeeping and study here in my beloved Venice. Oh, it has confounded me, sir, in its stubborn refusal to relinquish its manifold secrets! And now, to further trouble my soul, my soon to be betrothed has expressed a dislike, a fear even, of its shining presence in my humble villa! Sir, she has gone so far as to claim... no sir... I shall not trouble your mind with maiden's tales of guardian spirits and dire, dramatic warnings of dire circumstances.

CLINT: 25,000?

MARCO POLO: Sold! Can you get it out by Wednesday?

188 years later. 1488 A.D. Venice. House Calamari.

A memorable day. 'Roricus Eastwood Calamari', local tradesman, scholar and misterioso, was invited to attend an investment assemblage to hear the proposal of one Cristoforo Colombo concerning a voyage to China. Across the Atlantic, of course. There was no way I'd miss this.

Colombo turned out to be something of a self-righteous bore, which may explain why he'd had such a poor response from the Portuguese. He droned on and on in his Genoese accent (not winning him any friends here, that) and I quite tuned him out and was lost in my own thoughts.

I'd been here for nearly 200 years, living as the Eastwood Calamari family for 150. I was at the hub of world commerce; my agents brought news from every known corner of the globe. Sure, there were irregularities, but the world was working. Things were on schedule. Here was Columbus, failing to attract investors in Venice in 1488, just like he was meant to do. "In four years he'll discover America," I thought, "and I'll have nothing to do with it." Right then and there, while Columbus was slapping his servant for dropping a sheath of maps on the floor, I realized that my very best future course was to stay quiet, unseen and forgotten. No more playing with history. Guarding Amy, being the Lone Centurion, was all that mattered. I felt good about it; like a weight came off.

Well, the meeting ended, Columbus retreated in a dark cloud of Venetian rejection, and not once did he say, "It's-a round like-a your head". Disappointing. We drifted into another room and had wine (No cigars, yet) and gossip. Giovanni Bellini had painted another nice picture of Jesus. The new Doge was being too conciliatory with the Ottomans. Old Fabretti was complaining about inaccuracies in a recent printing of Avienus (I knew Avienus, in fact, and he was always losing his notes, the sloppy bastard).

Then came the second thing that made this a very interesting day – Giorgio Cornaro was keen to show me a gift from his little sister, the Queen of Cyprus. "Your interest in the natural sciences is well known," he said, "tell me, what do you make of this stone, said to have fallen from the sky?" He opened a small metal chest and I saw a meteorite. Then, static.

The next thing I knew, I was floating in a sort of void, confused and unfocussed. I had a brief sensation of touching a familiar mind (the Doctor?) and then the real world asserted itself. I was home, in my great hall, reclined on a couch. Two men worriedly gazed at me. One I did not

recognize, but he was dressed in the regalia of Cornaro's personal guard. The other, a Moorish trader everyone called Stephan, I'd known for nearly a decade as a good sort. He'd dined here, been a friend.

Right away, I knew. I can spot them a mile away. "I thought you lot were all gone," I said, sitting up, "I looked everywhere for you."

"We feared your wrath, Centurion," said Stephan, "after you slew so many of us with your black powder and disappeared into the Earth. It was decided to watch you from afar. There were many of us with you in the Holy Land and later, in the church."

"Who watches the watchman, huh?"

"We did not forsake our duty to the Lady and the Stars," he added, "and still we adhere to the Great Blueprint of the Future." Was there a hint of accusation there?

"Wait. You've been blaming me for that since... since Rome fell? Are you out of your minds? The explosion was an accident. I didn't... I spent 400 years in that cave, you know," I said.

"And now you are here," said Cornaro's guard, "safe again."

"Yes," I said, "here we are, safe. And we're going to stay safe, and that means keeping quiet and not meddling in things. Listen, I appreciate what you've done here. I do. But just today I realised something. The stars are coming, no matter what we do. It won't matter what I do and it won't matter what you do. All I need from you is this: First, get rid of that damned stone. Throw it in the sea. Second, trust me, and leave me alone. I have a good thing going here. No-one suspects. The Pandorica is safe."

After they promised to observe from a distance and keep me out of their plotting, we had a pleasant evening. In a way, it was relaxing to know they were out there. Saying good-night, I assured them, "This is really the best thing we can do. In a few years I'll start powdering my hair. Then I'll disappear up north for a couple decades, fake my death and return as my son. I'm getting good at it. You guys just chill. Nothing can go wrong."

100 years later. 1588 A.D. Venice. Weirdos bearing gifts.

They came in broad daylight. I thought they were my friends. They had Cornaro's damned Mystery Stone in a lead box.

Oh, Amy.

I can't move. Hinged iron gauntlets trap my hands. My ankles are manacled, my wrists

bolted across my chest. My body is strapped by dozens of woven bands to a heavy iron frame. Before they put the iron mask over my head, I see occult symbols written across the entire apparatus.

I am moved. By sea, by land. Weeks crawl past. No one offers me food. They know.

Amy, I cannot feel you. Are you here? Are you safe in Venice? Does Guido still watch over you?

The journey ends.

I am set upright. I sense heat on my head, coolness below my feet. I hear water running, far below, and distant conversations above. Men come down, swords and armor clanking. All pause and there is whispering; then, softly, one approaches. I imagine I can feel him, studying me. I do not expect his first words.

“MAD MONASCI OI ‘AUTON,’” he says, in the unspoken language of the Nestene Consciousness.

“BAGLE?” I say, “I mean, what do you want?”

“Later, creature, “ he says. “All you need know is this: you are bound by cold iron, inscribed with Solomon’s Holy Seals of containment, and suspended over running water. A sluice above your head will deliver molten silver if you struggle or attempt to utter incantations. You have no recourse but cooperation.”

Right. I’m in Sandman, issue one: I remain silent and stylishly moody, goading my evil captor as the years pass and he becomes old and careless. Then I strike with cool, righteous fury.

Nah. I opt to blubber instead.

“I swear, you do not know what you are doing,” I say, “You’re making a huge mistake. I’m not who you think.”

“And so it begins, with lies. Oh, fallen one. HCHZRH MIRC MAD BABALON, HAMI,” he says. I say, “BAGLE?”

He does not answer. I hear him hiss to his men, there is a rustle and clank, a shooting of bolts and rattle of chains, then I am alone with the darkness and rushing water.

20 years later. 1608 A.D. Mortlake. De-doo-doo-doo, de-Dee-Dee-Dee

As the ages of my ‘reflection’ passed, I became attuned to the rhythms of the house above. Stomping feet and splashing water was morning. Quiet study and earnest discussions was afternoon. Prayers, recitals, rattling dishes and laughter was evening. Soft snores, creaking timbers,

settling stone and furtive movements was night. And always, visitors, day and night. Sometimes they came below and I was shown, exhibited. I did not speak, nor was I prompted. Slowly, fragments of names, details, plans and contingencies reached my plastic ears. I sought an advantage.

Time crawled on. Slowly, the rhythm changed. It became the sound of a fortune dwindling. Visitors came less often, and the dim clamor of the surrounding town grew closer, then surrounded us. There were fewer voices and longer silences. The master of the house no longer exhibited me, but he and his guards came more often. We did not speak; I heard paper rustling, soft sighs and mild curses. Near the end, all through a long autumn and into winter, he came and sat every evening.

And then, one winter's night, the rhythm was broken. For an entire day all was silent except for muttered prayers. And at midnight, chains and bolts and locks were undone, like a thousand times before. But there was a strange feeling in the air. Something had changed.

"Remove the creature's helmet, so that we may look upon it," he said, and this thing was done. I blinked as the dim light seared my eyes. "Clean it," he said, and a sponge on a pole removed the decades of web and dust.

The man peering up at me was dressed as a seventeenth century Bond villain, or maybe a Goth Gandalf. Black robe, black skull cap. Pointy, snowy beard. Thousand meter stare. But frail. I knew the signs; this was a man about to die.

I looked at his companions. A rough servant, ears bound, stood to the side, hand on a lever. Another aimed a crossbow. A scribe stood beside the master, and behind him a little girl on a stool swung her feet.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"A Cure fan?" I said.

He frowned, then forged on. "You may address me as 'Doctor'. Now, Auton, I have bound you by the power of Christ. Cold iron inscribed with the sigils of Solomon compel you to speak only the truth and maintain a pleasing aspect. Do you swear by the Holiest to honor the aeons-old compact?"

You know what's strange? I should have been furious with him, but I felt sorry for the old man. There was something about him, a sense that he knew all the sigils and silver were a charade, but he had a part to play, an appearance to keep up. That's when I realized that my captivity was torture for us both. My long imprisonment wasn't an attempt to break me; ever since my capture,

when he'd had to face positive proof of my existence, he'd been afraid to speak to me. Advantage: Williams.

"No," I said, "I won't swear. I am the Lone Centurion, guardian of the Pandorica. I'm not some demon that you can lock up using magic words. I'm only up here because these chains are strong, not because of some spell. You can't keep me here forever, and when I get free, I warn you, John Dee, there are going to be some dire consequences."

He did not seem surprised at my knowledge (I'd sussed it out twenty years ago, anyway; who else would he be?), nor bothered by my dire warning. Instead, he snapped his fingers, and gestured to the scribe. The man produced a mirror and warily approached. He angled it so I could see behind me. The iron frame rattled as I sagged and relaxed. She was there, right behind me. Had been for all this time. At first, I was overwhelmed by relief and could not speak. Then I realized the power he held over me. One word from him and I could lose Amy forever. Advantage: Dee.

"As you see, I hold a few secrets still, Auton, but I will dole mercy out as I see fit," Dee said, "See how I honor your duty? I am a humble servant of God and do not seek to thwart His great plan. But... but His mysteries confound me. I am a man of unparalleled learning. I am master of equations. I conquered the oceans. I was mooncaster to the Queen. I placed her spies in every court and knit the bones of her empire. In better days the house above us held the greatest library in all of England, the finest laboratories. With the aid of... another, I learnt the language of the angels themselves. Always, always, despite false accusations, despite imprisonments, despite baffling incongruities in God's creation, I have kept my faith, even as I searched for the Veritas, the perfect form, the ultimate truth."

He stood below me on the edge of the deep well. "I am dying, immortal. My pride and my fear have fled before me into the night; now only dread curiosity remains. Though my last days on Earth be blighted by the awful truth, I am content that they shall be few."

"Fair enough," I said, "But this is an agreement between men, you understand. None of that Hellblazer stuff."

"Agreed," he says, "if man you be."

"I'll get to that. And then you free me."

"By the grace of God, we both shall be free."

"I mean... literally. I leave, and take the Pandorica with me."

"Agreed."

"Well, where do you want to start?"

His eyes narrowed. "Let us discuss you. We shall delve into broader matters later." He gestured. "In that trunk there is a lifetime of research into you, Auton. Books, journals, correspondence, works of art. Your travels, your associations. Your many names. Lone Centurion. Spartacus Star-Seer. Wandering Jew. Are there not hundreds of other names you have taken? Shall I state them all?"

"No... and call me Rory. Not 'Auton'. Just Rory."

He'd practiced this in his imagination many times. It'd already gone off script. Finding out the fearsome immortal you've kept prisoner in your basement for twenty years is named 'Rory' does that. I decide to keep him off balance.

"That was pretty impressive, learning Nestene like that. You know it's not meant to be spoken aloud, right? NOSTOAH OI LONCHO OE OIAD MANIN?"

"Then it is as I feared. Enochian is not the language of Eden. Not the tongue of angels."

"Sorry. No, it's the language of a being that came from the stars, called the Nestene Consciousness. It made servants for itself called Autons. Think 'golem' and you'll get the idea. They were guardians of the Pandorica. Pretended to be a Roman Legion. This is an Auton body, but I'm not one of them. I'm trapped in here, unfortunately. I was born in Leadworth, actually."

The man with the crossbow murmured, "Stars." Dee didn't seem to notice.

"Then tell me, 'Rory'. How did you come to this condition, this Auton shell?"

"You might want to grab a chair. I'll tell you the whole story."

And that's what I did. I told them everything. Born in the 20th century. Growing up with Amy, falling in love. Meeting the Doctor and Prisoner Zero. Proposing to Amy (sort of), then the Doctor reappearing. Venice. Silurians. Dying. Then, plastic Roman, the Pandorica, killing Amy, watching the universe explode, standing guard. Waiting for the Pandorica to open.

It took several hours. They had a snack mid-way through. It was nearly morning when I finished. The little girl dozed on the doctor's lap.

Dee asked questions, but not many. I got the idea that I was just verifying what he'd guessed, learned or been told. It was a big trunk, and he'd studied for extra credit.

"That's it," I said, "Can you answer a question for me?" I was about to ask him how he'd learned the Nestene language (I still don't know) when he held up a hand for silence and asked me a question.

I still get chills, because somehow he knew to ask the one question I assiduously had not been asking myself for 1500 years. God, he was shrewd.

“Do you believe you are in Hell?”

There it was. He might as well have written it on a note, tied it to a bolt, and shot me in my heart area. I stammered.

“I... Wait, no...”

“Truth now. Are we but actors in your Hell?” He bellowed. Then, almost in a whisper, as if he did not want the child to hear, added, “Is anything real? Is there a true state of Veritas, a divine reality, or is all this merely a cruel illusion, a crucible to burn away your sin?”

“How should I know? I mean, why me? I didn’t do anything wrong... except after I died. Then... Amy.”

He gazed at me, eyes gleaming. “You are the one constant in this world. Did you not know that? You, a creature of deception. History lies. The world lurches onward, but to perceptive eyes there is no cause and effect. You, and only you, stride a straight line through history while all around you is lunacy. God’s creatures defy their natural boundaries. Movements are born, kings wage war, empires rise and fall, but why? Who can explain how we have reached this point? What is the natural order of things? I ask you again – is this world real, or is this just your Hell?”

The answer was, ‘No’, but how could I convince him?

“Doctor Dee... “ I collected my thoughts. “I told you about the stars and the universe exploding. I told you that I’m from one future, and the Doctor came to me from another one, your future. I don’t think they’re all that different, in that time. So things should end up the same, right? But there’s a big problem – you don’t have stars. You can’t go out at night and look up and see that the sky doesn’t end right beyond the sun. It goes on, Doctor Dee. It goes on and people in my world looked up and it got them wondering, it made them think, got us out of the caves. But you lot – you don’t have that. So how could your world end up like mine?”

I paused for effect. He shooed the girl back to her stool and stood.

“It didn’t bother me, you know,” I said, “at the beginning. I had a single purpose. Guard Amy. Simple days. Accept offerings to the Lady, slay a few bandits. But then, after I went to Rome, I started to notice things. Things that didn’t square with what I remembered. Something had to be done, to set the world straight. I thought it was up to me. Guard Amy, but make sure the world worked right. So there would be a world for her. I had a couple proper cults working for me, learning for me.”

The little girl stopped swinging her legs and listened. I noticed a small box at the foot of the stool. It threw me off for a moment, some unconscious recollection, but I continued.

“Cult of Samson, Knights Templar. Had more spies than you. Told them secrets, taught them medicine and science, told them the future, told them about the stars. And you know what? None of it mattered. I didn’t have to do a thing. The world, the universe... I think you’re right. There is a Veritas, a pattern, a way things ought to be, and you were clever enough to see it. It’s right there, in the Pandorica. But a little bit leaks out, or maybe the universe just remembers. This starless, impossible world is doing her best to mold herself to it.

“And you know what, John Dee? This isn’t Hell. Mine, yours or anyone’s. But you knew that, deep down, didn’t you? It’s a real world, as real as any other, and look what you’ve accomplished in it.”

Honestly, I should have still been furious with him, but I was glad to see him stand taller and swell with pride. I decided then and there not to mention ‘Jubilee’. All right, job done. We’re all friends. Now to get out of here.

“There’s never been but one important thing,” I said, “and it isn’t angels or gods or demons. It isn’t history or science or power. It’s just her.”

He looked beyond me. “Protect the Lady of the Pandorica,” he says. “Forgive me, my friend. This is the last night of your captivity. I, my home, what few resources remain to me; they are at your disposal. Free the man!”

And the crossbow man aimed and fired. It went through him and stuck in my chest. John Dee went to heaven. I just hung where I’d been, baffled and outraged.

The scribe, the guards and the little girl knelt. “Hail to the Guardian, Hail to the Mystery, Hail to the Stars Inside,” they intoned. The litany of the cult of Samson of Bethlehem. Oh, no.

“What have you done?! Why did you do that?” I cried, “I didn’t want him dead!”

The little girl smiled up at me. “Grandfather was dying anyway. It’s sad, but of what value are a few weeks or months, measured against the furtherance of the Holy Purpose?”

“Holy Purpose? Oh, you dim lot. Weren’t you listening?” I said, to no response. “Why are you even here? I thought you were all dead and gone.”

Little Creepy gestured to Crossbow and Scribe, and the well was capped.

“Let me down from here,” I said.

Doctor Dee was respectfully removed. They avoided looking at me; I avoided wondering why.

“I command you to release me!” I shouted. Might as well play the card. “I am your leader! Obey me!”

Earmuff pulled a series of levers. Gears turned, chains clanked and I was drawn back until I felt the cold Pandorica.

Little Creepy smiled again. I wished she wouldn't. "You will be safe here, Oh Leader, until the Great Night. There is a message some of us learn, passed down from Great Samson, to say to you in such a situation as this. Listen: 'Remember the oath, Centurion, that you taught us. By the Lady and the Doctor, we will protect the Pandorica when you falter in your duty.' And he adds, 'Forgive me, old friend. I but do your bidding.'"

"No, listen! Venice was a mistake, I see that now! But I'll... do... dooo..."

She opened the little box in her hand and there was the damned Mystery Stone, again. Static crackled through my thoughts, my vision faded and my struggles ceased. I did not feel the helm being bolted around my head. I did not see the box placed open at my feet. I did not see the workmen brick up the doorway, or fill the stairwell with earth, or hide the entry with flagstones. I did not hear the building demolished or the Mortlake Tapestry works built in its place. But that's what happened.

Sometime between 1608 and 1783 A.D.

Here's another fine mess I've gotten myself into. I'm back in the void. But I don't really think that, because I can't really think. I drift without moving, no reference or pattern to mark my way or gauge the time. Just static, unending static and a vague, puzzled sense of identity. It's very zen.

Until:

"Oh, Hello!" A familiar presence impresses itself on the static.

"Hello!" An identical one answers. Somehow, it's the Doctor. Two of them.

Imagine astonishment expressed as static. I go, "Zzztzt!"

"Hello! Are you my subconscious?" This wasn't addressed to me.

"Zzzt! Zzt!"

"You know, I believe I might be. Look here's another of me! Pleased to meet you!"

"Zzztt! Zzztt! Zzzttzt!"

"Hullo! What is this? I believe there's someone else here!" Finally!

"You're right! That's brilliant! One, two, three... seven of us and... Oh, there is one other!"

"Zzztt... Zozztor?!" I am ignored.

"Is it the time manipulators? Are we crossing chronolines?"

“Zzzzttt!”

“Wait, why are you all wearing cool fezzes? Or is it Fezii?”

Oh, for Pete’s sake.

“Zzztttt! Zzttzzz! Zozztor! Zory! Rzzz!”

“Say, I think that’s Rory. How very odd! Hold still, there...”

Psychic fingers massage my mind. Bleah. I feel my thoughts crystallizing.

“I was just talking to him, you know!”

“So was I! Hello, Rory!”

The static becomes a snapshot of a snowstorm at night. I remember who I am. And swimming around me like hyperactive goldfish are seven... I don’t know. Concentrations of Doctorness?

“Doctor? Doctors? What’s happening? Where are we?”

They all answer at once. One’s hard to follow. Imagine seven.

“One at a time!” I say.

“Oh, all right. Well, we’re using a vortex manipulator...”

“I wanted to go first.”

“...which sends us on the path of least resistance...”

“...and now we’re crossing ourselves.”

“But how are we talking?” I say.

Murmurs, then, “We have an idea. It’s because you’re here to sense us. We’re just waveforms in space right now...”

“...but we’re also Time Lords so we guess part of us is aware...”

“...of the movement between points A and B. And you...”

“...caught our attention! Oh! We aren’t going to remember this, either! But that’s not important.”

“It’s sort of important.” I say.

“Very well, you’re right, it’s sort of important. But it’s not the very important thing. The very important thing is this -- why are you here? Aren’t you meant to be guarding something?”

Seven points of interest peer at me. It’s embarrassing.

“Rory, you did stay out of radiation like I told you?”

“Umm... I’m guessing, ‘No’?”

“Just a minute.”

They huddle, then --

"I didn't really mention radiation, per se, did I?"

"Nooo..."

"Whoops. Just a sec..."

They warble and bleep. Finally, the spokes-Doctor comes back.

"The good news is, we've identified the radiation. The bad news is, the beta decay will take about 200 years. But you should be fine. It's not damaging you, just interfering with your mind and motor skills. You'll wake up, good as newish. Incidentally, what year is it when you're at?"

"Last I remember... 1608."

"Oh, that's fine then. Listen, Rory, and try to remember this. London. National Museum. 1996. Do be there. And make sure the Pandorica's there, as well. Mustn't take things for granted."

I bite my mental tongue. For once, I know more than the Doctor. But now's not the time.

"So, see you soon, then?" I ask.

"Yes... Um, Rory... about that..."

"Yeah?" I say.

"Well, we're kind of stuck here because of you... We have to take you back apart or we're just going to swim around and stare at each other forever. As attractive a prospect as that is, I'm afraid that now is not the time for personal indulgences, is it? Sorry."

Seven pointed looks of interest. Seven invisible raised eyebrows.

"Oh. Can't have that. You'd better take me apart, then."

"All right, This won't hurt at all. Not a bit, just a little. Trust your Doctor, and for God's sake, however bored you get, stay out of—"

My second thought, when I awoke in 1783, was, "I swear he did that on purpose."

I don't have to say what my first thought was, do I?

The shadows are growing long and cool. It seems like the afternoon has sped by.

The professor leans forward on the bench. "How did you get out of the cellar?" he asks.

"Oh, it was easy," I say, "Only took a couple of years. Rusty chains and all. I got out, traveled around..." I give him my best stern look. "You lot were gone by then."

"Many disagreed with the actions that were taken. There was a schism, then another, then a war. The survivors drifted into secret societies, cults, revolutions, in America, France, Mexico... A few stayed true. The man you called 'Scribe'..."

"I see the resemblance. Anyway, It was time to plan ahead. I was counting down now, right? I went to Venice and cashed out some... investments, let's say, and bought the property. Dug up the Pandorica."

"Then, you lent it to the National Academy, is that correct?"

"Yeah, they couldn't do any harm. After that, safe and snug in a warehouse. Until the Blitz. That was bad. I got hurt in that. I looked like Doctor Phibes. Luckily I had a friend at Madame Tussaud's. After the war I helped rebuild. Did some writing for the telly. Ever see 'Doctor D', the old show about John Dee time traveling in a Police Box? That was mine. Lets see... used to write a lot of crank letters to Archeology Review... invented the VCR... You know what's crazy? I ran out of time. The 1980s arrived before I knew it. It was time to pay attention.

"Knocked around Scotland, just watching, making sure Amy was born. Followed her to Leadworth. And, well, here I am."

The professor is tired; he isn't young, and he's sat in the sun all afternoon. But he has one last question.

"Obviously you've heard about me and the Star Cult. It's made me rather infamous. I rather thought you'd contact me when we went public, but you didn't. So why now? Why call me out of the blue to meet you here? Why did you insist it had to be today?"

I watch the crowds trickle out of the museum. A police car drives off. Lights begin to go out. I stand and straighten my museum guard uniform. It's almost time. I can't help smiling, and Dawkins frowns slightly. The question is still in his eyes.

"One reason is because the days are getting shorter. Just a little, but I've noticed. It's speeding up. Something's coming."

I shake his hand. "And I wanted someone to hear my story. I told Sam, back when I thought I had to control the world. I told Doctor Dee when I realized the world would take care of itself. This is my final chance to tell the story, I think, before the very last. I want to get it right. For her."

I breathe deep, though I don't need to. My hands tremble, though they shouldn't.

"Why? Because, right now, there's a little girl with red hair hiding behind some stuffed penguins in the Pandorica Hall. Because she's been there, waiting, since this morning. Because someone stuck a note on the Pandorica that says, 'Stick around, Pond'. Because it's finally time."

I look back and the bench is empty. The city is silent. I tell the world:

"Because my task is done, and I'm going to be late for work."

DOCTOR WHO

CLASSIC DOCTORS - BRAND NEW ADVENTURES

MY 2000-YEAR
DIARY BY
RORY WILLIAMS
(PLASTIC)



by Al B Dickerson



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