

# Right of Passage

by Nic Ford

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*"Listen, younglings, and listen well – for I am Leela, warrior of the Sevateem, and I have a tale to tell you. A tale of death and pain and sorrow, of wrath and bitter terror. A tale so harrowing, so hung with horror and blood and fear, that you may quake in your cots as you sleep this sundown, lest the night spirits take you and rend you from the protection of your fathers' spears and the comfort of your mothers' dugs.*

*"For this is a tale of the Evil One!*

*"Yes, the Evil One! I have met him, younglings, I have met him! He came in the night and took me into his realm! Showed me wonders and horrors and monsters and ghouls! Bade me eat babies with him! Yes, quake, younglings, quake! For the Evil One may one day take you too! The height of two men, with fangs that drip venom and claws caked with the blood of the innocent, with eyes like red coals, burning evil in the dark, with.... ow! Ow! Ow! Let go! Ow!"*

I entered the Tardis's 'console' room, towelling my hair. The Doctor was standing over the 'console', staring intently at one of the demons that he had imprisoned within it. He looked up.

"Hallo," he said, grinning. For a moment, I tensed. His face was that of the Evil One, with maddened eyes and enough hair for three men, and he was baring his teeth. At any moment he

might eat me! Before I could remind myself that he was actually the Doctor and now my friend, my knife was out and I had coiled myself ready to spring at his throat.

“Ah,” he continued, his grin not dropping for a moment. “Put that away, Leela, there’s a good girl. You could scratch the hat-stand. Who’d want a scratched hat-stand? Someone with a scratched hat, I suppose...”

I straightened, and tried to regain my dignity. “I have taken,” I said, “a... a ba... a ba...”

“A bath,” he finished for me. “Well done!”

“I do not approve,” I said. “My ears have water in them. And my scent has changed. I smell like the flower of the Joplin tree. Disgusting! And my tunic...”

“What about your tunic?”

“It is heavy now. And it squelches. How can I hunt an enemy in a tunic that squelches?”

“Squelches?!” he said, his grin at last vanishing. “You mean, you didn’t take it off?” And then the grin returned. “Never mind,” he said. “It’ll save on laundry, at least. And it won’t squelch for long.”

Suddenly, on the ‘console’, one of the captive demons started to shout. *Meep!* it said. *Meep! Meep! Meeeeeep!* And as it shouted, it made fire beneath the small glass dome that roofed its prison. On, off. On, off. On, off.

The Doctor turned back to study it. “Now, that shouldn’t be happening,” he said.

“What is it?” I asked. “Is the demon still sad?”

The Doctor turned back to me, confused. “The demon? What demon?”

“The one that you have captured and caged there. The one that is shouting and lighting fires.”

“It’s a warning light, Leela, not a demon. Accompanied by a warning beep.” He looked at me curiously. “Why do you think it’s sad?”

“Because you have imprisoned it in the ‘console’. To console it, I supposed.”

“Ah! Of course!”

I smiled, pleased with myself. “So I am right?”

“Right?” the Doctor demanded, as he turned his back on me and concentrated on the console. “No, of course you’re not right. You’re a tech-3 savage from a primitive jungle planet, and you’ve just worn your tunic in the bath. What would you know about warning lights?”

He looked back at me again. “But you’re making a terribly clever job of guessing,” he said. “I’d much rather be clever than right, any day of the week.” And his eyes sparkled. I liked it when his eyes

sparkled.

“So, this... warning light,” I asked. “What does it mean?”

“I’m not sure,” the Doctor replied, turning back. “But there’s something wrong. Something happening not quite the way that time thinks it should. A temporal inversion?”

He stood up straight, and gazed, silent and stock still, into the middle distance for a moment. Another moment. And another. I was about to take his shoulder and shake him, when he suddenly whirled around towards me and stared, very intently, into my eyes.

“And I think it may have something to do with you, Leela,” he said.

*The housemother does not let go of my ear, no matter how much I struggle and hit at her. She simply pulls me along by it, away from the cowering younglings sitting cross-legged and terrified on the childhouse floor, and over to the corner of the room.*

*“Let go!” I shout. “Leave me alone! I am Leela, warrior of the Sevateem, and...”*

*“You are not, young lady!” the housemother hisses at me grimly. “You are Leela, very naughty girl of the Sevateem, and I shall tan your hide for you if there’s any more nonsense!”*

*“I am a warrior! I am of age!”*

*“Tomorrow,” the housemother replies. “Tomorrow is your twelfth planetcycle, and you shall achieve menarche like your mother before you and her mother before that. Tomorrow, you’ll be an adult. Today? Today you’re in my care, and you’re scaring the younglings with your stories.”*

*“I’m going to be a warrior!” I shout again, hitting out at her. But she holds tight onto my ear at arm’s length, and I cannot reach her.*

*“That’s as maybe,” she says. “If you survive the Rite and Xoanon deems it to be. Or you could win the big prize and be made a housemother.”*

*I stick my tongue out at her. She ignores me and continues. “Today, you’re a child, and you’re telling tall stories, and you’re going to need this mop.”*

*She holds out a mop. I snatch it from her angrily, and look at it with doubtful eyes. “Why does a warrior need a mop?”*

*The housemother smiles. It is a mean little smile and I do not like it. “Most of us, Leela, fill the latrines from our backsides. But your warrior’s words sound like they live there too, so you can spend the afternoon slopping out.”*

“Why are you doing this?” I asked impatiently, as the Doctor waved his wand, his ‘sonic screwdriver’, in front of my face. Its noise rasped at my ears.

“I’m scanning you,” he replied. “I need to find out what’s wrong.” He stopped, and scrutinised the screwdriver. “Fascinating!”

“What is fascinating?” I demanded.

“There’s a temporal inversion focused around you, Leela,” the Doctor replied. “Something in your past that cannot – or can only – happen because you’re here in the Tardis with me. A paradox – but what?” He saw the confusion on my face. “Like a storm. A storm in time and space, with you at its eye. I wonder...”

I craned around to take a look at the wand, but all I saw was the same as the rest of the Doctor’s Tardis: a nonsense of flashes and beeps. I sighed. The Evil One could take the Doctor’s talk of storms: I was beginning to regret stealing on board. It had seemed exciting at the time, but that was three days past, and we still hadn’t done anything other than sit around here. It was almost as if he were waiting for me to do something. Testing me. I sighed again. “Can’t we go somewhere?”

“Hm?” the Doctor replied, absently. “Go somewhere? Oh, all right then. Where would you like to go?”

I smiled, excited. “Just... somewhere! Somewhere different! Somewhere new! Take me to... a city! I should like to see a city!”

The Doctor straightened up, and pulled a lever on the console. Immediately, the large, coloured column in its centre ceased rising and falling, and the groan of the machine receded.

“Here we are then,” the Doctor said. “We’ve landed. Somewhere.”

I gasped. “Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“Then... why have you not performed that ‘landing’ ritual before?!”

“Well, you’ve never asked before.”

It was my intention at that point to strangle him. Just a little. But before I could he swiftly performed another ritual with the console which caused the doors to open wide. He knew it would distract me.

Laughing, I ran through them. To somewhere!

*As quietly as I can, I push the furs back from my cot, and slowly, so slowly, swing my legs out. I have*

*feigned sleep quite successfully, and now the housemother herself is snoring on the other side of the room, oblivious to my scheme. It is safe for me to leave.*

*The night is half done and thus at its darkest, and in the childhouse there is no light at all. I have to navigate by memory – here a youngling’s cot to avoid, there a food basket, over by the wall a sleeping Spineweasel – but this I manage with ease. I tried to tell her, the housemother: I am a warrior of the Sevateem! And a warrior needs no sense other than her own cunning.*

*I’ll show her!*

*Silently I pull back the door hanging, and slip out into the gloom. Outside the going is easier. Despite the lateness of the hour, the moons are high and their light makes shadows of the plants and huts, defining at least in part the edges of the forest paths. I pull the kitchen knife I had hidden in my tunic from its hiding place, and heft it. Lower myself to the ground a little, so that the shadows hide me that much better, and silently move forward. Away from the settlement, and out into the jungle.*

*Tomorrow is due to be my Rite, my journey to adulthood. To slay a Bemmoth beast and become a warrior, should Xoanon will it. But everyone knows, the Bemmoth beasts hunt at night – and if Xoanon is otherwise distracted tomorrow, and no beast awakes at the sound of the hunting drums, my chance will be over for another year. Far better I take the Rite now, when the beasts are abroad, than suffer a planetcycle’s further humiliation at the housemother’s hand. I am a warrior of the Sevateem, I am of age, I choose when I hunt! And I choose now!*

*I take a deep breath, and grip the knife tighter. My hand is shaking a little. Excitement. Not fear: excitement! My first hunt! I steel myself, and set off into the unknown forest.*

*I’ll show all of them!*

I turned, furious, towards the Doctor, as he came out of the Tardis and closed its doors behind him.

“This is not a city!” I shouted. “This is not ‘somewhere’!”

The Doctor looked around. “Well...” he said, the word long and drawn out, “...it is somewhere. Just not a somewhere you wanted, you see.”

Indeed it was not. Rather than a city, teeming with people, he had brought us to the darkest night hour of a sleeping jungle. A jungle thick and undiscovered, to look at it: in every direction were trees, vines, plants; and in no direction a path or even a gap in the undergrowth, let alone a person or a road or these ‘starbucks’ of which he had told me.

My eyes had accustomed to the gloom now, and I realised that in fact there was more light

than I should have expected. I looked up to the forest canopy, and spied through the leaves the source of the light. A moon. No, wait...

Three! Three moons! Which could only mean...

"You have brought me home!" I seethed again, my anger pushing the words from my mouth in a furious hiss. "This is *not* 'somewhere'! I am home! Twenty planetcycles it took me to escape, and you have brought me straight back! Why would you do that?!"

"Not quite home," the Doctor said, "but it is your planet, yes. This is where and when the temporal inversion originates, you see. Don't you want to find out what's going...?"

"*Quiet!*" I hissed, clamping my hand over his mouth, and cocking my head in order to better hear the voice of the jungle. I had sensed something. The hunter's ear is always alert, and there had been a noise. Almost inaudible, but a noise nonetheless.

There it was again! In the distance, but getting closer. Something was coming this way.

"Mmmph!" the Doctor protested from beneath my palm, but it simply made me tighten my grip all the more.

"*Quiet!*" I hissed again. "Something is approaching. And it is dangerous this deep in the jungle at night. The Bemmoth beasts hunt at this time!"

He protested more, but this was my domain and I was not about to relinquish control to him. I roughly pushed him down to the ground, my hand still clamped across his mouth, and crouched down beside him.

A minute passed. Another. The thing drew closer. Throughout I could hear the sound of twigs cracking underfoot, branches being pushed to one side, as it made its way. It was either a dumb prey-beast of the forest that was too stupid to keep itself hidden at night, or the youngest, clumsiest of hunters on his first foray into the jungle. And probably his last.

Suddenly, branches to our side rustled violently and a figure burst into the clearing. A girl dressed in animal skins, no more than eleven or twelve planetcycles in age, wielding a toy knife. She smelt a little of latrines.

The girl stopped and stared at the Tardis, and then at me and the Doctor, dumbfounded. And it took me a moment to realise who I was looking at. My hand fell away from the Doctor's mouth, and I stood up in shock. "That's... that's..."

"Yes," the Doctor said. "Yes, she is. I've been trying to tell you: we're a bit early."

*The hunt has not been going well, though I have no idea why. I have been as stealthy as a Spineweasel, and twice as quiet. There is no way that a prey-beast could have heard me coming. And yet, none were to be found – not a baby Groat has crossed my path, let alone a Bemmoth beast.*

*But all of a sudden something happens to drive all thought of the hunt from my mind. One moment I am pushing – silently! – through the undergrowth, the next I find that I have broken through into a small clearing. And there in front of me, on the far side, is the strangest thing I have ever seen: a tall, blue box, made of some kind of wood and sporting characters like those used by the cursed Tesh in their arcanery. I stop and examine it for a moment: a thing of wonder and beauty, and like nothing I have ever seen before.*

*Suddenly there is a movement, and to my surprise I realise that there are people crouching in the undergrowth before it.*

*One is a woman dressed in hunter's leathers. She rises, and stares at me. She is beautiful, and her scent is most strange, like the Joplin tree. For some reason, though, her leathers squelch as she moves. She is obviously not a warrior, wearing squelchy leathers.*

*The other is a man dressed in strange clothing, with teeth and hair that could have won prizes. I know his face, but cannot tell where from, until...*

*I gasp, and try to back away. He is the Evil One! He has come to eat me! Oh, why was I so stupid as to try take the Rite before my time? Why? Why? Now I shall die at his hands without ever having hunted a Bemmoth beast and become a warrior!*

*Well, I shall not go without a fight: I raise my knife, and thrust it at the Evil One's face.*

*Suddenly my wrist is hurting worse than ever I can remember, and my knife is juddering to a halt, embedded halfway to its hilt in the bark of a tree. The woman lowers the foot that has just kicked me, and stares at me sternly.*

*"Do not try that again, Leela!" she says to me.*

*I gasp. "How do you know who I am?" But of course, I see the answer straight away. He is the Evil One, and she is his servant. And I am the youngest and best warrior of the Sevateem – their most dreaded enemy, undoubtedly. They would have been stalking me for months. Years! They know all about me!*

*"We know all about you, Leela," the Evil One says.*

*See? Told you, didn't I?*

*"My name is the Doctor," the Evil One continues. "And this is my friend..." – he pauses, and*

*looks the woman up and down before turning back to me – “...Norman.”*

*“Norman?!” says the woman. Her voice has become strained, for some reason.*

“What’s wrong with Norman?” demanded the Doctor, turning his back on the girl to face me. “It’s a perfectly lovely name.”

“It is not *my* name,” I replied. “I am...”

“...Norman,” the Doctor interrupted. “We wouldn’t want to corrupt the timelines, would we? So in front of little Leela here...” – the girl bristled at being described as little – “...your name is Norman. Or how about Archbishop Beneficio fffizz-fffizz McPackington the Third? Yes, I rather like that. Anyway, you can choose.”

The housemother always told me, when you are angry, count to ‘many’ before saying something you regret. So I counted. One. Some. Many.

“My name,” I said through gritted teeth, “is Norman.”

*The woman whose name is Norman comes towards me again, and roughly takes me by the arms.*

*“What are you doing here?” she demands. “The hour is late. You should be sleeping in your cot in the childhouse.”*

*“Why don’t you tell me what I’m doing here?” I shout at her, fear and loathing masked as defiance. “You know all about me, after all!”*

*“Yes, Norman,” says the Evil One. “Why do you think she’s here?” And as he says it, he takes a strange metal wand from his pocket and points it at the two of us. It makes blue fire, and hums like a Stingfly. I do not like it and try to pull away, but the woman holds me back.*

*Suddenly, a look of realisation crosses her face. “The Rite!” she says. “The Rite of Adulthood! It is that night!”*

*“Interesting...” says the Evil One, examining the wand. He looks up at the woman. “What night?”*

*“This foolish girl,” Norman says, shaking me roughly once more, “is due to undertake the Rite of Adulthood tomorrow. Hunt a pretend Bemmoth beast. Be called an adult, and hopefully start becoming one.”*

*“What do you mean, a pretend Bemmoth beast?!” I demand.*

*“You don’t think we’d make you face a real one, do you?” the woman scowls, shaking me*



again. *“That’s just a story for the younglings! A piece of make believe!”* She sees that I do not trust her words. *“It is a rite, a ritual,”* she explains, *“not a real hunt. It is Tomas’s father in a skin.”*

*Now I know she is lying. I almost laugh. Tomas’s father in a skin! Does she take me for a simpleton?*

*“Oh, Xoanon!”* the woman says at the disbelieving sneer on my face. *“You think it’s real, don’t you? You think that the hunt is real, that to become a warrior you must face a real Bemmoth beast!”* She turns to the Evil One, her face unfathomably one of shock. *“Doctor, I remember now! I... that girl, that stupid, stupid girl, has come out here to get herself killed!”*

The realisation hit me like a fist. I remembered. Remembered being the very girl now standing in front of me, so superior, so sure of her own abilities.

And I remembered my hatred of the housemother, slipping out in the night, going on my first hunt. I’ll show them – that’s what I had thought at the time. Show them that I was a warrior, an adult. Show them I could hunt and kill a Bemmoth beast on its own territory in the middle of the night, without even the aid of the hunting drums. Show them they were wrong to ever doubt me.

Show them I was vain and arrogant and ignorant and far too much of a liability ever to be allowed beyond the village walls, let alone become a warrior: that was the reality. Oh, how could I have been so very, very stupid? It was suicide!

And I remembered pushing through the jungle, searching the night for Bemmoth beasts. And I remembered... I remembered...

But I could not remember. My memories held nothing else!

“Doctor!” I said. “I have forgotten what happens next. To Lee... to the girl! I cannot remember! What is happening?”

The Doctor was examining his sonic screwdriver again, his face frowning in deep concentration. “Hm?” he asked, absently. “Well, that would be the temporal inversion. Reality is in a bit of a state of flux, you see. What happens next, whatever path is taken, hasn’t really happened yet at all.” He looked up at me, and grinned, and the madness of his face was, this time, somehow reassuring. “I think the way forward is rather up to you!”

I knew what had to be done, of course. The girl Leela had to be taken back to the village, to the housemother. A backside red-raw from a beating and latrine duty for a month, that was what she needed now. Is that what had happened to me? It felt like maybe it had.

I crouched in front of the child and used my most soothing voice. Taking her arms more gently this time, I said: "Leela, we are here to help you. Let us take you back to the village, where you'll be safe."

The girl looked doubtful. But she was tired and fed up and secretly wanted to return, I think. She did not struggle or disagree.

"Well done, Norman," the Doctor said, looking once again at the sonic screwdriver. "The temporal inversion is lessening, it seems. I think your instincts are right."

I smiled at the child again, and straightened up. "Come along," I said. "Let us return. There will be plenty of time for the Rite next year."

The wrong thing to say! The girl immediately scowled, and roughly pulled her arms from my hands. Hit me across the face with more strength than a girl her age should have so that I went flying to the ground, pulled her knife from the tree, and...

*...and I run! And run! Away from the clearing, from the Evil One and his servant Norman! Away from their lies and temptations! Away!*

*I hear their calls behind me. Norman shouting my name in desperation as she squelches through the trees after me. The Evil One ranting at his servant as he follows her, using words I do not understand: "temporal inversion", "reality flux", "corruption of the timelines". And then words I do: "If we don't get her back, the whole planet will be destroyed!"*

*I smile to myself. I always knew I was special.*

*And I run!*

"Come on, Leela!" the Doctor said, running past me at a pace of which I did not think he was capable. One hand was on his head, holding his hat in place; the other pumping at the air as he ran. It would have been a comical sight, had his urgency not been so transparent.

I, too, ran, the pair of us following the path that the girl had smashed through the undergrowth. She really was a poor warrior, making no effort to hide her tracks or lessen the noise that she made. But she *was* fast. I would give her that. Fleet as a Springbeast.

I felt strangely proud.

"We will catch her, Doctor," I said. "Soon! I promise!"

"Good!" he shouted back over his shoulder. He looked down to examine his sonic

screwdriver, nearly crashing into a Joplin tree as he did so. "Because the inversion is growing exponentially again! Soon may not be soon enough! We need to make sure she's safe!"

He put on another burst of speed – how a man of his size and clumsiness could do it, I still cannot fathom, but do it he did – and pushed on after the girl. Then his foot caught in a vine, and he fell heavily to the ground. I ran past him, my mission too urgent to see that he were all right. If anyone were going to save the girl now, it would have to be me.

Suddenly, from up ahead, came the sound I had been dreading. A screech, a shriek of hate, a sickening, blood curdling, double-voiced snarl of rage and defiance. The roar of a Bemmoth beast!

And then, the scream of a child.

*It... it is a beast! A Bemmoth beast! I stop, stock still in my tracks, staring up at it. It twists both its necks towards me, its blind heads searching me out with the echoes of its furious, hellish chatter. The steel-spined foliage of one of its limbs thrusts at me, missing my face by a finger's width. Its maws spring wide, revealing row after row of razor teeth. It roars again, then makes another series of rasping clicks as it searches for me.*

*I scream.*

*Why? Why did I scream? Xoanon, I'm meant to be a warrior! I'm meant to be hunting this creature, not calling it to me like a petrified prey-beast awaiting its end. I screamed?!*

*It will eat me now, and I shall deserve it!*

*I cannot move. I am shaking, and I cannot move. The beast's necks snake its heads towards me, jaws open wide to consume me whole. My fingers are numb. I drop my knife. Tears well in my eyes and my whole body quakes. I hear the sound of whimpers, like a Spineweasel kitten that has lost its mother: I think they must be coming from me.*

*Suddenly, another roar. Another beast? A rival? No! There, at the side of the clearing, is the woman whose name is Norman. She is crouched like a hunter, a knife in her hands, and her mouth is open wide as she tries to mimic the beast's call.*

*She is distracting it! Why? Why would the Evil One's servant endanger herself to save me?*

What else could I have done?

The girl was petrified, and unable to move. And the Bemmoth beast was almost upon her, the echoes of its enraged clicking having shown it exactly where she was. There was nothing else for me

to do but use the skill that Tomas and I had learned together: one of us would distract the beast with its own call, and the other would kill it.

If only Tomas were here!

I hefted my blade, and called to the beast – not a good call, but enough. It turned towards me, roaring again in rage and searching me out, its interest in the girl having waned now that a rival was nearby. I called again.

The lumbering creature thundered across the clearing towards me, its necks twisting and heads snarling. I lifted my knife again, ready to thrust it into the beast's liver... when suddenly, the Doctor limped into the clearing.

"Ah, that's the way, Norman!" he called to me. "Keeping her safe! Good, good!"

"No!" I snarled in frustration as the beast turned away from me to this new distraction. The Doctor backed slowly away from it, a look of shock and fear on his face, as it turned and lumbered towards him instead, clicking its deadly, blind search.

"I almost had it!" I shouted. "And you... gah!" Honestly, if the creature did not get to him first, I was ready to finish the Doctor myself. I roared again, trying to get the beast's attention, but it was no good: its only interest now was that infuriating man, the thorn in both our sides.

I turned my knife and held it by the blade, ready to throw it at the creature's hide in an effort to slay it which would undoubtedly fail. But it seemed to know my intention: almost leisurely, it swiped a spined branch at me, knocking the weapon from my hand and me to the ground.

In desperation, from my prone position I roared a final time. Anything to get its attention to me. It partially worked. One head pulled away from the other, its neck twisting towards me and its jaws wide, the rows of teeth glistening. It drew back and high, ready to slam down and take me.

I am ashamed to say that I closed my eyes. If this were the end, I would not see it. The last thing I heard was the beast's roar again, furious and enraged. And then a clump, as if the sound of a mighty tree falling.

I opened my eyes once more.

*And I hack and stab and cut and thrust and slash and chop and cry and cry and cry...*

Before me, the Bemmoth beast lay dead, sprawled across the floor of the clearing. One of its heads was as close to me as the span of a hand. The other stretched towards the clearing's far side, where

the Doctor was holding onto the trunk of a tree for support, fear and relief mingled on his face.

Astride the dead beast's carcass, to my surprise, sat the girl. She was still petrified – white as a sheet and shaking like a leaf – but her knife was in her hand, and she stabbed at the creature for all she was worth, again and again and again.

She had been lucky, I saw: the beast's heads distracted and splayed, she had managed to plunge the toy blade into the soft place between its necks with the first blow, and penetrate to its liver. Death had been instant for the creature – and had she not achieved that, I am sure that death would have been instant for her.

I saw also that she had learned the first lesson of warriorhood: that it is a terrible, terrible thing. She was sobbing uncontrollably.

I went to her, took the knife from her quaking hands, and put my arms around her. Around Leela.

Later, I crouched, glumly, by the doors of the Tardis. Across the clearing from me, too far to hear, the Doctor was talking solemnly to the girl. To Leela. To me.

He took something golden, hanging from a chain, from his pocket, and gently swung it in front of the girl's eyes. Slowly, I saw her body slump to the ground. The Doctor crossed back to me.

"She's sleeping," he said. "I think it'll do her good."

"What was that thing?" I asked. "The thing you waved in front of her?"

"Oh, just a pocket watch," he replied. "A little hypnotic suggestion to help her forget what happened tonight. I don't think a child of her age should remember doing *that*, do you? And also, I don't want her to remember you."

He looked at me, and saw my dejection. "What's the matter, Leela?" he asked. "Why the long face?"

"My face is not..."

"Sad. I meant, why so sad?"

"I failed her," I said. "I closed my eyes and opened them to find that she had done what I should have done. It should have been me that slayed the Bemmoth beast to keep the child safe. Not the other way around."

The Doctor laughed, loudly. I scowled at him. "I do not see what is so funny," I said. "I should have protected *her*, saved *her* from death."

“Oh, come on Leela!” he grinned. “That’s exactly what *did* happen. You *did* save her from death – just, a younger you and an older her! Hm?”

I pondered on this for a while. “I suppose so,” I said eventually. “Does this sort of thing happen *very* often, when travelling in the Tardis?”

“More often than you can possibly imagine,” he replied. He opened the doors to the Tardis, and beckoned me in. “Let’s go somewhere,” he said, his eyes sparkling again. “Somewhere *really* interesting, this time.” He grinned a mischievous grin as he went inside. “Come along, Norman,” he said. “I think you’ve earned the right.”

Before following him in, I looked around one last time at the clearing, the jungle, my home. I might never see it again. Would that be bad? I looked at the place wistfully – but my decision had been made.

And then I heard it. The unmistakable noise of a party of warriors from the village, searching for a lost child. I knew what I must do. Swiftly, I ran to the carcass of the Bemmoth beast and severed one of its heads. I placed the trophy beside Leela’s slumbering body, and ran back into the Tardis, slamming the doors shut behind me. And the demons of the console made us ‘dematerialise’ just as Tomas’s father and his band came into the clearing and, to their relief and joy, found my younger, sleeping self.

*I awake to find that I am lying in my cot in the childhouse, staring up into the face of the housemother. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see something. I turn to look: it is the head of a Bemmoth beast!*

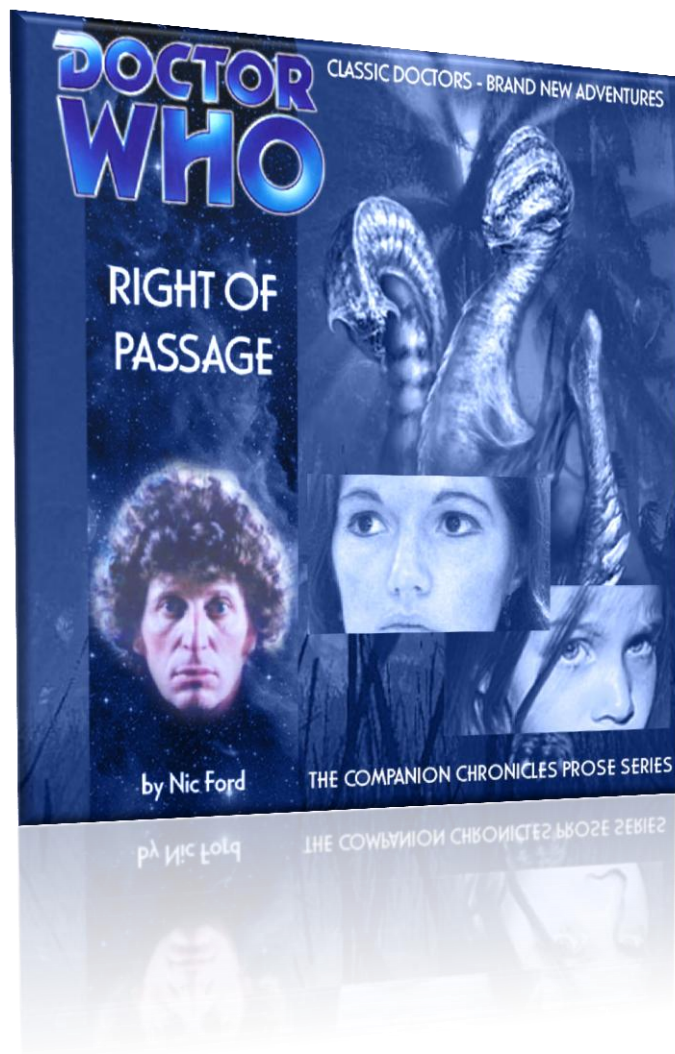
*I sit up in shock, and pull back lest it bite me – before realising it lacks a body. The creature is dead.*

*But why is it here? Did I take the Rite? I have some vague memory of a forest, a fleeting feeling of terror... but it is all a blank. I have no recollection of anything since leaving the sleeping childhouse a night – a week? – ago.*

*I look to the housemother, my face a hundred questions. What has happened? Why can I not remember?*

*She smiles, and gently pushes me back down into my cot.*

*“Rest now, Leela,” she says, kindly. “Warriors need their sleep.”*



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