

It was halfway through the year, and I was halfway around the world. I still had a long way to go. I had made my way to Australia, in my quest to bring down the Master. I thought it might be safer here, so far away from the United Kingdom. But I was wrong.

The few people that were willing to risk their lives to resist the tyrannical rule of the dangerous rogue Time Lord were gathered around me, in a tiny wooden shack, in what felt like the middle of nowhere.

They had waited for me to come to them, heard rumours for the last six months that a mysterious stranger called Martha Jones was walking the dying Earth, searching for a way to save them. We sat together in the suffocating heat, with the shriek of the Toclafane - or whatever they were really called - ringing in our ears as the patrolling spheres passed overhead. The people looked up at me, so desperate, so helpless. And now that I was here, what was I going to do?

I was going to tell them a story.

The Devil's Rock

by Samuel Marks

I had been spreading the word of the Doctor since the Master's reign began, just like he told me to. The people of the world had been given hope by stories of the man who saved a hospital on the Moon from the Judoon and a Plasmavore on the same day, who united the human race's second home in song, who gave up his own identity just so he could show mercy to a family of murderers who did not deserve it.

But there were stories that had not yet been told.

On this day, I was going to tell them how the magnificent Doctor broke the curse of a long-dead world, liberated a treasure far more valuable than anyone knew, and saved the soul of a man who seemed beyond redemption. But above all else, the

oppressed human race would learn why the Doctor's name was worth knowing.

This is what I told them...

"Oh, a wasteland!" said the Doctor, throwing open the TARDIS doors. "Brilliant!"

Following him out, I failed to see why he was so excited by our destination. What was he so pleased about? He was, after all, correct - a wasteland was exactly where we'd ended up.

I felt strange as soon as I arrived, and then I worked out why.

There was no life on this world at all.

This realisation spooked me, so I pointed it out to the Doctor in case he hadn't noticed. I was hoping that he could offer a reassuring explanation.

"Doctor," I said, "there's nothing here."

He turned to look at me with those big, expressive eyes, like I was a nuisance. Had he forgotten that I was there? Or, more likely, had he forgotten that it was me, and not someone else? Someone he'd rather have been with...

"Oh, come on, Martha," he said, throwing his arms out to draw my attention to the scenery - what little of it there was. "There's always something to do, something to see!"

"No," I said. He was missing the point, again. He never seemed to understand what I was trying to tell him, how I felt about our lives, our friendship. How I felt about him... "There really is nothing here."

The Doctor's eyes narrowed as he scanned the horizon.

"You're right, Martha," he said. "No plants, no animals - nothing at all!"

Then the Doctor was knelt down on the ground, and started waving the sonic screwdriver over the lifeless earth. It was a brilliant gadget, as he so often told me. He said it could - amongst countless other things - detect any reading on any scale or wavelength. But I knew that he must have been wrong about that. It couldn't, after all, detect me, how I felt...

Or maybe it could - that thought often went through my mind. What if he already knew that the only reason I had chosen a life in the TARDIS, dashing through time and space, was because he was there with me? Would he really stay quiet

about it, and carry on as if everything was fine? That, I guessed, I would never know.

"Martha?" he said. "Are you all right?"

"I think," I said, "that I should be asking you the same question."

I noticed that the Doctor had given up scanning the ground, and had now, somewhat bizarrely, taken to sprinkling a small amount of soil onto his tongue. After a moment, he spat it out.

"Was that good?" I asked, with a smirk.

"Very good," he said. "Brilliant, in fact. Great mineral levels, fertile, ideal for plant life... I thought the sonic might've got the readings wrong - but no, it really is perfect!"

"So why hasn't anything grown?"

"That, Martha, is a very good question. So good, in fact, that I genuinely have no idea what the answer is.... Well," he said, "you're probably wondering why I brought you here. I mean, a dead world isn't really anyone's idea of a fun day out, is it?" I agreed. "Thing is, we picked up a distress signal, and that's why we're here."

We seemed to spend most of our time answering distress signals, sorting out other people's problems whilst our own still remained.

"Why didn't you tell me that before?" I asked.

"Oh," he said, surprised. "Sorry. Must've forgotten."

Forgotten about the distress signal, or forgotten about me? That was one question I didn't ask. I didn't need to. I suspected that I knew the answer, but if I didn't hear him say it, I could always pretend that it wasn't true. There was, however, another point worth mentioning, something that needed to be asked. And the Doctor seemed to sense that this question was coming and, in a moment of beautiful synchronicity, he answered it before I'd even asked.

"I know," he said, still scanning the area. "I can't see it either. Whoever's in distress, I mean. I suppose I could've got the landing a bit off. We might be a few miles east or west..." Something new caught his attention. "Or, we might be a few miles below..."

We both looked up. Something was forging its way through the thick white clouds, heading downwards, towards us.

Fighting the urge to look away, I managed to force myself to watch the falling thing - that being the only way I could describe it - plummet to the surface of this planet, a short distance away, just beyond a ridge on the landscape. A moment later, a thick plume of jet-black smoke rose up into the sky, marking the object's location.

He grabbed me by the hand, and the next thing I knew, we were running. Into what, I didn't know. Neither did I care in the slightest. The only thing that mattered to me was who I was running with.

The object that had fallen from the sky turned out to be an escape pod, containing a man. At first, I noticed that he was handsome, ruggedly so, and really rather pretty. It was only then that the Doctor pointed out that he was unconscious, and recommended that we take him back to the TARDIS to recover.

When he finally awoke, I approached the man, helped him to his feet, and introduced us both.

"What a beautiful name," he said to me, not the Doctor. He grasped hold of my hand and pressed his lips against it gently. "Thank you, Martha, for rescuing me."

"Well," said the Doctor, "it was actually me who rescued you. But you don't have to kiss my hand. Start talking," he said to the man.

The Doctor seemed cold and distant towards him, almost suspicious. He'd said before that he had instincts, usually accurate, that told him when something was wrong. And today, they seemed to be warning him about this man. I couldn't see what was wrong myself. He seemed polite and charming and lovely - and most importantly, he was all these things towards me.

"Let's not rush things," said the man. "Although I'm sure you're a little nervous - star struck, even - but that's to be expected. Everyone is, around me. Firstly, introductions - my name, as if you didn't know, is Logan Hawk." He paused, as if waiting for applause. I almost obliged, but the Doctor's silent stare told me not to.

"You've really not heard of me?" he asked.

"Afraid not," said the Doctor.

"But," he said, "I'm Logan Hawk! Adventurer, explorer, treasure-hunter! And I share these quests with the world, writing them up as my memoirs - I'm the

bestselling author of *How I Saved the Universe* and its much-anticipated follow up, *How I Really Saved the Universe*. Not to mention my self-help book, *How You Can Save the Universe*. Do they ring any bells?" he asked frantically. "No? How about my heartbreakingly personal autobiography, *How the Universe Saved Me*? Nothing?"

"Nope, sorry, not a clue," the Doctor said. "But perhaps you can call your next one, *How I was Saved from Certain Death by Two Random Strangers*?"

"Don't worry," Logan said. "It's all part of the plan."

"Oh, there's a plan, is there?" said the Doctor. "Right... Because we came here following your distress signal, your little cry for help."

"Nothing to do with me," said Logan. "It's automatically triggered when my ship loses power. I don't want anyone else here. You won't get a mention in the book, that's for sure. And I'm certainly not sharing the treasure with anyone else."

The Doctor and I looked at each other. This was the first we'd heard of any treasure. Logan sighed, realising that he was going to have to explain an awful lot to us.

"This place," said Logan, "is known as the Devil's Rock, because nothing here ever grows. Stories almost as old as time itself talk of this cursed planet, tainted by death. All the space-lanes twist and curve around this place, avoiding it, because the curse goes far beyond the surface and reaches up into the stars. That's what happened to me. My ship's up there, caught in the orbit of the Devil's Rock, completely useless. I had to use the escape pod to get down here, or I'd have been trapped up there in a dead ship."

"Rubbish," said the Doctor. "I don't believe in curses. You must just be bad pilot, because there's no way a ship can completely lose power like that - completely impossible! It can't just die!"

And then, right on cue, the warm orange glow that emanated from the walls of the TARDIS faded away, until all that was stopping us from being in complete darkness was the mysterious green light that shone weakly from beneath the control console. Our ship had, quite simply, and quite impossibly, died.

The Doctor seemed utterly devastated.

"No," he said, in disbelief. He started running around the console, frantically

trying every switch and lever, desperate to restore some life into his beloved craft. "No, no, no..." he said, over and over again, as if saying it might just reverse what had happened. But it was no use. It seemed that nothing could be done.

"Is it dead?" asked Logan knowingly.

The Doctor shot him a look - the kind of look that he usually reserved for me, when I spoke out of turn.

"All the energy cells have been drained," he said. "It's like the power's just been snatched out of it. But the thing is - and it's a very important thing - you can't just dissipate TARDIS energy. The universe wouldn't be able to handle it. So it's not just been taken away. It's been taken somewhere else..."

The trouble was, he didn't know where that place was. And until he found out, we were stuck here. The Doctor didn't believe all this talk of a curse, but he knew that something was odd about this planet.

"Then let me tell you," Logan said tantalisingly, "of the cursed treasure of this world. Oh, you may roll your eyes, Doctor. But it all makes sense. You see, the stories also speak of an ancient race of beings that once lived here, on the Devil's Rock, but they left something invaluable behind in a secret temple."

"A hidden temple?" I asked. "Sounds slightly oxymoronic. I mean, surely people would notice a great big structure, especially on a world like this, where there's nothing else to see."

"Good point," said the Doctor. "This whole thing sounds a little suspect to me. Where exactly did you hear this story, Logan?"

"The fourth moon of Castalaropa."

"Castalaropa only has three moons," said the Doctor.

"Oh," said Logan, flustered. "Well. The third moon, then." He turned to me and, as if trying to compensate for his error, added, "I visit a lot of places, you see. Bound to get them mixed up."

However, he had to admit that one thing he didn't know was what exactly the fabled treasure was. Not that the Doctor seemed interested, though. He was staring off into the distance, as he often did when a plan was developing in his brain. His eyes widened and then started to dart around the dead time machine, as his

thoughts grew and expanded and developed into something vaguely coherent.

Then, out of the blue, he bounded down the ramp towards the doors, throwing on his coat.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Logan," said the Doctor, grabbing the man's hand and shaking it vigorously, "let's find your treasure!"

The Doctor was striding out in front of us, following the readings that were being detected by the sonic screwdriver. The TARDIS was now a tiny blue dot in the distance. We had been walking for what felt like hours, and it probably was. The Doctor's sudden change of heart with regards to looking for the lost temple and its treasure had been explained by the Time Lord on our long trek.

"You see," he had said, "the thing about legends is, although they're usually mostly nonsense, they're sometimes rooted in fact. And the treasure and curse can't be entirely unrelated. Perhaps it's a piece of technology with the power to deactivate any spaceships within a certain range."

"Ah, yes," Logan had added. "But what about the plants and animals? How do you explain the lack of them?"

The Doctor had fallen silent. He had no answer for that. Logan decided that he would fill the gap by telling me about his adventures. Not all of them, however, because he seemed quite adamant that I should buy his book...

"And then," he said, "I unsheathed the sword from the Undying Knight's ancient armour, and presented it to the Tryok Warlord. I thought he'd honour his word and release the prisoners. But he tricked me. I was trapped on the bridge, surrounded by the deadliest race of warriors in the known universe."

I saw the Doctor glance discreetly over his shoulder at this point. I assumed that he hadn't been listening, completely uninterested in Logan's tale, but perhaps he was curious after all. Or was he perhaps a little jealous of my new friend? I put my arm through Logan's.

"Go on," I said.

"Well," he said, "what was I to do? I was without backup, on a high-security

starship in the depths of space, surrounded on all sides by a brutal army. Most people would've given up, but not me. I couldn't leave the poor children trapped there. I had to save them. So I drove the sword right through the Tryok Warlord's heart, killing it there and then. The others lost all morale, ran for cover, and the ship was mine. Logan Hawk had saved the day again!"

"You did what?" asked the Doctor, not taking his eyes off the sonic.

"Logan was just telling me," I said, "about how he battled the - what was it? - Tryok Warlord and took control of their command ship. Have you met them, Doctor?"

"Met them?" asked the Doctor. "I defeated the Great and Terrible Tryok Empire! Twice!"

"How did you defeat them twice?" asked Logan.

"Well," said the Doctor "I battled the fleet in the fifty-first century, then accidently blew them up again when I travelled back to the forty-ninth century. Caused a bit of paradox, but it was all just a simple misunderstanding..."

The sonic screwdriver started to make another of its odd noises, interrupting the Doctor's almost unbelievable story, and he stopped walking. We were all relieved for a break, and gathered around the Doctor to see what he had discovered, why we had stopped in what still appeared to be the middle of nowhere. There was no sign of the temple we were looking for.

"What's wrong?" asked Logan. "Why have we stopped?"

"I programmed the sonic," said the Doctor, "to seek out the nearest energy source. Which, on a dead planet, can only be the treasure in the heart of the temple."

"I'll repeat my question," said Logan. "Why have we stopped here?"

"It says this is the spot," the Doctor said. He tried the sonic on various other frequencies but, apparently, the result stayed the same. "The energy source," he went on, "is right here. Roughly. We should be standing at the foot of a temple."

"Oh, this is ridiculous!" said Logan, throwing his arms up in the air, despairing. "It's that daft little gadget you've got, I'll bet. It's faulty, isn't it? We've wasted all this time!"

“Don’t talk to me about wasting time,” said the Doctor. “We were on our way to a lovely little holiday planet when your distress signal knocked us off course. Paradise Max - that’s where we should’ve been today. But instead, we’ve spent our day chasing after an escape pod, and pulling a stupid treasure-hunter from the wreckage!”

“I told you,” Logan said, “that I had a plan!”

“Oh, right,” said the Doctor, squaring up to Logan. “That’s interesting, because I’ve not seen it. You’ve been more than happy to let someone else take control, lead the way... Until it all goes wrong, then you’re the first one to point out whose fault it is...”

Clearly they weren’t going to stop arguing any time soon, so rather than try to stop them, I decided to let them get on with it, get it out of their system. As I stood there, arms folded, I felt a sudden, sharp pain in my chest. I couldn’t stop myself from giving a little cry of pain.

I almost expected Logan, my new hero on this dreadful world, to rush to my aid. But he was so engrossed in his argument with the Doctor that he didn’t even notice. The Time Lord, on the other hand, immediately noticed that something was wrong, and abandoned the altercation to see if I was OK.

“Martha?” he said. “Martha, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing...” I said, lying to appear strong. “I’m fine... Just a pain, that’s all.”

“It’s this planet,” said the Doctor, looking around at the wasteland that went on forever. “I don’t like it. Something about it just feels wrong.”

“Oh, yes,” said Logan. “Yes, I feel that too. Got a sixth sense for this sort of thing. Anyway, shouldn’t we get a move on? This treasure won’t find itself.”

“Are you capable,” the Doctor said, “of thinking about anything that isn’t shiny or valuable or covered in gold for more than ten seconds?”

Logan thought about this for a moment.

“Do you think it will be covered in gold?” he asked. I didn’t know how he decided that it was the right thing to say.

“Martha,” said the Doctor, “take a few moments to rest. Sit down.”

I almost collapsed onto the barren earth, and as I did so, the strangest thing

happened. A noise filled the air. It was a strange, metallic noise - a single, heavy, hollow clang.

The Doctor looked at Logan. They had both clearly realised something.

"Martha, get up," said the Doctor.

"Oh, great," I said. "That wasn't much of a rest, was it? About three seconds!"

Nevertheless, I only complained as I was already clambering to my feet. I turned to see where I had been sitting, because the Doctor and Logan were now on their knees, brushing a thin layer of lifeless soil aside to reveal whatever was underneath, which I supposed much have been the source of the odd, metallic noise that rang out as I crashed down on top of it.

I watched as, quite bizarrely, the earth was moved away to show, beneath it, a great metal hatch in the ground. The Doctor told Logan to move aside, as he took the sonic out of his pocket, and whirred it against the metal.

The hatch swung downwards, and revealed a rusted ladder that led down into complete blackness.

"Oh, very clever!" said the Doctor. "We said that having a temple on this planet didn't make sense. We said that, didn't we, Martha?" I nodded. "Of course, that's to be expected - legends and stories and myths get warped, changed, twisted over time. Just look at me. Some of the tales that talk of the Doctor have become complete nonsense, but they started with a single truth - me!"

"Is there a point to this self-congratulation?" asked Logan.

"Yes, I'm getting there," said the Doctor. "So, there's not a temple, but instead there's a crypt! What a brilliant idea - it's much more secretive, easier to hide. Makes sense, really, when you think about it."

"Unfortunately," I said, "I reckon I know the answer to this, Doctor. But I'll ask anyway... What do we do now?"

"Oh, there's only one thing we can do," he said. "We go down. Into the dark."

The Doctor climbed down the ladder first, to check that it was safe. I waited at the top with Logan, who seemed oddly anxious and jittery at the thought of going down there. I reminded him of all his adventures that he'd proudly told me about, but it did

little to reassure him, for some reason.

The Doctor said that, when he reached the bottom, he would shout back up to us to let us know that it was safe. It must have been a long way down, because we didn't hear anything for along time. It was only when I peered down into the hole in the ground, suddenly fearful for the Doctor's safety as he'd been gone too long for my liking, that I saw a tiny, blinking blue light in the pit of blackness. He was obviously too far down for his words to carry, so the sonic was acting as a beacon to tell us to follow him down.

Logan seemed adamant that I should go second, after the Doctor but before him. The excuse he gave was that he could keep watch, and make sure that nothing followed us down. But seeing as we had seen literally nothing since arriving here a fairly long time ago, that seemed unlikely and felt more like an excuse than a legitimate cause for concern. If I didn't know him better - and, to be honest, I barely knew him at all - I'd say that he was scared. Then again, so was I, so I was in no position to say anything to him.

When I reached the bottom, I saw that the Doctor had acquired a large torch from his limitless pockets. He shone it in my face.

"You OK?" he said.

I nodded. But as he turned his attention to the sonic screwdriver, pointing it skywards to send a message to Logan to tell him to come down, I silently clutched my chest - the pain was back again. It stayed for longer this time, but I said nothing to the Doctor. If it was caused by this cursed planet, he would fix it soon enough...

Eventually, after much coaxing, Logan joined us in the darkness.

"You know," he said, "this reminds me of the time I rescued the Benuvian royal family. I had to crawl through a set of tunnels similar to this in order to avoid being detected by the Voxorn militia, and get inside the walls. Oh, good times!"

Something about the look on the Doctor's face told me that he was about to speak up, but he decided instead to bite his tongue. There were apparently more pressing matters at hand, like exploring this crypt.

He kept the torch for himself, preferring to be the one in control. With us all together in this underground crypt, the Doctor shone the torch around us, revealing

that we were in a metal corridor, stretching out a great distance in front of us. I had been expecting an ancient, stone crypt, with carvings on the wall and that sort of thing - and clearly the Doctor had been too.

"This is all a bit modern," he said. "I think there's far more to this planet than the legends say."

"Look," said Logan, "enough of that. It's none of our concern. Let's just get the treasure, then get the hell out of here."

"There are more important things," said the Doctor, "than treasure."

"I'll have to take your word for it," Logan said.

The Doctor was about to respond, having taken a strong dislike to this man over the course of the day, but he was interrupted by a terrible screech coming from deeper in the crypt.

"Oh, as if things weren't bad enough," said Logan, "there's a monster here too!"

As we scurried after the Doctor, our beacon of light who seemed completely unafraid at the prospect of monsters nearby, I felt Logan take my hand in his, and he held it tight. Strangely, his hand seemed to be trembling. I started to wonder who was comforting who...

"That noise, Doctor," he said nervously. "What was it?"

"Don't you know?" he asked. "I thought you'd recognise it."

"Should I?" asked Logan.

The Doctor didn't answer.

We heard the screech again. It seemed closer this time. The monstrous outcry went on forever, constantly bouncing around this metallic crypt, echoing in the darkness.

The Doctor had been passing the beam over the path that lay before us, like a searchlight, scanning for anything that might be in our way. It had developed into a sort of rhythm, highlighting only that our path was safe, and that nothing was threatening us. So when we did actually catch sight of something, it seemed even more terrifying than it was - and it was pretty bad to start with. We all stopped dead in our tracks, as the beam of light slowly revealed the hideous elements of this

Logan's so-called monster.

It was tall - almost unable to fit in the metal tunnel - and seemed to possess a mass of sharp, angular limbs, like spears. Its body was a great protective shell, and all I could see of its head were two red eyes, like warning lights, shining out at us.

The monster - I'd decided that Logan's prediction was indeed accurate - advanced upon us, its spear-like limbs outstretched, ready to kill.

"What do we do, Doctor?" I asked, as we all moved backwards through the tunnel.

"Well," he said, "I wouldn't worry. Let's leave this one to Logan, shall we?" He slapped the self-confessed adventurer on the back. "Go on, you can take it from here."

"What?" asked Logan. His hand had become so clammy that I had to pull away, and wipe mine clean. "Don't be daft! What the hell is that thing?"

"So you admit," said the Doctor, "that you have absolutely no idea what this thing is?"

"Not a clue!" said Logan. "Now kill it!"

The Doctor smiled, then took control of the situation. He stopped his retreat and stood his ground. The monster stopped too, and raised one of its many pointed limbs, ready to strike down upon the Doctor.

But the Time Lord didn't seem afraid - he never did. He pointed the torch right at the monster's eyes, and then rolled it under the beast's legs. We could hardly see what was happening, but we could just about make out that the monster turned, now facing the opposite direction.

Then, quite calmly, the Doctor reached up to the back of the monster's neck and flicked a switch. The monster then slumped forward, and we heard yet another strange sound. It was like something powering down...

The Doctor reclaimed the torch, and shone it over the monster.

"You see?" he said. "It's not a monster, not really - just your basic security drone. This one's been programmed to zero in on the nearest source of light - that's how I got it to turn away. The whole unit's a bit out of date now, of course. I mean, having an off switch in easy reach is not exactly precision engineering..."

"And what is it?" I asked.

"That, Martha, is a Tryok."

"But," I said, "that's what Logan was talking about earlier, wasn't it? He said that he defeated their Warlord, by stabbing it through the heart!"

"And that," the Doctor went on, "was my first clue. I mean, I can let him off with the mix-up with the moons - saying that there were four instead of three - because we all make mistakes. Yes, even me, occasionally. Hard to believe, I know. But what he said in that story about the Tryok fleet was just unforgivable... For starters, there's no such thing as a Tryok Warlord, because they're just drones - they don't have ranks. And he said that he stabbed one through the heart, when they don't even have hearts. Central processing unit, yes - but no heart."

I listened with fascination as the Doctor deconstructed Logan's lies that he'd been spinning, ever since we met him earlier that day. Here, in the crypt, as everything was revealed, Logan had fallen silent.

"You kept quiet about it for a long time," I said to the Doctor.

"Well," he said, "to be honest, I wasn't entirely sure. It was when he mentioned saving that royal family that really gave the game away. I know for a fact he didn't do that, because I did! Plus, it was more fun to wait for an opportunity to get him to admit it himself, wasn't it? He's just a fraud, taking credit for other people's achievements, or making them up completely. Isn't that right, Logan?"

Logan was just staring at the ground, like a naughty child who had been told off. I almost felt sorry for him. Almost, that is, but not quite. As the Doctor explained all this, he just nodded.

"But there's one thing I don't understand," said the Doctor. "If you spend all your life making up all these fake achievements, why come here, to the Devil's Rock, where there's real adventures to be had?"

"People were getting suspicious," said Logan, "starting to work everything out. They've not done it as quickly as you, though - I've managed to keep the illusion going for my whole life. But someone spoke up. A whistle-blower talked to the Galactic News, which ran a piece about how all this was a lie. Of course, you know that news outlet's reputation, so not everyone believed it. But some people started

to doubt it, to doubt me. I thought I'd better have at least one proper adventure, then no one could say I was a liar - not this time, anyway..."

Suddenly, I felt that pain in my chest again. I couldn't stay on my feet, and slumped to the floor in a heap. The Doctor and Logan both rushed over to help me, but I felt like nothing could be done.

"Why's this affecting her, and not us?" asked Logan. "And how come that mechanical drone's still active, when all the other technology around here's dead?"

"The Tryok must be a servant of whoever - or whatever - is causing all this. They must've been deliberately keeping it active, for protection. As for Martha - she's from the twenty-first century," said the Doctor. "It's a much more vulnerable era. But don't worry - it'll kill all of us eventually. Martha, can you stand?"

I nodded. I had to go on. Logan helped me to my feet, and we both looked to the Doctor.

"What now?" I asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" he said. "We follow this tunnel into the main crypt, discover the thing that's doing all the draining, then shut it down before we all die. Easy!"

"If you say so..." said Logan.

The metal tunnel eventually brought us to a vast chamber, in the centre of which was what appeared to be a sarcophagus. Logan approached it, but the Doctor warned him off.

"Don't touch it," he said. "Could be dangerous. In fact, it almost definitely is, so just stand back and do absolutely nothing. Got it?"

Logan nodded. I stayed back with him, using him as a support. Without him there, I would've fallen over. I was losing strength, fast. The Doctor needed to be even faster in solving this mystery, because I didn't feel like I could last for much longer.

The Doctor was wandering around the sarcophagus-like object, studying it intently.

"It's a stasis chamber!" he said eventually.

“And the treasure’s in there?” asked Logan. Although the truth about him was out, clearly his goals had not changed. He still needed to return with something to continue his deception when he got home.

“Don’t you get it?” asked the Doctor. “The legends weren’t completely accurate. There’s no treasure - at least not in the conventional sense. Certainly nothing shiny.”

“Oh,” said Logan. “Damn.”

“Then what is inside?” I asked.

“Let’s find out!” said the Doctor.

He buzzed the sonic screwdriver at the stasis chamber, as he had called it, and he watched as the lid of the object slid open. The Doctor peered down, with a look of disbelief on his face. Logan helped me to stagger closer to it, so that we could both see what was inside.

It was a woman. She was young, beautiful, and blue. A few months ago, that would’ve freaked me out. But now, after all this time with the Doctor, it seemed somehow normal, or at least not too out of the ordinary. She was dressed in colourful, ceremonial robes, and wore a shiny crown atop her head. I knew what, out of all that, Logan would be focusing on. But I was more interested in what the Doctor made of it all.

I was about to ask him to explain this, just as he had explained everything else about this impossible world, but it became clear that I would hear what the woman herself had to say.

Her eyes slowly opened, adjusting to the light, and she heaved herself up using the sides of the stasis chamber, so that she was now sitting upright, looking at the three of us.

“You dare to disturb my slumber?” she asked, in a soft, silky voice.

“Yes, sorry, hello!” said the Doctor, smiling at her.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“I was about to ask you the same question,” the Doctor said.

“My name is Empress Shamara,” she said. “At least, that was my title, many years ago. Now I am nothing. My people are gone...”

"What happened?" I asked. I could feel the pain coming on again.

"The people, the Sylax, lived on this planet for centuries. They worshipped me, but I was not a good leader... We made enemies - so many enemies - until something had to be done. The Eternals watched over us in secret, observed how we were damaging the universe, and decided to put a stop to it. We were reduced to nothing.

"But my people did not want to be wiped from existence, not completely. They wanted to survive, and decided that they could survive through me, their leader. They constructed this underground chamber, designed to go unnoticed by the Higher Powers, so when the purge began, I was saved, whether I wanted to live or not..."

"And I'm guessing you didn't want to?" asked the Doctor.

She shook her head. "What is a ruler without her people? What is one without the rest of one's people behind them?"

The Doctor looked at the floor, deep in thought. He knew how she felt.

"But," she said, "I must respect the wishes of my people. I stay here, preserved, until..."

"Until what?" asked the Doctor. "What exactly is it you're waiting for? You're here, in your little box, like a relic from a forgotten age. The time of the Sylax has passed. They're never coming back!"

"What concern is it of yours, trespasser?"

I collapsed onto the floor again. I could barely manage to keep my eyes open. This might be it, I guessed. This might be the moment I die...

"Doctor," I said. "I have to tell you something..."

"Save your strength, Martha," he said.

"What is this?" asked Empress Shamara.

"My friend," said the Doctor. "She's dying, and it's all because of you. This machine, this stasis chamber - do you understand how it works?"

She had to shake her head.

"I suppose your followers wouldn't tell you that they'd been forced to build this with such crude technology, would they?" said the Doctor. "It keeps you alive by draining energy from everything within range. It's not some miracle that can just hold

off death. There had to be some sort of exchange of energies. My friend, Martha Jones, is dying so that you can live. Do you think that's fair? Do you think it's right that the entire planet above us is completely lifeless because of you and your stasis chamber?"

"It, uh, it also deactivates spaceships," said Logan, throwing in his thoughts, just because he didn't want to be left out.

It seemed to be too much for the undying Empress Shamara to fully comprehend.

"My..." she said. "My preservation has caused a loss of life?"

The Doctor nodded. "This technology's dangerous. It's deadly. It needs to be shut down."

"Could you do that?" she asked. "Could you kill me?"

"Yes," the Doctor said. There was anger in his eyes. The fact that lives had been lost - and would yet be lost - because of this one being upset him greatly, I could see that. He could be ruthless when he needed to be, and he needed to be now.

"Except," the Doctor went on, "that there's no controls on this thing - none that I can see, anyway. If there were, and I could've shut this thing down already, without even consulting you, I would've done it. But as it happens, there's not."

"Then how does it work?" asked Logan.

"Thought controlled," said the Doctor. "It keeps old Empress Shamara alive because she wants to live. If she accepts death, long after she should've done, then all this stops. The TARDIS lives. So does Martha." He turned to face the woman again. "Your choice."

The Empress thought about this for a long while. It must've been an agonising decision, I realised that. But as I was then, in the chamber, doubled over with pain, on the brink of death, I knew what I wanted her to do. After all, she had lived longer than most people could even dream of. Would she do the right thing?

"Yes," she said. "My people prospered here. Others should too. I will do it. I will allow myself to die, for the good of the universe."

"You've made the right decision," said the Doctor. "Your people will be

remembered by this act. So will you. You were a good ruler. Thank you."

The cry of the Toclafane grew louder. More of them were gathering, I could tell. Perhaps they had found me, or were close to it. I couldn't risk staying here for much longer. I'd be putting these people at risk, not to mention myself. And I couldn't die yet - I still had a lot of work to do.

But the assembled men and woman and children, who had been given hope by this story of the Doctor, still had questions.

"What happened to you?" asked a little boy, who I guessed could probably, tragically, barely remember a world that was not ruled by the Master.

"I survived," I said. "Obviously. I'm here, aren't I? As soon as the brave Empress Shamara let herself slip away, everything went back to normal. No more pains. As for the planet, the Doctor said that it would start to grow again, very slowly. Plants would sprout from the once-barren soil, and tiny germs would eventually evolve and grow into animals, creating a full and beautiful ecosystem."

"What about Logan?" said a young woman, who I'd watched become as entranced as I had been with idea of a handsome adventurer, and had been as disappointed as me to discover that he was nothing but a fraud.

"The Doctor offered him the woman's crown," I said, "as something to take back with him - the treasure he needed to maintain the lie. But he declined. He said that he didn't want to live a lie any longer. He would go off and have real adventures, then tell the universe about those, rather than feed people lies. The Doctor said that he could come with us, in the TARDIS."

"And what did he say?"

"Yes," I said.

People began to talk amongst themselves, eager to hear about this other adventure. But I had to interrupt them.

"There isn't time," I said. "Not now. That's a story for another day."

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