

I, Zygon

by Al B Dickerson

Being a manuscript of the final transmission to the Zygon refugee fleet from the survivors of the exploration vessel Hiskarasa; the final testament of Grotton, bound squire to Commander Broton. Found on Earth in 2357 and verified authentic by the cultural council of New Zygor, 51 Pegasi.

There was a human.

It clumsily descended the bank where I sat watching the loch. I heard its apelike grunts cease as it registered my presence. It merited no attention, no interruption of my meditations. Per my custom, I would ignore it if greeted. If pressed, I would answer noncommittally and assume the demeanor of a taciturn local. The human, thus assured I promised no diversion, would continue its insipid pursuits elsewhere and leave me alone. This maneuver had a high success rate; should the unwanted familiarity continue, I had further solutions of a less benign nature. From habit, I patted my jacket pocket. The device was there.

I was displeased when the creature brazenly sat at my right flank. Unused to this level of unwanted familiarity, I was at a momentary loss. The size of the body I wore generally discouraged such violations. I wanted to roar and bruise its flesh, or call that which waits below, but these just actions, given the circumstances, were untenable. I must suppress my warrior blood, lest I draw attention to myself. There was too much at stake.

I stared ahead and said nothing. I sensed it looking at me, then away, perhaps summoning the courage to break the silence. It exhaled and produced a cellular phone, tilted that I may see the pictures moving on the screen. I ignored them, and it, and studied the water. Beneath its placid surface, I knew, strong currents flowed.

The human grunted in its throat, rudely demanding my attention.

I turned to regard it. It was a male, the physically larger but subordinate human

gender. He was large for his type and wore a long yellow raincoat. A camera and sound recorder were slung on his neck. His backpack, I imagined, contained a portable computing device. I deduced from these accoutrements that he was a 'reporter', which is a particularly vile species of Earth researcher. His features were difficult to distinguish; like me, he wore a long beard. I saw my impassive reflection twinned in his tinted eye-wear.

"So, tell me. Have you seen any monsters out there?" he asked, gesturing to the loch.

I shook my head once, meaning 'no', and returned my gaze to the waters.

He produced a cigarette (a poisonous tube of dried vegetable matter), struggled to light it in the crisp breeze, succeeded and coughed. He offered one to me. Among humans, this gesture is either an expression of goodwill or a wish for the death of the recipient; I remain unsure. I waved it away; the smoke was foul.

He offered his name. I cared not for these ape's individual designations and disregarded it.

Then the creature leaned forward and spoke in a conspiratorial voice, "You're obviously a very busy... *man*."

I noted the deliberate emphasis.

"I'm terribly sorry to impose on you like this, but I rather thought we could have a conversation. It's rather awkward to sit here without saying anything, don't you think?"

After failing to intrigue, amuse or befriend, he would now turn to threats.

"It'll be bad for you if you keep ignoring me. I know people who'd really like to know what I know about you, you know?"

Yes. Finally, the meat. I looked down at him, eyes narrowed, not speaking. I was given to understand this body had an intimidating visage; I decided to amuse myself.

"Shove off," I said.

"Well, that's terribly rude. 'Shove off', indeed! But you've decided to speak, at least. Will you answer me a few questions?"

"You may ask."

"Splendid! To begin, your name is Dub... Dubgl!..."

"Dubhhlas MacRuisseal."

"Yes, that's it. You're the one they call the 'Caber'. You were the Duke of Forgill's ghillie back in the seventies?"

"I served the Duke."

He pondered. I waited.

"According to public records, that makes you eighty-seven years old."

"And?"

"Well, you look fantastic for your age."

"I maintain this body well. Is this why you bother me? Do you seek to profit from my health regimen, learn my secrets?"

"I think you know better than that. I bet you aren't even surprised that I'm here, are you, Caber? You didn't hide your trail very well."

"You begin to irritate me," I said. "Cease your tiresome circumlocution and explain this intrusion."

"Fair enough. Let me show you something." He pressed a sequence of buttons, showing me the phone.

On the screen I saw a series of images. A demolished oil platform. A casting of a giant tooth. A dead soldier, his body crushed. A blurred image of a giant creature dwarfing city buildings. Burning wreckage in a quarry. Another shot of the wreckage – behind a group of soldiers a hunched figure can be seen creeping away.

"Now, this one's particularly interesting. It was years until photographic enhancement techniques picked you out, there," said the human. He manipulated the phone and the picture was enlarged. I saw a human bearing away an alien body. The human was me. The alien was Odda, who I missed very much.

Now, in the present, I realized the human had been speaking.

"I'll repeat the question," he said, "one more time. I know you aren't human. What are you?"

Reflexively, my finger pressed the button. "I am a Zygon," I said.

"Zygon," he said, tasting the word. "Would it surprise you that I already knew that?"

My hands would easily encircle his neck, I observed.

"In fact," he continued, "I know quite a bit about you. For example, I know you recently entered the secure UNIT vaults at Mount Snowdon and absconded with Zygon technology from that ship of yours. Most impressive, by the way. It was days before they noticed."

I had hoped for weeks. No matter – I had only to keep the human occupied for an

hour or so, until sundown. After that, his knowledge would no longer threaten the plan. To use the human expression, I would stall for time. Then, when the signal came, I would slay him.

A small craft cruised past, close enough to shore that I could see the occupant watching us. Far overhead a small airplane left a vapor trail. At the overlook a human couple photographed the loch and each other. All could be agents of UNIT in disguise. One can never trust appearances, after all.

“Are you here alone, human?” I asked, not expecting an honest answer.

“Certainly not,” he said, surprising me, “I have a well-armed friend just over the rise. But he's just a friend, not someone come to arrest you. That's not why I'm here. I'd simply like to hear your side of things.”

“It would be best if you simply left me alone, human, and forgot everything you know.”

“I mean you no harm,” he promised me, “and I don't plan on exposing you. I am merely a seeker of knowledge.”

“Are you? So we are indeed brothers of a sort. You may remain, then, and I will share my tale with you.”

He smiled. “Thank you very much!” He busied himself, removing a recording device from his pack. “Is this all right?” he asked, and I nodded.

“Do you mind if I smoke?”

“Please do.”

Know, human, that I am Grotton, soldier-scout of Clan Glokon, clutch kin to Warlord Broton Glokon. As first hatchling of a green-shell clutch, I was deemed by tradition to be a Zygon of superior foresight and intelligence. As such, I was inducted into the Clan militia at my third turning. At his urging, I was awarded the honour of assignment as bound squire to my valorous uncle, Broton. On my fourth turning at his side, he was honoured to be named commander of the exploratory vessel, 'Hiskarasa'.

(“Eh?” asked the human. “What does that mean?”

“In your limited tongue,” I replied, “it is best translated as, 'Swimming sky mother'.”)

Oh, human, she was a fine ship. Her shell was grown in orbit by our finest organic crystallographers, her systems nurtured and trained on the planet below, in the great nerve

vats of the Green Miasma.

While the components of the ship grew to adulthood, we of the crew trained together. After many turns of attrition, the surviving six of us were overjoyed to learn the time of assembly was at hand. The shell was dropped from orbit and found, once the surrounding rubble was cleared away, to be remarkably intact. This, and the fact that her impact was on an artist's colony, was hailed as an omen of good fortune. I myself supervised the enshelling and, as First Officer, my blood fed her first conscious computation.

Our launching was a great occasion. The far-flung star fleet were recalled and arrayed in a mighty show of Zygon military mastery. Beyond their orderly ranks thousands of crawler ships, those confined to the system, frolicked about in celebration of a new sister. Body Print Gladiators fed the crowd's bloodlust for a day and a night. The Trilanic Guild led a procession of eighty tumbling Skarasen up the Boulevard of Sacrificial Banners, the ground trembling from their awesome feats. A million agitators were fed to the Skarasen and a million hatchlings drank their milk. Oh, but it was a mighty day! But, human, standing on the dais behind Broton as he waved to the adoring masses, a shadow crossed my mind. A sense of foreboding, so strong I nearly mistimed the ritual salute and ended my career then and there.

I paused. Why was I confiding in this human?

"What did you feel?" he said. "Was it a premonition?"

"Something like that. I felt... an expectation of failure. It was an alien feeling."

"You'd know," he said.

"Yes. Very droll, human. I shall laugh later."

"Is your species telepathic, then?"

"No more or less than yours. We have certain devices that augment natural ability, but I've none installed."

"Oh."

To my surprise, I found myself accepting the human's presence. As he sat, noxious cigarette in hand, waiting for me to resume my story, it occurred to me that, save for the uncommunicative felines in the cottage, I had not spoken to an Earth being in many turnings. The experience was... enervating.

"Standing there, I was struck by an impulse to flee, escape. Perhaps traveling to one

of the primitive lands and living under an alias or using the body print to transform myself to a wild beast. But these shameful urges were fleeting. My commitment to the voyage had exceeded the bounds of duty. There was Uncle Broton, for a start. He had placed great faith in me.”

“So you had to go with him.”

“Oh, I wanted to. Broton had my utmost fealty. But there was more. Odda was there, for one. We do not observe courtship and mating rituals in the human manner, but we do form attachments to other individuals. Odda was a nurse at the Green Miasma and a loyal clan spy. She was what would correspond to a human 'female', though the correlation is less than exact. I used my small influence to secure her a post where we would not be separated.”

“Wait. You said the crew had already been chosen by attrition.”

“Oh, very well. 'Small influence' and a molecular dispersal accident.”

“Grotton! You sly dog.”

“I choose to accept that as a declaration of admiration. Otherwise I would kill you now.”

“And who could blame you? So, despite your case of the willies, you had to go because of your uncle and your friend.”

“And one other. The most important reason, in fact. I have said my blood was used in the Hiskarasa's first computation. You do not understand what this means. You see, she was what you would call an organic machine. She was alive, and at her moment of first awareness my blood was her first nourishment. This was a great honour, but also a calculated precaution. Like any animal, a Zygon ship must be tamed. The blood of an occupant facilitates this by engendering an empathic link between the two. The responsibility of the ship to protect the one ensures protection for all the ship's occupants. I had to go. It was my duty. It was my honour. It was my desire. Human, it was glorious.”

I looked to the blue sky, imagined the veiled stars beyond. I felt a swell of emotion, heard my voice find the cadence of saga-teller.

“The Hiskarasa leaped into enemy space on the third revolution of the twelfth occlusion in the year of the Loyal Mollusc. Her commander was Warlord Broton, his squire was myself. Our doctor of organic crystallography was Odda. Our Philosopher of Science was Horto. Our Attendant of Cybernetic Systems was Madra. Last, but of critical importance, was our nameless representative of the Trilanic Guild, responsible for maintaining the Hiskarasa's

lactic systems and guarding the growth of our passenger.”

“Oh!” said the human, deftly spoiling the moment. “Who was your passenger, then? Some sort of ambassador?”

Despite my irritation, I was amused. Ambassador, indeed.

“No, human. Our passenger was not a Zygon. It was the egg of the sacred animal, the Skarasen, source of all sustenance. We evolved together, our fates intertwined until neither could subsist without the other.”

“Like humans and cows, you mean?”

“Are your cows armor plated cyborgs a dozen meters tall? Does the earth shake from their passage? No, human,” I scoffed, “the Skarasen are not 'cows'. Cows do not eat inattentive herders.”

“They don't stomp soldiers or destroy oil rigs, either, do they?”

“You know much, human.”

“I've read the word 'Skarasen' in old files. I recognized it when you said it before.”

He gestures to the loch for confirmation. I nod.

“The Skarasen is the Loch Ness Monster, of course”

“Of course. Would you like me to arrange a meeting?”

The human chuckled.

“Believe it or not, we've already met, years ago. A second time might just be the death of me.”

How right he was.

“Besides,” he said, “I'd hate to interrupt your story. Now, can I ask a question?”

“Certainly,” I said.

“This premonition of yours, the one you had on launch day. I saw you hesitate. There's more to it, isn't there? Something you've held back?”

“You are astute, human. I'll grant you that. Yes, there is more, and it is directly related to the next part of my story. We didn't land here, you see. We crashed, and only a miracle of navigation saved us from tumbling through the vacuum forever. And it was all due to a single member of the crew.”

“Not you, I hope.”

“It was Broton. Know this, human - we Zygons do not seek personal glory for our own enrichment; we of the lower castes serve our Clan; the Clans unite in service to the

Warlord. And the Warlords, despite their internecine conflicts and plotting, are sworn to unite in the Conclave to serve the great glory of the Zygon race itself. But Broton was different. I believe, human, that his waters were tainted. In your parlance, he was insane. His hunger for adulation was too strong. He wanted to rule the world!"

"He couldn't have been happy to be shot off into space, then."

"Perhaps he envisioned a triumphant return? Still more personal glory? I do not know. The important thing is that I was not the only Zygon to notice his ambition. It struck me suddenly, as I have said, but I believe others observed it long before. I suspect he was victim of a conspiracy hatched by the other Warlords. Why would he, a veteran soldier of little scientific knowledge, be chosen by the Conclave to command a research expedition on a lightly-armed vessel? Oh, he was clever enough and his rapid assimilation of knowledge was laudable, but he was decidedly unqualified for the mission. No, I believe the other Warlords plotted against him. Seeing his popularity and his desire for power, they schemed to send him far away. In a position of honour, of course, that he could not refuse."

"Out of sight, out of mind."

"Precisely."

"Lucky for them he never returned."

"Luck had nothing to do with his failure to return, human."

He snapped his fingers. "You crashed! Your Conclave made sure you never returned!"

"Correct. As bloodfather to the Hiskarasa, I was attuned to her systems and moods.

Our voyage was barely under way when I sensed something was very wrong. I shared my concerns with Odda and she concurred. Something, somewhere, was infecting her sense systems. We went to Broton, but he would hear nothing of it. This, his mission to glory, would suffer no setbacks, no failures. We left him, confided in the crew, and studied the problem in secret. We discovered a root systems ganglia infected with sap-rot and administered the proscribed remedy. For a time, we congratulated ourselves on our clandestine triumph. But the sap-rot was tenacious. We discovered it next in the purification filter of a body print chamber, then in the power distribution nodule. Once Odda and Horto discovered the sap-rot was mutating, Broton could no longer deny our peril.

"The ship was undeniably ill. First, she lost her voice. She could no longer sing home. Then her navigation control systems crashed. Struck blind, we slipped into the unknown.

"We conceived a daring plan but Broton refused to approve. Granted, it was

unprecedented. Our proposal was to induce deep sleep in all nonessential personnel, kill the Hiskarasa, and allow the sap-rot to die of malnourishment. When her systems were clean we would induce reanimation.

“After heated debate, the specialists Odda and Madra were chosen to remain awake while the rest of us slept. Broton was affronted by his status as irrelevant but grudgingly complied with common sense.

“Odda's face was the last thing I saw as I drifted into the sleep and the first thing I saw upon awakening. I immediately knew something had gone amiss. As I slept I had again provided the blood to quicken the Hiskarasa and I immediately sensed the ship's distress. But even lacking that insight, I would have known. I heard Broton raging incoherently somewhere in the ship. Instruments and debris littered the deck. Beyond the alarming mutters and moans of overloaded systems there was a pervasive absence of sound.

“We are not moving.” I said to Odda.

“Can you stand?” she asked. “I believe the commander may kill Madra if we do not hasten.”

These were my first moments on planet Earth.

“Did Broton kill Madra?”

“No, we intervened in time.”

“Well, that's good, I suppose.”

“Indeed. We needed Madra's knowledge. The ship was gravely injured.”

“So you needed time before you could fly again?”

“There would be no flying. It was this, Madra's assessment of our situation, that drove Broton to his murderous rage. But he quickly became reconciled to our fate. We had no choice but to await rescue, he finally assured us. But the estimated time of rescue passed. 'They will come,' said Broton, 'honour demands it. In the meantime, we will wait.'”

“But you suspected they wouldn't be coming.” murmured the human.

“Yes. Privately, I was sure our memorial service already had been held. The final interment of Broton's threat to the Conclave.

“Centuries passed but we were not idle. There in the loch, we put down roots. We healed the Hiskarasa, save for the uncooperative dynacon thrust and communication systems. The necessary resources simply do not exist on your world. We were denied the

stars. We could travel short distances, but to what end? We were safe beneath the waves, undetectable and unreachable but able to see all that occurred above.

“As we observed them through the centuries, I grew to admire your species. This land of the Scots,” I told him, “bred warriors whose battle prowess is almost equal to our own.”

“Yes, I've met a few. I'm not much of a fighter, myself. More of a thinker,” he replied.

“We had our 'thinkers', as well. Many Zygons believed that peace and cooperation would improve the lives of all. 'Stop the killing!' they bleat, or, 'But what of the hatchlings?' Bah! Weaklings!”

“Survival of the fittest? That's your motto?”

“No. The continued proliferation of creatures ideally suited to an environment is meaningless. Survival of the strong, those unfit who triumph and go on despite adversity – that is where glory lies.”

“Well, there's something to that. I guess humans don't look very glorious to you, then.”

“You are wrong, friend. You may be warm and well-fed but such was not the case for your ancestors. Humans were meant to live with the other apes in the jungles of your warm lands. But you spread into harsh terrain where only by ingenuity and tenacity did you survive. This is worthy of respect.”

“That's awfully big of you.”

He threw a rock into the loch. It skipped across the surface and sank. In moments there was no trace of its passing.

“We experimented on systems, captive humans and Earth animals. Using body prints we explored the nearby areas and placed surveillance devices. Unsuspected, we moved among you. And on a momentous day we released the Skarasen into the loch, there to be glimpsed and called 'monster'.”

“The UNIT report on Stanbridge House claims the Skarasen is a cyborg.”

“Oh, yes. As it grew we introduced organic crystallographic growth vectors to its hide, rendering it impervious to all concussive or energy-based attacks. For a creature of its size, its dietary needs are minimal; small amounts of any organic material keep its biofusion reactor fully fueled. It is immune to disease and aging. It thrills me to think, human – the Skarasen may outlive us all. Perhaps, some day, after your species has destroyed itself and

this world, it will still gambol and play in the lifeless seas, its mournful cry echoing over the empty vastness.”

“Say, Grotton, that's pretty poetic.”

“Poetry is a Zygon warrior's privilege. Had you a day or two, I would recite one of mine for you.”

“Oh, another day or two, maybe. Anyway, the report says you controlled the Skarasen?”

“Yes. Its mind is augmented with remote guidance systems, allowing its keeper to relay instructions from afar.”

Quite afar, I thought. The beast was taking forever. It must have been at sea.

The human produced another cigarette. I observed that he lit it but did not smoke it; a curious custom he had observed throughout my story. I was about to ask him about it when he spoke.

“Am I right that on its own the Skarasen is not dangerous?”

“This particular individual, yes. Some are quite dangerous. An untamed Skarasen is a mighty prey.”

“So it only attacked when you told it to?”

“That is correct. Again, it is due to Broton. He had become quieter, less bellicose, as the centuries passed. He obsessively studied humanity and the Earth environment. Again and again he hinted at some great plan that he refused to disclose. Finally, about 300 of your years ago, he returned from a scouting expedition and declared, 'The end of humanity and the Zygon conquest of Earth has begun!'”

“Long-term planner, was he?”

“It seems he had sent a missive to a human engineer and explained the concept of cooling condensers as a component of efficient steam engine construction. From that modest beginning, he envisioned an industrial age such as the one in our own early history. He would continue to monitor Earth's progression, sending word to prominent thinkers when development needed to be steered in the right direction. When the rescue ship arrived, it would find a familiar, hospitable world of warm seas and swampland. How would this be accomplished? By the process of selective pollution, resulting in the crude, but effective, terraforming you call 'global warming'.”

“Broton did a good job.”

“Indeed. He envisioned great glory for himself, I am sure, as the architect of a second Zygon home world. Would that he had lived to see it. But your world was changing so slowly. Even to we Zygons, who sense time in a less constrictive way than your people, the waiting was insufferable. Broton felt a more direct method of control was needed. He would one day have to influence humanity as one of their own.

“The Duke of Forgill!”

“Precisely. We tunneled to the foundations of the current Duke's residence. There was no hurry. We had hundreds of your years before the impersonation was to commence. Until then, we took rotas of servitude to the generations of Forgills, surreptitiously constructing a hidden door linking the Duke's library to the Hiskarasa.

“Finally, near the beginning of the last century, Broton decided the newly born son of our laird was to be the one. Broton took the identity of his private tutor and steered the hatchling's interests in the desired directions. I myself had my eye on his childhood friend, the one you call Caber, whose body I still wear.

“Then came the great catastrophe and the final manifestation of Broton's madness. Human science had progressed to the point that we were able to obtain the inanimate materials needed to establish communications with Zygor. To call for help was a shameful action, but Broton hoped our accomplishments would outweigh our failure. The Conclave expressed surprise and pleasure at our survival and promised to send help. But something always chanced to divert the necessary ships.

“Decades passed. Human technology began to worry us. Then, one year, ships using radar to search for the Skarasen came perilously close to discovering our location. It was decided to call home and demand action.

“But as Broton reluctantly explained our situation to the home world, a burst of hissing static overwhelmed their voices. Hurriedly searching all bands, we made contact with an ore freighter orbiting one of the outer planetoids. The Zygon there was wailing with grief and when we heard his report we joined him.”

I gazed at the bright reflections dancing in the waters. To my shame, they began to blur. The eyes of this body leaked when I thought of home.

I controlled my emotions. “My planet was destroyed.”

“Oh, I see. Was there a war?” he asked.

“No. Merely an astronomical event.” I gestured to the loch and hills. “Once, my

world was fertile and green, not much different than yours... wetter, warmer, but similar. Our race conquered the lands and oceans. We were fierce, proud, ingenious. We escaped the binds of gravity and flung ourselves outward to the planets, always learning, always conquering. When our own solar system was subjugated, we looked to the stars... But I prevaricate. The answer, human, is that our home, our race, our accomplishments, all were for nothing. When the end came, it was not our doing, nor an enemy action. It was... impersonal, shameful. The universe did not recognize our right to destiny, and a single, cruel stellar expansion burnt us to ashes."

"That's terrible."

"Indeed. Your sun is no different to ours, human. Remember that."

He looked at the sky, sunlight glinting off the frames of his glasses.

"That's not an especially comforting thought, Grotton."

We watched a flock of birds explode with panic as a hawk swooped among them.

"It's hard to imagine, the end of the world," he said.

"I regret that I am cursed with imagination, for I can see my world's death. A billion Zygons looked up and cried, 'Why?' as our star trebled in size, ignited the atmosphere, boiled the oceans and reduced the land to slag. Those on the surface had no chance to escape. There was no time to launch, no underground shelters. There was no hope for the off-world survivors, no habitable world in range. The entire star fleet, our only light speed capable vessels, had been mustered for maneuvers in close stellar orbit and were all destroyed."

"So, you're it? The last Zygon?"

"No. Remember, we are a spacefaring species. Besides ourselves, dozens of crawler ships remained. As time passed we listened as a fleet was assembled from the rim worlds. They devised a stratagem to achieve light speed by inducing an intrinsic magnification field around their linked mass, then using a dynachronatic velocity boost from the gas giant Yuggor, but the maneuver could only be performed once. Their calculations required a destination."

I stopped talking for a moment. I was pleased at the speed of the human's comprehension.

"What? There's an entire Zygon fleet approaching?"

"Do not worry about the fleet, friend. They are very far away. You will be dead many hundreds of years before their scheduled arrival."

“Oh! Well, that's alright, then. I suppose.”

He pondered a moment, then ventured, “You know, in a couple hundred years humanity will be pretty advanced. They'll put up a good fight, you know.”

The device in my pocket twitched: the Skarasen grew near.

“Perhaps,” I said, “if their progress is unimpeded. I have had many years to weigh the problem and I hope to have learned from Broton's failure.”

“You're talking about the attacks on the oil rigs and Stanbridge House.”

“Correct. In a matter of days everything was undone. You seem well-informed about the events.”

“Let's see,” said the human, “It was 1976. Quite a year for Britain. Everything changing, but maybe not for the best. 'No Future', am I right?”

“Yes. Our monitoring revealed much unrest. Old institutions were falling and their replacements were less than satisfactory. Humanity was adrift, it seems, disconnected from the forces that guided their lives. They were weak. It was time to strike, Broton declared, but unforeseen events accelerated his program.

“It was the Duke, you see. Amongst the other entitlements of his position, he owned several unconnected expanses of land. Broton, his childhood tutor, remember, had convinced him of the dangers of atomic energy. Acting on his own initiative while Broton enjoyed a brief hibernation, he allowed a petroleum company to construct its headquarters directly atop the Skarasen's path from the Devil's Punchbowl to the sea.

“Broton was furious. Privately, the rest of us thought his reaction out of proportion to the problem; the growth of the city called Inverness had posed an earlier problem that led to the establishment of a tunnel between the the Punchbowl and the loch; surely a similar excavation could extend the tunnel to the sea?

“He would hear nothing of it. I now believe that Broton had so long envisioned himself as the Duke that he became unhinged when the latter's actions inconvenienced our routine. The Duke, he decided, must go.

“And that is when the Duke of Forgill and his ghillie, the Caber, became changed men. We simply walked the long tunnel from the ship to the Duke's library and surprised them there. I gained respect for the Caber that night, I assure you. With ourselves in place, it was time to expand operations. Soon Odda was dispatched to spy on the Hiberian base; she chose as her body-print a female medic called, 'Sister Lamont'.”

“And then,” said the human, “Hiberian built platforms in the sea.”

“That is correct. Others were already there. It was a great success. The more oil burned, you see, the closer Broton's plans came to fruition.”

“Then why order the Skarasen to destroy them? I have to say, it doesn't make a lot of sense. I'd have just destroyed the base.”

“Oh, I completely agree and, exercising great care, I suggested as much to Broton. Not only did the flow of oil advance our plans, I counseled, but using the Skarasen endangered our secure position. But he would hear none of it. The humans had unknowingly disrespected our great work and must be punished. More, they must be shown our power. Besides, he said, once their platforms were destroyed, Hiberian would close the facility and drill elsewhere. With that, all discussion was closed. He inferred that further questioning would result in discipline. Under the assault of his withering glare, I acquiesced. I will always wonder what the outcome would have been had I pressed my case.

“And so the end came. After the third platform was destroyed, the humans you call 'UNIT' appeared in the village near the Punchbowl. We arranged for a surveillance device to be placed in a stag's head, a gift to the owner of the tavern they commandeered. The human leader, a man called Lethbridge-Stewart, was observed using an advanced machine to contact someone called 'the Doctor', whose presence was deemed very important. Intrigued by the device, Broton, on the pretext of complaining about poachers to the human commanding Hiberian, drove to the village. Heeding a curious impulse, he stopped when a curious trio appeared on the road. One was a tall male in native ceremonial garb; one a small female and the other, from his bearing, a military officer.”

“Ah, yes! The tall, devastatingly handsome man was UNIT's scientific adviser, the 'Doctor' the Brigadier was calling on the Space-Time Telegraph. The woman was his best friend, Sarah Jane Smith, the reporter. The other was Surgeon Lieutenant Harry Sullivan, a Royal Navy doctor assigned to UNIT.”

“All three of whom we tried and failed to destroy. I shot Sullivan but did not kill him. Odda left the Doctor and the Smith woman in a pressure chamber but left before they died, bearing Sullivan to us. Broton was furious. Then Sullivan interfered with our attempt to kill the Doctor.”

“You lot had a run of bad luck, I'm afraid. After the Skarasen failed to kill the Doctor, the military traced your control signal and dropped depth charges on your ship...”

He sat quietly for a moment, listening as the soft lapping of waves subtly changed.

“Grotton... There's really no need to revisit the entire incident, is there? We know how it ended. Broton shot dead in London, the rest of you lot presumed destroyed when your ship exploded. The rest was just a lot of running around, really.

“Besides,” he said, looking up, “that's rather of more immediate interest, wouldn't you say?”

A shadow fell. Water cascaded off the mighty neck of the Skarasen as it peered down at us. It ran off my guest's yellow raincoat. He stood and looked down at me, the Skarasen blotting the sun behind him. Behind the false beard, his broad grin was familiar. Not that I needed any further evidence; his gestures, his vocal mannerisms and his scent had already exposed his deception.

I didn't bother to stand.

“Yes, Doctor, I'd say it is of immediate interest, indeed.”

“I used to enjoy disguises when I was younger,” the Doctor said, shedding the rain coat, beard and glasses, “but you know, I've gone off them.”

He frowned at me, then looked up at the swaying head of the Skarasen, his hair gently fluttering in time to its breathing. Eclipsed by the sheer presence of the beast, his voice sounded very small.

“I suppose you intend to kill me, then? Revenge of the Zygon?”

“You are my enemy. You killed my Uncle...”

“No, that was the Brigadier. Shoot first and don't ask questions, that's his way. Broton was trying to kill several dozen humans at the time...”

“You killed Madra.”

“An accident. He fell. I wasn't even there.”

“You destroyed the Hiskarasa.”

He had no answer to that. Instead, he lit another cigarette. As the smoke dispersed, I noticed the Skarasen retreat slightly.

“A naphthalene derivative, Doctor?”

He looked at me, grinning. “Something like that. I quit smoking centuries ago. Vile habit.”

“I'm afraid the Skarasen has a respiratory bypass system.”

“Well, there's a coincidence. So, I'm at your mercy, then?”

“Entirely. Please, sit and answer a few questions. Answer carefully, and you may yet live.”

He eyed me carefully.

“I offer no guarantees, of course.”

He flicked the cigarette into the loch and sat. “Fair enough, Grotton, fair enough.”

“Very good. First, I know you aren't human. What are you?”

“I'd be happy to answer that, but there's something you're forgetting.” He rolled his eyes at the Skarasen looming out of the loch.

“This place will be crawling with tourists in a moment. Fair amount of traffic on this road.”

“You make a good point,” I conceded. I instructed the Skarasen to submerge. The Doctor grinned.

“Much better! You really should brush its teeth more often, you know. Now, where were we? Ah! I'm sure you haven't heard of it, but my planet's name is Gallifrey.”

Gallifrey? It meant nothing to me.

“Why were you helping the humans? This is a quarantined world, you know.”

“Well, if you must know, I'm frequently at odds with my own people. I was banished here many years ago. Helping the humans became something of a bad habit. You weren't the first invaders I dealt with, not by a long shot.

“Besides,” he said, “I'm rather unaccountably fond of them. They're very young but they have potential. Not very different than your people, Grotton. Not really.”

He leaned in and, in a confiding tone, said, “My people are time travelers, so you can believe this because I've seen it. One day, not soon, solar flares are going to scour the face of this planet. Forewarned, humans will send arks and flying cities to the stars. Some of them will land on other worlds and I'm afraid they'll behave rather exactly as your lot did. But not all of them, Grotton, and that's the point. It's the choices we make, not what species we are.”

“You attempt to appeal to my better nature. You believe this will save you, Gallifreyan?”

“Can't hurt to try.”

“But why are you here, now? This cannot be a coincidence.”

“Oh, it's no coincidence. My old friend the Brigadier called me on that machine that

intrigued Broton so much. I wasn't going to come. I never visit this decade if I can help it and I'm very busy right now. But Romana pointed out something very interesting about the stars tonight – it's the reason you're here now, I believe – and here I am.”

“What did your Brigadier tell you?”

“I've already told you; it seems a secure storage facility has been breached and several surviving components from the Hiskarasa were stolen...”

“Recovered.”

“Very well, recovered. I've also learned several people went missing this past week...”

He knew far too much.

“Doctor, you must not interfere! I no longer seek revenge but I will instruct the Skarasen to kill you here and now if I must!”

“Are they dead, Grotton? Bright, Westchester and the rest? Did you kill them? What about the others? The Duke, the Caber, Sister Lamont?”

Once, my admission would have seemed a weakness. “Doctor, I have slain no-one since the man your friend Sullivan found on the coast. The Caber, only days after Stanbridge house, drowned in the loch. He was hunting the Skarasen, the fool. It defended itself and presented his body to me. As I still wore this form-”

“About that-”

“In a moment. I will explain. As I still wore this form I simply re-assumed his identity. I served the Duke until his death. You know, I think he suspected, but he never asked. Strange. He died peacefully, in his sleep, leaving his ghillie a substantial pension. I have dwelt here ever since. I do not know what became of Sister Lamont.”

“Fine, but what about these television people?”

“They are unharmed. When the work is done they will be released.”

The sun set. In the clear sky, the stars began to appear.

“What 'work', Grotton? What are you planning?”

I searched the sky and found a tiny, flickering speck of light. My heart thumped. I wished Odda was here to share the coming moment.

“Why, I'm calling the fleet, of course.”

“You can't! Why would you do that?”

“I notice you persist in asking questions, Doctor.”

“What can I say? I am cursed with curiosity.”

“There is an Earth homily about that.”

“I'm not an Earthling.”

“But you are allied with them. Now, tell me your intentions. Do it now. Very soon, I will want to be alone. This can be accomplished in two ways.”

He looked at the stars. I sensed that he was waiting for something. Then, I heard a buzzing. He answered his phone and listened. “Thank you, Romana. Keep them there for now,” he said, and ended the call.

“That was Romana,” he said. “All your prisoners are well and accounted for, if a bit confused.”

“As I said.”

“But what was it for? Why did you infiltrate a television news network?”

“You haven't guessed? Your powers of deduction fail you, Doctor. Who on this world could refuse free publicity? Any moment now, the Bethel Ridge radio telescope is going to send a transmission to the stars. To the fleet.”

“How are you going to do this if you're here? Unless... Grotton! You aren't alone!”

My telephone beeped.

“Excuse me,” I said, “that will be Odda.”

“In her final moments of life, the Hiskarasa saved us,” I said. “Oh, but we underestimated the craft and loyalty of the ship. On her own, her intelligence had devised a way of saving me if the unthinkable occurred. Just as the final moment passed we were enveloped in a mass of tough, fibrous tissue and I felt the familiar tingle of a body-print. But this was different. More than perception, my very body changed. Odda retained her glorious form but I felt my tissues flow and reform. Then the blast rendered us unconscious.”

“And after you awoke you slipped away and were accidentally photographed. Odda survived her wounds, then?”

“Barely, but yes. She stayed in the Caber's cottage, venturing out at night. For half a human lifetime, this was our existence. We became used to it, and to this world. And we realized we did not miss Zygor. It seems like a dream now. We are more Earthlings than Zygons.”

“I know exactly how that feels, but don't tell anyone!”

“If Odda completes her task as planned, we will make one final transmission. I

believe I will describe our encounter.”

“Oh. Well, I won't stop you.” He produced a small paper sack and said, “Would you like a jelly baby?” He smiled at my expression. “That's not a literal description.”

He watched me eat the vile treat.

“I have a confession to make, Grotton. I've already heard the transmission. Oh, don't look so surprised. I told you, I'm a time traveler. Tell me, why did you do it?”

I thought before I answered, then decided to tell him the truth, just as I tell it to you who fly so far away.

“Because any attempted invasion of the Earth would fail, Doctor. I have watched your technology develop – Broton sowed the seeds of our failure on the day he contacted the man Watt. By the time the fleet arrived, centuries from now, Earth will have the technology to meet them in open space, long before she is threatened in any way. So why bother? 'Find another planet', we told them, 'Earth is defended.'

“So it's a purely tactical decision, then?”

“Well... of course. What else would it be?”

“Right. One wouldn't want to be accused of going native, would one?”

“There's no need for insults, Doctor.”

He stood. “Well, this has been pleasant, but I must go. I'll tell the Brigadier something or other. You'll be left alone.” He spied the barely visible top of the Skarasen's head as it lurked, watching us. “Good-bye!” he told it. “Take care, Grotton,” he said, turning to go.

“Doctor.” I said, “tell me one more thing. The fleet... have you seen what happens to them? Do they survive?”

He stopped and searched the sky for a moment. “There!” He pointed. “Do you know the constellation Pegasus? See the square? Halfway down its right side is 51 Pegasi. It's orbited by the planet Bellerophon, orbited in turn by a Zygorlike moon. It's a hot, nasty, swampy place. Completely wild. But in about two hundred years there will be a thriving culture there, slightly xenophobic but not aggressive to her neighbors. And in the central court of her capital the new government will erect a statue of a breaching Skarasen, a tribute to the greatest heroes the race has ever known: the crew of the Hiskarasa.”

“I do not understand, Doctor. Why are we held in such esteem? Because we warned them about Earth?”

He chuckled. "No, Grotton. It's because you told them how to reach their new home. Or you will. Presumably when you send that last transmission. Remember, 51 Pegasi."

"I understand. Thank you, Doctor."

"Don't thank me! Just tell me you'll leave humanity alone. They have enough problems. Do that and you'll never see me again."

I promised and he was satisfied. The Doctor slipped away. A few moments later I heard him calling a dog. I thumbed the device and the Skarasen returned to the sea. I was alone with the loch and the sky.

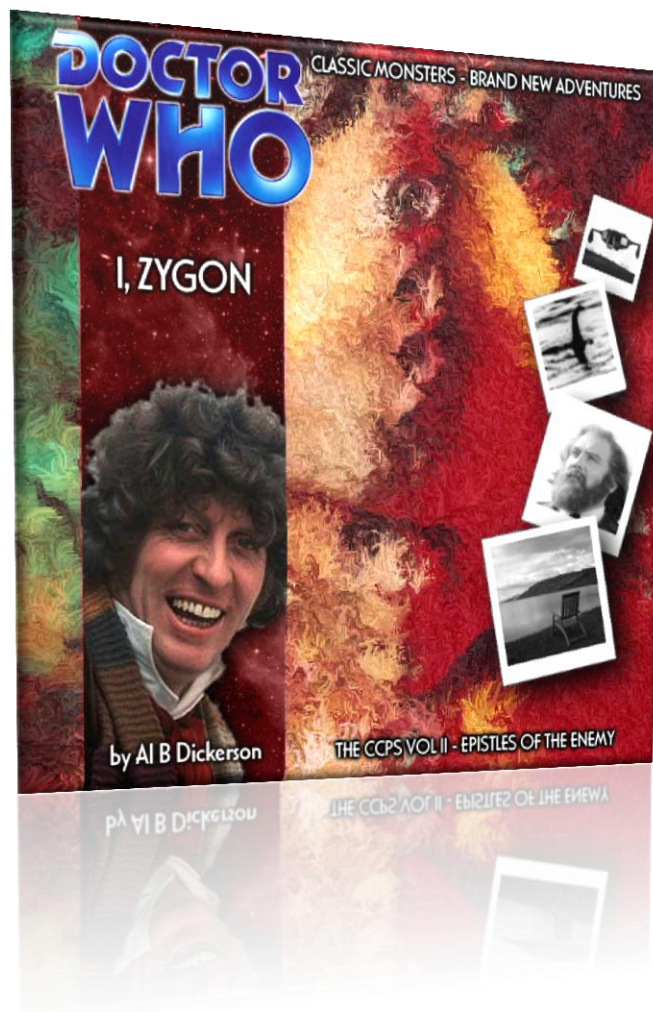
Kinsmen, I would kill them all if I was able. Perhaps these words shock you and your new society but I am still a Zygon of Zygor. My mind burns bright and my hands are strong. These humans are dim and weak. But you are all so far away, and if the alien Doctor was right and you have renounced the old ways then Odda and I have no place among you.

I watched the stars. There! A distant sun flared and became the brightest object in the sky. Across the light years, I watched our world die. The mighty Zygor, reduced to a silent memorial to cosmic chance.

Odda would be watching. She would call me soon, I knew. I thought of her and our plan to modify the body-print for permanence. We will be humans together, and produce offspring in the human manner. Perhaps, one day, they will venture to 51 Pegasi and unknowingly meet their ancestors. I wonder if they will make war upon you?

But for now, Odda and I have no immediate plans beyond sending this final transmission to you. The Earth is ours. Perhaps we will introduce Zygon science to Earth and become wealthy and famous. Perhaps we will sell our warrior skills to this world's dictators. I do not know, but I suspect we will do nothing of the sort.

Hiding has become a habit, you see. We will not commit Broton's error. We will dwell quietly, rear our offspring. And on nights when the moon is dark and the loch is still, we will swim with the Skarasen.



DOCTOR WHO

CLASSIC MONSTERS - BRAND NEW ADVENTURES

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