

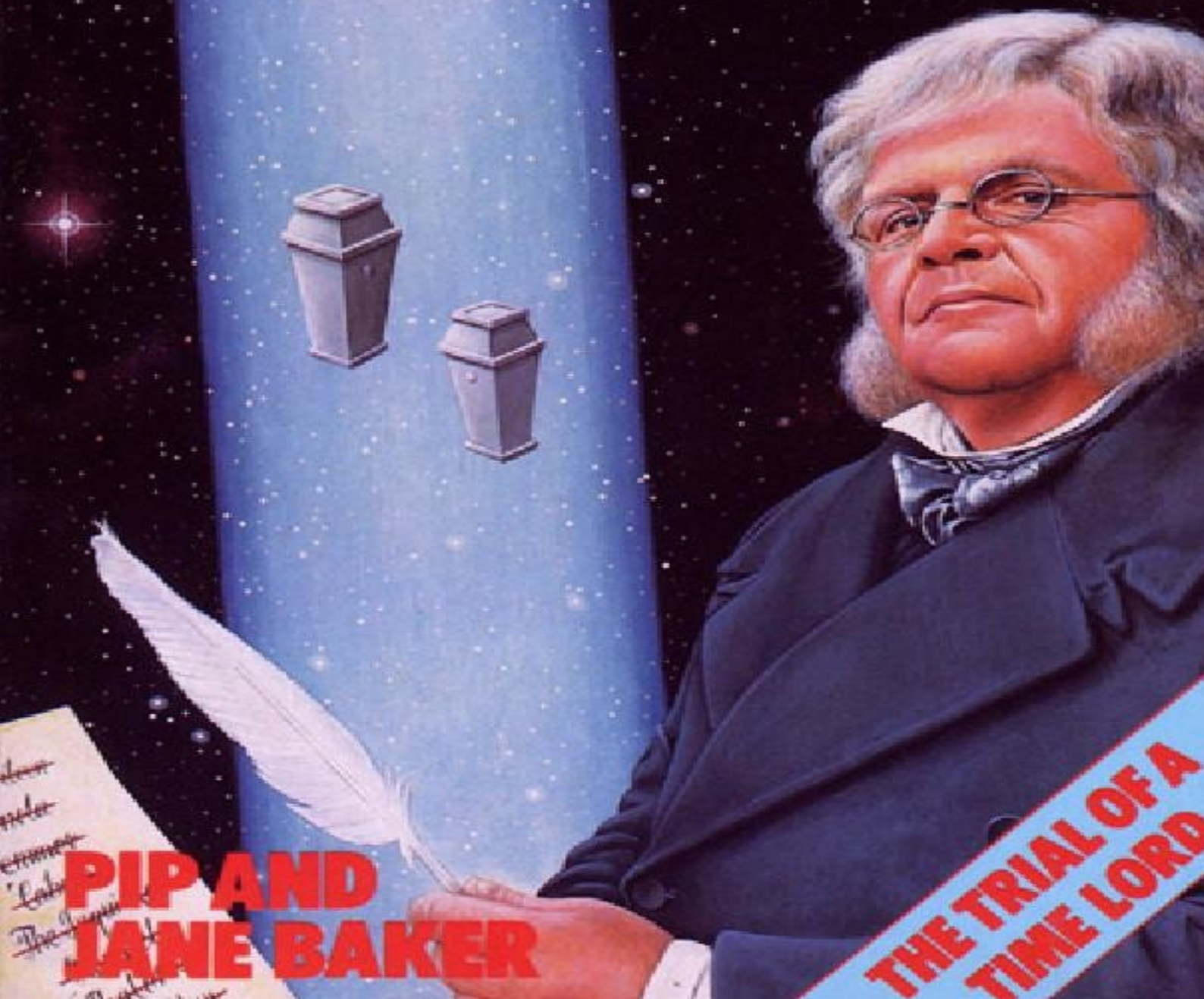


No.
131

Doctor

WHEN

THE ULTIMATE FOE



**PIP AND
JANE BAKER**

**THE TRIAL OF A
TIME LORD**

Snatched out of time and place and brought before the Time Lords of Gallifrey, the Doctor is on trial for his life.

While the Doctor asserts that the evidence of the Matrix, the repository of all Time Lord knowledge, has been tampered with, the mysterious and vengeful prosecuting council, the Valeyard, is confident that the Doctor will be sentenced to death.

In a dramatic intervention the Valeyard's true identity is revealed but he escapes from the Courtroom into the Matrix, and it is into this nightmare world that the Doctor must follow – to face his ultimate foe . . .

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THE TRIAL OF A TIME

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PIP AND JANE BAKER

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Prologue

‘The charge must now be genocide...’

Genocide!

The Doctor’s face blanched, contrasting with his colourful patchwork coat. Snatched out of Time to stand trial for a crime of meddling in the affairs of other societies was traumatic enough, but the new charge echoing around the Court carried with it a greater penalty.

The ultimate punishment.

When a Time Lord is brought before the bar of justice, it is to no ordinary tribunal that he is transported. But then, as a member of the most remarkable species in Creation, this is only to be expected.

Plucked out of Time, the accused is incarcerated in a beam of turbulence which lances through the vast reaches of the four-dimensional Universe, to penetrate a unique dimension where all the processes of existence hitherto experienced are suspended.

Hovering in this singular vacuum is the venue for the Trial: a vast, incredible Space Station. Constructed like a baroque cathedral with dozens of thrusting spires and straddled with porticoes, the gargantuan hulk is embellished with a rococo scroll glorifying the achievements of the Time Lords.

In acknowledgment of the gravity of the proceedings a perpetual electric storm of Wagnerian magnitude leaps and dances with unabated fury.

This was the dramatic setting into which the Doctor had been pitched.

From the prisoner’s rostrum, he watched events unfolding on the giant Matrix screen that dominated the Court. The Matrix contained the memories of all the Time Lords, and from there the black-garbed prosecutor, the Valeyard, had extracted two cases to present in evidence against the Doctor: interference on Ravolox, and aiding the brain transference travesty planned by the gruesomeness of Sil.

Neither case caused him particular concern because of the strong submission he intended to offer in his own defence: the tale of the terrifying Vervoids; those plantoid creatures who had infested the intergalactic liner Hyperion III. Only his resourcefulness prevented the homicidal monsters from reaching Earth. His intervention saved the human race.

Having concluded his evidence, he awaited the Inquisitor’s declaration of exoneration.

In vain.

It had been the Valeyard who spoke. ‘Every Vervoid was destroyed by your ingenious ploy?’

Apparently a guileless question.

But the Doctor had realised where the vengeful prosecutor was leading. ‘My Lady,’ he said to the white-gowned Inquisitor. ‘Had even a leaf survived and fallen on fertile soil, a Vervoid would have grown.’

No murmur of understanding came from the jury of his peers, the ancient Time Lords lining the rows of seats in the austere Court.

‘The beings on planet Earth would have been eliminated!’ he affirmed desperately.

To no avail.

The triumphant Valeyard had his victim by the tail and he intended to twist it! ‘On his own submission,’ persisted the sonorous tones, ‘the Doctor has admitted responsibility for destroying a complete species. Thus breaking Article Seven of Gallifreyan Law. For this there can only be one punishment!’

The Doctor knew what that was.

Death.

The Key of Rassilon

It seemed there was no help for the hapless Time Lord.

Not a single witness who could speak in his defence.

Peri, his companion, was dead.

Mel, his subsequent companion, was somewhere in his future. He could call on neither of them to testify on his behalf.

Someone though – an unexpected and unlikely saviour – was waiting in the wings...

Two coffin-shaped caskets came drifting down a light beam. Like the TARDIS, which had been captured in a similar beam, they spun towards the hovering Space Station that housed the Courtroom to land with a bump beside the deserted and somewhat battered navy-blue police box.

Both were occupied but the occupants were too dazed by the twisting, shaking and buffeting to do other than lie still.

Then a lid lifted.

A pair of crafty eyes peeked over the edge. Seeing nobody around, Sabalom Glitz oozed forth.

Sabalom Glitz! Thief, liar, and incorrigible rogue. A coward who would sell his grandmother to save his own skin. For whom profit was a god. A wheeler-dealer devoid of conscience, whom the Doctor had encountered on Ravolox.

‘How the blazes did I get here?’ muttered Glitz. ‘And anyway, where in the Universe is here!’

He received no answer. The manipulator behind this bizarre arrival was not ready to reveal his name or her –

presence.

Yet.

‘Have you ought to offer in answer to the charge, Doctor?’

The Inquisitor’s head, wreathed in a flattering white headdress edged with a filigree trimming of gold, inclined towards the bemused Doctor.

‘Only one which you will not accept, My Lady.’

She knew what that was. The Doctor had been claiming throughout the trial that the events displayed on the Matrix screen were distorted.

‘This so-called evidence is a farrago of distortion that would have Ananias, Baron Munchausen and other famous liars blushing down to their very toenails! Many happenings are not as I remember them!’ insisted the Doctor.

‘It may not accord with your memory, Doctor, but – as has been said before – it is possible for there to be genuine differences in recollection.’

‘Not that different. Even my story – offered in my own defence – has been falsified!’

‘Balderdash!’ interjected the Valeyard.

A frown of reproof from the Inquisitor. ‘If you wish to make an observation, Valeyard, you will do so lucidly and with due deference to this Court.’

‘My apologies, ma’am. But I beg you to realise what is being implied here,’ came the obsequious rejoinder.

‘I understand that without the use of expletives! Doctor, what we have been watching on the Matrix screen are hard facts drawn from the Matrix itself. And the Matrix cannot lie.’

‘With respect, if you’ll believe that, you’ll believe anything!’

She adjusted the scarlet sash draped over her shoulders, a gesture with which the Doctor had

become familiar: an indication of a flutter of uncertainty. He decided to capitalise on the moment. ~~can quote an instance from my defence. According to what we saw on the Matrix screen, I destroyed the communications room on the Hyperion III.~~

Never! I swear I went nowhere near that room. Why would I? By smashing the equipment, we were effectively cut off.

Left to the mercy of the rampaging creatures whose sole aim was our annihilation!

Murmurs and shuffles rippled along the benches as several venerable heads nodded in acceptance of the Doctor's reasoning.

'Fetch the Keeper,' ordered the inquisitor.

A uniformed guard quit the Court.

'Doctor, you are saying—'

'That the Matrix has been tampered with. Yes. That the ragbag of evidence you have seen is the result of perjury.'

Gasps of horror hissed: such an accusation was equivalent to sacrilege.

Indomitably the Doctor persisted. 'All I don't understand is who's doing the tampering. And why!'

He would find out.

Soon.

And from a most unexpected source.

Alone with only his fears for company, Glitz chose not to reveal his presence.

Not without a back-up anyway, His partner, and minder, Dibber was nowhere to be seen. And Glitz was no glory boy!

Quite the opposite.

He almost jumped out of his swarthy skin as a thump came from inside the other casket. He edged as far away as possible: these monstrosities looked too much like coffins for his taste!

'Hey, what's going on?' came a shrill whine. More thumping from the inside. 'Let me out of here!'

'Dibber?' said Glitz. 'What's happened to your voice, lad

—'

'I'm not Dibber!' declared the voice. 'Neither am I a lad!' Indeed Mel wasn't. Her mass of red curls emphasising the blue of her costume, the diminutive new companion rose from the second casket. 'And what's more,' she continued. 'There's nothing wrong with my voice!' Her brown eyes surveyed his hotchpotch apparel with disapproval. 'As a matter of total disinterest, who are you?'

Half his size, a quarter his weight, Mel felt less fear of the blustering Glitz than he did of her.

'Er – I – er – Sabalom Glitz.'

'I'm Mel. You're shaking! Pull yourself together, man!'

'Well, I don't know where I am. It's very disconcerting for an experienced traveller such as myself to suddenly find he's somewhere he hadn't planned to go and...' A devastating thought! He gazed at the casket in horror.

'And arriving in a coff –' He could not complete the word.

'In a – Mel, you don't think I'm – I mean, I haven't been croaked, have I?'

Glitz was alive and kicking and, with his devotion to self preservation at any cost, he was likely to stay so for a good many years.

No such rosy future stretched before the Doctor.

The Keeper of the Matrix, having obeyed the summons, was dispassionately tightening the noose around the defendant's neck. 'My Lady, no one can enter the Matrix without the Key of Rassilon.' He tapped the huge key safely fastened to a chain looped across his chest.

‘Is it at all possible for the data stored within the Matrix to be tampered with in any way?’ The Inquisitor was anxious to be absolutely impartial.

‘Quite impossible, My Lady.’

‘By whom is the Key used?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Qualified people. For inspection. Once in a millennium perhaps, to replace a transducer.’

‘Keys can be copied, you will agree.’

‘The Key of Rassilon never leaves my possession,’

avowed the Keeper, pressing the precious article to his bosom.

‘Except when it is in the hands of these qualified people!’ persisted the Doctor.

The Valeyard stretched to his full majestic height: the argument was beginning to swing in the prisoner’s favour!

‘This is a ridiculous allegation, My Lady. The Doctor is challenging the evidence of the Matrix on the grounds that it has been tampered with. A charge he is totally unable to substantiate.’

‘That is accepted,’ the Inquisitor replied. ‘Wild accusations of malfeasance do not constitute defence, Doctor.’

‘The Matrix can be physically penetrated. The Keeper has admitted as much!’ shouted the Doctor. ‘And the evidence you have been shown is totally at variance with my own memory. Therefore it has been deliberately distorted!’

‘And who would do such a thing – if it were possible?’

‘Somebody who wants my head!’ He pointed an accusing finger. ‘Such as the Valeyard!’

He was right.

Though not entirely.

His head was certainly wanted – but not only by the Valeyard...

An Unwelcome Intruder

‘Ouch! That hurt!’

Mel had given Glitz a hearty pinch to convince him he was still in the land of the living! It hadn't been easy to find an exposed spot, what with his leather cladding on one arm and thick protective clothing on the other, but she'd managed.

‘If you're expecting an apology, forget it,’ she said. ‘Now, I'm going through that door. Coming or not?’ Without awaiting a reply, she began mounting the steps to a closed portal.

‘Are they all your sort here?’ grumbled Glitz.

Nevertheless, he followed: better to have this tiny harridan by his side than nobody at all!

‘Let's find out, shall we – Listen!’

A voice, feminine, authoritative, could be heard from beyond the door. ‘There is only one way to rebut the evidence of the Matrix, Doctor...’

‘Doctor?’ Mel gulped in surprise.

The voice continued ‘... to produce witnesses who can support your version of events. Can you do that?’

‘Of course I can't! You know I can't!’

Mel's face lit up. That was indeed her cherished Time Lord. But who was the woman laying down the law?

‘Then we must accept the Valeyard's evidence.’ The well-modulated female tones again.

‘My Lady, such witnesses as I might call are scattered all over the Universe. And all through Time. How can I find them now?’

Then came another voice. Oily. Vengeful. Mel took an immediate dislike.

‘My Lady, the Doctor is blatantly lying. His sole defence against the charge seems to be that ridiculous –’

Mel had heard enough.

She pushed open the door and burst into the Trial Room. Close on her heels, ludicrously trying to hide behind the petite girl, scampered Sabalom Glitz.

Consternation from the assembled throng.

The Doctor was the first to recover.

‘Mel! Glitz! How did you get here?’

A brief glance at the courtroom... and Glitz was immediately on the defensive! ‘I was sent here wasn't I? Not my wish, mind you.’

‘Same here.’

Mel harboured no such guilt complex. Nor was she concerned for herself. Simply for the Doctor who was occupying the prisoner's podium.

‘What're you doing in there, Doctor? Why are you on trial –?’

‘Be silent!’ The precipitate arrival made the usually calm Inquisitor tetchy: there was a protocol to Gallifreyan court proceedings, and the intervention of extraneous persons was not according to the book. ‘Who sent you to this Court?’

Sheltered by Mel and spurred on by the Doctor's obvious dilemma, Glitz became quiet and expansive. ‘That's the beak, is it?’ he whispered, giving a nudge and a wink.

‘They all look the same. Carved out of something hard and nasty.’

‘I should warn you my hearing is excellent!’ rasped the Inquisitor.

Bravado melted. ‘Uriah Heep’ took over. ‘Naturally I wasn't referring to you, you

worshipfulness –’

–‘Your name, I take it, is Gritz.’

‘Sabalom Gritz, your honouress, at your service –’

‘You said you were sent here, Sabalom Gritz. By whom?’

Before he could answer, another voice, low, well-modulated, menacing, replied.

‘By me, Madam.’

Every head turned to the back of the Courtroom.

There on the giant Matrix screen, a spectre of Nemesis, was the Doctor’s most implacable antagonist.

The scales of justice had tilted...

And not in the defendant’s favour...

Evil Intent

Seen in close-up on the Matrix screen, the regular features appeared even paler, the dark hair, beard and moustache even darker, the black-as-night velvet costume even blacker.

His brooding eyes surveyed the scene below him. ‘By me, Madam,’ he repeated, enjoying the consternation his intrusion had caused.

‘This is entirely irregular!’ reproved the Inquisitor, not in the least daunted by the apparition of evil. ‘Who are you?’

‘I am known as the Master. And, as you see, I speak to you from within the Matrix.’ A wide, expansive smile. ‘Proof, if any be needed, that not only qualified people can enter here.’

‘But – how –?’ The Keeper’s fingers grasped the Key hanging on its silver chain. ‘You – you haven’t the Key of Rassilon –’

The Master held up an identical model. ‘I have a very good copy, Keeper.’

‘Ah!’

‘Exactly, Doctor. Just as you said – it is possible.’ His gaze switched from the mortified Keeper to his hated enemy in the dock.

Bold blue eyes returned the gaze: the Doctor appreciated the irony of his adversary providing the proof of his contention that the Matrix had been infiltrated.

None of this impressed the Inquisitor. ‘Do you realise you are imposing your presence on an official Court appointed by the High Council to consider the most serious –’

‘Madam, I *know!*’ he interrupted. The orders of the High Council meant nothing to him. He was a renegade Time Lord who had been exiled from Gallifrey. ‘I have followed the trial with great interest and amusement.’

The cruel lips widened, the regular white teeth gleamed.

‘But now I must intervene for the sake of justice.’

‘Humbug! Take no notice of him!’ the Doctor fumed, affronted by the hypocrisy. ‘Justice! He doesn’t know what justice is. He’d see me dead tomorrow.’ Quite true. The Master’s dedication to the Doctor’s destruction was legendary.

‘Gladly would I, Doctor.’ The smile faded as the Master recalled, with bitterness, the last occasion on which they had met. It had been on that despicable planet Earth in the nineteenth century when the workers were running amok.

In alliance with another renegade, the Rani, he had embarked on a campaign to destroy his *bénoîte*.

The Doctor’s thoughts were following the same train.

Only his went further. At the end of that episode – an episode he christened ‘The Mark Of The Rani’ – the two renegades were sent spinning into space locked in the Rani’s TARDIS. Hurtling, out of control, towards the far reaches beyond the Milky Way.

How, then, had the Master escaped?

‘I can guess what you are wondering, Doctor,’ came the unctuous tones. ‘And before I dispose of you, I will assuage your curiosity. However, my present concern is to prevent you from forfeiting your remaining lives to the Valeyard.’

Forfeit his remaining lives? Mel gripped the Doctor’s arm in fear. She had so many questions: who was this creep? What had the Doctor done? How had she herself been brought here? Yes, that was an unexplained puzzle. One moment she’d been immersed in writing an experimental programme for one of the TARDIS’s complex computers – the next she’d found herself incarcerated in a custom-made casket. No light. No sound.

Until, lifting the lid, she was confronted by the shivering specimen now doing his best to wheedle past the guards and out of the door!

Futile. The guards, clad in immaculate uniforms of cream, red and gold, were not mere ceremonial adjuncts to the elegant assembly. Nor were the phasers they levelled loaded with blank Glitz, coward incarnate, hurriedly retreated to the dock, using the Doctor's portly form for a shield!

The Master was continuing. 'As an opponent, Doctor, I can deal with you.'

'What's he on about, Doctor-?'

'Sssh!' The Doctor wanted to hear what was being said.

'But... I am not prepared to countenance a rival.'

A rival? The Doctor was intrigued. 'To which rival do you refer -'

'My Lady,' the Valeyard cut in. 'I must propose an immediate adjournment.'

'I am sorry, Valeyard. The prosecution's evidence is completed. The ball, as the Doctor might say, is now out of your court.'

'Admirably put. I have little regard for the idiotic High Council, but in selecting you to preside over this travesty of a hearing, Madam, they chose wisely.' The Master's audacity left the Inquisitor speechless. He carried on talking. 'Doctor, I have sent you two star witnesses. I knew you would need them.'

'No!' the Valeyard thundered. Beneath his close-fitting skull-cap, his forehead creased into a scowl. 'With respect, My Lady, the matter of admissible witnesses is for you to decide. We have seen enough to know that Glitz is an admitted criminal.' He was referring to evidence presented at the beginning of the trial when Glitz had been shown on Ravolox trying to steal a black 'box' which he believed was priceless. No exaggeration. The 'box' contained the secrets of the Matrix!

'Any testimony from him, therefore,' maintained Valeyard, 'must be dubious in the extreme.'

'But not from me!' Mel averred. 'I'm no criminal. Nor am I a liar. Any testimony I give will be the truth and nothing but the truth.' She'd heard that phrase used in courtroom dramas and thought it would help emphasize her validity as an honest broker.

'We are not impugning your integrity.' The Inquisitor spared a smile for the earnest young Mel.

'Let Sabalom Glitz speak!' The clipped order was issued from the Matrix screen. 'I assure you, Madam, he is too scared in this august conclave to utter other than the truth.'

Hesitation from the Inquisitor: despite the unusual turn events had taken, it was her wish – and her duty – to ensure the Doctor had a fair trial. 'Criminals have been known to speak truthfully,' she said to the protesting prosecutor. 'Especially when their own interests are at stake.'

'My point, My Lady, is that this person who calls himself the Master, whoever he might be -'

A hoot of laughter burred from the screen. '*Whoever* he might be!' The chortle rolled hollowly around the room.

Why did the statement afford the Master such amusement, the Doctor wondered. As he studied the gloating face enlarged to many times its normal size, he felt a sense of foreboding that he could not explain.

But the mystery was about to be unravelled.

And when it was – the Doctor's presentiment of evil would prove to be only too justified...

Twelve-and-a-half

‘This *person...*’ re-emphasized the Valeyard, not allowing the Master’s derision to divert him from his argument.

‘Should not be permitted to produce surprise witnesses of whom the prosecution has no prior knowledge.’

‘As I understand it, Valeyard, the evidence for the prosecution is concluded. The Doctor may now, in his defence, call witnesses to rebut that evidence. After which you have the right to cross-question them on what they have said. That is the procedure.’

‘If I might intercede –’

The Inquisitor had had enough interference from the interloper on the Matrix screen. ‘You may not! You have no part in these proceedings, sir!’

‘Corporeally, of course not. But I am present – and enjoying myself enormously.’

‘I’m glad somebody is,’ muttered Mel. ‘The sooner this is over and we can get out of here, the better!’

‘Maybe we could scarper together,’ whispered Glitz.

‘This has nothing to do with us now, has it? So why don’t we make a silent strategic withdrawal. Just the two of us –’

If the expression in Mel’s smouldering eyes was not sufficient answer for the thick-skinned Glitz, the Doctor’s shove was. ‘Quiet!’ He was absorbed in the Master’s dissertation.

‘I merely wished, Madam, to comment on the shortness of the Valeyard’s memory.’

‘In what respect?’

‘My Lady, pay no heed to –’

The Inquisitor waved the prosecutor’s objection aside,

‘Let him continue.’

‘The Valeyard – or, as I have always known him – the Doctor...’ A dramatic, deliberate pause.

Confusion rippled along the benches. Questions overlapped.

‘What did he call him?’

‘Did he say “The Doctor”?’

‘Was that a Freudian slip?’

‘Who was he talking about?’

Heads turned every whichway; the Inquisitor’s regal halo, Glitz’s close-cropped brown curls, Mel’s mass of red ringlets.

‘I don’t get it,’ grumbled Glitz.

‘Doctor,’ said Mel. ‘Do you understand what’s going on?’

I surely don’t.’

‘I wouldn’t expect you to, Mel. I’m not certain I do myself.’ How could he? The mind of the Master was a labyrinth so devious, Machiavelli himself would need a map! But the Doctor understood the renegade well. This was no slip. If he addressed the prosecutor as ‘The Doctor’, it was deliberate. He braced his shoulders, glared defiantly up at the grinning, oversized image, awaiting the explanation that he knew would come.

And fearing it.

‘I repeat...’ said the Master, ‘... the Valeyard is my most constant and determined of foes. And you

now he affects not to recognise me.'

~~'This is clearly a blatant attempt by the Doctor's cronies to fudge the issue,' blustered the Valeyard.~~

'I must admit to a feeling of bewilderment,' confessed the Inquisitor.

'Me, too,' added Mel.

'If the prosecutor's accusation of a deliberate conspiracy to deceive is true –'

'As it most assuredly is, My Lady –'

'Do not interrupt me, Valeyard!'

'I am merely fulfilling my function as prosecutor.'

'Then perform it in the accustomed manner. With civility and decorum!'

'I stand corrected, My Lady.'

'Why not sit?' gleefully interceded the Master, revelling in the disturbance he was causing in the hitherto placid Court. 'After all, the dénouement was no surprise to you!'

The comment deflated the Valeyard.

A heavy sigh from the Inquisitor: the prosecutor she could control, but this smug interloper on the screen was another matter... she returned to her theme. 'As I was saying, Doctor, if the prosecutor's accusation is true, I shall

–'

'It's not!' A curt rejection by the Doctor.

'Then I fail to comprehend,' she retorted in exasperation.

The Doctor ran a hand through his mop of fair hair, wrestling with the import of the Master's declaration.

'No questions, Doctor?' The Master adopted a velvety tone: the apocalyptic nature of the disclosure was too delicious to be rushed.

'You – you called him by my name,' ventured the Doctor.

'I did address the Valeyard so.'

Instinctively Mel drew closer to her mentor, sensing he was about to be dreadfully wounded by the revelation the sinister intruder was intent on imparting.

'Much as I hate you, Doctor,' asserted the Master. 'I have never underestimated your intelligence. I believe you know the substance of what I am implying – albeit your conceits urge you to reject it.'

An accurate summary of the quandary ravaging the Doctor's hearts.

He wanted to hear no more.

To escape.

To shut out the cruel expose about to be delivered. But he couldn't.

'The Valeyard, Doctor, is your penultimate reincarnation... Somewhere between your twelfth and thirteenth regeneration... and may I say, you do not improve with age.. !'

Treason

Shock had becalmed proceedings in the Court. Adorned with rigid hoods and taped robes of office, the venerable Time Lords might have been russet-coloured gargoyles poised on the rows of benches. The Inquisitor in her white, starched gown could have represented a statue sculpted from frozen snow.

‘Can anyone believe that this worm, this lackey of the High Council, could be *me!*’ The Doctor’s voice broke the spell.

‘Well you know, there is a similarity. When I clapped peepers on him, I thought – hang in there, Glitz, this Valeyard must be the Doc’s brother.’

‘Shut up, Glitz!’ admonished Mel.

‘Same shaped nose. And the mouth. He’s got your mouth –’

‘When you get back to wherever you come from, you want to have your eyes tested! He’s nothing like the Doctor!’ Mel elbowed Glitz aside and laid a comforting hand on the Doctor’s arm.

The squabble did at least unfreeze the traumatised onlookers. The Inquisitor rubbed her brow wearily, trying to assimilate this extraordinary allegation. ‘Frankly, I fail to see any relevance in this communication.’

‘My Lady, these scandalous accusations –’

‘Valeyard! The single purpose of this trial is to determine the guilt or otherwise of the prisoner on the basis of the evidence that has been submitted.’ She turned to the Doctor. ‘Examine your witnesses.’

Having been scathingly reprimanded by Mel, and convinced all this was of scant concern to him, Glitz in his usual predatory manner, had been scrutinising the panelling of the dock, sniffing out possible profit. ‘This is real machonite, y’know,’ he confided to nobody in particular. ‘Worth a few grotzis today.’ The scent of money emboldened him. He approached the bench. ‘Your honourees, could give you a fair price for this little lot –’

‘Glitz!’ cautioned the Doctor.

‘Carriage included... What?’ The interrogative was addressed to the Doctor.

‘You were sent here by the Master?’

‘Well, he’s a business partner, so to speak. We’ve pulled off a few tickles together –’

‘The Court isn’t interested in your squalid deals, Glitz!’

‘Squalid, Doc? That’s a bit strong for–’

‘Quite,’ interjected the Inquisitor. ‘The witness will keep to the point.’

‘Glitz, when we first met –’

‘On Ravolox, Doc.’

‘Yes. Your main interest was in getting possession of a chest of secrets.’

‘Right. A black box.’

‘What were those secrets?’

‘I dunno. Scientific stuff, that’s what he said.’ He jerked a thumb at the Master on the screen. ‘Stuff the Sleepers had been nicking from the Matrix for years, he said.’

‘The Matrix!’ protested the Keeper. ‘My Matrix?’

‘Right. The Sleepers had figured how to break into it. So they were creaming off all this hi-tech info to ship home to Andromeda.’

‘Sleepers? Andromeda?’ queried Mel.

‘The constellation where they live, Mel. No more questions. Just listen quietly.’ A difficult task for Mel!

Playing the bystander did not suit her ebullient personality.

~~The Doctor resumed his cross-examination of Glitz.~~

‘But they were operating from Earth?’

‘Sure. That was their cover, wasn’t it? They knew the Time Lords would trace the leak eventually.’

‘My Lady!’ The Valeyard sprang to his feet. ‘This is a palpable tissue of lies!’

‘I don’t think so,’ countered the Doctor. ‘It begins to make good sense.’

Not to me, it doesn’t, thought Mel, but she stayed mute in deference to the Doctor. No doubt he explain eventually. When the mood took him.!

‘Go on, Glitz. What happened then?’

‘Well, Doc, it appears the Time Lords sussed out the leak and tried to knock off the thieving Sleepers. Used this magno– magno thing.’

‘Magnotron?’

‘That’s it.’

– which could only have been done by an order in High Council!’

A slow, congratulatory handclap from the screen. ‘Of course, Doctor. These paragons of virtue these peers of the Universe who set themselves up as Guardians of Gallifrey, simply drew the plan Earth millions of miles across Space in order to protect their precious secrets.’

‘Causing the fireball which almost destroyed the planet!’

The Doctor’s chubby cheeks were flushed with anger.

Destroyed Earth, pondered Mel. How could that be?

She’d come from Earth. Pease Pottage, Sussex, England to be precise. And Earth was still there when she left! But then, she was a rookie in this game. The concept of Time Travel had her bemused. She glanced at her youthful looking mentor: who would dream he was over nine hundred years old...

‘The destruction of your favourite planet was of little consequence in the High Council planning, Doctor,’ the Master continued. ‘They needed to frustrate the recovery mission that was despatched from Andromeda. So, to ensure the mission should miss Earth and go plunging futile into Space, the target was plucked from its orbit.’

An extravagant gesture demonstrated this horrendous act.

‘Thus saving Gallifreyan secrets.’

‘And burning to a crisp all life on Earth!’

‘Not entirely, Doctor. At the primary intimation of the coming holocaust, the Sleepers on Earth were able to set up a survival chamber.’

‘But the High Council were unaware of that,’ added the Doctor.

‘Oh absolutely. They believed by renaming Earth and calling it Ravolox, it would become an insignificant interstellar speck lost among the myriads.’

‘The sanctimonious gang of hypocrites were dishonourably covering their tracks!’

‘Exactly. It needs a while, Doctor, but eventually you get there!’ Sarcasm rather than approval the Master would find it impossible to approve of anything his hated adversary did.

The Doctor was too infuriated at the enormity of the despicable enterprise to take up the cudgel. ‘They put an ancient culture like Earth’s to the sword for the sake of a few miserable, filthy, scientific advances!’

‘Big market for them, Doc,’ counselled the opportunist Glitz. ‘So *he* said,’ – indicating the Master – ‘Worth a lot of grotzis he told me.’

‘A lot of grotzis!’ The Doctor’s temper exploded. ‘In all my wanderings through the Cosmos, I have battled against evil... against power-mad conspirators!’

A gracious bow from the Master – of amusement not acceptance of the insult.

~~‘I should have stayed on Gallifrey!’ The blue eyes shone with rage. ‘The oldest civilisation decadent, degenerate, and rotten to the core!’~~

‘Gently, Doctor,’ begged Mel, worried lest the passionate denouncement of the High Council alienate the Court.

‘Daleks. Sontarans. Cybermen. They’re still in the nursery compared to us Gallifreyans!’ ranted the Doctor, regardless of the consequences. ‘Ten million years of total power. That’s what it requires to be wholly corrupt!’

‘Doctor, these unseemly outbursts do not assist the Court,’ admonished the Inquisitor.

‘Nor your case,’ urged Mel.

‘Unseemly outbursts!’ Nothing was going to stop the incensed Time Lord now. He had a full head of steam. ‘If I hadn’t visited Ravolox – as I then imagined it was called – the High Council would have kept this atrocity carefully buried –’

‘Clever stuff, Doc, you’ve got to give them their due –’

‘– as they apparently already had for several centuries!’

Stroking his beard, the Master enjoyed the fervid castigation of the Universe’s elite. ‘It pains me to make such an admission, but in this instance, I do agree with you.’

The renegade’s support had a deeper, more sinister intent. He knew that earlier in the Trial during the submission of the Doctor’s adventures on Ravolox, a reference was made to the activities of the Sleepers, and the Valeyard had intervened to plead security of the State to have the evidence suppressed. Obviously, with the connivance of the elected High Council, he had perpetrated an ignominious cover-up. When the news of the unconstitutional deception reached Gallifrey, the authority of the rulers would be demolished...

‘You have, Doctor, an –’ the Master sought the appropriate epithet, ‘– shall we say – endearing habit of blundering into things. And the High Council took full advantage of your blunder.’

‘Explain that,’ ordered the Inquisitor.

‘You could ask him, Madam,’ sneered the Master, signifying Valeyard. ‘Those exalted culprits made a compact with the prosecutor to adjust the evidence.’

‘Aha!’ exclaimed the Doctor. ‘I knew it!’

‘In return for which he was promised the remainder of the Doctor’s regenerations...’

‘Doctor!’ yelled Mel, interrupting the Master’s explanation again. ‘Watch the Valeyard!’

Having edged towards the door by which Mel and Glitz had entered, the prosecutor was now slipping from sight.

‘Stop him, My Lady,’ implored the Doctor.

‘Do not fear, Doctor. There is no way he can escape.’

‘That’s true,’ agreed Mel. ‘The only door from there is this one.’ She was a computer expert whose training and natural curiosity endowed her with an aptitude for accurate observation. Despite her uncomfortable arrival, she had noted that the corridor was a sealed unit.

The Doctor wasn’t convinced. Experience during his trial had taught him to beware the wily Valeyard. He descended from the dock. ‘Come on, Glitz!’

‘What?’

‘Move, man! He’ll get away!’

‘Yeah, but, she said there’s no exit –’

‘You want your money, don’t you?’

‘Money?’ The effect was like magic. Glitz was through the door in a flash!

To no avail.

The corridor was deserted.

A World Apart

‘Look, Doc, this is all too much for me. I mean, working a few shady deals is one thing, but disappearing acts – no thank you very –’

Ignoring Glitz’s specious protests, the Doctor examined the walls of the enclosed corridor. ‘There must be a way out of here.’

‘There is.’ The Keeper preceded Mel and the Inquisitor.

‘Explain, Keeper.’

‘The Seventh Door, My Lady. He obviously had a Key.’

‘Which Seventh Door? Where?’ The Doctor’s search had been thorough.

The Keeper crossed to the wall. ‘The Seventh entrance to the Matrix.’ No trace of the entrance showed on the panel the Keeper indicated.

‘Then open it!’ shouted the Doctor. ‘The Valeyard has to be brought back!’

‘To fulfil that request would require an order from the High Council. I dare not –’

‘Nonsense. Obtain such permission. The Court has many pertinent questions that it wishes to pose –’

Paying no heed to the Inquisitor, the Doctor snatched the Key from the Keeper and planted it flat, against the surface of the wall.

The panel began to slide apart.

‘You’ll never find him!’ protested the Keeper. ‘The Matrix is a micro-universe –’

‘Don’t go! Please don’t go!’ begged Mel.

‘I must. Perhaps nothing in my life has been more important than this, Mel. Come on, Glitz!’ He hauled Glitz towards the opening.

‘Who? Me?’ protested the reprobate. ‘Suppose I just wait here till you get back –’

A mighty yank – and Glitz, protests and all, was through the gap!

The panel glided shut...

Darkness.

And fog.

A solitary gas lamp spluttered and spat as it fought forlornly to illuminate the narrow alley, throwing into eerie relief the decaying Victorian setting.

Suddenly the night air was filled with drunken shouts and rowdy catcalls. Contrapuntally came a sweet chorus of children singing...

‘London bridge is falling down...

Falling down... falling down...’

and then, dominating the cacophony, an echoing, evil laugh.

The Valeyard’s...

A thin strip of intense white light accompanied by a high-pitched, electronic screech, sliced through the darkness. A figure was ejected from its midst before the beam vanished: the Doctor.

‘Not a pleasant journey. And rather an unpleasant place, don’t you think, Glitz?’ He turned to look at the spot where he had landed. ‘Glitz? Where are you? Glitz!’

The sole reply was the mocking laugh. Swivelling in its direction, he caught a glimpse of the Valeyard.

Momentarily. Swift-footed, he gave chase... but his quarry was swallowed by a dense patch of yellow fog.

Confused but undaunted, he began a cautious check of the alley, pausing beside a large, full

rainwater barrel. 'I can't believe you're in there,' he said, peering into the water - two powerful gnarled hands broke the surface and, with enormous strength, grabbed the Doctor's neck! —

'Glitz..!' his cry was drowned by the water as his head was pulled, inexorably, down into the barrel...

Evil laughter. A gurgling shout. Glitz heard them both as he staggered from another shaft of white light. Despite entering the Seventh Door together, they had been conducted separately into the fantastic world of the Matrix.

'Doc?'

'Glitz!' came another gurgle. 'Help me, man! Help!'

Tentatively - and not relishing the role of knight-errant

- Glitz sidled towards the plaintive cry. However, his guise of intrepid rescuer was shortlived. When he arrived at the combat zone, the Time Lord's head was out of the barrel and he was prostrate beside it.

'What's going on?'

I don't know.' The Doctor struggled slowly to his feet.

'That is, I don't know if what happened was real or just an illusion.'

Since Glitz had not seen what happened, he didn't know either. The Doc did appear dishevelled though.

'Someone's had a go at you, have they? Torn collar. That's real enough.'

'Would you mind?'

'What?'

'Feeling in the barrel.'

'It's full of water.'

'Is it?'

Glitz cupped his hands and scooped up the water, allowing it to trickle through his fingers. 'Okay?'

'Apparently. But whatever tried to throttle me just now was in that barrel.'

Quick as a flash, Glitz scooted aside. 'You're a fine one!

I could've been attacked!'

'Unless - it was simply in my mind...' The Doctor shook his head. Not a droplet of water flicked from his curly mop.

'You're a weirdo, d'you know that? If it wasn't for the grotzis, you wouldn't see me for dust! A bit of it is, I'm here under protest. Wherever, "here" is!'

' " *Here*" is inside the Matrix. We're not in the real world any longer.'

'How can we be in a different world? We stepped through a door, that's all.'

'Exactly. Into the Matrix. Where the only logic is that there is no logic!'

'I knew this was a mistake. Never wanted to come in the first place!' He rummaged in his pockets. 'My grip on reality isn't too good at the best of times.' He found what he was seeking - a rumpled sheet of paper. 'Grab hold. This is for you. Now, where's the quickest way out of -'

'It's a note from the Master!' exclaimed the Doctor after glancing at the note.

'I know that! I've just given it to you!' He squinted over the Doctor's shoulder. 'He said it would be useful.'

'Did he!'

' "The Fantasy Factory, proprietor J. J. Chambers", ' read Glitz.

'The Valeyard's base!'

'Yeah?'

'Has to be. Why else was I sent the information?' The Doctor set off into the gloom.

‘Where’re you going?’

‘To find Mr J. J. Chambers.’

‘I can’t see no factory round here.’

‘Neither can I. Come on, Glitz. Best foot forward.’

Glitz hesitated. Either he had to find his way out alone.

Or dog the Doctor.

Discretion being the better part of valour, he tagged after the Time Lord. Jettisoning an article of faith he cherished, Sabalom Glitz wished he were back before the beak! Even that court room would be preferable to these threatening surroundings.. !

‘In all my experience I have never before had to conclude a case in the absence of both the accused and the prosecutor.’

The Inquisitor had resumed her seat in the Courtroom.

‘One and the same person, Madam,’ insisted the Master from the Matrix screen.

‘Couldn’t you switch him off or something?’ said Mel.

‘He gives me the creeps!’

‘May I say you’re a charming girl,’ countered the Master, stroking his Vandyke beard.

‘And may I remind you that this is a courtroom in which we are conducting a very serious trial.’

The Inquisitor’s anger subdued neither protagonist.

‘How can you when you’ve no one to try!’ Mel piped.

‘Unless you try him – *them* as you would phrase it – in *absente reo*, Madam.’

The Inquisitor rounded on the Master. ‘You continue to maintain this absurd notion? Can you prove it?’

‘Indeed I can. I know them both. Intimately,’ he affirmed.

‘Look, Madam Inquisitor, I’m not meaning to be disrespectful and all that... I don’t really know much about legal protocol... what I do know is the Doctor could be in danger and we’re doing nothing to help!’

‘Not *could be*, my dear young girl. *Is!*’ chortled the Master. ‘As you will be privileged to see on this sacred screen. I intend to occupy it for relatively few moments more. I have business affairs that require my presence.

Duty, as they say on your planet, calls..!’

‘You have become a material witness in this trial,’

blustered the Inquisitor. ‘I order you to remain.’

‘Madam, you have no jurisdiction over me. However, since I am minded to remain a while longer, I am content to be debriefed – I believe that is the jargon.’

The Inquisitor adjusted her scarlet sash before commencing her cross-examination: it allowed a pause to contain her growing sense of frustration. ‘Assuming I accept what you contend regarding the Doctor, how much of the evidence we have seen was contrived?’

‘For a lie to work, Madam, it must be shrouded in the truth. Therefore, most of what you saw was true.’

A sibilant murmur rustled along the benches as the august Time Lords digested this statement.

‘It rests with us then, to discover which was truth and which falsehood?’

‘Precisely. Although I could elaborate.’

‘A fat lot of use that’d be!’ retorted Mel. ‘He’d twist the facts to fit his own convenience!’

‘You have a delightfully blunt approach. Quite an abrasive personality. An unusual choice of companion for the quixotic Doctor.’

‘Talking of companions...’ the Inquisitor remarked.

‘You could answer one question.’

~~‘I am at your disposal, Madam. Briefly.’~~

‘The young person – the girl who died. Was that true?’

She was referring to Peri.

‘Ah mmm... the pert Miss Perpugilliam Brown.’

‘Yes.’

‘That was clever of the Valeyard, exploiting the affection the Doctor had for her.’ The Master was remembering the second case which the Valeyard had submitted. In it, Peri was captured and her body used to house the brain of an ailing alien monster.

To all intents, the Doctor had made little effort to save her.

In the Valeyard’s version of events.

The Doctor, watching the tale unfold on the Matrix screen, had been devastated by his pretence companion’s ghastly end.

‘An exploitation of which the Valeyard took full advantage,’ volunteered the Master. ‘But then of course, he would know exactly how the Doctor felt.’

‘Do I gather the story was untrue?’

‘Let us say, Madam, the ending was prejudicially falsified.’

‘Then she lives?’

‘She is a queen. Set up on high by that warmongering fool Ycaros.’

Ycaros was the leader of a marauding tribe whom Peri had encountered on Ravolox: a warrior of immense strength and size with an overwhelming personality to match. He had been attracted to the waif-like charmer and, by fair means or foul it would seem, had won her affections.

‘I’m pleased.’ The Inquisitor was genuinely relieved: the Doctor’s distress at being party to Peri’s demise had touched her.

Death meant nothing to the Master. ‘Sentiment, Madam, has no place in a court of law. Nor will it keep the Doctor alive.’

Or Sabalom Glitz.

Who was at that moment walking into danger from which the Doctor would be powerless to save him...

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