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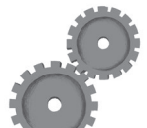


1. Too Close to the Sun

Island of Crete, circa 2000 BC

Icarus watched the flying orb touch the edge of the setting sun and explode into flames. With jarring suddenness, it altered course, and fell to Earth trailing fire.

He flinched at the violence that had shattered the peace of the late afternoon. He and his father had come to the beach, as they had done every evening, to chart the heavens. They had spent the summer of this, Icarus's fifteenth year, noting the position and motion of the celestial objects that speckled the curtain of night. At first, Icarus had believed the fast-moving orb he'd

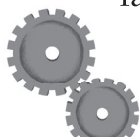


sighted low in the western sky to be a falling star. Sitting beneath the clear night skies of their island homeland, wrapped up against the cold, they had recorded several such phenomena already this year. He knew that many of his countrymen feared the blazing light in the dark. They regarded it as a bad omen signifying the death of a king, or the coming of a natural disaster. For others, it was more than a portent – it was a god falling from the sky. Icarus didn't believe in any of that stuff. His father had taught him to approach the world with a critical mind, so Icarus dismissed all these explanations as superstitious nonsense.

He tracked the object with sharp, youthful eyes. As it sank lower, the orb came more clearly into view. From here it looked more disc than orb, and huge – thousands of cubits wide, bigger than the king's palace at Knossos. The very air shuddered at its passage, while shafts of golden sunlight rolled off its smooth surfaces, gleaming like the throne in the same palace.

Beside him, Icarus heard his father gasp and mutter, 'By the gods, what is it?'

The words made Icarus afraid. His father, Daedalus, the man of reason, was calling on the very gods he spurned. But Icarus understood his father's fear and wonder. The object was too



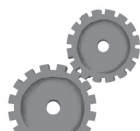
perfect to be found in nature; it had to be the work of humankind. Or god. Some kind of vessel.

A ship of the sky.

It fell without a sound, and then was gone, dipping from sight beyond a rocky outcrop at the far end of the shoreline.

As Icarus ran up the beach for a better vantage, he heard a resounding boom, like the sound that the crumbling cliffs had made the year before when they had tumbled into the sea. By the time he'd reached higher ground, the setting sun had all but disappeared. A pale finger of light pointed to the skyship's watery resting place. The wine-dark sea bubbled and boiled around the spot, while something vast and otherworldly glimmered beneath the surface.

News of the crash quickly reached the palace. Word came that the king himself would ride out to inspect the mysterious object for himself. In the morning, Icarus watched a group of figures approaching fast across the beach: the king at the head of a detachment of royal cavalry, bronze helmets flashing in the early sun, their mounts' hooves skimming the sand. They were an awe-inspiring spectacle. However, he knew that they were as nothing to the spectacle that awaited them.



Icarus turned to look out to sea. The tide had receded, exposing the fallen skyship. It was like the shield of some war god, half buried in the shallows, its shadow darkening the shoreline. He shivered in the morning air.

At first, the procession swept past the gawping Icarus, but then the king reined in his horse and trotted back towards him, the royal mount kicking up clods of sand. With a snort, it came to a halt, so close that Icarus could see the sheen of sweat on its flanks. Astride the horse, King Minos of Crete gazed down upon him.

‘Boy, where is your father?’

Daedalus was the king’s most trusted adviser. King Minos went to him for advice on matters astronomical, medical, architectural, sculptural, musical and political. In fact, the king rarely made a decision about anything without first consulting Daedalus.

Icarus swallowed. His mouth felt as dry as the sand he shuffled his feet on.

‘Where’s your tongue?’ King Minos snapped. ‘Answer me, before I have it cut out.’

Kings were not known for their patience.

The truth was that natural curiosity had overcome Daedalus and, as dawn arrived, he and Icarus had ventured closer to the stricken skyship, the better to inspect the vessel. Wading

out into the shallows, they had found a broken seam in the otherwise unblemished exterior, like an armoured breastplate pierced by a well-placed arrow. The split was wide enough to squeeze through, giving access to the ship's interior. It was too tempting to resist. Instructing his son to stay put, Daedalus had gone inside.

That had been several hours ago.

Before Icarus could convey any of this, the captain of the guard's voice trembled on the morning air.

'Sire, look there!' He thrust out an arm.

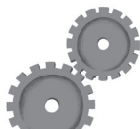
All eyes turned to where he pointed. At the base of the vessel, where the shining hull met the sand, a section was opening up. Icarus would have called it a door, except that it was bigger than any door he had ever seen, dwarfing even the entrance to the great temple. No human needed a door that big.

And it was no human that emerged.

It had the broad head and legs of a bull and stood some ten cubits tall, yet seemed even taller thanks to two great horns that sprang from its head. It regarded the Minoan welcome party with a pair of blazing red eyes.

'Great Zeus,' muttered the king.

'Protect the king!' cried the captain of the guard.



Responding to this call, two of the king's men drew their swords and urged their mounts forward to intercept the creature.

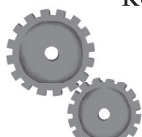
It sensed their approach. Cloven hooves pawing at the sand, the beast lowered its head. Icarus expected it to charge like any other bull, but instead it pointed the twin horns at the cavalry.

A spiral of light leaped from its horns, as red as the creature's terrible eyes. As the vivid beam touched the leading soldier, he let out a scream. His cry was cut short as his flesh turned to ashes and his bones fell to the ground. The bodily remains of the soldier drifted away on the breeze, as his horse fled, unscathed.

The surviving soldier had closed the distance between himself and the creature to a few horse-lengths.

It swung its head to aim at the onrushing horse and rider. Its movements were unsteady and ponderous, causing Icarus to wonder if it had been injured in the crash.

The cavalry blade flashed in the sunlight. With a howl of pain, the bull creature went down, clutching its shoulder. Thick black blood gouted from the freshly inflicted wound on to the pristine sand. The creature sank to its knees. Seemingly exhausted and no longer a threat, it emitted a keening sound as though it was in pain.

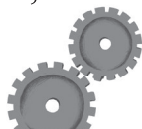


The soldier jumped down from his horse and raised his sword once more, ready to deliver the killing blow and avenge his fallen comrade. His furious grip tightened round the hilt. Just then, the bull creature opened one of its strangely human hands, revealing in its leathery palm a device the size and shape of a large coin. Before the soldier could react, the device exploded, flinging tiny shards through the air. The soldier winced in pain, clutching a hand to one eye, where a fragment of the disintegrating device had struck. He shrugged off the injury – just a scratch.

‘Sire!’ yelled a voice.

Icarus shaded his eyes from the low sun and attempted to locate the source of the familiar voice. It was Daedalus, calling from the open door of the skyship. He carried something across one arm. It looked like a warrior’s shield, and for a moment Icarus thought it must be, but he dismissed that idea just as swiftly as it had arisen. His father was many things, but a warrior was not one of them.

King Minos trotted forward, and in his wake Icarus crept closer. The king paused over the injured creature. It snorted like a bull of the field, but its breaths came shallow and its blood soaked the sand. With one last bellow,



it slumped to the ground and breathed no longer.

‘Is it dead?’ the king asked tentatively.

Daedalus lowered the round shield-like object, dropped to the ground and made a cursory inspection, before announcing, ‘I believe so, Your Majesty.’

The king drew his own sword and gave the beast an investigative poke. ‘What abomination is this?’

Daedalus shook his head in wonder. ‘It came from the stars.’

‘Sent by the gods?’

Daedalus made a pained expression.

‘Yes, yes,’ tutted the king. ‘But unlike you, my enlightened friend, the rest of my subjects will believe that this is a judgement from the gods. The people must not learn of this *thing*. Burn it.’

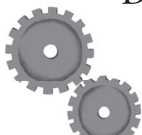
‘No!’

The king glared at him. ‘You dare defy me?’

‘With your indulgence, I would like to study the creature.’ Daedalus gestured to the skyship. ‘And its vessel. I have been inside and it is . . .’ He struggled for words. ‘Wondrous. There is much we can learn. Much we can take.’

This stirred the king’s interest. ‘Gold? Jewels?’

‘Something greater than either,’ declared Daedalus. ‘I found this after only a short



exploration of the interior.’ He lifted up the object Icarus had believed to be a shield. Apart from a small central section, its surface was featureless.

Holding it horizontally, Daedalus let go, but instead of falling to the ground the object remained in place, floating like a feather upon the wind.

‘I believe it is a flying machine,’ said Daedalus, gazing at it in awe.

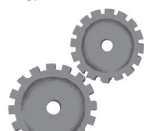
In the stunned silence that followed, Icarus was aware of an odd repetitive sound. Above the distant lapping of the waves he could make it out quite clearly.

Tick-tick-tick.

It was coming from the centre of the shield. He saw now that the central part – what would be called the boss on a soldier’s shield – was embedded with an intricate mesh of wheels. Each wheel had a circumference of tiny teeth that interlocked with the next wheel.

‘And this is just the beginning,’ Daedalus went on excitedly. ‘We have been granted access to a treasure trove.’

The king appeared to weigh his words. Slowly he looked up at the towering skyship and then back to Daedalus. ‘Very well. But hide your work from ordinary eyes. The people will call this a bad omen. Kings and

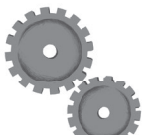


omens do not sit well together.’ He snapped his reins and rejoined his men. The cavalry formed up around him and they rode off across the beach.

Icarus regarded the ship and its occupant. ‘He asks you to hide a mountain. Father, how is it possible?’

There was a gleam in Daedalus’s eyes. Icarus knew this look. His father was deep in thought. He tucked the mysterious flying machine under one arm and steered the boy towards the skyship’s open hatch. ‘Now, let’s get you out of the sun.’

Tick-tick-tick . . .





2. Out of the Blue

Unfashionable end of the Western spiral arm of the galaxy, circa 2020 AD

Alone in the dimly lit console room, the clicks and whirs of the timeship's baffling control mechanisms filling the air, Yasmin Khan caught herself.

She was aboard an *actual* alien spaceship.

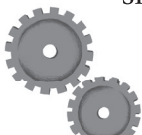
There was rarely time to reflect on her remarkable circumstances, what with running along endless corridors, fending off crazed Stenza warriors and helping to save the universe on a weekly basis. So, when an opportunity arose to reflect on her journey, she seized the chance.



The viewscreen showed the constellation of stars through which they were currently travelling. She watched them hang in the darkness of the void. They didn't twinkle out here – she'd learned it was the passage of their light through the Earth's atmosphere that made them appear to do that. Not that the view was any less awe-inspiring for that. And, somewhere out there among them, was her home. Her mind flew back to another time and place. She pictured her younger self sitting at a desk in Redlands Primary School, carefully writing out her address as part of some lame exercise set by her teacher. Yaz had always constructed it the same way:

Yasmin Khan
Flat 34
Park Hill
Sheffield
England
United Kingdom
Europe
The World
The Milky Way
The Universe

Now, as she stood at the heart of the astonishing ship, she realised that wasn't just her address – it



was her journey. A schoolgirl in Sheffield, a probationary police constable for Hallamshire Police and now . . . Who was she exactly? Astronaut? Explorer? Assistant saviour of the universe? *Who?* Her brief spell with the mysterious traveller known as the Doctor had already granted her more experience of life, the universe and everything than she could have dreamed, but it wasn't half going to be tricky to describe on a CV.

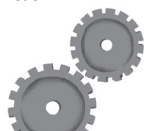
BLINK. BLINK.

The orange light on the display ticked on and off with the regularity of a car indicator, but it promised something far more interesting than a left turn into Talbot Street.

It was a distress signal.

Since joining the Doctor on her travels, Yaz had got used to racing across time and space to the aid of some alien race/marooned humanoids/sentient vegetables/all of the above. But there was something notably different about this signal. Unlike every call for help they'd received so far, this one had originated from *inside the ship*.

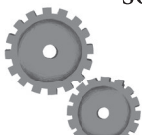
That wouldn't have been a problem in an ordinary vessel, but this one was far from ordinary. It was called the TARDIS (or, more accurately, *a* TARDIS, although Yaz had yet to encounter another). The letters formed an acronym that



stood for Time And Relative Dimension In Space. Which, frankly, was meaningless mumbo-jumbo. In practice, it meant the ship mucked about with your perception of scale. So, on the outside, the TARDIS appeared to be a regular blue police box from Earth's mid-twentieth century, but one turn of its disappointingly ordinary key opened the doors into a room your monkey brain told you couldn't possibly fit inside the modest exterior dimensions. Yaz could only compare it to one of those Russian-doll sets, where you opened the first wooden doll to find a smaller one inside, and so on and so on. It was like that, except imagine opening up the first Russian doll and finding Russia.

Taken Aback Regarding Disorientating InSides. That was more like it.

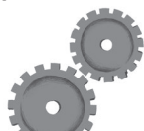
The first place you encountered was this, the console room. A command bridge, although that seemed somewhat grand for a vessel whose flight controls included a custard-cream dispenser. But the console room was just the beginning. The TARDIS wasn't big. The Meadowhall shopping centre was big. The TARDIS was unfathomable. A maze of corridors and doors, decks and staircases, walk-in wardrobes and ballrooms. Apparently, there was even a swimming pool somewhere. Not only was the ship a confusing



labyrinth, but to make matters worse it also had a personality. Annoyingly, most of the time it seemed to Yaz to have the personality of a ten-year-old boy, and liked to keep its crewmembers guessing. Yaz could have sworn that it constantly rejigged the interior layout, moving walls and doors so that, even after living aboard for as long as she had, she would still get lost. She could never find the loo in the middle of the night. In an odd way, the ship wasn't so different from the Doctor herself – playful, puzzling and, occasionally, downright reckless. As she thought about it, Yaz realised that she couldn't picture one without the other. The Doctor and the TARDIS were inextricably linked.

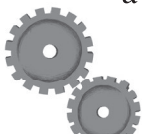
Right now, the TARDIS was playing one of its games – hide-and-seek, to be exact. Yaz and the others had spent hours searching for the source of the distress signal. If it wanted to, the TARDIS could presumably have led them right to it, but instead it was pranking them. She could almost hear it chuckling into its chocolate milk at their attempts to locate the signal's origin. At some point, she had grown weary of the game and decided to come here to the console room for a break.

She cast her eyes across the befuddling main console. It was hexagonal in shape, requiring six



qualified members of crew to pilot it successfully. But, since the Doctor was the only one among them to have the foggiest idea about how to steer the thing, every flight involved her running around the console like a kid in a playground. The main scanner in the wall next to the console displayed exterior images. More panels provided information that assisted the Doctor in navigating time and space – or at least gave the impression that she was moderately in charge of the process. Yaz saw that Graham had left his sandwich maker plugged into the console, so she took the opportunity to make herself a cheese toastie. She fired up the Breville and waited.

Usually, the Doctor would be throwing switches and hauling levers and the place would be rocking and buffeting its way through time and space to a new adventure on an alien world. Or Sheffield. But for now it was relatively quiet. Yaz laid a palm on the surface of the console. The material was paradoxically cool and warm at the same time, and it pulsed beneath her fingers as if alive. It was not like anything she had encountered on Earth. Back home, she had been in training to be a police officer. A thought popped into her head: a cop with a time machine, solving crimes across the universe. That'd make a great TV show. Her mum would watch the



heck out of that. She fished out her toastie, nibbled the piping-hot snack and imagined herself in the starring role, confronting some alien horror using her particular set of skills.

‘Excuse me, madam, but are you aware that the rear offside light on your flying saucer is broken?’ She mimed a quick-draw, holding out the half-eaten sandwich like a gun. ‘Keep your tentacles where I can see them!’

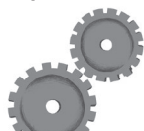
‘Ahem.’

Yaz spun round to see a woman in a grey gabardine coat, which was open to reveal a rainbow-patterned top and blue dungarees. Her short blonde bob was partially concealed beneath a knitted hat in the shape of a chicken. Two strings dangled loosely from either side of the hat, ending in bobbles of red yarn.

‘Sorry,’ said the Doctor, wrinkling her nose apologetically. ‘Didn’t mean to sneak up on you when you were . . .’ She paused, putting her head on one side. ‘What *were* you doing?’

‘Nothing.’ Yaz lowered her sandwich with as much dignity as she could muster.

‘Were you pretending to be the star of your own cop show?’ asked the Doctor. ‘Because that’s a brilliant idea!’ She extended one hand and drew it slowly across her chest, declaring in a gravelly voice, ‘In a world on fire, only one



woman and her plucky canine companion . . . ? She paused. 'I feel your character should have a dog.' The Doctor's gaze drifted off and her knitted bobbles swung gently from side to side. 'I had a canine companion once.'

Yaz knew so little about the Doctor's past – mostly because there was such a lot of it. 'Labrador? Poodle?'

'Robot.' Her shoulders heaved with a sigh.

Yaz had reconciled herself to being surprised on a regular basis by this kind of thing. After all, anyone who had lived as long as the Doctor was bound to have accumulated a lot of baggage. And she was properly old. Although the woman in front of her appeared to be somewhere in her thirties, Yaz knew that she was on the far side of two thousand. Yaz had learned that such longevity wasn't unusual for someone like the Doctor, who came from the planet Gallifrey. Far beyond the Milky Way, located in the constellation of Kasterborous, was the planet of the Time Lords, a race of spacefaring, dimension-hopping, giant-collar-wearing beings who'd mastered the mechanics of time travel (up to a point). An inscrutable people with a fearsome intellect, guardians of the secrets of the universe and –

'D'you like my chicken hat?' asked the Doctor. And fans of novelty headwear. Apparently.

‘Thought I’d lost it. Pressie from the Master-Weavers of Arnn after I helped them out with a nasty double cross-stitch. They gave me this and the secret to the reverse triple-crochet.’ She tugged at the cords dangling from the hat. The chicken’s wings flapped and its beak opened wide.

It was a peculiarly elegant action, thought Yaz.

The Doctor examined the blinking light on the console, tapping it lightly. ‘Found my knitted chicken, but still don’t know where you’re coming from.’

As she made several minor adjustments to the controls, there was a commotion from the entrance to the console room and two men sprinted inside. One young and black, the other older and white, both out of breath. They skidded to a stop and Yaz considered them as they recovered. Ryan Sinclair and Graham O’Brien were an unlikely duo, neither as dynamic as Batman and Robin nor as ideally matched as fish and chips. Their history may not have been as ancient as the Doctor’s, but it contained more than enough anguish and sorrow. Flung together as a blended family of grandfather and grandson aboard the TARDIS, they had been initially scratchy with each other but mortal danger and monsters had brought them close.



Graham stood bent over, hands on his knees, gulping for air after his dash through the TARDIS. The younger man, Ryan, recovered first and held up what looked to Yaz like a small, crumpled paper bag. With a grin he announced, 'Found it! This is what's been sending out the signal.'

'Doesn't look very distressed,' Yaz noted.

'Quick,' urged Graham through ragged breaths. 'Give it to the Doc!'

Ryan thrust the bag at her. The Doctor looked puzzled. 'Why the rush?'

Graham stood up with a confused expression. 'Aren't we racing against time, with the fate of all life in the galaxy at stake?'

The Doctor exchanged a glance with Yaz, who shrugged her shoulders. 'Uh, no.'

'Oh.' Graham puffed out. 'Then, you're also out of hand soap in the toilet next to the swimming pool.'

Yaz beamed. 'You found the pool!'

While Graham attempted to describe to Yaz precisely how to reach the semi-mythical pool, the Doctor took the bag from Ryan. The paper was yellowing and brittle with age.

'Found it in the pocket of an old coat,' said Ryan.

The Doctor raised a flap of her hat and lifted the bag to her ear. 'It's ticking.'

