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The Treaty of Llangol

by Selenay (feedback@selenayhaven.com)

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When something blasts a huge hole in the M25, Brigadier Bambera starts to get that Doctor-ish feeling. As the death toll mounts and creatures from ancient myth stalk the country, it is up to Bambera and UNIT to find the Doctor and combat forces greater than anything they have met before.

Betaed by: Paranoidangel

Warnings: None

Spoilers: Very tiny spoiler for Victory of the Daleks (S5)

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After the Doctor left to return Ancelyn to his own universe, Brigadier Bambera expected that would be the last that she saw of the strange little man in his blue box. According to UNIT records that Lethbridge-Stewart sent her - the ones that never made it to the official files - it had been at least two decades since the Doctor had worked regularly with UNIT. There had been sightings, certainly, and his influence had been traced in resolving dozens of incidents that UNIT had arrived too late for but he seemed to actively avoid official notice.

Bambera was a little sorry about that. He was annoying, confusing and possibly mentally unbalanced, but she suspected that life was much more interesting when he was around.

For a few years her prediction held true. There were odd alien incursions and a fair number of incidents that Bambera was half-convinced had been due to aliens but someone out there was covering their tracks very well. Every time she tried to look into those events, though, something else seemed to come up that was much more important.

Then something blasted a massive hole in the M25 and Bambera got that Doctor-ish feeling.

It was on the long, boring stretch between junctions 23 and 24, anti-clockwise, and having been stuck there in endless jams a few times Bambera had a bit of sympathy for whoever - or whatever - had decided to destroy it. The problem was that there were now thousands of motorists stuck in a queue that was already back past the Dartford tunnel on a Friday afternoon just before the May bank holiday. This would not be an incident that was quick to resolve.

"Set up a no-fly zone over Hertfordshire," Bambera ordered as the jeep did a tight turn to get off the slip road and onto the anti-clockwise M25 travelling in the wrong direction. "I don't want any reporters getting more footage of this than they already have."

Her aide made a note and asked, "News black-out?"

"As much as possible," Bambera said. "We can't do much about the traffic reports, not at this time of day."

"Yes, ma'am. The local police are closing junctions 21 to 26 and trying to get the traffic off."

"Poor bastards."

Fortunately, this side of the motorway was entirely blocked by the very large hole so Bambera did not meet anything coming towards her until she reached the big green army trucks. On the other side of the crater, cars littered the carriageway and she could see the green uniforms of paramedics still working on some of the motorists. Other motorists were sitting on the grassy banks below the motorway, mostly looking shell-shocked and quiet.

Captain Leblanc was directing the science team and looking harassed, but Bambera approved of the efficient, calm atmosphere. Nothing ever seemed to faze him. She left her aide to her phone calls, checked her side-arm and marched briskly to the captain.

"Report?" she asked.

Leblanc snapped out a salute quickly and said, "It's definitely not a bomb, ma'am. Several motorists report that the blast came from a man dressed in furs, who seemed to shoot lightning at the road surface and then blow a hunting horn."

This was definitely Doctor-ish.

"Are the reports reliable?"

Leblanc shrugged. "They're all fairly similar but there is enough subtle variation in the way that they describe it. I believe that they think they saw it."

"Was there any mention of knights? Or Arthur?" Bambera asked.

"No, ma'am," Leblanc said. "I've read the reports from Carbury, this appears to be a separate incident."

"Have there been any sightings of a blue police phone box?"

Leblanc frowned. "No, ma'am. Are you expecting any?"

"I'll be surprised if one doesn't show up eventually," Bambera said. "Keep your eyes peeled."

"Very good, ma'am."

She left him to direct the large truck that had arrived with what she hoped would be an enormous marquee that could cover the hole from prying eyes and made her way to where two scientists were clambering around the edge of the crater. The young woman was taking photographs while her young male colleague muttered at a small black box in his hand. It seemed like the science geeks were getting younger every year.

"Any ideas what caused it?"

The young man looked up. "Hello. You are?"

Bambera frowned. "Brigadier Bambera. Your commanding officer. And you are?"

"Doctor Rhys Thomas." He gulped nervously. "Sorry."

Bambera waved off the apology. "What have you learned?"

"It wasn't a bomb," Thomas said quickly. "No trace of explosives and Carol says that the shape of the void is wrong."

"Captain Leblanc already told me that," Bambera said impatiently. "What do you actually know?"

Thomas shrugged. "Not much. I'm picking up traces of radiation but the levels aren't much higher than the usual background stuff. There are traces of metal and plastics in the debris, but I suspect that it's from the car that got caught in the blast."

"Leblanc!" Bambera shouted.

He arrived with gratifying speed.

"Why is Doctor Thomas telling me about a car caught in the explosion that you didn't mention?" Bambera asked.

Leblanc rolled his eyes. "None of the eye witnesses can confirm it."

"My instruments..."

"Someone would have seen it," Leblanc said firmly.

"Everyone was either half asleep or distracted by the big guy in fake fur shooting lightning out of his fingers!" Thomas shouted. "It's Friday afternoon on the M25 - they saw the guy, they saw the lightning, they saw the big explosion. Noticing whether it was a car, motorbike or neon go-cart wasn't their priority."

Bambera held up her hands. "So, there may or may not have been a victim apart from the Friday evening of about fifty thousand motorists. Is that an appropriate summary?"

Leblanc and Thomas glared at each other and grudgingly nodded.

"Excellent!" Bambera said. "This gets better and better. For now, I'll assume that Doctor Thomas is correct and there was a vehicle involved. Frankly, that makes a lot more sense than random destruction of major London orbitals, no matter how frustrating the traffic jams are. Doctor, how long do you need to get samples and readings?"

The scientist scratched his head, making his curly red hair stand on end. "Probably another couple of hours."

"Leblanc, organise someone to patch up this mess as soon as Doctor Thomas and his colleague are satisfied that they have everything they need," Bambera said. "We need to get this tidied up ASAP if we're going to keep the media quiet and the Minister happy. I want the M25 flowing normally by tomorrow morning if possible."

"I'll do my best, ma'am," Leblanc said.

Her aide, Corporal Paris, was already looking frazzled when Bambera got back to her jeep.

"Ma'am, they want you in London," Paris said, barely getting her seatbelt on before Bambera executed a high-speed U-turn in the middle of the road. "And they're setting up a video conference with Geneva."

"Of course they are," Bambera said, accelerating away.

"Also...Radio 2 just had a call," Paris said. "They read it out on air during the traffic bulletin."

"I'm not going to like this, am I?" Bambera said.

"Probably not."

Bambera got back to her office from London early on Saturday morning. The all-night session had been of little practical use, but at least it would keep the high-ups off her back for a while until she could work out what had happened. The Minister had been more difficult to pacify than Geneva simply because he knew that the media would find a way to blame the government for such a huge fiasco on a busy commuter weekend and he had been right. The morning papers had been filled with reports on a 'suspected terrorist outrage' and, coming less than a year after the destruction of the World Trade Centre, Bambera could almost understand the near-hysteria.

Despite the no-fly zone, someone had still managed to get an aerial shot of the damaged motorway. The UNIT press secretary had spent the night in the office along with everyone else, trying to keep the more fantastical elements of the reports quiet. Bambera did not envy her job.

There was a spare uniform in a cupboard so Bambera ducked into the tiny bathroom that was her only privilege as UNIT commander. A wash and a clean shirt made her feel more alert, if no less tired, and at least she would not look smarter. Bambera felt that it was important to give the illusion of total professionalism, no matter how she felt inside.

The stack of reports on Bambera's desk had multiplied while she was changing and there was an equally large stack of phone messages. Her email inbox had likewise exploded and every other email was marked urgent. Most of them were easily sorted out by vicious deletion and the rest Bambera would look at after she had talked to the scientists. There were folders of press-clippings, damage reports and repair estimates, but the science reports were notable by their absence.

Bambera sighed as the telephone on her desk started trilling loudly, caller ID showing that it was the Minister's office. He was probably calling for yet another update. As Bambera knew no more than she had known when she spoke to him an hour ago, she felt entirely guiltless about ignoring it and leaving.

The UNIT labs were in a bright, airy, glass building at the centre of the compound. There was an underground level where anything really sensitive was done, but Bambera did not blame the scientists for hating to work down there. No matter what the architects did, underground labs were still damp and depressing. Bambera blamed the lighting. Her office was almost as bad, with no windows and therefore requiring clinical fluorescent lighting at all hours.

Doctor Thomas was staring intently at a computer screen that displayed hundreds of green and blue lines when she arrived. A few of the scientists stood at attention as she passed, but most of them were

civilian contractors and barely acknowledged her. She stood behind Thomas for a couple of minutes and then cleared her throat loudly.

His barely-muffled yelp and jump were completely satisfying.

"Brigadier Bambera," he said, turning bright red. "I didn't hear you."

"That was painfully obvious," Bambera said. "What is that?"

Thomas looked back at his screen. "Nothing particularly useful."

"Oh?"

He gestured at it. "A spectrographic analysis of some of the samples we took from the site. There are traces of any number of things, none of them helpful because they're all substances we'd expect to see on a busy motorway. I can confirm that there's a good chance a car was destroyed in the explosion, but we already knew that."

"So nothing to explain what happened," Bambera concluded.

"No," Thomas agreed.

"No radiation?"

"Nothing our equipment can detect," Thomas said. "No traces of explosives, though, so I think we can rule out terrorists."

"Have you found anything useful?" Bambera asked impatiently.

"We may have a lead on the car," Thomas said. "Carol!"

"Five minutes, Rhys!" a voice shouted from behind them. "Five bloody minutes, that's all I ask."

"It was five minutes two hours ago," Thomas said. "The Brigadier wants to know what we've got, it doesn't have to be perfect."

"The Brigadier isn't trying to sift through traffic camera data that's so badly focused it's almost useless," came the response. "Tell her to wait."

The voice appeared to be coming from a red-headed young woman on the other side of the lab. Her long hair was the same bright ginger as Doctor Thomas', worn in a messy bun with a pen stuck through it and half the hair escaping. She sat with her back to Bambera, staring intently at one of two monitors on her bench and she had that hunched, intense look that hinted at the hours she must have spent immobile while she scanned data. Her bench was littered with mugs and an uneaten sandwich sat at her elbow.

Bambera strode towards her, saying, "Doesn't have to be perfect, we just need somewhere to start."

Carol did not jump, although bright spots of colour on her cheeks betrayed her embarrassment.

"Sorry, ma'am, I didn't see you," she said.

"There's a lot of that going around, Doctor-?"

"Thomas," the young scientist said. "Rhys is my brother."

"So I see." Bambera peered at the fuzzy image on the monitor. "You can actually see number plates on that?"

Carol nodded. "I've got software that can clean it up reasonably. It's not perfect, but you can make out most of the plates. The software just takes a long time to process the image."

"Very impressive," Bambera said. "Have you been able to identify the car that was destroyed?"

"I've narrowed it down," Carol said. "The camera's position doesn't give us any footage of the explosion, but I can use its distance from the site and the speed of the traffic to calculate a window when our mystery car would have passed under it. That gave us around sixty cars. A lot of them can be discarded because they were on the witness list from yesterday. A few more can be seen in footage from the camera at the next junction, but it could take me days to identify every car in that footage. I've got our list down to twelve cars that I can't positively confirm as escaping. I'm still working on getting plates for two of them - we've had every computer in the lab running the images - but ten of them are ready for checking. Like I said, not perfect."

Bambera raised her eyebrows. "You've managed to produce a list of ten - possibly twelve later - cars that could be our victim out of hundreds of cars in the vicinity at the time. And you did it in less than fifteen hours. That's pretty impressive."

"Thank you, ma'am," Carol said, flushing again.

"I'll get my people onto that list," Bambera said. "Get me those missing licence plates as soon as you can. Then you should probably get some sleep if there's nothing else."

"Yes, ma'am," Carol said. "I'm emailing the list now. You'll have the rest by lunchtime, definitely."

The lab was already starting to empty as Bambera left. She suspected that the scientists would be back soon, but with so little to work on they were smart enough to get out and recharge while they could.

Carol's message was in her inbox when Bambera logged on. It even had home and work addresses plus information on next of kin. The scientist was impressively thorough.

Bambera spent a few minutes farming the list out for further investigation and then she eyed the narrow camp bed in the corner of her office. It would probably take a few hours to confirm whether anyone on the list was missing and she had a nasty suspicion that sleep might be a rare commodity over the next few days.

Despite the thin, lumpy mattress and the low hum of an active military base, Bambara was asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

Carol threw her post down with the rest on the little table by her front door and sighed as the large stack teetered and then slowly slid to the floor. Muggins chirped happily and started to roll on it, purring like a small, fluffy motor-boat. Ignoring the light flashing on the answering machine, Carol hung her bag over the end of the banister and stepped over the ecstatic cat.

"Come on, fluff brain, I'll get you some food," she said.

Muggins' dish had a few pieces of food left but she still ran into the kitchen as soon as she heard the rustle of the food bag.

"You only love me for the opposable thumbs, don't you?" Carol said as Muggins almost fell over in her eagerness to get her nose in the food dish before Carol could even put it down.

The prospect of climbing the stairs to her bed filled Carol with exhaustion, so she trudged through to the lounge and sank onto the sofa. A minute later she pulled the afghan down from the back, wrapped herself in it and stretched out to sleep. Warm afternoon sun bathed her corner of the room, chasing away the last chills from the hour in an air-conditioned lab. For a long time there was quiet apart from the Muggins' contented purr where the cat lay along the back of the sofa.

Then, just for a moment, the light in the room flickered and a chill in the air made Carol shiver and pull the blanket closer. Muggins looked up and mewed inquiringly.

The moment passed, the sunlight returned and Muggins put her head down for a good nap to dream of mice and bacon scraps.

In a small copse a hundred metres from the M25, a patch of air seemed to shiver and then pulse blue. A wheezing sound echoed around, causing birds to suddenly flutter away and disturbing the play of three small fox cubs. Nobody was there to watch a blue police phone box materialise out of thin air or see the door open slightly to allow a hand holding an odd device to emerge. The device pinged quietly for a moment and then the hand withdrew.

When the blue police box disappeared with a loud groaning noise, the vixen ushered her cubs back into their burrow and spent the night watching warily for more strange intruders.

The victim of the mysterious events on the M25 turned out to be in the final car that Doctor Thomas identified. It was Sunday morning before all the other drivers were tracked down and the missing

man's tearful wife accepted that her husband was not coming home. Bambera read through his file, but nothing really stood out.

His name was David Owens and he was an accountant who worked in Stevenage. He had been on his way home, having called his wife just before he left to confirm that she still wanted him to pick up Chinese on the way and ask her whether she wanted king prawn sweet and sour or lemon chicken. She had waited until midnight before calling the police, in denial that her husband could possibly be involved with the bizarre accident she had been hearing about on the news. When she eventually called the police because she could no longer pretend that he might be stuck in the horrendous tail-backs, they were unsympathetic and advised her to wait until morning before she panicked.

Bambera had a suspicion that Thames Valley Police was going to be facing a lawsuit.

Mr. Owens had no enemies and his employer seemed genuinely upset by his death. He left no children and his bank accounts looked perfectly normal.

No matter how hard Bambera looked, she could see no reason why he had been killed. Or at least, no reason that made sense in an ordinary world devoid of aliens and oddities. The frustrating thing was nobody really knew what had happened on the motorway and that meant Bambera had nowhere to even start investigating for unearthly reasons for his death. David Owens was as ordinary as anyone could be.

They did try. Bambera had people digging into everything he had ever done, everywhere he had been, everyone he had known. It took days and in the end they were no further forward. For a few hours there was the tantalizing possibility that David Owens was a cover identity for an MI5 man, but that proved to be a red herring caused by the transfer of records from paper to computer ten years before.

David Owens was exactly who he appeared to be and Bambera's team looked just as disappointed as she was when they finally gave up. The next Friday evening rush hour proceeded perfectly normally, the eighty miles of slow or stationary traffic on the M25 that night caused by an overturned lorry transporting jars of honey that took hours to clean up combined with a three car pile-up at junction 15.

If Bambera had not been an officer, in charge of an elite force of soldiers trained for the strangest things imaginable, she would have screamed from the frustration.

Mary hated burying an empty box, but the stern black woman had told her there was no body and she had to accept that. Or at least learn to move on from it. An explanation would have helped. Major Bambino (Bambona? Mary could not remember) had failed to hide her frustration when she told Mary that she did not know why David died.

The funeral was long and difficult. Mary barely heard any of it and she sat in a sort of dazed stupor in the corner of the pub where everyone gathered afterwards for food and drinks. Her brother drove her

home and Mary took one of the little white tablets that the doctor had reluctantly given her to help her sleep with a large glass of water.

Deep red still stained the evening sky when she went to sleep, which was why she did not notice the man who stood outside her house for half an hour. He appeared to be reading a newspaper, but he held it awkwardly and every now and again something emitted a quiet 'ping' noise.

He was frowning when he walked away.

The next death was thankfully a little more low-profile. Bambara's Jeep slewed a little on the gravel as she braked in the car park at Clifford House. Already most of the public had been quietly ushered out of the stately home and only a few stragglers in the furthest corners of the grounds were left. They would be rounded up and returned to their cars shortly. A mobile incident room had been set up and a private was manning the ice-cream stand, handing out tea, coffee and choc-ices to hungry soldiers.

Captain Leblanc spotted her and hurried up.

"Where is it?" she barked.

"In the rose garden," he said. "The good news is that the only witnesses were her family."

"And the bad news?"

The captain considered for a moment. "The bad news is that she's dead, ma'am."

Bambara rolled her eyes. "Thank you for your insight. Right, you'd better take me to the scene first. Then I'll want to talk to the witnesses."

"This way, ma'am," Leblanc said, gesturing for her to follow.

They had to walk through an ornamental Japanese garden and skirt around a maze to get to the rose garden. Bambara had been taken through her share of stately homes and gardens as a child and this one was pretty typical. There was a big garden in front of the house, laid out to look amazing from the windows but not that interesting to anyone standing in the middle. The grounds immediately around the house were laid out in a series of gardens separated by tall hedges with the rest of the grounds left as pastoral park land. It would be very pretty, the kind of place families visited on sunny weekends so that the mothers could drag everyone around the formal gardens before letting the children loose in the park while everyone tucked into a picnic. There would be ice-creams in the afternoon or, for those with a bit of money, teas in a large conservatory that had been built on the side of the house. The house itself would probably only be open for tours on bank holidays.

Bambara had always found visits to stately homes mind-numbingly boring and her parents had never been able to afford the fancy teas.

The smell of charred earth and burned meat hit Bambera's nose as soon as she stepped into the rose garden. It combined with the sweet scent from the roses into a nauseating miasma and she had to take a deep breath to settle her stomach. Scientists were already crawling all over an area next to some bushes heavy with yellow blooms. Doctors Thomas and Thomas were immediately visible due to their bright red hair.

"What do you have?" Bambera asked.

Doctor Rhys Thomas looked up at her. He was examining a small, shallow crater with some kind of handheld device, his face smudged with dirt. The remains of a blanket covered with plates and sandwiches lay undisturbed next to the hole.

"Same as last time," he said. "No radiation, no traces of explosives, nothing to explain why there's a big hole in the ground."

"It's a smaller hole," Carol Thomas pointed out. "That might mean something."

"It could just mean that whatever did this wasn't aiming at a car," Bambera said.

Carol nodded. "Exactly. Whatever did this only wanted to kill the woman. It could have got her entire family, but it was precise. Last time it just targeted one car. There were hundreds of vehicles that day, lots of collateral damage possible, but it was precise."

"Good thinking," Bambera said.

"Thank you, ma'am," Carol said with a smile.

"Take as long as you need," Bambera said. "We can keep this place closed down for the next six months if we have to. Find something."

"Yes, ma'am," Rhys and Carol chorused.

They looked faintly embarrassed and Bambera suppressed a grin.

"Captain, where is the dead woman's family?" Bambera asked.

"I'll take you," Leblanc said. "She was called Gwen James. Her husband is Bill, there were two kids."

Bambera winced. "The kids saw it?"

"They were eating their lunch," Leblanc said. "They're all pretty traumatised. I don't know how much they'll be able to tell us."

The small family had been put in the tea room. A young female sergeant was sitting with the children, who had been given blankets and large slices of fruitcake. Their father sat by himself at another table cradling a mug of tea, his eyes red-rimmed and blank. Two privates guarded the door and they saluted to Bambera as she went in.

Bambera took it all in with a glance. Comforting grieving relatives had never been her forte. She was better with action and decisions. She took off her beret and tried to look a little less military.

"Mr. James?" she asked, approaching his table. "I'm Brigadier Bambera, I'll be investigating your wife's death."

He looked up and frowned. "You're not police."

"No, Mr. James," Bambera said. "This isn't a police matter."

"Oh." He seemed to think about it for a minute and then said, "We just wanted a day out."

Bambera pulled out a chair and its legs screeched on the floor, unnervingly loud in the oppressively quiet room. She sat down opposite him, trying to gauge her approach.

"Mr. James, I know this has all been a shock," she began.

"I don't understand," Mr. James said. "My wife has never hurt anyone."

"Can you tell me what happened?" Bambera said patiently. "We need to know how your wife died."

Mr. James stared into his tea for a while.

"Gwen loves gardening," he said. "She's been having a rough time lately, so I thought it would be a nice treat for her to come here and look at the roses. They're her favourites. We only have a tiny garden at home and she can't get roses to grow in it. Something about the soil, she says. The kids got hungry - you know what boys are like - so we decided to have our picnic in the rose garden rather than walking out to the park. It would give Gwen more time there. She loves - loved - roses."

He paused and took a sip from his tea, making a face as he did so.

"Too sweet," he commented. "We were eating our picnic. Jake kept stealing Simon's cheese sandwiches - they're the only ones he'll eat right now - and Gwen told him that he wouldn't get any cake if he kept it up. Then the sun seemed to go in and it got chilly. I thought the weather forecast might have been wrong, it felt like rain was coming in. Gwen was just starting to pack up the sandwiches when there was this sound like thunder and something - someone - appeared."

"Can you describe it?" Bambera prompted.

"She was dressed like something out of a movie," Mr. James said. "Long dress, lots of gauzy stuff floating around. Like an elf out of Lord of the Rings or something. She had long black hair and she was tall."

Bambera frowned. "She?"

Mr. James didn't seem to hear her. "She pointed at us and said something. I didn't understand any of it. She must have been foreign. Then she laughed - laughed! - and it was like lightning came out of her

finger right at Gwen. One minute Gwen was there, trying to get the kids to run away, the next minute she was gone. She didn't even scream."

"What happened to the woman?" Bambera asked urgently.

"She vanished," Mr. James said. "She looked up at the sky and there was another thunder noise, then she vanished. It was weird: as soon as she was gone the sun came back."

"And that was it?" Bambera asked.

Mr. James looked up and seemed to see her properly for the first time. "What happened? Why is my wife gone?"

"I wish that I knew," Bambera said.

She beckoned to Leblanc and said, "Make sure they get home safely."

Outside it was still a beautiful sunny day. There was even birdsong overhead and Bambera was struck, as she often was, by how ordinary the world seemed sometimes and how jarring that sense could be.

Leblanc caught up with her before she got back to the Jeep.

"What are your orders, ma'am?" he asked.

Bambera looked around at the small car park filled with military vehicles. "Get the scientists to go over every inch of this place. See if you can get a sketch artist in with Mr. James. I'll see you back at HQ: the Minister is going to want a full report immediately."

"Very good, ma'am," Leblanc said.

"Let me know if that blue box turns up," she added.

"Do you really think the Doctor will come?" Leblanc asked.

"I think this is exactly the kind of thing the Doctor will be interested in," Bambera said, "and we need him."

Bambera climbed into her Jeep feeling bone tired.

The scientists packed up when the sun went down. They had all the time in the world to do a thorough job, no need to hang around with no light. Guards were posted at the entrances to the Clifford House's grounds but nobody stayed to keep an eye on the rose garden. Who could get within fifty feet of it with half of UNIT guarding the borders?

That was why nobody saw the blue police box that materialised with a loud wheezing groan. A man stepped out and spent a long moment gazing up at the sky. It was a cloudless night and the stars shone

with that intensity that only happens when everything is perfect. He took a deep breath and made a face at the smell that still lingered in the air. Nothing moved in the garden for a long time. The man seemed to be listening for something or perhaps just waiting.

Somewhere in the distance an owl hooted, shaking the man from his reverie. He pulled a small device from his pocket and extended a long aerial. For a couple of minutes the device pinged quietly and the man fiddled with a couple of knobs on the front. Then he hummed under his breath and frowned.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

His blue box disappeared a few minutes later, leaving only the impression of something square in the grass that would fascinate the scientists in the morning.

Bambera grinned when they told her about it.

It was close to midnight when Carol got home, having checked a few things in the lab after work at Clifford House became impossible due to the lack of light. The sight of a warm light in her house and a battered old VW Bug sitting in the drive made her smile tiredly as she pulled up behind it.

Muggins greeted her at the door with a pleased little chirp that said she had been fed and cuddled so Carol was forgiven for being away for so long. Carol tossed her jacket into onto a peg and picked the cat up, letting Muggins snuggle into her neck and purr enthusiastically for a couple of minutes before carrying her into the living room. The TV was on, playing a late edition of the news, and there was a tall man in jeans and crumpled shirt sprawled on her couch. His long brown hair flopped over one eye and he was snoring lightly.

Carol nudged him with a knee and he stirred.

"When did you get in?" she asked.

The man rubbed his face and blinked up at her. "Uh, a while ago. I didn't know you'd be out so late."

He raised an eyebrow and Carol rolled her eyes. "It was work, Paul, nothing like that."

Paul grinned. "I had to check."

Carol snorted. "As if I have time to date with all the work that keeps getting thrown at me. How was China?"

"Very Chinese," Paul said. "It's nice to come home."

"Have you been to your place yet?"

Paul shook his head. "It didn't really appeal. Your place is nicer, and you have food in the cupboards. Are you hungry?"

The loud gurgle from Carol's stomach answered that question before she could form a response and Paul sighed.

"You know, sometimes the human body requires calories," he said, getting up and padding towards the kitchen. "You took A-level biology, I'm sure they mentioned it somewhere in there."

Carol followed him. "I forgot. It happens."

Paul busied himself with pans and things from her fridge while Carol sat on one of the kitchen chairs and shifted Muggins to her lap. The cat seemed content to curl up and purr herself to sleep. She had always been an easily pleased little creature. Carol and Paul chattered about inconsequential things as he cooked pasta and put together a sauce from ingredients that Carol had forgotten were even in her kitchen. They never talked about their work; it was one of the rules.

The food, as always, was delicious. Cooking was Paul's speciality and he always claimed that it was the part about travelling that he hated: the weeks of anonymous hotel food and terrible airline meals without even the chance to make an omelette. Sometimes Carol wondered whether the reason he enjoyed cooking so much was because it was such a rare treat. She found the entire process boring and never seemed to produce food that tasted anything like Paul's, so she often settled for cereal or take-out when she got home early enough to eat at home.

Muggins had retreated to the couch for a proper snooze and the plates had been cleared away for a while when Carol realised that she was yawning and struggling to stay awake.

"It's late," she said.

Paul nodded. "I should leave, unless...?"

The question hung in the air for a moment before Carol said, "You could stay here."

Paul stayed until the weekend. Then Rhys popped in unannounced on Saturday morning carrying a paper and a carton of orange juice. He did not hide his displeasure at finding Paul eating breakfast with Carol and Paul made his excuses shortly after.

Rhys fumed as he dried dishes.

"I don't know why you keep him around," Rhys said.

"He's a good friend," Carol said. "We have fun. He cooks. I need someone outside UNIT."

"He's using you," Rhys said, wiping vigorously at a bowl.

Carol rolled her eyes. "We use each other. Neither of us has time for anything serious, this works for us."

"And if he meets someone?"

She shrugged. "He won't sleep over any more. No big deal."

"It's just weird," Rhys said. "Why do you let him do this?"

Carol took a deep breath, determined that she wouldn't shout. "Rhys Edward Thomas, you're a prick. Keep your nose out of my life, I'm perfectly capable of running it myself. I like this arrangement, it works for both of us, and that's all that matters."

Rhys looked a little stunned. "But-"

"You're my twin and I love you," Carol said, "but right now, you need to leave before I shove this spatula where spatulas should never go."

UNIT kept Clifford House closed for nearly two weeks before the screams from the National Trust became so loud that the Minister could not ignore them and politely requested Bambera to get out of the stately home. Rhys Thomas had declared that there was nothing to find after twenty-four hours, but Carol Thomas had stayed on with another young scientist, determined to test and examine every inch of the grounds if she could. Bambera admired her determination but could not justify keeping the house any longer. So the scientists had to pack up and leave, allowing the gardeners back so that they could try to salvage something from the mess in the rose garden.

Bambera was almost ready to close the file, declare everything unexplained, when she got a call about two bodies in a garage in Swindon.

It was actually a large scorch mark and two missing mechanics but Bambera thought that correcting the local police assessment might not be conducive to cooperation. She arrived at the same time as the scientists to find Captain Leblanc already coordinating the taking of statements and clearing of the premises. He saluted smartly as she entered the drafty garage with the scientists tailing her. The Thomas twins led their people straight to the cordoned off scorch mark and started setting up equipment, muttering things about spectrums and decay rates as they went.

"What happened?" Bambera asked.

Leblanc shrugged. "Nobody knows. Nobody saw anything. One minute they were working on a car, the next they were gone."

"Any witnesses?"

"Another mechanic, Gary Silver," Leblanc said. "The business is owned by two brothers. Their apprentice had stepped into the office to make the tea. Do you want to talk to him?"

The apprentice was a tall, gangly twenty year-old with a prominent Adam's apple who looked terrified out of his mind. Bambera tried to look reassuring and non-threatening, but she was dressed in army

fatigues and it was hard to look reassuring in khaki and heavy boots. Gary Silver audibly gulped when she introduced herself and Bambera had to resist the urge to wipe her hand after shaking his sweaty palm.

"Mr. Silver-

"Gary," he corrected nervously.

"Gary," Bambera said, "can you tell me, in your own words, what happened?"

"We had a silver BMW in," Gary said. "Nice car, but the customer can be pretty touchy and Jim doesn't like teaching on the nice ones. He usually leaves me with the Golfs and Micras. Not much in the way of computers in those things. They had the car up and Andy asked me to make the tea so I was in the office. I heard Andy say something, couldn't really hear it, then there was this loud bang. Really loud. I ran out, but they weren't there."

"You're sure they didn't just leave?" Bambera asked.

Gary shook his head emphatically. "They'd never leave me alone here. Not when the kettle's on, anyway."

"Can you describe the 'loud bang' you heard?" Bambera asked.

Gary thought for a long moment, frowning intently, before shaking his head. "It was just...a bang. Like something blew up, except not. I'm not great with words, sorry."

She tried to get more details out of Gary but he just became more flustered the longer she stayed, so eventually she turned him over to a sergeant and went back to the workshop. The scientists were already looking disappointed and Bambera knew what Rhys Thomas was going to say before he even opened his mouth. It was the same thing he had said at the previous two sites and his glum expression spoke louder than words.

"Nothing?" she asked.

"We'll do what we can, but it's not looking good," Rhys said.

"There's nothing for our equipment to detect," Carol added. "A bit of static in the air - not unusual in a place like this - and that's about it. We'll take samples, record everything, and see whether anything comes up in a more detailed analysis at our lab. I wouldn't hold my breath, though."

"Do what you can," Bambera said.

It was turning into a hot day, the sky cloudless and the sun already intense enough to make her jacket uncomfortable. A small crowd was gathering at the end of the street, pointing and muttering at the green military vehicles, and Bambera sighed. It would be another long day of frustration with no results and the prospect of returning to head quarters and explaining to everyone higher up in the food

chain why UNIT had so far been unable to prevent any of this. Corporal Paris trotted up with her ever-present notebook in hand and saluted smartly.

"The press office is issuing a statement," the aide said. "They've already had two calls from the local paper."

"What's their story?" Bambera asked.

"Unexploded World War Two bomb under the garage," Paris said. "We're here to dispose of it. The mechanics were killed by a massive electrical shock from faulty wiring and the bomb was found when they were looking for the source."

Bambera rubbed her forehead. "Do they ever actually listen to their statements?"

Paris chuckled.

"What about national media?" Bambera asked.

"We should be lucky," Paris said. "Most of the media will be talking about the eclipse tomorrow. We'll just be a thirty second segment on the evening news and they'll probably have forgotten all about us by tomorrow."

"We'll keep this place shut down until the scientists have everything," Bambera said. "Make sure their report is on my desk tomorrow morning."

"Yes, ma'am."

Bambera stayed for most of the day feeling useless, but there was no physical evidence and Gary Silver's story only grew less coherent the more he was asked. Eventually he was sent home in a police car. The scientists declared that they had everything they could get by late afternoon and UNIT was on the road back to head quarters at seven.

If anyone had stayed, they would have seen the blue glow that lit the windows of the garage in the early hours of the morning. There was the sound of someone moving around inside the garage, an exclamation when someone stubbed their toe and then the pale glow of a torch moving around.

A few minutes later, the garage windows lit up with blue light again, but the industrial estate was deserted and nobody noticed.

Carol stared at the empty page in front of her, trying to find a polite way to word "we found nothing". It needed to be a balance between scholarly insight and bald facts, phrased in a way that indicated the scientists were still worth employing despite their failure to pin down the cause of the recent deaths. The problem was that scientists needed something to work with and in every case there had been

nothing. Even the static electricity present in the garage had been nothing out of the ordinary, certainly not sufficient to cause two people to disappear and leave only a scorch mark.

She had heard rumours about oddities that UNIT had investigated in the past and Carol was starting to wonder whether they might be looking at something outside the usual realm of experience.

The problem with that was that it made it even less likely that she would find a decent explanation for what was happening. Rhys had already washed his hands of it all and moved on to other projects. Carol was the only person still staring at graphs and read-outs from Swindon. She eventually closed the half-written report and started to go through the test reports again, hoping that maybe this time she might spot something they had passed over.

It was almost a relief when her concentration was broken by the shrill ring of Rhys' telephone. Carol glowered at their colleagues ignoring the phone, even though Rhys had popped out to get a Coke, and scooted her chair over to his desk to answer it.

Dartmoor was one of those places that could be described a hundred times in books without ever really capturing it. It managed to look wind-swept and lonely despite the bright sun, blue skies and the occasional ponies that Bambera passed when she left the main road. Large stone tors rose from the scrubby grass and heather in the distance, some of them dotted with the bright colours of hikers in T-shirts clambering or picnicking on them. The narrow track that Bambera followed took a winding route, designed more for spectacular views than getting to a specific part. It was depressingly easy to spot where she needed to be: the tor was surrounded by police cars and a green UNIT lorry had already pulled up.

A policeman in a fluorescent jacket approached as Bambera parked her Jeep. He was a tall man with greying hair and a weather-beaten face, but he looked exhausted.

"Inspector Ewing," he said, holding out his hand.

Bambera shook it, noting the Devonshire accent of a local man.

"I've never seen anything like this," Ewing continued. "We thought they were joking when they made the 999 call. I'm still not sure how it happened."

"Neither are we," Bambera said grimly. "But we're working on it. Can you show me?"

Ewing led her to the summit of the tor, where the scrubland gave way to granite bedrock surmounted by boulders. There were two distinct scorch marks a few feet apart and a chalk outline of a body had been drawn just by one of the marks. Bambera raised an eyebrow.

"There was a body?" she asked.

Ewing nodded. "It's what convinced the constables who were sent out."

"Where is the body now?" Bambera asked.

"The RD and E. Royal Devon and Exeter," Ewing clarified. "I'll make sure your people have full access."

Bambera nodded. "How many people died?"

"Four," Ewing said. "Two sisters in their sixties, a daughter and a granddaughter. It's the granddaughter's body we found, we think."

"Any witnesses?"

"The husband of one of the older women," Ewing said. "He was taken to the hospital a little while ago, suspected heart attack."

"Shame," Bambera said, sighing. "Did you get a statement before he fell ill?"

Ewing grimaced. "It didn't make much sense, I'm afraid."

"You'd be surprised at what makes sense to me," Bambera said.

The scientists arrived a little later and Bambera was busy for most of the day assigning people to take statements from the witness and the policemen who had been first on site, arranging accommodation for everyone and working out a way to set up a mobile laboratory. It had taken several hours to get permission to establish a campsite a mile away from the incident site and Bambera shuddered to think about the favours that the Minister had called in to get the Duchy of Cornwall to allow that much. A lot of the minutiae were taken care of by the efficient team of Leblanc and Paris, but Bambera had to find creative solutions to any number of issues and it was late before she finally got to retreat to the small tent that Paris had reserved for her.

She was up early the next morning and hiked over to the tor rather than driving: their vehicles had made a mess of the turf the day before. There was little to see and Bambera quickly retreated to the mobile lab. Someone had brought the scientists coffee and bacon butties and they were generous with their supplies. The defeated air of the past weeks had evaporated and the lab buzzed with machines and conversations. Bambera found Rhys and Carol Thomas chatting in one corner with mugs in hand.

"Please tell me you have something," she said by way of greeting.

"I've got the preliminary autopsy from the pathologist," Carol said immediately. "Dental records confirm that the body was Judy Nichols, the youngest victim, and she died from a massive electrical shock."

"I'm sending a couple of our people over to do a more detailed analysis," Rhys said. "Maybe we'll finally get lucky."

"What about the other women?" Bambera asked.

Carol checked her notes and said, "No trace of Edith Williams, Janet Davies or Amy Nichols I'm afraid. Edith and Janet were sisters, Amy was Edith's daughter. They were here with John Williams, Edith's husband, on a hiking holiday to celebrate the end of Judy's A-levels."

It took all of Bambera's self-control not to swear.

"Shame," she said viciously. "Do you have any ideas what could have caused the electrical shock?"

Rhys shook his head. "It would have been enough to cause those scorch marks, though. The witness statement reads like the one from Clifford House, except he described it as something from *Midsummer Night's Dream* rather than *Lord of the Rings*. I think we can assume it was the same creature."

"Which isn't the same creature that killed the first man," Bambera said.

"And we don't know what the thing in Swindon looked like," Carol added. "It isn't making this any easier."

"We'll do everything we can here," Rhys said, "but we our facilities are limited. We'll collect everything and take it back to head quarters for proper analysis later."

"Keep me posted on what you find," Bambera said. "I'll make sure you get full access to the body and to Mr. Williams when he wakes up."

Bambera seemed to spend the entire day in meetings or press briefings. The official story was freak lightning and the press seemed happy with it, but they also wanted statements from dozens of local experts on the myths and legends of Dartmoor. That kept the press satisfied - particularly after Paris dug out some local nutters for them to play with - but it meant that the UNIT press office was on the phone every five minutes. She supposed that a bizarre death on such a well-known site was bound to cause some interest on a slow news day and almost found herself praying for something normally disastrous to happen just to get the press to leave them alone.

The news from the scientists did not change: massive electrical shock, no cause and no idea how three women had vaporized. They did speculate a lot about the amount of energy it would take to do it and although Bambera's scientific knowledge was very basic even she could work out that they were talking about enormous amounts. It was becoming increasingly unlikely that any of it would have an Earthly explanation.

The following day, the scientists were beginning to pack up for the move back to UNIT headquarters when Bambera got a call from Wales that made her blood run cold.

Bambera's Jeep was the first one out and they startled ponies and tourists as they poured down the narrow roads in their large drab green vehicles at speeds that were almost certainly illegal. She had the

sense of time running out as she hurtled up the M5 northwards. It was ridiculous, there were nothing that she could do now about it, but she still had that urgent sense at the back of her mind.

Something was coming. Something worse than she had seen so far.

Her hands on the wheel eased slightly when she turned onto the narrow, twisting roads that would take the convoy into the tiny Welsh village at the foot of the mountains. While the rest of the country burned under bright, unforgiving sunshine it seemed that North Wales lived under a perpetual cover of grey clouds and drizzle. The views were spectacular despite the weather. Every turn and rise revealed a new sight, low mountains with their heads hidden in mist or valleys with streams rushing through. Some of the higher passes forced Bambara to slow to a crawl, the thick fog dangerous when the roads were so narrow and prone to sudden changes of direction that could send an unwary driver careening down steep, shale coated slopes.

They only met a few cars, always on the roads that were barely wide enough for the large trucks filled with men and equipment that Bambara led. Most of the time, the drivers of those cars immediately began reversing to safe passing spots but on one occasion a particularly belligerent man with an enormous walrus moustache and a car filled with children, dogs and luggage nearly found himself arrested. He finally conceded and carefully reversed for a mile to a spot where the road widened after Bambara stepped out of her Jeep and explained all the laws he was potentially breaking. She did not know whether it was her demeanour or the sight of her side-arm that suddenly made him turn white and hurry back to his car.

A police road block had been set up on the only road in or out of Llangol and several media vans had already set up camp a hundred metres away.

"My sergeant will be so pleased to see you," the young constable who let them through said in a tone filled with relief. "We've got some men up from Caernarfon but this isn't something we've ever had to deal with before."

"My men will set up a perimeter," Bambara said. "You'll be relieved shortly."

"Thank you, ma'am."

One of the UNIT trucks stayed behind, uniformed men already pouring out as Bambara drove away.

Corporal Paris, her aide, had been quiet through the trip, making notes when Bambara dictated them but otherwise knowing Bambara's mood well enough not to interrupt her.

Now she spoke up. "The RAF has a no fly-zone set up, ten mile radius from the village."

"Excellent," Bambara said. "Hopefully if there are no pictures, this won't be too high in the headlines tomorrow. Any word on the scientists?"

"They're on their way," Paris said. "Doctor Thomas estimates that they'll be here in two hours. It took them a while to get their equipment secured and ready to transport."

"I suppose that's better than nothing," Bambera said, reminding herself yet again that it was pointless to resent the laws of physics. "Here we are then."

She stopped in front of the village school. Most of the convoy had split away now, taking up positions throughout the village according to the orders Bambera had issued during the drive up. Only one other truck stopped with her, disgorging its thirty soldiers before it had completed halted. Bambera hopped out of the Jeep and was met at the gate by a policeman in a florescent jacket.

"Inspector Bracknell," he introduced himself, holding out his hand. "You must be Brigadier Bambera. They told me you were coming."

Bambera shook his hand firmly. "Has anyone left the village?"

The inspector looked faintly embarrassed. "We had to let a few of the teachers and pupils go to the local hospital. Shock, you must understand."

"Not a problem," Bambera assured him, even though it was not what she wanted to hear.

"It's this way," Bracknell said.

They walked through the school without talking, the silence oppressive. Tiny chairs had been overturned as people ran from the school and Bambera grew grimmer as they passed each classroom.

"This is the worst one," Bracknell said eventually.

He opened a door and Bambera stepped in. Her eyes widened and she hissed quietly.

She wanted to swear and shout, but settled for a whispered, "Shame."

Carol gritted her teeth and concentrated on swallowing hard as her stomach tried to climb through her throat again. She had not had travel sickness this bad since she was a child. Rhys, for once, had been moderately sensitive and he was the one who grabbed a big bowl out of the gear for her to throw up in after their third roadside stop. Not that being sick into a bowl in the back of a van was much better than being sick on the side of the M40, but at least Carol no longer felt like she was holding them up each time her body rebelled.

Her stomach was tied into knots and cramps, emptier than it had ever been and Carol could not decide whether dry heaves were better or worse than productive nausea. Closing her eyes helped, oddly, so Carol rested her head back and tried to concentrate on steady, even breathing and ignore any signals from her body below her chest.

Despite working until the early hours of the morning, she had been unable to sleep comfortably on the hard ground until an hour before dawn. Then she had slept like a log, not rousing even when the camp got busy, until Rhys shouted at her from outside the tent. She had rushed through getting up, and the time she got to the lab, it had been a hive of frenetic activity as the scientists tried to pack everything

to go to Wales immediately. Breakfast had been some kind of bar thing discovered in her duffel bag washed down with coffee.

Carol tried not to think about food.

She slipped into a light doze, dreaming that she was back at home in her bed and Paul had brought coffee from that place at the end of the street. Then someone jostled her awake and Carol grunted unhappily.

"We're almost there, Twin," Rhys said cheerfully. "Just another couple of minutes and then it's all over."

"Thank god," Carol muttered, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"Are you sure that you didn't eat anything dodgy last night?" Rhys asked. "I haven't seen you this bad in forever."

"You ate the same pizza that I did," Carol said. "Are you OK?"

Rhys grinned. "Cast-iron stomach. No problem."

Their van pulled up in front of an old school, the kind that had Victorian windows and high gables and a small paved playground in front behind pointed iron railings. Carol could just see the corner of a new building behind it but the façade was classic and she could almost squint and see her own primary school there. The school faced the village green where a drab green military truck was parked on one corner, almost seeming to hunch down and try to be invisible even though that was impossible. A couple of police cars were parked further down the road but the entire place felt empty.

Carol took a deep breath of the damp, Welsh air as she jumped out of the van and immediately felt her stomach calm and settle. There was a fine, misty rain in the air with just a slight breeze, so different from the hot, stifling corner of England that she had left a few hours ago. She and Rhys had come to Wales a few times on holiday as children and it always seemed the same.

Bambera came out of the school as the scientists were putting on their white paper suits. She was scowling, something that Carol had learned to recognise was the Brigadier's way of hiding distress. Anyone else would be pale and shaking, Bambera just looked angry.

"It's not pretty in there," Bambera said. "You lot ready?"

Carol picked up a case of equipment and followed her colleagues.

The school was oppressive in its emptiness. Carol shivered as she entered. She felt as though there should be a storm outside or terrible destruction around her. It was all too normal, the corridor lined with paintings and pottery displays. Exercise books lay open on the tiny desks as she walked past classrooms and in one room there were pots of paint lying splashed on the floor.

Bambera stopped three doors down, gesturing for them to look. At first, Carol thought that the tiny shape under a desk was a doll or perhaps a bundle of clothes. It was only as she grew nearer that she realised that it was a child, perhaps five years old, curled up as if to sleep with a slight smile on its small face. There were no injuries, no traces of blood, just the unnatural pallor of death in the child's face.

Rhys touched the child's face and Carol realised that it was a little boy, his sandy hair unkempt as if it had been weeks since anyone last cut it.

"There's more," Bambera said grimly.

Small bodies lay in ones and twos in other classrooms, nine in all, looking peaceful and happy yet cold and stiff. The oldest was eleven, the youngest that small boy in the first classroom.

"They're all boys," Carol murmured as she knelt between the two bodies in the Year Four classroom.

"I noticed that as well," Bambera said. "All boys, all born in this village, two sets of brothers."

"Do they know what happened?" Carol asked.

Bambera shook her head. "The teachers were all taken to a hospital in Caernarfon. We'll be able to interview them tomorrow. Apparently the kids just dropped dead."

"Why were we called?" Rhys asked. "I'm sorry, but these kids could all have had food poisoning or something. Why call UNIT?"

There was a horrible silence for a moment as everyone tried to pretend that Rhys was nothing to do with them and edge away without actually moving.

"Doctor Thomas, we were called because all of these children died at precisely nine thirty-two this morning and nobody can explain it," Bambera said evenly, although her voice throbbed with something nasty and unhappy. "Nobody else knew what to do with it. That's where we come in. Now, do you want to do some work or...?"

The hand on her side-arm was an implicit threat and even Rhys picked up on it. He was silent as he opened his equipment case and started removing pieces. Bambera nodded and left, her boots echoing on the wooden floor. Carol cringed inside because Rhys had never learned tact, subtlety or human empathy, it seemed beyond him, and Bambera had no way to know that Rhys was not as cruel as he sounded.

They worked in silence, photographing the bodies, taking samples, running every detector they had over them and then calling for men to take them away in tiny black bags. By the time they had finished it was late and Carol's head was aching intensely. She left the school with the others and they stood around in the playground for a while, shivering in the wind but feeling much better in the darkness than they had in the under the harsh, unforgiving fluorescent lights.

A young soldier hurried up to them after a few minutes and saluted.

"We have rooms for you at the pub," he said. "Brigadier Bambera sends her compliments and requests that you meet with her at seven tomorrow. We're using the village hall as an HQ."

"Thank you," Carol said. "Where is the pub?"

The soldier pointed across the green to a large white building that was one of the few with lights at the window. A black sign across the front was impossible to read but there were benches and umbrellas outside in the vain hope that sun might come to the Welsh mountains.

"The village hall is just down this road, on the right," the soldier said. "Not far at all."

Carol was the only woman in her little team so she had the luxury of a little room in the attic all to herself. Her small bag of clothes was already on the bed and there was a thermos on the table under the window that emitted the delicious chocolaty scent of cocoa when she opened it. She poured the cocoa into a mug, changed into pyjamas and sat up in bed for a while trying to forget or unsee the tiny bodies for a while. Eventually she admitted defeat, drank down the last of the hot drink and rolled onto her side.

She left the lights on.

An urn of coffee had already been set up in the village hall when Bambera arrived the next morning. Someone had even had the foresight to get plates of sausage rolls and pasties from the bakery and Bambera snagged some as she headed towards her temporary desk. Most of the UNIT personnel had either been patrolling through the night or sleeping in tents in a field just outside the village, so the hot food was an instant success. Bambera had spent the night in a tiny attic room above the hall so that she could be on-site should anything weird happen, but that meant she had slept in a sleeping bag on an uncarpeted floor. Her shoulders and back ached and the cold wash at a tiny sink had been entirely unsatisfying.

The scientists trailed in just before seven looking barely awake. Carol Thomas was the last to arrive and she had black bruises under her eyes. Someone thrust a sausage roll in her direction and she went pale and shook her head quickly.

Bambera caught the worried look that Rhys directed towards his twin, but he stayed away from her and she settled on the edge of a desk in the corner.

Gradually everyone settled and when Bambera judged that they were mostly ready - meaning everyone had a mug and some food in their hands - she stood up and clapped her hands.

"We have a busy day, everyone," she said. "Let's get to it. Doctor Thomas, do your people have anything yet?"

He shook his head. "Sorry, ma'am. The local hospital has given us a couple of labs for post-mortems, so we might have something from those. None of our instruments picked up anything odd and we haven't had time to start processing samples yet."

It was what Bambera had expected, but she was still disappointed.

"We need to keep this place on lock-down," Bambera said. "Nobody in or out without my say-so, the last thing we need is a media circus. I'll be speaking to the teachers this morning - Carol, can you sit in with me?"

The young woman nodded.

"Everyone should already know what they're doing," Bambera said. "I'll want everyone to report back at six with whatever you've got, provided nothing else happens. Remember, nobody in or out. We don't know what we're dealing with, but those children didn't die from something ordinary. Anything strange, whether it looks connected or not, report it immediately to a superior."

There was a chorus of assents and the men and women who were due to relieve their patrolling colleagues quickly left. Most of the scientists followed, taking their coffee and pastries with them as though afraid that they would never get more coffee.

Bambera moved over to Carol and looked at her with concern. The younger woman looked pale, possibly slightly green at the gills, and her bright red hair only emphasised the pallor but Bambera had never been good at the sensitive inter-personal stuff.

"Ready?" she asked, signalling for Corporal Paris.

The aide arrived at Bambera's heels smartly as Carol looked up and smiled.

"As I'll ever be," Carol said.

The first two teachers knew very little. Neither of them had been aware of a problem until their pupils started shouting and by then it was too late, they each had a dead little boy in their classroom.

Morning sunshine was trying to break through the thick grey clouds as Bambera, Carol and Paris walked to the third teacher's cottage. She lived at the end of a narrow lane just off what passed as the village High Street. Her thatched cottage had roses in the front garden and lush green grass in need of trimming. Bambera rapped sharply with the iron knocker shaped like a grinning man's face and the door opened almost immediately. It framed a woman a few years older than Bambera, her hair thickly streaked with grey. She was dressed smartly in a trouser suit even though it was early and the headmaster had decided to finish school for the summer a few days early.

"Mrs Bell?" Bambera asked.

The woman smiled uncertainly and said, "Yes. Can I help you?"

Bambera introduced herself. "I'd like to ask you some questions about yesterday, if you don't mind."

Mrs Bell's expression had changed from uncertainty to concern on hearing Bambera's titles, but she nodded anyway and stepped back from the door.

"Come in, dear," she said. "I'll do anything if it will help."

The cottage was small, with a narrow hall leading straight to a kitchen and a door to the left that opened onto a tiny sitting room. The staircase on the right, just by the door, was steep and twisting. Despite its size, the cottage was beautifully decorated and furnished and Bambera somehow knew that this had been Mrs Bell's home throughout her life. There was none of the ornaments and knick-knacks that she expected in a home of this kind, a choice that Bambera approved of greatly. A small fire burned in the living room hearth opposite and there were two comfortable armchairs on either side with a two-seater settee against the wall on Bambera's left. An old TV sat on a cabinet to her right and there was a low set of drawers next to it covered with framed photographs, the only sign of collections in the room. The armchairs were flanked by a couple of small, sturdy tables, obviously there for cups of tea and books rather than collectables, and there was a mountain painting over the fireplace. It was a comfortable, uncluttered room that somehow gave the impression of being quite roomy despite being only a few paces wide.

Mrs Bell gestured for Bambera and Carol to sit and then hurried into the kitchen to make tea, judging from the noises. It would be Bambera's third cup for the day and she didn't like tea, but she had learned that people tended to make tea because the ritual soothed them and trying to stop her would only make Mrs Bell agitated.

Bambera took one of the armchairs, and Carol perched on the edge of the settee. The young scientist looked better than she had earlier and she even seemed to perk up a bit when Mrs Bell emerged with a tray set with teapot, cups and a plate of rich tea and bourbon biscuits. Mrs Bell poured the tea and Bambera hesitated for a moment before giving in to her chocolate craving and sheepishly taking a bourbon. Carol stuck to the rich tea and she ate carefully, but she looked much more comfortable.

"Perhaps you could just tell me about yesterday in your own words, Mrs Bell," Bambera said.

Mrs Bell took a sip of tea. "I'll try. It was all so strange."

Carol smiled at her reassuringly. "Don't worry, we deal with strange all the time."

"Most of the day was perfectly ordinary," Mrs Bell began. "We were doing maths. I always do maths first, so that the worst bit of the day is over early, then they can go outside for break to play and clear their brains before we do other things. Billie James has a bit of difficulty sometimes so I put a few sums up on the blackboard and then sat down to help him."

She took another sip of tea. "I thought at first that one of the children was playing around. You know what nine year-olds can be like, they start to fidget and find tricks to pull as soon as the teacher seems to be distracted."

Bambera could easily remember all the time that she had done exactly that, throwing paper aeroplanes and making faces at Danny Carter because he always snorted when he laughed.

"So I looked up," Mrs Bell continued. "I always make sure that I'm not sitting with my back to them. They all seemed to be working properly, but I could hear this noise. It made me shiver."

Bambera sat up. "What was it like, the noise?"

Mrs Bell thought for a minute. "It reminded me of dogs howling, but it sounded nastier somehow. Then the sky suddenly went very dark and the howling got louder. It was so fast and I know that it couldn't have been the children. None of them could possibly have made a noise like that and as for the sky..."

"What had the weather been like before that?" Carol asked.

"Sunny," Mrs Bell said. "Warm and sunny, a beautiful day. We'd planned to let the children eat their lunches on the playing fields."

Bambera looked at the rain streaming down the windows and Mrs Bell caught her look.

"Wales isn't always what you see in films," she said. "This weather, it's only been like that since yesterday morning. We didn't have the heat that England has had, but we'd been having a beautiful summer until then."

"So this weather, it started when the children died?" Bambera asked.

Mrs Bell nodded.

"What happened?"

The teacher took a deep breath, steeling herself for the worst part of the story. "It got dark and the howling got louder. I was standing up by then and the children looked quite terrified. Then Amy Hutchins screamed and the howling stopped. I looked at her and saw Ryan Jenkins just fold up and slide off his chair. At first I thought he'd fainted - that's what it looked like - but he was already cold when I went to him. I knew that wasn't right. My husband died from a heart-attack three years ago, just dropped dead beside me in the supermarket, and his hand was warm in the ambulance all the way to the hospital even though the doctors said that he died immediately."

There were tears in Mrs Bell's eyes and her voice had started to crack.

Bambera gave her a couple of minutes to gather her composure before asking, "Is that when you got the children out?"

"I heard a lot of noise out in the corridor, that's what got me moving again," Mrs Bell said. "The other teachers were sending their pupils into the playground so I knew something terrible had happened."

Carol leaned forward intently. "The noise you heard, the howling, do you think the children could hear it?"

Mrs Bell looked surprised. "Do you know, it hadn't even occurred to me that they might not have heard it."

There was little else that she could add so they thanked her and left the house. The wind had picked up while they were in the cottage and the drizzle had turned into sheeting rain.

Carol stopped a few feet down the road. "I believe her."

"So do I," Bambera said. "The story is too unbelievable to be made up."

"We should--"

Bambera's radio crackled and then Captain Leblanc's voice came through, cutting Carol off.

"Base to greyhound, come in greyhound."

Bambera thumbed the radio on. "Greyhound, what's going on?"

"I'm not sure, Brigadier," Leblanc said. "Something odd is happening."

At that moment, a loud thunderclap sounded and lightning forked down in the distance.

"On my way," Bambera said. "Greyhound out."

She took off at a run, outpacing Carol immediately, and her boots thundered on the road as she hurtled towards the village hall at top speed. It was not far but she was gasping when she neared it due to the mad speed of her run and she slowed to a trot as she approached. At first, she could not see what had unnerved the captain. There was a group of people standing outside the village hall, all women in their twenties and thirties, presumably some of the mothers from the school.

Then another streak of lightning illuminated the scene through the streaming rain and Bambera knew why she had been called.

The women were motionless and silent, all staring intently at something in front of them. Three UNIT soldiers stood just outside the hall doors, aiming their guns at the same spot. Wind whipped around them ferociously, tearing at hair and clothing, but none of them moved or made a sound.

Electricity seemed to fill the air, building up until Bambera's teeth itched with it. She stopped, only a few feet from the gathering, and finally saw what held them immobile.

It was the woman's height that Bambera marvelled at. She was taller than anyone Bambera had ever seen before, probably near to seven feet, and she held herself with a majestically arrogant bearing. Her features were perfect and fierce; a long, hawkish nose and eyes the colour of a starry night dominating her face. Long black hair blew around her and she wore a dress of many layers, all in shades of deep

grey and pure black, which glittered as they moved. Every inch of her looked utterly alien despite the surface humanity of her appearance.

Something inside Bambera quailed at the sight and she had to lock her knees to keep from just sinking to the ground and crawling away. It took all the strength she had to move her hand to rest on her side-arm and she had to grit her teeth to force the muscles to work so that she could unclip and draw it. That was all she could do, there was nothing left in her to call out and the gun felt so heavy that her arms trembled with the weight of it.

The strange woman stared intently at the women surrounding her for a moment more and then she lifted her gaze to Bambera. It was impossible to meet those eyes, which burned with star fire and seemed to see directly into Bambera's head.

"Speak," the woman commanded in a terrible voice.

Bambera swallowed and wet her lips. "Who are you?"

The woman laughed. "I am the storm crow, the Morrigan. And who are you, pretty child?"



"Brigadier Winifred Bambera, UNIT commander," Bambera said.

She tried to add something, anything, to that but speech froze in her throat.

The Morrigan inclined her head. "You are a warrior, I see that. You seek to protect these ones?"

She gestured to the woman who still stood in a semi-circle before her, ignoring everything else around her.

"What do you want with them?" Bambera asked.

"To reassure them," the Morrigan said. "Our children have been avenged."

Her words were fierce but her tone was unemotional, a statement of fact and intent rather than threat. Bambera could easily imagine that this woman would destroy anything that stood between her and vengeance.

In the distance, unnoticed by anyone, a wild groaning sound of stressed engines began to echo through the village.

"What are you?" Bambera asked.

The Morrigan laughed. "What could you understand of what I am? Your mortal mind would be consumed in flame if you understood even the smallest shadow of what I am."

"What about my mind?" came an unfamiliar voice. "Could my mind comprehend you?"

Bambera could not look away from the Morrigan. The voice sounded young, male and completely unfamiliar yet there was something in it that she recognised. The Morrigan's hesitation was momentary, so slight that Bambera might not have seen it had she been looking away, and the triumphant celebration that had filled her face seemed to pale a little.

"What are you?" the Morrigan asked.

"What's more interesting is what you are," the stranger said. "You're not from this world, not even this universe. I've never seen anything like you."

The Morrigan drew herself up. "Nor will you again, I think."

"Are there others?"

"Yes," the Morrigan said.

"Are they here?"

"When the mood takes them," the Morrigan said. "We have visited this world many times."

Bambera's voice seemed to return as the woman's gaze left her. "What did you mean, 'the children have been avenged'? What you have you done?"

"What I have done is nothing you need concern yourself with," the Morrigan said coldly. "It had to be done."

The sound of footsteps rattled down the road and the Morrigan looked round sharply. Out of the corner of her eye, Bambera caught a flash of bright red hair.

"Your child is beautiful," the Morrigan said.



Then there was a loud crash of thunder and she disappeared. The wind dropped and the air stilled. Bambera's ears rang from the thunder. She turned to see Carol beside her, gasping for breath and looking stunned.

"Well, that was all very interesting," a voice said brightly. "It's not every day that you get to meet a fairy war goddess, after all."

Bambera turned to look at the strange man, finally able to lower her arms and shake out the stiffness in her shoulders. He was very tall and skinny, wearing mismatched jacket and trousers with a bow-tie. He even had leather patches on his elbows and his hair was wild.

His face was entirely unfamiliar. Nothing about him even slightly resembled anyone that Bambera had ever met.

There was only one man who could look like that.

"Doctor?"

The Doctor beamed. "Brigadier Bambera! Good to see you! I should have known you'd pop up eventually."

"Doctor, what was that?"

"That was a fairy, or possibly a goddess, called the Morrigan," the Doctor said. "Or at least, she's probably the creature that started all the stories anyway. Most myths are based on something real."

"Is she from Ancelyn's world?" Bambera asked.

"I doubt it," the Doctor said. "Different signature."

"Different what?"

The Doctor held up a long, slim gadget. "Her energy signature, when she disappeared, it's different from Ancelyn's people."

There came the sound of footsteps running and then a tall young woman pelted round the corner and came to a stop next to the Doctor. Her long red hair had come loose from the pins valiantly trying to hold it away from her face and her face was flushed from the exertion.

"Did you have to park so far away?" she asked irritably. "I missed it, didn't I?"

The Doctor looked a little sheepish for a moment. "Yes, well, you'll have to get faster, Pond."

Bambera winced as the woman glared at the Doctor. Then her attention was distracted by a confused murmur from the women who had been enthralled by the Morrigan.

"Oh, shame," she said irritably, and began issuing orders to get the women home and given appropriate cover stories.

The toilets smelled of bleach and Carol noted absently that the hand towel dispenser was empty. She put the bag from the chemist's on the little shelf below the mirror and stared at it for a while.

Perhaps the Morrigan had not intended to look at her. What could an alien know?

It did not matter how hard she tried, Carol could not shake off the conviction that the Morrigan had directed her final comment at her. The nausea of the last few days and the vague sense of fatigue kept rising to her mind each time Carol tried to tell herself that she was crazy.

It was a surprisingly small box. Carol had always vaguely assumed pregnancy tests were larger, to match the importance of their results. Not that she had ever really looked. Pregnancy and babies had never been on her life agenda, so she knew all about prevention and very little about being pregnant.

It was impossible. They had always been careful. Neither of them were in a position to raise a child.

Carol had almost convinced herself that she was over-reacting when the bathroom door opened and the Doctor's friend entered. She was tall, thin and her hair was a shade of red that Carol envied intensely.

The girl bent to wash her hands and they exchanged smiles in the mirror.

"Are you alright?" the girl asked, her eyes straying to box on the shelf.

Carol nodded but could not manage a smile.

"I'm Amy," the girl announced, holding out a wet hand. "Amy Pond."

"Carol."

They spent a moment not quite shaking hands and then Carol asked, "You came with the Doctor, right? I've read about him."

Amy rolled her eyes. "Of course you have. Everyone knows about him. Even Winston Churchill has his phone number."

This time Carol managed a small smile. "I wasn't expecting him to be so tall."

"So, are you going to use it?" Amy asked, nodded at the box of tests.

Carol shrugged. "I can't be. We're careful."

"Yeah, so are a lot of people," Amy said. "Nothing's a hundred percent."

"I don't know what I'll do," Carol said.

"Look, wouldn't it be better to take the test, get it over with, and then worry if you need to?" Amy asked. "That's what I'd do."

It was an entirely logical argument that Carol could not argue with, even though she really wanted to lie down and kick her heels on the floor the way she used to when she threw tantrums as a child. She took a deep breath, grabbed the box and retreated to a stall.

Reading the instructions took longer than using the test and then she stood for a while watching the indicator, hoping that it was lying.

"Well?" Amy asked after the silence had gone on just that little bit too long.

Carol unlocked the door and something in her face must have told Amy everything she needed to know. The test went back into the box and she wordlessly buried it in the rubbish bin under the mound of paper towels.

"What are you going to do?" Amy asked.

"I honestly don't know," Carol said. "I've never even thought about it."

"Is the father around?" Amy thought for a moment. "You do know who the father is, right?"

"Of course I do!" Carol said indignantly. "The father is, well. He's..."

She trailed off.

"He's a friend," Carol said eventually. "My best friend. We have this arrangement. Neither of us has time for anything long-term or meeting new people, so when he's around and I'm around we get together."

Amy nodded wisely. "Friends with benefits, got you."

"So this isn't something either of us want," Carol said.

"You need to talk to him," Amy said.

"I'm not sure where he is right now," Carol said. "He's in intelligence."

"Oh." Amy made a disappointed face. "That might be difficult."

There was nothing funny about it, not at all, but Amy's expression was such a mixture of childish disappointment and adult pouting that Carol had to laugh. It seemed to break the tension and Carol felt oddly relieved when she calmed down.

"Are you OK?" Amy asked.

"I wonder how my cat will react to a baby?" Carol asked.

"So you think what happened here is related to the man who died on the M25 and all the other deaths we've been investigating?" Bambera said.

They were sitting in a corner of the village hall that had been designated as Bambera's temporary office, ignoring the curious stares of the soldiers around them.

"I know they are," the Doctor said. "The energy signatures match."

"My people couldn't detect much," Bambera said. "Just some static electricity at a couple of the sites."

The Doctor shook his head. "Why do humans always think they know everything?"

He was definitely as insulting as the previous version she had met, Bambera decided. He was probably just as mad, too, although at least he no longer seemed to be travelling with an overly enthusiastic explosives experimenter.

"So why is this one different?" Bambera asked. "Until Dartmoor, we didn't even have any bodies left. Everything was vaporized."

"They've upped their game," the Doctor said. "They're getting more serious. We seem to be in the middle of some kind of revenge face-off, getting a bit worse each time."

"So there will be more?"

"Oh, absolutely," the Doctor said. "The Morrigan said that the children have been avenged. Past tense. Avenged. She's already done something to even the score - those boys weren't her doing - and we'll find out what she did soon, I'm sure. Then her opponent will take his turn and they'll keep going until nothing is left."

"What is the Morrigan?" Bambera asked.

The Doctor frowned and rubbed his hands together. "Mythologically, she was a great queen or possibly a goddess. Death and war follow her. She's usually associated with Irish myths, the Ulster Cycle and so on."

Bambera made a face. "So she's not the good kind of fairy."

The Doctor shrugged. "It depends on whose side you're on. Whatever myths she started, she's from another universe and I think we can assume that she's been visiting this world for at least a couple of thousand years. You haven't asked the other question yet."

"What's the other question?"

"If she's the Morrigan," the Doctor said, "who is she fighting?"

"Don't you know?" Bambera asked.

"Haven't the slightest idea yet," the Doctor said cheerfully. "I can't wait to find out."

"Oh, wonderful," Bambera said sarcastically. "Could you be a little less happy about this?"

"But don't you find it fascinating?" the Doctor asked. "I certainly do."

"You'll get to disappear when it's all over," Bambera said. "It's the people in this village that will have to live with it."

That seemed to sober the Doctor a little. He frowned and picked up a pen to fiddle with.

"You said that you interviewed some of the teachers," the Doctor said. "Is Mrs. Bell the only one who heard anything?"

Bambera rubbed her forehead tiredly. "Possibly. I've got people out interviewing the rest, but I don't think we'll find anything. It's possible that she's crazy."

"Possible, but not likely," the Doctor said. "Some people are more sensitive, they hear and feel things that the rest of us can't even hope to see. Of course, a lot of them end up locked away or turned into drugged zombies because you lot don't like people who see things, but some of them are smart enough - or know enough - to keep it quiet. Little villages like this one always used to have one or two so-called witches. I'd imagine that if you look back far enough in Mrs Bell's history, her ancestors had the sight or acted as the village midwives or wise men."

"If she's telling the truth, then what does it mean?" Bambera said.

The pen fell apart in the Doctor's hands, the spring from the clicking mechanism pinging across the room. "I know this. I know that I know this. It's right there, on the tip of my tongue."

Bambera opened her mouth to ask something, but then she spotted the young sergeant coming towards her and his expression stopped her. He saluted and glanced at the Doctor.

"Go ahead," Bambera said. "He's our scientific advisor."

"The police called, ma'am," the sergeant said. "Something happened in Altown and they think we should be there."

"Did they give any details?"

"Not really, ma'am. Just that something went on a killing spree in the high street."

Altown was about ten miles away, a small town overlooked by mountains and split in half by a small river that only had one narrow bridge which could not hold the lorry transporting Bambera's men. It was quicker to abandon the lorry and jog to the high street than drive to the larger bridge further downstream and then drive back.

Bambera's Jeep had no problems with the bridge, so she drove straight towards the high street. The Doctor, Amy and Carol had squeezed in with her and the Doctor pulled out the slim gadget he had been using earlier as soon as they got near. It made a variety of bleeps and low pitched hums in time to the flashing of the green light at the end.

"Hmm," the Doctor said.

"What?" Bambera asked.

He looked up as she executed a rapid turn. "I'm picking something up. She's been here, the Morrigan."

For a moment he paused, staring into the distance. "I feel like I'm missing something. There's an idea, somewhere in here, on the tip of my tongue. You mentioned something earlier. I just can't quite place it yet."

"We're here," Bambera announced.

The high street was empty of cars, but not deserted. Here and there, huddled forms draped with coats lay on the pavement; Bambera assumed they were the bodies. Elsewhere there were clusters of people sitting on the kerb with blankets over their shoulders, holding polystyrene cups. A few emergency workers - mixed police, paramedics and firemen - in fluorescent jackets moved between the groups. It looked like the town's entire force of emergency personnel had been brought in, few as they were, and Bambera noted that a couple of them were dressed in an odd mix of official uniform and casual trainers.

She parked the Jeep at the side of the road and everyone spilled out. An older woman wearing a police uniform under her bright jacket hurried over.

"Inspector Gold," the woman said, holding out a hand. "Are you the help from Caernarfon?"

Bambera shook her hand briskly. "Brigadier Bambera, United Nations Intelligence Taskforce."

The inspector's eyes widened.

"Can you tell me what happened?" Bambera asked.

"I wasn't here," Gold said. "I was in the station. We started to get reports of a woman walking down the high street shooting lightning out of her fingers. By the time we got here, the woman had disappeared and there were four bodies. The rest are shocked rather than hurt, the paramedics say."

"Did you get a description of the woman?" the Doctor asked.

"Apparently she's tall, looks like something out of a bad fantasy movie, and acts like it as well," Gold said. "I'm not sure what to believe, quite honestly, but she's done some serious damage."

"Why would she leave bodies this time?" Bambera asked.

"This time?" Gold asked.

Bambera asked her, looking to the Doctor instead. "Is this her escalation of whatever is going on?"

"Could be," the Doctor said. "Brigadier, I-"

Her radio chose that moment to crackle and then Captain Leblanc's voice came through.

"Base to Greyhound, come in Greyhound," Leblanc said.

Bambera thumbed the radio on. "Greyhound here. What's going on?"

"Call from Caernarfon," Leblanc said. "They've had a visit as well. Three dead."

Any hopes of keeping things out of the media vanished with that and Bambera felt a headache starting.

"Is that it?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," Leblanc said. "There were another five killed in Llyn Padern."

"Get some people out there," Bambera said. "And put in a call to HQ, we're going to need more men out here if this goes on."

"Very good, ma'am."

"Greyhound out."

"Doctor, I hope you have some clever ideas," Bambera said. "This can't carry on."

"You're quite right," the Doctor said.

"Would someone explain to me what's going on?" Inspector Gold demanded.

Clearing away and debriefing the witnesses took all night, even though Bambera had all her men distributed across all three sites. The evening news carried the Caernarfon story accompanied by long-lens photos of the bodies huddled in the corner of a square. The BBC journalists were suitably vague, not really committing to anything apart from the confirmed deaths and sprinkling their report with phrases designed to sound important without actually saying anything. The commercial channels were a little less vague, implying that the murderer had been a patient at the local psychiatric hospital, but still quite cagey.

The morning newspapers were horrendous and Bambera had to spend most of the morning on the telephone with the Minister. Headlines on the tabloids screamed about manhunts, psychotic lunatics and the News of the World printed a surprisingly accurate eye-witness statement from Llyn Padern. The only good thing about it was that it appeared in the News of the World, giving it even less credence than the same report would have had in the Sun, so Bambera felt fairly safe in assuming that most people would assume that story was utter rubbish.

It was the only bright spot to her morning.

After the long interview with higher-ups, Bambera discovered that the Doctor and Amy were nowhere to be found. Nobody could find the TARDIS and they had not been seen since the early hours. Everyone thought that they had got a lift back from Caernarfon with someone else. Adding to that, UNIT did not have enough qualified pathologists for all the post-mortems and Bambera was reluctant to involve local pathologists and make the control of information even harder. Her scientific team took samples and investigated all they could, but their work was limited by the facilities and Bambera had to do a lot of fast talking to get Bangor University to lend them some labs.

Bambera drove between the hospital where the bodies had been taken and the university several times through that day, stopping at Llangol to pick up messages and enquire about the Doctor periodically. It seemed that there was always someone who needed her presence either to show her something or solve a problem and yet they made no progress. She finally gave into exhaustion as the sun set behind heavy, rain-laden clouds and slept on a camp bed in the village hall until the men who had been patrolling the village through the night clumped in heavily.

A quick change of uniform and some cold water splashed on her face revived her a little and Bambera sat down at her desk to read through all the reports that had come in through the night.

Knowing why she was throwing up did not make Carol any happier. It added a weight to it, a feeling of mild panic each time she thought about the pregnancy that only made the nausea worse. There was a sense of time running out that she could not understand because there was no way that she could be more than a few weeks gone. She had plenty of time to decide what to do.

Normally she would have talked through decisions as big as this with Rhys. He was her rock, her shoulder to cry on and the one person who was always on her side. The problem was that this was something far outside his experience and she felt odd about telling him until she knew how she felt about it. Their twin-link, as she thought of it, had seen them through so many changes but this was something he could not share with her.

Also, she was slightly worried that he might track down Paul and do something they would all regret. None of this was Paul's fault, not really. They had been careful and something had obviously gone wrong despite all their precautions.

The scent of bacon and toast wafted up from the kitchen downstairs and Carol's stomach heaved again even though she had nothing left.

It was the unfairness of it that really made Carol unhappy. She was not one of those teenagers who didn't know one end of a condom from the other. This whole thing was the kind of situation she had always prided herself on avoiding. She was a scientist, a career woman who would only take a break from it all when she chose to, not before.

Carol had lain awake half the night worrying about her job with UNIT. There was nothing else she wanted to do, nowhere else that she could see and experience all the things that UNIT had shown her, but it was hardly the kind of job that gave someone time to raise a family.

When she finally had a child, she wanted to be there properly for it. That was the life that her parents had given her, the mother who stayed home to give her and Rhys everything they needed, who helped with homework, cooked meals and played games with them. How could she do that when she might need to fly across the world for UNIT at a moment's notice?

How could Paul do that?

Did she even want that kind of relationship with Paul?

Carol washed her mouth out with cold water from the bathroom tap and wiped her face. She looked in the mirror and assessed herself critically, deciding that the pallor and black circles under her eyes were deeply unattractive but there was nothing she could really do about it. Make-up had never been something she had really 'got'. The pub landlady had kindly done her laundry, so Carol pulled on a clean shirt and trousers and was pleased to find that her nausea seemed to be settling a little. As she descended the stairs, her stomach wobbled a little as the bacon smell grew stronger but she was able to get through the pub and out to the fresh air without incident.

Somewhere in the distance Carol heard a wheezing sound like overstressed engines that seemed to rise in pitch until it disappeared with a faint clunk.

The Doctor and Amy were waiting outside the village hall. Amy looked bright and healthy, although her skirt made her legs look incredibly long and Carol eyed her hair with jealousy again. Why did some people get hair like that while her hair was a shade of red that would never flatter anyone?

Carol smiled cautiously at the pair and let Amy draw her back a little as they went in.

"Are you OK?" Amy asked not-quite-casually.

"I'm fine," Carol said. "Really."

"Where the hell have you been?" Brigadier Bambera roared as soon as she caught sight of the Doctor.

He looked a little startled. Amy glared.

"Doctor, I thought you said we'd only be gone a couple of hours," Amy said.

"It's been at least thirty-six since anyone saw you," the Brigadier said.

"Ah," the Doctor said awkwardly.

"He's been thinking," Amy said. "He likes to hang around star nurseries, he says the view helps his brain. Apparently *someone* still can't steer."

"Thank you, Pond, that's very helpful," the Doctor said irritably.

This was one of those conversations that Carol was fairly certain she was supposed to understand, except it was completely bonkers. Although she did remember reading or maybe hearing something once about a scientific adviser years ago who had some odd ideas.

Then she reminded herself that a creature claiming to be the Morrigan, a creature out of ancient myth, had murdered twelve people two days ago and something else had killed nine little boys a couple of days before that. Her definitions of 'normal' and 'rational' appeared to need some reworking.

"Did this 'thinking' actually do anything?" Bambera asked, apparently willing to let go of the long disappearance if it had produced something useful.

The Doctor brightened up. "Yes! Probably. I think. Is there anything that the most recent victims have in common?"

Bambera shrugged. "They're all Welsh."

"Exactly!" the Doctor said. "They're all Welsh."

"They're all female," Carol added, wondering whether it could really be so simple.

The Doctor grinned at her. "They are indeed. And the previous victims - not killed by the Morrigan - were all male. She first killed a woman at a stately home and our other killer started it all with a man on the M25."

"So they're picky about gender," Bambera said.

"And nationality," the Doctor added. "I bet that if you looked carefully, everyone who has died came from Wales. Probably they probably all came from an area within a fifty mile radius of this village."

"Gwen James came from Llanberis and Janet Davies was from Betws-y-Coed," Carol said slowly. "I don't know about the mechanics, but David Owens was adopted. We didn't see any point to checking his original birth certificate. At the time, it didn't seem like that would be significant."

"Of course you didn't," the Doctor said. "Why would you? It's so obvious that nobody would notice it."

"I don't really see how this helps us," Bambera said.

"Where does Mrs. Bell live?" the Doctor asked.

The abrupt change of subject caught everyone off-guard.

"Why?" Bambera asked.

"She's the only real witness to what happened in the school," the Doctor said. "I want to ask her a few questions."

"I can show him," Carol said.

Bambera considered it and then she shook her head. "I'll take him. See if you can get hold of David Owens' adoption records and talk to your brother, his report is total gibberish."

The Doctor grinned and rubbed his hands together. "Lead on, Brigadier."

Mrs. Bell answered the door at the second knock and she smiled cautiously when she saw the Brigadier.

"We need to ask you some more questions," Bambera said. "May we come in?"

"Of course, dear," Mrs. Bell said.

She led the way to the small living room, which seemed much smaller than it had a few days ago. Bambera remembered the way that the Doctor always seemed to have so much energy that he occupied more space than seemed normal for a short man. This Doctor was much taller and the energy he emitted seemed even more overwhelming in the small room.

"Would you like some tea?" Mrs. Bell asked.

The Doctor smiled merrily. "Tea! Perfect, that would be lovely. Great stuff for getting the old synapses firing."

Mrs. Bell gave him a slightly confused look but hurried away to make tea anyway. Amy spent a moment bending to look at the photographs on the low unit and then she joined the Brigadier on the settee. As before, Mrs. Bell had a book and a workbag next to her armchair so the Doctor took the other. They all sat in slightly awkward silence. Amy seemed about to start a conversation a couple of times, but she subsided each time. It was a relief to hear the rattle of teacups as Mrs. Bell returned. She poured for everyone, doctoring with sugar and milk as requested, and then looked expectantly at the Brigadier.

"Mrs. Bell, this is my scientific advisor," Bambera said, "ah, Doctor John Smith and his assistant, Amy Pond. They have some questions."

"I'm not sure how helpful I've been," Mrs. Bell said.

The Doctor smiled reassuringly at her. "You've been very helpful already."

A faint flush appeared on Mrs. Bell's cheeks.

"You're the only one who heard it all," Amy added.

"I'm the only crazy one," Mrs. Bell said shrewdly. "I'm sure that's what you've been thinking."

"No," Amy said, "of course not. Ah, Doctor?"

"Absolutely not crazy," the Doctor said. "No question."

"I did wonder whether I should have said anything," Mrs. Bell said hesitantly. "It sounds so odd and none of my colleagues heard anything."

"You might be the only person who could hear anything," the Doctor said.

"Or the only one admitting to it," Amy added with a sly grin.

Oddly, it was that comment that seemed to finally relax Mrs. Bell and she laughed.

"Yes, well, I'm sure my younger colleagues probably have more care for their futures," she said. "I'll be retiring in two years. My kind of teaching isn't needed any more and it's time for me to go."

"You're probably the teacher that everyone remembers, though," Amy said. "I bet half those pictures are from children you've taught."

Mrs. Bell smiled proudly. "I have grandchildren, but there's something special about seeing children you taught take their places in the world. I've taught some of their children as well, the ones who stayed around the villages."

"Were there ever any odd stories or rumours about the children here?" the Doctor asked. "Funny parents, that kind of thing?"

There was a canny look in Mrs. Bell's eyes and Bambara had the strange feeling that this was what the last few days had been leading up to.

"You mean the fairy children?" she asked.

At Amy's widened eyes, Mrs. Bell chuckled. "Old stories, my dear. Probably a lot of codswallop to cover up babies out of wedlock, but some people put some store in it still."

"What are fairy children?" Bambara asked.

Mrs. Bell took a sip of her tea. "There have been stories about them for years, centuries probably. They vary a bit. Fairy women appearing and living with a mountain man, disappearing and then a babe left at his door nine months later. Fairy wives who disappear or turn to stone when their husbands break the rules. Elf knights who visit young virgins. There was an entire clan of redheaded boys who were supposed to be descended from one fairy wife."

"Did any of the children who died have any connection to those stories?" the Doctor asked.

Mrs. Bell thought deeply. "I can't be sure, but I think I remember my ma telling me that Daffyd Jones took a fairy wife, who disappeared after their second son died. That would have been when my ma was a little girl. Three of the boys who died were descended from Daffyd. I think Evans the Post's mother was also supposed to have been got from a fairy wife. There are stories like that all over this area. You'd probably be hard-pressed to find a village without a few oddities."

"What about you, Mrs. Bell?" the Doctor asked.

"No fairy blood in my family," Mrs. Bell said. "Just a touch of the sight, so my Nan claimed."

The Doctor grinned triumphantly. "Told you."

Amy rolled her eyes and Bambara thought she might have stuck her tongue out if they had not been with Mrs. Bell.

"You said that you heard hounds," the Doctor asked. "Just before the children died, you said that you heard dogs howling. Can you describe it?"

Mrs. Bell frowned. "Like dogs, but not really. They sounded nastier, evil. There was something in the noise that wasn't quite right for normal dogs."

"Like they weren't really dogs, just things that reminded you of dogs," the Doctor said.

"Yes, that's it exactly," Mrs. Bell said. "It's the closest I can come. They don't really sound like wolves and I don't like to think of wolves as evil. Whatever it was that I heard, it was evil and it hated us."

She slowly put her teacup down, her face clouding.

"They hated us, but they couldn't get to us, not really," Mrs. Bell said. "I think that they could have killed everything in that school, but something was holding them back and they hated that even more than they hated us. The howling was angry as well as hungry. That's why the children were so frightened."

"Interesting," the Doctor said quietly.

Mrs. Bell shot him a sharp look. "You know something, don't you? You know what they are."

The Doctor said nothing for a moment and then he said, "I think so. You're lucky you didn't look out of the window."

"What was...?" Mrs. Bell trailed off.

"It's not really a Welsh story," the Doctor said. "Everyone knows it, though. The Wild Hunt."

"That's just a story," Mrs. Bell protested.

"All stories have a beginning," the Doctor said. "The oldest ones have the darkest. Brigadier, we need to go."

Bambera stood, burning with questions that she knew would need to wait until they were somewhere more private.

As they left the cottage, the Doctor put his hand on Mrs. Bell's arm.

"If you hear howling again," he said, "don't look out of the window. Go somewhere with no windows, close your ears. Don't come out until everything is over."

Mrs. Bell nodded. "I understand, Doctor."

"Yes, I think you might."

Carol was talking with Rhys when the Doctor, Bambera and Amy returned. The first thing she noticed was that there was an intensity to the Doctor that had not been there earlier, as though he was now focusing everything he had into one place rather than being torn in several directions. He was muttering under his breath and the Brigadier and Amy followed in his wake, shooting each other worried glances.

"Red-headed scientist!" the Doctor called as he neared Carol's desk. "Girl scientist. I don't know you."

"Doctor Rhys Thomas," Rhys introduced himself, holding out a hand.

The Doctor ignored him. "Did you find out about that first victim?"

Carol nodded. "He was born somewhere around here - looks like it was in a maternity place that closed years ago - and his adoption was processed in Cardiff. The family probably moved soon after they adopted."

"It all fits," the Doctor said. "The Morrigan has probably been coming to this area for centuries - possibly thousands of years - and so have others."

"But why?" Amy asked.

"Procreation," the Doctor said. "All the old stories describe half-fairy children left here, most of them with no special powers at all, who live their lives just like everyone else. Every now and again, the stories are about human babies that are taken and exchanged for dead or dying fairy babies. The idea of fairies that can't create their own children but need to take human children and raise them as their own often appears."

"And that means?" Amy raised an eyebrow.

"If we assume that all those myths and legends have a basis in fact and the Morrigan's people are the originators of the stories," the Doctor said, "then it means that the Morrigan's people can't procreate on their own. They need humans in their fertility cycle in some way."

Carol frowned. "Why would a race of creatures be dependent on another species in that way?"

The Doctor shrugged. "It's not really important. They might not have been originally, but something happened and they discovered, probably by accident, that humans were the answer to their problem."

"I can buy that years ago," Amy said, "but wouldn't someone notice that a bunch of aliens were living here?"

"Not if the human DNA bred true in most cases," the Doctor said. "If only a very few actually expressed the alien DNA in any way, then they'd stay undetected unless very sophisticated tests were done. As the years went by and the half-humans bred with full humans, and so on and so on, the alien DNA would have been diluted. The Morrigan and her people probably come back every now and again to see whether any of the children are suitable for them to take back or to seed more of their DNA."

Amy made a face. "You mean they come for cross-dimensional booty calls?"

The Doctor looked a little nonplussed for a moment. "Well, ah..."

"That's all very interesting, Doctor, but what does it mean for us?" Bambera asked irritably. "And what is the Wild Hunt?"

The phrase rang a bell in Carol's memory, of her father telling her stories when she was a child that sometimes frightened her so much that she had to sleep with lights on for days.

"It's the heart of the problem, I suspect," the Doctor said. "If I'm right, the Morrigan and her opponent are killing each other's children. She seems to be killing the female descendants, he's killing the males. Possibly they each believe that only that gender can carry their genetic material through the generations. They might be right, we have no way to know."

Carol suddenly went cold. "They're murdering each other's children?"

"Yes," the Doctor said.

"Why?"

"Now that's the real mystery," the Doctor said. "What drove them to it?"

"The Wild Hunt, Doctor," Bambera reminded him.

"Yes, the Wild Hunt," the Doctor said. "It's an old story, not just in Wales but all over the place. The Hunt crosses the skies and anyone who sees it, dies. In Wales, it would be called Cwn Annwn, the hounds of Annwn."

"What is Annwn?" Bambera asked.

"Land of eternal youth and wonder," the Doctor said. "Almost like a heaven to the Welsh."

"That doesn't sound so bad," Carol commented.

"In English folklore, the Wild Hunt was led by Herne the Hunter," the Doctor continued. "Gwynn ap Nudd is supposed to have led Cwn Annwn. The Morrigan's people seem to have been all over the place, if we assume that Herne and Gwynn are the same creature. It's the hounds that are usually considered deadly. Sometimes they're supposed to be spirits, sometimes hounds from hell."

"You don't believe that, do you?" Amy asked sceptically.

"Psychic projections, probably," the Doctor said. "Perhaps enhanced by technology. It would appear to be magic to your ancestors. Perhaps it is. There's no telling what they're really capable of."

"How do we fight it?" Bambera said. "I've got a full range of-"

"We can't fight it," the Doctor said. "Not with your weapons. This isn't something we fight."

Bambera frowned. "How did I know you'd say that? What do we do?"

It was as though something suddenly connected in Carol's head. "We talk to the Morrigan. She's the one who can stop it."

The Doctor grinned at her. "Got it in one. Good girl."

His praise made her feel oddly pleased, even though she barely knew him and did not know why she would want to impress him.

"How do we find the Morrigan?" Carol asked.

"We call her," the Doctor said and hurried out.

The Doctor was standing in the centre of the village green when Carol, Rhys, Amy and Bambera caught up with him. Bambera drew her handgun and held it, pointing down to the grass but obviously trying to be ready this time. Carol shivered. The wind had picked up again.

For a long moment, the Doctor simply stood there with his eyes closed and his hand held loosely at his sides. It was the first time that Carol had seen him so still. He was usually filled with energy. His stillness seemed to unnerve Amy because she edged closer to Carol and wrapped her arms around her chest. The wind caught her hair and the red strands glinted in the sunlight that appeared through the clouds racing overhead.

Then the Doctor opened his eyes and shouted, "Morrigan!"

Nothing happened at first. Carol released the breath that she had been unconsciously holding and then something in the air changed. The wind died and electricity seemed to move around them. There was a loud crack, almost but not quite like thunder, and Carol's eyes blurred for a moment. When her vision cleared, the Morrigan stood before the Doctor and her eyes were filled with rage.

"You dare to summon me!" she said, in a voice that was rich and beautiful yet grated on the ears.

"I dared," the Doctor said. "You didn't have to answer."

The Morrigan seemed to grow taller. "You know the ways, the names and the passes; I had to answer. These are the rules we set."

"And you can't break those rules," the Doctor said, "without breaking your contract with this world."

"Yes," the Morrigan spat. "Few now know those passes. Who are you?"

"I'm the Doctor," he said.

"You aren't human," the Morrigan said. "I have no memory of your kind."

"That makes us even," the Doctor said. "I've been visiting this world for a long time and I've never seen your kind before."

"We do not involve ourselves," the Morrigan said grandly. "We take what we need and then we remove ourselves."

The Doctor held up a finger. "That's interesting. What do you take?"

The Morrigan stared at him for a long moment and then she refocused her attention. Carol felt the Morrigan's eyes on her and she shivered. It was impossible to meet the Morrigan's eyes: her eyes were like a star-filled void and the ancient chill of space radiated from her. Everything that Carol was seemed to be examined as the Morrigan looked at her, sifted and panned and found her wanting.

"Your child grows well," the Morrigan said eventually. "He will be strong."

Carol could feel Rhys' stare, but she lifted her chin defiantly and spread her feet slightly, prepared to run if the time came. That was when she knew that, whatever else might happen, she would keep her baby.

The Morrigan smiled. "Brave child."

"What's your interest in her child?" the Doctor asked suspiciously.

"That is not your concern," the Morrigan said. "What is your interest in this world?"

"I like it," the Doctor said briefly. "We found your handiwork. Why?"

"You need to ask why I would avenge the death of my children?" the Morrigan asked. "If you must ask, then you must not know the agony of parenthood."

"I do know," the Doctor said, his youthful face suddenly looking old. "I understand."

"Gwynn's children paid the price of his actions," the Morrigan said.

"Why?" the Doctor asked.

"It is the way," the Morrigan said.

"So you kill his children, he kills yours, you go round and round in a circle killing more each time until there are none left," the Doctor said. "What then?"

It was as though the Morrigan suddenly stopped and had to think. "Then? Afterwards?"

"Yes, when all your children are dead and there are no children to take your revenge on," the Doctor said. "What will you do?"

"I..."

The Morrigan hesitated.

"How did it start?" the Doctor asked in a gentler tone.

A far-off look spread over the Morrigan's face. "Gwynn had a daughter. She was beautiful. My son fell in love and they were happy. For years, they were happy and they commanded our fleets together."

"And then?" the Doctor asked.

"War came," the Morrigan said, her face hardening. "They were our battle commanders and they led the fleets to victory, commanding our forces together so perfectly that even the enemy commanders had to praise them. Gwynn's daughter fought the enemy's greatest fighter on the world of Gator's Gate and she defeated him. Then disaster came. A dagger in the dark and my son died. In my anger, I struck Gwynn's daughter and she died. She should have protected him! Gwynn could not take his revenge in our universe: my only true son was already dead. He came here for his slaughter."

"So you started killing and couldn't stop," the Doctor said. "It's very sad." He paused and then he drew himself up, seeming to become taller and strangely fierce. "It's very stupid. It won't bring them back."

"It is all we have," the Morrigan said.

"That's not an excuse," the Doctor said.

"He'll release the Hunt soon," the Morrigan said. "He has done it in the past and he will do it again in the future. All of this, everything he has done and forced me to do, has been the prelude. His Hunt will be let loose upon this world. If he does that, even he can't control it."

"So help me to stop him," the Doctor said. "You're the only one who can."

The Morrigan stared at him for a long moment and Carol was aware of the wind beginning to grow again, tugging at her hair and chilling her through her sweater.

"He allowed one of his Hounds to kill your children," the Doctor said. "Do you want to see the full Hunt?"

The Morrigan sighed. "His Hunt will not just kill my children. All will die. His grief only grows with each death."

The Doctor snorted. "Morrigan, you brought this. Yes, what he did was wrong and he shouldn't have gone after your children but you have met him at each turn and escalated it as quickly as he did. If his Hunt is released, it's your doing as much as it is his."

Her eyes hardened. "Who are you to judge us?"

"I'm the Doctor," the Doctor said. "And this world is protected. If you harm this world, you'll have me to answer to."

"Am I supposed to tremble in fear?"

The Doctor smiled, and it was the coldest, most chilling smile that Carol had ever seen. "Worse creatures than you have."

There was a long, breathless moment where the Morrigan glared at him and Carol almost found herself praying to the god she did not believe in. The wind dropped completely and everything was still. Everything seemed to be focused on the two unearthly beings before her, on their unspoken conflict of wills.

Then the Morrigan screamed. It was a terrible sound, full of anger and hatred and loneliness. The kind of sound that human ears were not supposed to hear and Carol's head exploded into pain that forced everyone except the Doctor to their knees.

Abruptly, the scream stopped and when Carol looked up the Morrigan was no longer there.

Bambera holstered her gun, folded her arms and looked at the Doctor.

"Is there a plan?" she asked.

The Doctor frowned and fiddled with a long, silver pen-like thing that rattled metallically. "Plan. Yes. I'm working on it."

"From the sounds of things, we don't have much time," Bambera said. "I've got men and fire-power, but none that is going to work against these things, is it?"

"Five rounds rapid and all that?" the Doctor asked. "No, not really going to help. What we need to do is delay Gwynn until the Morrigan decides to do something."

"You think she will?"

The Doctor shrugged. "I don't know, but I hope she will."

"Great, we're dealing with the potential death of thousands and he's hopeful," Bambera muttered.

"What we need is to contain him," the Doctor said. "It won't last long, but maybe that will give us time."

"How do we do that?"

"If the Hunt is a psychic projection - albeit a strong one - then we need a psychic dampener," the Doctor said. "I suppose you don't have one hanging around? No, didn't think so. Well, we'll just have to build one. Do you have any tin foil?"

For the next hour, Bambera fielded requests for a series of unusual objects (a kettle, fifty steel forks and the innards of a defibrillator among others) and watched as the Doctor directed Amy, Rhys and

Carol to put them together. He disappeared for a few minutes and returned with an array of odd bits of machinery that were added to the thing he was building. Bambera tried to do the bits of construction that the Doctor gave her, but he quickly took the things away from her and declared that she was much more useful as a supervisor. She tried not to resent the implication of that too much.

There was a lot of whispering going on between Carol and Rhys, the kind of angry whispering that people did when they were having an argument but did not want anyone to notice. Amy kept glancing over at them with a concerned expression and Bambera knew enough of human nature to be able to predict what it was. Rhys seemed like the type to be a protective older brother and, to the best of Bambera's knowledge, Carol was unmarried and probably single.

A protective brother - any sibling, really - would have plenty to say. Bambera remembered a similar argument a few years ago with her baby sister. It had all worked out in the end and little Sophie was growing up to be a good kid, but those first weeks had been tense and Bambera had been tempted several times to hunt down the little twerp who had dared to run away from his responsibilities.

The way Carol's eyes flashed and the colour in Carol's cheeks told Bambera that, whatever the consequences might be, she was not letting Rhys brow-beat her into anything she did not want. Bambera silently cheered her on.

The machine was constructed in the middle of the village green, despite the steady drizzle that had started as soon as the Morrigan disappeared. When it was finally finished, everyone stood back and stared at it for a while. It was the strangest contraption that Bambera had ever seen. Forks sprouted in every direction and an umbrella with its covering removed rose from the centre. The interior was a mess of wires, pipes and tubes and the entire thing was fastened to a massive tyre from one of the UNIT lorries. The Doctor stepped forward and flipped a switch with a cautious expression, as though afraid that the entire thing would blow up.

It hummed.

The hum was low, just at the very edge of hearing, but after a couple of minutes Bambera could detect that the hum was very slowly growing louder. Flashes of blue and green light traced through the interior, hints of the power that was starting to build inside, and Bambera frowned.

"How long before this thing is active?" she asked.

The Doctor shrugged. "It's a bit hard to predict, with this equipment."

"What happens if Gwynn releases the Hunt before this thing is working?" Bambera asked.

"Humans, always so pessimistic," the Doctor complained.

Bambera crossed her arms and glared. "You aren't exactly comforting."

"Hmm," was all that the Doctor said.

They stood watching the machine hum for a while and then the Doctor caught Bambera's eye and gestured to her. It was not exactly subtle, but Amy rolled her eyes anyway and allowed the Doctor and Bambera to wander away out of earshot.

"Your scientists," the Doctor said. "The twins. Where are they from?"

Bambera shrugged. "Is it important?"

"I'm not sure yet," he said. "Well?"

It was not something that Bambera ever really thought of unless someone was from outside the UK and needed the extra security procedures that were required despite the official international co-operation that UNIT was supposed to operate under. The Thomases were definitely British so the paperwork had never gone through her office.

"English, I think," Bambera said after a moment.

"Interesting," the Doctor said.

Bambera closed her eyes, trying to remember the personnel file that she had barely glanced at several years ago. There was something that had stood out, something unusual...

"They're adopted," Bambera said. "It wasn't an overseas adoption, that's all I remember."

"Red hair, brother is called Rhys," the Doctor noted. "What are the chances that they're Welsh, hmm? I'd say quite high."

"It's possible," Bambera said. "Their accents are Home Counties, but if they're adopted they might have been moved young. Why?"

"The Morrigan seemed very interested in Carol Thomas' pregnancy," the Doctor said. "That makes me interested."

"Wouldn't it be quite a coincidence if they came from this area?" Bambera said doubtfully.

"It would, wouldn't it?" the Doctor said.

The hum from the machine was still building when the sky suddenly darkened. The light rain seemed to become colder and Carol shivered, despite the olive green kagool that one of the UNIT soldiers had given her. She looked up at the sky, wondering how Gwynn ap Nudd would appear. Her breath steamed in the cold air and the wind died as the sky grew darker and darker until it was almost as black as night. No stars appeared; they were hidden by the clouds.

The Doctor and Bambera returned and he frowned worriedly at the device in the centre of the green.

"How much longer will it take?" Amy asked.

"I don't know!" the Doctor said sharply.

In the distance, just at the edge of hearing, Carol heard a dog howl. It sent goose-bumps down her arms and she hugged the coat closer.

Bambera barked something into a radio and a minute later came the sound of dozens of booted feet running in unison. A troop of UNIT soldiers appeared, running together in perfect harmony with guns slung over their shoulders. They spread out to surround the green, taking the guns in their hands at a single command.

"Bambera, what are you doing?" the Doctor asked.

"Protecting you," Bambera said sharply.

"They won't do any good," the Doctor said.

"I have to do something."

The air grew colder and the rain was icy cold against Carol's skin. The dog's howl came again, closer this time. One of the soldiers, a broad, blond man, stiffened and looked around.

"He's coming," Carol said quietly.

The Doctor frowned at her, but said nothing.

They waited in silence. Carol felt oddly numb, as though all her emotions had become boxed away somewhere. Lightning crackled over the forks bristling from the psychic dampener, blue and purple flashes that left a whiff of ozone in the air. As the hum slowly grew louder, the lights within the dampener seemed to get brighter and the lightning became more frequent. Sometimes the entire thing was briefly encased with the electric glow.

Still they waited, as the air grew so cold that it hurt to breathe and Carol heard the howl of dogs over and over.

The Doctor looked up at the clouds, fiddling with his sonic screwdriver and flicking it on and off. Carol wondered what they would do if Gwynn chose to appear somewhere else, by-passing this village that seemed to be the heart of the Morrigan's power.

A moment later that worry became pointless as, with a crash of thunder, Gwynn ap Nudd appeared.

He was nothing like Carol's imagination. The Herne of her imagination, formed mainly by films and TV, was an older man, broad and bearded, wearing furs and possibly carrying an axe. What stood before her was a young man, barely out of his teens, slim and wiry. He wore clothes of green and brown, covered by a long, sleeveless open robe of deep grey. His black hair was long and loose. The only element that conformed to Carol's imagination was the pair of horns that curled from beneath the hair.

Something moved under the robe near the ground and Carol caught a flash of red fur and eyes that burned deep green.

"Ah, I was starting to get worried that you wouldn't be here," the Doctor said.

Gwynn ap Nudd turned to him and frowned. "Your presence here is not needed."

"Yes, well, you would say that," the Doctor said, and darted towards the dampener.

He pushed a button and the entire thing was suddenly suffused with lightning which crackled from fork to fork and burst forth from the prongs of the umbrella. It arced into the sky, splitting and meeting until the entire village was contained in a cage of lightning.

Gwynn ap Nudd screamed.

"What have you done?" he cried.

"Contained you," the Doctor said.

For a long moment, Gwynn ap Nudd closed his eyes. Then he smiled, slow and cruel.

"You cannot hold me for long, stranger," he said. "I will break your chains shortly and then the world will know my Hunt."

The Doctor drew himself up, suddenly seeming ancient and far more powerful than anyone Carol had ever met.

"I'll hold you for long enough," he said. "It's time you called a truce, Gwynn ap Nudd. You can't go around killing people left, right and centre."

"You know nothing of my pain," Gwynn said.

The Doctor waved a finger. "Oh, no, I know everything. That's why I say that you can't continue."

Then he raised his sonic screwdriver and a beam of green light shot from it as he shouted the Morrigan's name. The hound at Gwynn ap Nudd's feet shifted, the robe that covered it seeming to shift colour like an oil slick. Gwynn roared his fury and Carol abruptly felt something cold slide through her veins, as though she was suddenly filled with ice.

The Morrigan appeared in an instant, her face filling with fury when she saw Gwynn.

"What are you doing?" she shouted.

The Doctor raised both hands, as though to keep the warring creatures apart. "Protecting this world. It's time for both of you to meet. You need to find a way to resolve your differences that doesn't involve mass slaughter."

There was complete silence.

"Well, that went better than I expected," the Doctor muttered.

"Never," Gwynn ap Nudd declared. "She murdered my son. I shall not rest while any child of hers lives."

"I must protect my children," the Morrigan said.

The hound at Gwynn's feet grew more restless, whimpering slightly. Carol cursed as nausea twisted her stomach.

"I think we can all agree that this won't be easy," the Doctor said calmly. "You both have quite valid grievances. However, I don't think mass slaughter will solve anything."

"If he will cease murdering my children," the Morrigan said, "then I will agree to a truce."

"I took a vow," Gwynn said. "My daughter must be avenged."

The hound began to growl and Carol sank to her knees as pain lanced through her belly.

"Yes, yes, it's all very noble and tragic," the Doctor said. "Mythical, even. I'm not going to let you do this, though."

"How do you propose to stop us?" Gwynn asked.

"I don't," the Doctor said. "But you'll stop."

"Why?"

At Gwynn's feet, the hound growled again and his red tail slipped from beneath the robe. Carol moaned softly as the hound's burning green eyes caught hers and held her immobile.

"Can you kill one of your children?" the Doctor asked.

Gwynn frowned. "My hounds will not kill my children."

"What if one of your children is carrying one of hers?" the Doctor said, pointing towards Carol.

Pain was fogging her mind, but Carol still felt the shock of recognition as the Doctor's words triggered memories.

"It cannot be," Gwynn said.

The Morrigan smiled triumphantly, her face filled with cruel pleasure.

"Oh, but it is," she said. "She carries my child and your Hunt will kill her as surely as it will kill the child. What will it be, son of Nudd? She is not a true child, will you let her die?"

Emotions that Carol could not guess at twisted Gwynn's face, but the pain in her belly eased as the hound retreated under his master's robe.

There was a rattle around the Green as Bambera's men raised their guns to their shoulders and prepared to fire.

"Bambera," the Doctor said sharply. "Brigadier, tell your men to stand down. This is delicate enough as it is."

Bambera looked as though she wanted to argue, but she met the Doctor's eyes and after a moment made a gesture to her soldiers. They lowered their guns slightly.

"Well, what's it going to be?" the Doctor asked. "Continue your fight here and kill another of your children, or take your fight away from this world?"

"I will fight you," the Morrigan said. "At the ancient place, just you and I. We can meet in single combat and resolve this with one stroke."

"You will agree to that?" Gwynn said. "No trickery?"

The Morrigan inclined her head. "I will."

"You will remain in that shape?" Gwynn continued. "I have heard of your tricks."

The Morrigan's eyes flashed. "I will."

"We will be armed alike and fight until one of us shall yield?" Gwynn asked.

"Three times I say, I will," the Morrigan said.

"Then it is agreed," Gwynn said. "I will meet you on the ancient grounds and we will make a fair fight. You have declared yourself three times, you are bound."

"Neither of you will bring your conflicts here again," the Doctor said. "I'll know if you do."

"How can you stop us?" the Morrigan asked arrogantly. "This device is not capable."

"I stopped you this time," the Doctor said. "I'll always be able to stop you."

For a moment everything teetered and Carol wondered whether they were all about to die despite the truce that the Doctor had apparently forced. Then the Morrigan laughed.

"You are a worthy opponent," she said. "Perhaps I will see you again."

There was a flash of lightning and she disappeared.

Carol pushed herself up, shivering in the cold that lingered in the air. A hand appeared before and she took it, allowing Gwynn ap Nudd to pull her to her feet. His eyes were a dark, mossy green, as unlike the Morrigan's as anything could be and yet she felt that he was equally dangerous. He kept her hand for a long moment and she was surprised to see a tear roll slowly down his cheek.

"My daughter," Gwynn said.

"I have parents," Carol said.

"Do not worry," Gwynn said. "The Morrigan will not take your child. He is not a true son, despite carrying her inheritance matter. Perhaps his great-great grandchild will be a true son, but his inheritance is too recent. As is yours."

With those cryptic words, he vanished before he eyes.

A moment later the psychic dampener overloaded and exploded in a shower of sparks.

"Well, that went quite well, I think," the Doctor said.

Carol swayed on her feet, her face grey with exhaustion and the memory of pain, and Bambera leapt to catch her. Amy caught her other arm and together they supported the scientist despite her murmured protests. Within a minute, the rain slackened off and then stopped as though a tap had been turned off.

"Is that it?" Bambera asked.

The Doctor twirled his sonic screwdriver in his fingers and slipped it into a pocket.

"That's it," he confirmed cheerfully.

Bambera nodded to her men. "Stand down."

Guns rattled as the soldiers put them on their shoulders and tried to look at ease, even though a few of them looked thoroughly rattled by recent events.

"Sergeant!" Bambera barked. "Let's not frighten the villagers any further than they already are. Take your men back to the camp and report to Captain Leblanc."

The sergeant snapped a salute and led the men away at a fast trot. Bambera looked down at Carol, who was wilting and did not seem entirely aware of her surroundings.

"Doctor, can you give me a hand?"

With the Doctor's help, Bambera got Carol into the pub and up the steep steps to the room she had been given. They divested her of her kagool and boots, but left everything else intact and draped an afghan over her. Carol sank immediately into sleep, her face finally relaxing out of the pinched, unhappy look she had worn all day.

The Doctor passed his sonic screwdriver over her and mouthed "she's fine", so Bambera decided it was best to let her sleep things off and followed him out of the room. Getting everything sorted out was going to be a long, difficult job and Bambera needed to get started.

It was dark when Carol woke and it took her a few minutes to work out where she was. The memories came back slowly of the village green, the impossible creatures that they had faced down and the pain as Gwynn's hound started to do whatever the Wild Hunt's hounds did. Even though it was too early yet to feel anything, it was reassuring to place her hands over her belly where the baby was growing.

She checked the clock on the bedside table, which told her that it was nearly midnight. Her stomach growled hungrily and she realised that she had barely eaten all day. It was a pub, so Carol reasoned that there had to be food somewhere and set off to investigate.

The main room of the pub was dimly lit, just a couple of lights above the bar and a lamp on a table in the corner. Bambera, Amy and the Doctor sat around the table. They had a pile of bags of crisps, chocolate bars and pre-packed pasties and sausage rolls in the centre of the table. Amy grinned when she spotted Carol and hopped up to slip behind the bar.

"What can I get you, love?" Amy asked in a very bad Cockney impression.

Carol smiled. "Are you sure we're supposed to be helping ourselves?"

Amy nodded. "Pat said we could."

"He's charging UNIT a small fortune for your rooms," Bambera growled. "Free drinks is the least he can do."

"Is there any orange juice?" Carol asked.

"Coming right up," Amy said.

Carol took a seat next to Bambera and grabbed a pasty and a bag of steak flavoured McCoy's. She ate the pasty and half the bag of crisps quickly and snagged a Twirl from the pile for dessert. With the worst of her hunger satisfied, she slowed down to enjoy the rest of her food.

"What's been happening while I was asleep?" she asked.

Bambera selected a bag of salt and vinegar crisps and opened it, saying, "Not much. We should be getting some grief counsellors up here tomorrow. I've given orders for the bodies to be released to their families: there's no sense making them wait. The official story is that the little boys all had food poisoning and the Morrigan was a patient at a local psychiatric hospital who got hold of a Taser. The press seem to be accepting that so far."

"So everything goes back to normal?" Carol asked. "A couple of dozen people get killed by inter-dimensional bad guys and nothing happens?"

"Not nothing," the Doctor said. "We stopped them from killing anyone else. The world isn't ready for the truth."

"It's what has to happen," Bambera said. "Can you imagine what would happen if the truth got out? Most people would think we were insane. The ones who believed it would panic."

"You sound like this kind of thing is a regular occurrence," Carol said.

Bambera and the Doctor exchanged a look.

"I read about the Carbury thing," Carol said. "I thought that was the first time anything like that had happened."

"Inter-dimensional aliens are unusual," Bambera said. "They usually come from this universe."

"Oh." Carol thought for a moment. "That makes more sense, actually."

"It's actually been quite quiet for the last few years," Bambera said. "Back in the seventies, there seemed to be an alien invasion every week."

The Doctor had a mysterious smile. "Yes, well, enjoy this while it lasts."

The look that Bambera shot the Doctor was suspicious, but she said nothing and Carol decided that it had to be something private that was none of her business.

"So what happens next?" Amy asked. "How come none of this ever gets noticed?"

Bambera shrugged. "We'll tie up a few loose ends, make sure that everyone knows their stories, and then we hand over the rest of the clean-up to the local authorities. We've done our bit."

"So you just leave them to get on with things?" Amy asked.

"We have to," Bambera said. "It's not UNIT's remit to hold everyone's hands. I'll make sure the civilian authorities are on-site and everything we've done is cleaned up. After that, we're not supposed to be here."

"What about the Morrigan? And Gwynn? They'll be back one day, can't you stop them?" Amy asked.

Bambera raised an eyebrow. "What do you expect us to do, Miss Pond? We can't hide soldiers behind every hedgerow, waiting for the Morrigan's people to appear and believe me, that's the only way we could catch them. I could put the entire British army up here and they could still slip past us and seduce unsuspecting men and women. We'll do what we can to clean up and then we'll move on."

Carol frowned. "Doctor, my baby. What is it?"

The Doctor's smile was oddly reassuring. "Whatever you want it to be. I don't think you have to worry about the Morrigan returning to take it, if that's what you're afraid of. Her genetic material doesn't seem to be expressed at all."

"You're sure?" Carol asked.

"Absolutely," the Doctor said. "Your baby's DNA is one hundred percent human."

"But my boyfriend isn't the father," Carol said.

"I think that depends," the Doctor said.

"On what?"

Amy smiled. "Why don't you talk to him, see what he says?"

Carol snorted. "I can almost hear the conversation. 'Hi Paul, do you want to be a father to a fairy queen's baby?' He'll think I'm crazy."

"He's in intelligence," Amy said. "What's his security clearance like?"

"Fairly high," Carol said slowly.

"Brigadier Bambera," Amy said. "Are there files that Carol could show Paul? Things that would convince him that she's not mad?"

Bambera nodded. "I could get him some things."

"Give him the choice," Amy said. "He might surprise you."

Carol thoughtfully ate a stick of the Twirl. "Maybe I could try it."

It took Carol a while to track Rhys down the next day. He seemed to be avoiding her and she finally resorted to stealing his laptop - Amy's suggestion, oddly - and holding it hostage until he talked to her. A chicken pot pie and a pint at the pub was the agreed neutral ground and Carol had to remind Rhys twice to get her an orange juice instead of a beer. Then he concentrated hard on the pie for a while, avoiding her eyes.

"Did you see the papers this morning?" Carol asked eventually.

"I suppose the French President nearly getting assassinated is much more important than a few people dying in Wales," Rhys said glumly.

Carol raised an eyebrow.

"Well, we did sort of save the world here," Rhys said. "Or helped to save it, anyway. You'd think the press might have noticed."

"Rhys, do you live in the same reality as the rest of us?" Carol asked.

He had the good sense to look slightly embarrassed.

"I thought someone might say thank you," he said.

"I don't think it works that way."

They were silent for a while and then Rhys sighed.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Carol lowered her fork, feeling a bit pole-axed. "For what?"

Rhys winced. "For all the things I've said about you and Paul. He's not really such a bad guy. I guess."

"Are you just saying that because he didn't knock me up and leave me?" Carol asked slyly.

Twin spots of colour appeared on Rhys' cheeks. "Possibly. I'm not sure that aliens are much better, but I suppose it's something that I can get used to."

"I'm going to tell Paul everything," Carol said. "Who knows? Maybe he'll want to give me a hand anyway. He's not such a bad guy, after all."

She smiled gently. "Not a bad guy at all, really."

"Did you ever wonder about our parents? The genetic ones, I mean, not our real ones," Rhys asked.

Carol shrugged. "Not really. It didn't seem important."

"Maybe we should have been more curious," Rhys said. "Maybe our mother didn't have a Paul to go to. A village like this can't be an easy place to raise children alone."

"It would probably be the worst kind of place," Carol said. "Most of the village would have been convinced that she was a loose woman and treated her like a tramp. The ones like Mrs. Bell might have known what was going on, but how many people these days really believe in fairy tales? Even Mrs. Bell didn't really believe that there are fairy children. To anyone who wasn't living it, the stories must have looked like a convenient excuse for immoral behaviour."

"I'm not sure how I feel about it," Rhys said.

"The Doctor said that we haven't expressed any of the Morrigan's DNA," Carol said. "We're completely human."

"Our father is just Herne the Hunter," Rhys said. "That's going to take a while to wrap my head around."

"I think it might be one of those things that never stops being weird," Carol said.

"I think maybe all of this is the kind of thing where you worry when it gets every day," Rhys said.

Bambra stood in front of the TARDIS two days later with Amy, the Doctor, Rhys and Carol.

"Time to go," the Doctor said. "It's been good to see you again."

"I think that I liked the other one better," Bambera said.

The Doctor beamed. "I grow on people."

"Like fungus?" Amy suggested.

"Thank you, Pond," the Doctor said grumpily.

"You promised me somewhere interesting," Amy said. "Wales isn't interesting."

The Doctor rolled his eyes. "You got mythological beings trying to slaughter everything and all you can say is, Wales is boring?"

"I got fairies," Amy said. "You have an obsession with fairy tales."

She hugged Carol and Bambera heard her whisper something, but it was too quiet to make out.

Bambera stuck out her hand to shake the Doctor's.

"I thought that I'd missed all this," Bambera said. "Thank you."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow.

"The occasional ordinary alien is much easier," Bambera elaborated.

"You like things you can shoot at," the Doctor said.

"They're easier," Bambera said.

"Hmm."

There were hugs and hands to shake and then the Doctor and Amy disappeared into the TARDIS. Wind whipped at Bambera as the machine groaned and wheezed, slowly fading until the field behind it was visible. The sun came out bright and warm as the final strains of the engines went beyond human hearing.

"Right then, you two," Bambera said cheerfully. "Time to move out. We need to look for a village that's disappeared in Northumbria."

Carol was sitting in her garden working her way through a stack of journals, a glass of lemonade sweating on the table beside her. She sometimes wondered where the Doctor and Amy were, what kind of trouble they got themselves into. Brigadier Bambera had chuckled when Carol asked what the Doctor was and a couple of days later there had been some files in Carol's inbox that made for an interesting month of bed-time reading.

They were almost like science-fiction, filled with monsters and old men who plotted to destroy the world every week.

A baby giggled behind her and Carol looked up from her journal to see Paul appearing round the corner of the house, baby Gwen in his arms. Little Charlie toddled behind his father carrying a plastic cup in both hands, an expression of deep concentration on his face.

"Rhys called," Paul said. "He offered to babysit if we want to go out tomorrow. You up for it? We could try that new Italian place down the road."

"Sounds good," Carol said.

"Charlie wants another story," Paul said. "Maybe you could tell him that one about the Yetis again, he loves that one."