

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

The Master's Ashes

by Kevin M. Johnston

An (unofficial) adventure of the Seventh Doctor,

*set between Lungbarrow and the 1996 television movie.*¹

The Master was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The record of his death was filed away in the Matrix, the space-time coordinates of the event were solidified as a fixed point and the manner of his death agreed upon by both the Lady High President of the Time Lords of Gallifrey and the Supreme Emperor of the Daleks. The Old Master was dead as a doornail.

There was only one man who disagreed: the Master's oldest friend and chief rival, the Doctor.

The Doctor had been running from the Master's final death for what felt like a lifetime, ever since that incident at the Doctor's childhood home. That was when President Romana had first told him of the deal she had made; the Daleks would execute the Master for his crimes and the Time Lords would send the Doctor to retrieve the Master's ashes. The High Council had called it the "Act of Master Restitution", no doubt chuckling to themselves afterwards about just how clever they were.

He had told Romana he was going straight to Skaro to pick up the remains of his old friend, but he had no intention of retaining the Time Lords' remote-command program within the TARDIS computers. So moments after leaving Gallifrey, he'd wiped it... with a hammer. Then, the Doctor had gone about his business as usual for a while, adventuring with friends, rewriting time, manipulating events, saving the universe - and every once in a while, he would meet the Master again at earlier points in his life. Whenever he did, the Doctor would try to thwart the Master's destiny, in any way he could.

He remembered Perfugium, where the Master had lived for ten years, his memories and his dark thoughts banished from his mind. If only the Doctor had been stronger, fought harder, perhaps his arch-enemy could have reformed. His execution on Skaro would have faded from history, turned into a faint notion in the Doctor's mind - but the Master did not change, and so the moment remained.

¹ Look for a more specific placement in the **Author's Notes** at the end!

Then, one night, as the Doctor sat at his model train set, trying to get an N-gauge steam engine to move underneath a fourth-dimensional viaduct, a deep, tolling bell struck once in the cloisters of the TARDIS. Within the ringing of the bell, there came a telepathic message from the Master.

"I do hereby make my last will and testament," he said, "If I am to be executed, and thus cruelly deprived of all existence, I ask only that my remains be transported back to my home planet by my rival Time Lord and nemesis, he who calls himself the Doctor."

The Doctor barely looked up and continued tinkering with the engine in his hands, but his companion at the time had burst into the room.

"Did you hear that?" she asked him.

"Whispers on the winds of time," the Doctor said. "The TARDIS is full of ghosts, Cat. Ghosts from the past and the future."

He smiled at her as if it had meant nothing at all, but it had meant everything. Another summons. Time was solidifying. The moment was becoming fixed in his personal timeline. He tried to snap a piece of plastic track into place but the connector broke. His hands trembled. No. He would not lose control.

Instead, he took a deep breath, closed his eyes and made a plan...

The Emperor of Galaxy Twelve looked out at the gleaming golden city and sighed contentedly. His deathdroids marched citizens two by two through the streets, shouting orders in their static-filled droning rumble. He had hated the robots' voice boxes at first, when he'd first landed on the planet Kenaddan two years ago, but now he found them rather soothing, like white noise. Combined with the screams of the citizens and the blasts of laser rifles, it was practically a lullaby.

"Your magnificence," said a voice.

The Emperor spun around, his extravagant robes swirling around him, to see a frog-like creature bowing low to the ground.

"What do you want?!" the ruler rasped.

"I have come to bring you news from the outer worlds. The rebellion is rising on the planet Rasmalon." the frog trilled, his Rs rolling distinctively.

The emperor laughed in recognition. "My dear Doctor! I should have expected you'd come to visit my new empire sooner or later."

The frog sighed and removed its rubber mask, revealing the Doctor's soulful eyes and furrowed brow. "I suppose you *would* see right through my disguise. You are a master of them."

A hideous white grin crossed the ruler's mutilated deathly face, matching the flashes of skull the Doctor could see underneath the ruined flesh.

"I am the Master of all," the corpse replied. "Well, just this galaxy, for now. But I have no need for masks, not anymore. Not when my face is on statues all over the cosmos. I'm even on this system's money"

"I expect there'll be fewer coin collectors about," the Doctor said.

"What do you think of all I have accomplished?" asked the Master.

"I think you've done great things for the literature of Khalamino Beta! Devastation does bring out such depth of emotion and with nothing to do but wait in the bunkers for the nuclear winter to pass, the Khal'mi are becoming quite talented poets. Before, all they had was roses are red, Khalamino Delta is aubergine, that sort of thing," the Doctor said cheerfully. Then, his voice abruptly deepened as he spat, "but other than that, I think what you've done is atrocious."

"If you're here to topple my regime," the Master said, "I'll have you know every star in my empire is rigged with a doomsday device, to be used if I should be deposed or killed. I might even detonate the one in the Khalamino system just for fun, now that I know you're fond of it."

"It's your empire."

The Doctor unzipped the front of his frog-like alien costume and stepped out of it, revealing his red waistcoat and checked trousers. He ran a hand through his long black hair and teetered back and forth on his feet, as if testing his balance.

"But I thought I might offer you a little deal," the Doctor said.

"What could you possibly have to offer me?!"

"A new life! How long could that body have left? How long has it been decaying? Since that business on Terserus?"

"Technically, yes," the Master admitted, "but I am sustained by the energy at the core of this planet. Several worlds in Galaxy Twelve have cores that are rich with vhiseltium. In its gaseous form, it can mimic the lindos hormone and trigger a minor regenerative response in a Time Lord body. I could live forever."

"Sustaining an entire empire simply to keep breathing? It hardly seems worth the effort."

"My continued existence is worth any effort, Doctor."

The Doctor reached into his pocket and held up a small glowing blue sphere. "Do you recognize what this is?"

"A genome print," the Master said. "Carbon-based, mapped onto a three-dimensional surface. What species?"

"Gallifreyan," the Doctor explained, then added with a salesman's patter, "one cloned body, complete with a neat little black beard, just add artron energy! All for the low, low price of allowing the deposed royal Empress back onto the throne!"

"The Empress?" the Master laughed, "I'm sorry to tell you, Doctor, but I-"

"-atomized her? I'm afraid that was a holo-decoy. A bit trickier than a rubber frog mask, but I worked out the bugs just in time."

"But then... you've been here since the beginning? For two years?!"

"Of course! How else could I have removed all the cores from your doomsday devices? Or swapped all your deathdroid guns for teleporter rays? You don't really think I'd let you kill eighty percent of an entire galaxy? No, no, no! All those erstwhile victims were spirited away. They're the Rasmalon rebels. The Army of Ghosts! Has a nice ring to it, don't you think?"

The Master frowned and clenched his bony fists, then slammed his ornate desk angrily.

"Fine!" he exploded. "Give me the genome. Running this wretched little galaxy was getting rather tedious anyway."

The Doctor threw the sphere to the Master and unfolded a beaten-up panama hat from his pocket, replacing it on his head. The Master walked across the room to where an old Earth grandfather clock stood and swung open the casing, revealing the dark interior of his TARDIS beyond it.

"A new set of lives," he mused to himself, "to do with as I choose."

"One life," the Doctor replied. "Didn't I mention? The cloned body is that of a Time Lord directly after his twelfth regeneration. Do with that life what you will, old friend, but I do hope you make the most of it."

The Master, now shrouded by the darkness of his TARDIS, laughed hysterically.

"Hope?!" he cried. "Your hopes mean nothing to me, Doctor! I shall do with this life just what I have done with all my other lives."

With that, he slammed his TARDIS doors and left the Doctor grimacing to himself. He had dared not mention Skaro and the execution to come, but he felt a terrible foreboding that once again, he hadn't changed anything at all.

Mournfully, he looked to the gap where the Master's TARDIS had been, and said, "What you did with all your other lives was waste them..."

Many years later, by some measurements of time and space, the Doctor sat in the deep red armchair next to the controls of his ship. He reclined, his centuries-old bones aching, and grabbed a jelly baby from a crystal bowl. The candles scattered around him lit the massive gothic cathedral that was the TARDIS console room, casting strange shadows all around. For a moment, he thought he heard a voice laughing, caught another singing a familiar song and saw in the shadows the faces of Roz Forrester, Hex Schofield, Melanie Bush...

"The TARDIS is full of ghosts, Cat," he had once said.

And Catherine Broome, yes, he'd lost her too. He lost them all, in the end.

He was on his way to Skaro now, to answer the Master's summons, to fulfill Romana's mission, one she'd had to assign to him twice now. The Doctor's last stop had been Gallifrey to thwart the plan of the Eleven, yet another renegade Time Lord, thereby saving the universe from being consumed by darkness. He had been visiting the cells, allowing his enemy a few last words before he was frozen in time forever, when his old friend Padrac came to pass along Romana's message - to meet her in the Presidential chamber. It wasn't a request, but an order.

When the Doctor arrived in her office, the President of the Time Lords stood with her back to him, peering out over Gallifrey, striking the same pose as the Master had in his palace on Kenaddan. Romana's blonde hair was far longer than it had been when the Doctor had travelled with her, flowing down the back of her crimson robes of state. Even then, the Doctor recalled, she had been regal, well-suited to her current office. With a wistful sigh for those simpler times, he walked over to the window and stood by her side, looking down at his home planet.

"It's almost all back to normal," the Doctor said. "Soon there'll be time tots trespassing in the cloisters and Cardinals whispering in the corridors."

Romana stood silent for a moment, considering how to proceed.

"Doctor," she finally said. "Do you know why Gallifrey allows you your freedom?"

"I figured it was because I have friends in high places," the Doctor replied. "But I've a feeling I'm about to be told otherwise."

"It's because your 'friends in high places' are able to argue that, despite your unorthodox methods, you remain loyal to the people of Gallifrey," she said.

The President of the Time Lords glanced down at the little man beside her. She still looked so young, even now, but her eyes betrayed a great exhaustion. It was probably a side effect of being written out of existence by a being beyond time, then written back in again; the Doctor had experience with that sort of thing.

"If you don't do as we say on a simple little matter like a trip to Skaro," Romana said. "How can I maintain that lie?"

"You make it sound like a seaside holiday," the Doctor laughed. "We've been to Skaro, you and I. It's not exactly Tenerife."

"Please, we both know that the danger isn't keeping you away. You're trying to avoid a fixed point. But you can't. The decision has been made; the Master's execution is recorded in the Matrix and it has been for years!"

The Doctor smiled sadly. "Perhaps, perhaps..."

"Doctor, I can't say I understand your relationship with the Master - I don't know if any of us could - but the way I see it, in your view, he's an old friend and in his, you're an insect whose wings he can't wait to remove. Doctor, regardless of how well-intentioned, clever and dedicated we are, you can't force someone to change who they are. The only person you can truly change is yourself." Romana smiled back at him. "Take it from me. Every day, I make compromises that I resent with people I despise."

"Yes, I've been President of Gallifrey," the Doctor replied. "It's not a career path I'd recommend, but when did you ever listen to me?"

"There are some subjects that you can't change either," Romana snapped. "I've had Technician Fabian input the coordinates for Skaro, 502701.996 on the Dalek Imperial calendar. One hour after the Master's execution and a few centuries before the planet's mysterious destruction that - officially - the Office of the President knows nothing about."

"Only a few centuries? Then I suppose I must be going." The Doctor doffed his hat. "It's always a pleasure to see you, Romana!"

As the ruler of the Time Lords had watched her old friend go, she hoped that he had finally seen reason, but as the Doctor sat in his armchair aboard the TARDIS, hours later, he felt the weight of that reason hanging around his neck.

"Skaro," he said to himself, watching the time rotor rise and fall by candlelight, "Five oh two seven oh one, point nine nine six."

Before he knew it, he was on his feet, retrieving his hat from beside the bowl of jelly babies.

"Skaro," he repeated, looking at the positions of the brass controls on the wooden central console. He unhooked his umbrella from the large industrial beams that arched above him, and whistled a bar of the song he'd heard echoing from the depths of the TARDIS.

"Skaro," he said once again, "Five oh two seven oh one..."

Then he reached with his umbrella to the far side of the console and hooked a switch with the question mark handle.

"Point nine nine..."

He pulled the umbrella back and the readouts changed instantly.

"Two!" he proclaimed triumphantly.

And with a crunch, the TARDIS materialized on the planet Skaro, forty thousand rels - or thirteen hours and twenty minutes - earlier than expected.

When the Master arrived on Skaro, he had done so knowing the sort of reception he would receive. He and the Daleks were old allies and old enemies - funny, he thought, how often those two things went hand-in-hand.

He'd been wandering the cosmos, his essence burning behind these new cloned eyes. Inside, he still longed for revenge against the Doctor, even as he wore the body that his old friend had given him as a gift. So he had drifted aimlessly for a while, crossing timelines, in and out of other universes, witnessing - and often causing - the births and deaths of entire civilizations.

When he got bored, he allied with some Daleks and double-crossed them, the same way he'd done so many times before... but these Daleks were different. They were a race from beyond known history, with squeaky little voices and strange morals. They cared about the purity of time, as well as the purity of their own race - as far as the Master could tell, they came from a time after the Time Lords were long gone. Distantly, he wondered if his hands had been on the button when they'd been blown away. He liked that thought and made a note to revisit it in future.

Whenever he thought he'd escaped them, they were waiting for him just a few materializations later. He couldn't stay on a planet for more than a week without attracting their attention.

Something had to be done about it.

So the Master had materialized on Skaro, stepped out of his TARDIS and yelled, "Yes, it's me - your old ally, the Master! What have you got to say for yourselves, you stupid tin boxes?!"

When the Doctor broke into the Dalek data-vaults a few hours later and watched the footage of the Master's arrival, he simply had to laugh at the incongruity of it all. He scrolled forward to see where the prisoner was taken and where the Master's TARDIS was being held. Then, he checked the time on the device on his wrist - plenty of time still, he thought - and sauntered jauntily through the Dalek city, barely suppressing the urge to whistle.

When the door to the Master's cell opened, the Doctor found it entirely empty.

"Well, well, well!" he cried, "I suppose I'll just have to come back tomorrow!"

The Master stuck his head out from the left side of the door. He was standing on a ledge, waiting to pounce on whatever Dalek had come to take him to the chopping block.

"Doctor?" he said, incredulously, "I can't imagine you've come to save me from these wretched things. Do you know they mean to execute me? Can you imagine? A universe without me?"

"Yes, well, you did antagonize them a little bit, didn't you? With your 'stupid tin boxes' and all that," said the Doctor.

"They're Daleks!" the Master hissed. "They come out of the factory antagonized!"

"Alright, well, come on out of there. We've got some escaping to do."

The Master followed, but glanced around nervously after every step.

"They'll be right behind us, wherever we go," the Master explained. "That's why I came here, to surrender and come to some sort of arrangement. Or possibly to steal some secrets for the Time Lords, then gain their assistance in-"

The Doctor cut him off with a short laugh. "I don't think the Time Lords are going to be very pleased to see you. They're the ones who arranged your execution!"

The Master's face fell. "You mean, they're using me as a bargaining chip? After all my hard work to bring chaos to the cosmos, my own death is meant to bring peace between two ancient enemies? That's just-"

"Ironic?"

"Unsportsmanlike," the Master replied, before asking, "where are we going? Your TARDIS?"

"Yours. The Daleks rather foolishly kept it only one level below your cell. And here's the lift." He waved his sonic screwdriver at a control panel and a door swung open. "Apres-vous! I sent my TARDIS away to keep it out of the hands of the Daleks, safely at the other side of these coordinates." He held up his wrist, showing the Master the vortex manipulator he was wearing, then set the lift to go down a floor.

"I did try to send my TARDIS into a temporal orbit, but they just called it right back!" the Master replied indignantly.

"Yes, well, if you *will* materialize in the middle of their city..."

The lift doors opened, revealing two tall, bulky red Daleks.

"Ah, er..." the Doctor stuttered, "wrong floor! My mistake!"

He pointed his sonic screwdriver at the door to shut it just in time - hearing the blasts of Dalek gunstalks as the lift went back up to the level that the Master's cell was on.

"You didn't happen to have that shrink-ray with you when you were taken, did you?"

"I did," the Master replied indignantly, "and my belongings are just through here. Including my *Tissue Compression Eliminator*."

The Doctor pointed his screwdriver at the nearest door and it swung open. The Master rushed in and grabbed the bulb-headed tool from a pile of arcane items. When he turned around he was pointing it at the Doctor. The Doctor sighed dramatically.

"Come on!" he shouted. "Let's get out of here first and you can kill me later."

"Finally, a compromise worth taking," the Master said.

The Doctor led the Master to the room above where the Daleks were holding his TARDIS and pointed at a hexagonal tile on the ground. The Master fired his TCE and the tile shrunk to a tenth of its size and fell straight down to the next floor, leaving a gap big enough for

a Time Lord to jump through. The renegade made for the gap he created, but a blast of energy shot through the hole, startling him off of his feet.

"Dalek guards!" he shouted. "You couldn't have seen that coming?!"

"Of course I could!" the Doctor said, grinning. "Why else would we have brought that weapon of yours?"

The Doctor grabbed the Master's TCE and unscrewed the bottom of it, then pulled one wire out and rattled it around beside his ear. Then, with his sonic screwdriver, he activated something inside of it and it began to glow softly at the operational end. The Doctor lobbed it through the hexagonal hole and seconds later, a blast of energy came from the floor below.

The Doctor smiled to himself and walked calmly over the hole as if the floor were still there and fell through with a comedic whistle.

"All ready when you are!" he shouted from below.

The Master descended more carefully and saw what the Doctor had done - there had been four Daleks guarding the grandfather clock shape of his TARDIS, but they had been shrunk and twisted by the unregulated blast of his Tissue Compression Eliminator, which now lay warped and broken on the floor.

"I feel as though you've just killed an old friend," said the Master, quite genuinely.

"Yes, well, I know you usually like to kill your friends yourself, but we haven't the time today," the Doctor replied. "Get in the TARDIS."

The Master did as he was bid and let the Doctor follow him.

"You're not going to tell me to turn myself in are you?"

"To whom?" the Doctor said sadly. "The Time Lords will just send you back to the Daleks. No, best you just lie low for a while. Take up a hobby other than genocide."

The Master had set the controls and was about to reply when he roared in pain and grabbed his midsection.

"What's happening?" cried the Doctor.

"This body you gave me," the Master hissed. "It's dying."

"No. That's impossible," the Doctor gasped. "In a final incarnation, a Time Lord should be able to live for-"

"I tried..." the Master started. He took a breath and stood up, apparently fine again. "I tried to augment it, give it a full set of regenerations."

"Because that worked so well the last time you tried it!" the Doctor exploded, "Don't you remember what happened when the Tzun injected you with those silly nanites?"

A glimmer of nostalgia crossed the Master's dark eyes. "I remember killing thousands of Tzun on the day those nanites started to fail. Unfortunately, I have no-one to blame but me this time-" He grimaced in pain once again. "And it seems I've already killed myself."

"We can get you help, stabilize the body, perhaps if we could go to Karn-"

"Why do you care?!" the Master spat. "Why rescue me? Why try so hard to save me?"

"Because I can't lose you," the Doctor replied. "Not again!"

The Master raised an eyebrow, confused. "Again?"

"The Daleks aren't going to kill you, they killed you years ago! I'm trying to undo your foolish mistake!"

The Master laughed darkly. "Rewriting time? Defying the Time Lords? Raising the dead? So, nothing is beyond the powers of the great, sainted Doctor! I suppose that's why you tried to reform me on Perflugium? Or why you gave me this body on Kenaddan?"

"Master! Listen to me!" the Doctor shouted, his voice full of fury.

"No," the Master replied, "I don't think I will."

The TARDIS landed and the Master turned on the scanner.

"Earth. Egypt," the Doctor muttered to himself. "The Valley of the Kings..."

The Master's console room rocked as a blast hit the side of it.

"They followed us," the Master said coolly. "As I said they would."

"Then dematerialize," the Doctor said. "Get away!"

The Master reached for a control on his console and twisted it, opening the interior doors of the TARDIS. Two gold-plated Daleks slid through the doors and the Doctor leapt behind the console.

"What are you doing?!" he yelled.

"Doing what I'm supposed to do, for a change," the Master said, "and dying. Well, my dear Daleks! Back to Skaro, is it?"

One of the Daleks swiveled to face the Doctor.

"You are the Doctor!! You are an enemy of the Daleks!!" it droned. "You will be exterminated!!"

"Time to make your grand getaway, Doctor!" the Master said.

As the Dalek prepared to fire, the Doctor rolled up his sleeve and hit a button on the vortex manipulator. As his body turned into temporal energy and zapped into the vortex, he heard the Master's last words to him:

"You win."

Before he had left his TARDIS, the Doctor had entered random coordinates into the console; that way, he couldn't be interrogated if the Daleks got a hold of him, not even by a mind probe. He assumed the TARDIS would disregard the coordinates, anyway, and just pick somewhere she liked. The old ship had been through a lot just during his current lifetime. She had been infected, shattered, lost in a doomed universe - she needed a break.

So why had she chosen a rainy day in 21st century Northern Ireland?

"Late May," the Doctor said, sniffing the air.

A man across the street was wearing a blue medical mask on his face and was carrying two bags of groceries. He eyed the Doctor with some suspicion as the Time Lord raised his hat in greeting.

"Ahhh, May 2020," the Doctor murmured, "I understand, old girl. Somewhere you could be alone."

He unfolded his old umbrella and held it above him. He was already soaked, of course, but he so rarely used it to actually keep rain away that it seemed a novelty to do so. His sonic screwdriver pulsed quietly in his waistcoat pocket. The trusty multitool beat a faster tempo as he walked towards the TARDIS and a slower one as he moved away from it.

The rain pattered against his umbrella as he surveyed the near-empty village. Everyone inside these days, hiding from malignant micro-organisms. The smallest things, the biggest consequences.

One of his feet splashed into a puddle and he shook his shoe, as if that would come anywhere close to drying it off. He imagined himself, as a younger man, dancing in the rain, splashing in the puddles, laughing without a care in the world. Had he ever done that? Or had he always been so serious and brooding, even as a child?

Walking in eternity, wandering in the fourth dimension, standing up to despots, rewiring mad computers. Even when juggling or playing the spoons, he was just keeping his hands busy while his brain did the heavy lifting. Even when he played that precognitive game in his youth, he could see all the way to his current regeneration. What had they called that game? Eighth Man Bound, wasn't it? His fellow Academy pupils had called him a legend for accomplishing that feat - a record, only matched by one other - but he had only managed it because he was so unflinchingly morbid, laser-focused on life and death.

And what was he now? The Traveller from Beyond Time. The Destroyer of Worlds. The Sandman. Time's Champion.

"Why would Time need a Champion?" he asked aloud, then he laughed.

He'd never asked himself that question before.

Inside the TARDIS, all was the same, but it felt so empty. The flickering of the candles and the small mechanical chirps of the console echoed in the silence. The shadows that had resembled his old friends were now just shadows.

He had been alone for so long, but then he couldn't trust himself with friends anymore. On Gallifrey, when he'd said farewell to Ace following the capture of the Eleven, she'd called him a monster.

Oh, the games he'd played with that girl's life...

But perhaps Romana was right; the only person he could change was himself. Was it time to put Time's Champion away? To become the man who splashed freely in the puddles, without wondering what inclement weather the ripples might cause? Then, maybe, he could have friends once again. Perhaps he could be *Life's* Champion. He liked that.

He would make amends with Ace, that had to come first, then go and see Susan again. Perhaps she'd like to go to Ian and Barbara's wedding with him; he'd always been meaning to get around to going. Or he could look up old Herbert Wells, and take him to meet Shakespeare and Dante and Jane Austen, and see who can write the best cheeky limerick. Herbert! He hadn't thought of him in an age. Perhaps it was time to pick up that book of his and read it once again.

So, the Doctor poured himself a cup of peppermint tea and placed it on the side table, then fished out the first-edition of *The Time Machine* from a pile of Dandy and Beano annuals. Inscribed by Herbert himself, the sentimental man that he was. Then, the message came again, the Master's words echoing in his mind, ever so slightly different than they were before:

“Doctor. Consider this my last will and testament. If I am to be executed and so cruelly deprived of all existence, I ask only that my remains be transported back to Gallifrey, my home planet, by you, my rival Time Lord and nemesis. Doctor...”

This time, the Master made sure the Doctor saw the whole trial: the Dalek Emperor listing the Master’s crimes, the blast of energy, the Master’s ashes. And he knew that it was all over. A fixed point. His old friend was gone.

Finally, he set the coordinates for Skaro on the date 502701.996 and sat back down in his chair, considering what would be his second entry to the Dalek city in only a few hours. He doubted he’d be able to get in and out safely, even under the terms of the Time Lord treaty. He’d need a plan.

“No masterplans,” he muttered, “not anymore.”

Instead, he opened the book and began to read: *‘The Time Traveller (for so it will be convenient to speak of him) was expounding a recondite matter to us.’* There was something strange about the book, but he couldn’t put his finger on it, and so he continued: *‘His grey eyes shone and twinkled, and his usually pale face was flushed and animated.’*

Oh! It wasn’t the book itself, but rather that he was reading it in his head in someone else’s voice. Whose voice could it be?

He read another sentence: *The fire burned brightly, and the soft radiance of the incandescent lights in the lilies of silver caught the bubbles that flashed and passed in our glasses.* It was a man’s voice, English, but lilting - there may have been a touch of Liverpool about it. The voice was smooth and calming; the Doctor liked it almost instantly, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that it was somehow familiar. Then it dawned on him. The voice had been the one the Doctor had heard singing in the TARDIS - the man had a nice singing voice, too.

The TARDIS is full of ghosts, Doctor. Ghosts from the past and the future.

Finally, the Doctor recognized the song for what it was.

“Should old acquaintance be forgot,” he muttered to himself, then called to the empty TARDIS, “I know who you are!”

And a flickering candle whispered in the man’s soft, familiar voice, “who am I?”

The Doctor felt the blood drain from his face, then he breathed his quiet response: “You’re the Eighth Man Bound.”

Despite his lack of forethought or planning, the Doctor had made it through most of the Dalek City without incident. Only when he reached the Master’s execution chamber did he find himself surrounded by eyestalks and flashing dome-lights.

“Ah. So here we are,” the Doctor said, “I’ve brought myself to the one place I should never go - a Dalek execution chamber. I’ve saved you all the hard work!”

“You are here under treaty,” one of the Daleks said, not sounding much like a Dalek at all with its strange high-pitched tone. “You must not be harmed.”

The Doctor reacted as if he’d been struck, then he caught a glimpse of the Dalek that had spoken. It was shaped differently than any Dalek he’d ever seen. More lines for a start, and the bumps were all over the place, rather than arranged in neat lines. Its black casing looked reinforced and bulky; its plunger had been replaced by a compact metal claw.

"Can't say I care for the new look," the Doctor scoffed.

Two more of the strange Daleks slid forward from the shadows and pointed their claws at a shallow bowl full of crystalline ash that sat on the ground nearby.

"These are the remains of the space-time criminal known as the Master," one said. "You will take them back to Gallifrey."

The Doctor knelt beside the bowl and removed an urn from his jacket pocket. Then, he gently poured the Master's ashes into the urn and closed the lid. He stood to leave, but had a question to ask first:

"You know, Romana never said," the Doctor mused, "what the Daleks really get out of this treaty."

"The Master's death is fixed," a third Dalek said. "Necessary."

"And why not just shoot me here, add me to the pile, two Time Lords for the price of one?" the Doctor asked, before adding, "not that I'm suggesting anything."

"Your death is also fixed," the Dalek replied.

The Doctor chuckled. "A Dalek worried about the Web of Time! And here I thought your squeaky voices would be the funniest thing I'd hear all day."

"Please," the first Dalek said, "take the criminal's remains and remove yourself from this planet. We three will not harm you but we are not the only Daleks on Skaro. We cannot assure your safety for much longer."

"Point taken," the Doctor replied, bowing politely to the Daleks, "Cheerio! Defeat you soon, et cetera et cetera!"

The Doctor examined the Master's temporary home, atop an appropriately ornate lectern. As ostentatious as the old rogue had been, perhaps he'd have appreciated the gesture.

Why, the Doctor wondered, had his old friend asked to have his ashes taken back to Gallifrey? He'd always hated it there. Nonetheless, the Doctor had decided to take them back to the Master's ancestral home of Oakdown. There he would bury them, under the stump of Gallifrey's first tree, the fallen brother of Mount Plutarch.

Then... Ace. Susan. Friends. Life. No more grand schemes. No more trying to change everyone. No more double checking. It's about time.

Well, he would have to double check one last thing; he took out his sonic screwdriver and locked the box containing the Master's ashes.

"There," he said, satisfied at last, "that should do it."

This short story was written for the 24th anniversary rewatch and Tweet-along of the 1996 TV Movie on May 27, 2020, as organized by @TardisMonkey. If you enjoyed it, please show your support by throwing a few dollars, pounds, euros, yen, et cetera, et cetera, at a local charity doing good work at this awful moment in history.

And don't worry, a brighter future will come.

It always does.

Author's Notes

Scene 1. The TARDIS Train Room

- “Marley was dead: to begin with.” If you’re going to steal, steal from the best...
- The Doctor’s memories of speaking to Romana for the first time occur directly after the Virgin New Adventure **Lungbarrow**.
- The phrase “Act of Master Restitution” comes from a piece called **Meet the Doctor** written by Russell T. Davies for the 2006 Doctor Who Annual.
- The Doctor’s first attempt to save the Master (on the planet Perflugium) is chronicled in the Big Finish audio **Master**.
- The Doctor receives the Master’s telepathic summons shortly before the events of the Telos novella **Companion Piece**, which was the only appearance of companion Catherine Broome.
- The Master’s “last will and testament” is taken directly from Gordon Tipple’s monologue, deleted from the final cut of the TV movie **Doctor Who**.

Scene 2. Galaxy Twelve

- This scene takes place sometime between **Companion Piece** and the Big Finish audio **Dark Universe**. It probably hasn’t been long since the novella.
- The Master lost his Trakenite body (Anthony Ainley) and was once again trapped in his corpse-like body (Geoffrey Beevers) just prior to the Big Finish audio **Dust Breeding**. He later shows up wearing a Gordon Tipple-shaped body in the TV movie, **Doctor Who**.

Scene 3. The TARDIS / Romana’s Office

- This scene - and indeed the rest of this story - takes place moments after the end of **Dark Universe**.
- A rel is 1.2 seconds as per **Evolution of the Daleks** - thanks, Russell T. Davies!

Scene 4. The Master’s Arrival on Skaro

- The “tin boxes” line is a direct quote from the BBC novel **The Eight Doctors** by Terrance Dicks, although I’ve added some additional context to the scene - there, it’s implied that he’s just trying to get himself killed to activate the Deathworm. Not that he’s not also planning that here, he’s just playing more than one game at once!

Scene 5. Prison on Skaro / The Valley of the Kings

- The Master’s TARDIS was found by UNIT in the Valley of the Kings, surrounded by laser scorch marks, as per the Big Finish audio drama **Mastermind**.

Scene 6. Northern Ireland

- A little nod to the world today... this is, after all, not just a prologue to the TV Movie, but a prologue to the 2020 rewatch of the TV Movie!

- From “Walking in eternity” to “Time's Champion”, there's something of a lightning round of continuity. So, just for fun: **The Brain of Morbius, An Uneearthly Child, The Greatest Show in the Galaxy, The Face of Evil, Christmas on a Rational Planet, The Savages**, the novelisation of **Remembrance of the Daleks, The Sandman, Love and War...** phew!

Scene 7. The Empty TARDIS

- The Doctor's suggestion that he might not be Time's Champion anymore, but rather “Life's Champion” is a foreshadowing of the BBC novel **Vampire Science**, where the Eighth Doctor calls himself by that title.
- Some of these events will indeed happen during the Doctor's later incarnations - in **At Childhood's End, Hunters of the Burning Stone** and **Legacy of the Daleks** (or **An Earthly Child** but let's not get started there!). However, we have yet to see Shakespeare, Dante, Jane Austen and HG Wells in a limerick contest. Your move, Chibnall.
- The Master's message - now with slightly different wording due to the Doctor's changes to time - is taken from **The Novel of the Film** by Gary Russell.

Scene 8. Skaro Again

- We don't get a good look at the Daleks in the TV Movie - so I've based their “future” appearance on the set pictures from the upcoming **Revolution of the Daleks** - although I doubt that Jodie Whittaker will be up against Daleks with chipmunk voices!

Scene 9. The Urn in the TARDIS

- The Master being from Oakdown is from **Divided Loyalties** by Gary Russell. The bit about it being founded on the stump of the oldest tree on Gallifrey is my own invention but I'm rather fond of it!
- And we close on the first diegetic line of the **Doctor Who** movie: “There, that should do it.” (One of Sylvester McCoy's ten lines in the whole thing!)