**Gothic Horror on a Gallifreyan Afternoon**

The weather on the southern plain had turned cold quickly after the long summer, just as everyone expected. The dawn most mornings brought grey skies and with it, penetrating wind and rain blew across the plains, bending the trees that surrounded Mount Lœng House and protected it from the full force of the gale.

On days such as these Marion stayed home, glad that she had such comfort and didn’t have to run for buses in the teeming rain and spend her days in an office somewhere with the windows assaulted by the same weather, reminding her that she had to go home again in the dark and cold.

Late in the month of Octima when it was possible to hope for another change in the weather bringing a blanket of snow over the land until spring, Marion showed her Gallifreyan friends something Kristoph had bought for her on a trip to Earth, a way to while away dark afternoons.

“It’s called ‘home cinema’,” she explained to Talitha Dúccesci, Valena d’Arpexia, Calliope Haddandrox and Mia Reidluum as she brought them into the large but cosy room with long, thick curtains at the window and three big, squashy sofas to relax on. Her friends looked at the huge screen mounted on the wall critically.

“Live debates from the Panopticon don’t need such a big screen,” Valena pointed out. “I suppose an opera might look splendid in such dimensions, but there’s no fun in watching those at home. Dressing up and going out to meet everyone is the whole point of it.”

“Yes, it is,” Marion agreed. “But on my world we have more than opera and political debate on television and by my time people had been making films for nearly a hundred years. Spending a cold autumn afternoon watching them with plenty of nibbles and drinks is considered sociable.”

Her Gallifreyan friends were dubious about the idea, but it had to be said that the weather outside was atrocious and any indoor pursuits were welcome. Mia, especially, warmed to the idea. She rarely visited anywhere outside the safety of the Capitol’s envirodome in winter. She had accepted Marion’s invitation only because Kristoph had brought her by TARDIS and promised to bring her home again. Seogham, the under-butler, was charged with her care and helped her from her wheelchair to one of the sofas. She gathered her long skirt around her paralyzed legs and made herself comfortable. The others found their own comfort zones.

“This is as close as possible to the last day of October on Earth,” Marion continued. “Halloween. So there is a particular genre of films to watch.”

Her friends, of course, didn’t know what Halloween was, and the history of a pagan harvest festival turned into a commercialised costume party wasn’t something Marion felt up to explaining.

She nodded to show that they were ready and the head footman slotted a Blu-ray disc into the player fixed beneath the screen. While the opening titles of the Hammer Films 1958 version of Dracula came on in restored and enhanced sound and vision, Caolin and two of the maids served the drinks and nibbles. The crisps and popcorn were in silver tureens and the dips in cut glass bowls with the de Lœngbǽrrow crest etched into them. The fizzy pop had been decanted into a punch bowl from a huge piece of rock crystal that had been cut and polished until it was translucent and finished with silver handles. Cups made of the same materials hung around the side for dipping into the cola when required.

Those details aside, and the fact that the old ‘smoking room’ had been converted into the ‘home cinema’, Marion’s afternoon was just as anyone else would experience it on the sofa in their living room on a cold autumn afternoon.

At first her friends weren’t sure what to make of an afternoon of mild horror and unhealthy snacks, but as Jonathon Harker arrived at the Count’s ponderous door and heard ‘the children of the night’ make their sweet music, Mia leaned towards Talitha in mild excitement.

“I’ve read the book of this, haven’t I? You brought it to me from the library along with a story called Wuthering Heights.”

“Yes,” Talitha answered. “But this seems a little bit different. In the book Harker comes to the castle as a clerk to conduct some conveyancing business. In this version he already knows that Dracula is a vampire and has come intending to kill him.”

“Oh, there are lots of film versions of Dracula,” Marion explained in a loud whisper so as not to disturb her other friends who were following the plot more closely and uncritically. “Most of them have adapted the story, either because it’s a bit too long or the epistolary style of the book doesn’t translate to film, or the budget didn’t stretch to actual scenes from Transylvania. This one is considered a ‘classic’ even though there are a lot of differences from the original text.”

For most of her friends this was the first feature film of any sort they had ever seen, so the concept of a ‘classic’ was bewildering, but that problem aside they were happy to be drawn into this less literary but more bloody version of the great classic of the English gothic novel genre. All but Mia found themselves reaching for a handful of crisps or a punch cup of cola without feeling self-conscious. Unable to reach for herself Mia only had to think about what she wanted to eat or drink and Seogham got it for her. Caolin had brought several refills for the crisp tureens and the punch bowl before he was required to slot in the next disc.

“Kristoph said there were solid state devices that would hold a hundred films at a time,” Marion explained. “But I felt I wanted to have the discs with a film on each one. It seems more ‘real’ that way, like a proper collection.”

“Like books on a shelf, rather than stored on a hand held device,” Mia suggested. “The boxes are very…. colourful.”

Since they were all horror films made in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties, the covers were lurid and featured blood very heavily. Colourful was a kind word for them.

The follow up to the first film gripped them all as thoroughly as the first. Interestingly, Marion’s Gallifreyan friends had no problem accepting Dracula’s resurrection from the dead. Of course, no Time Lord they knew of had ever regenerated after being reduced to dust, but the principle was firmly understood, and when, at the end of the film, the Prince of Darkness was frozen beneath the icy waters of the castle moat they were in no doubt that he would be back.

“They ought to have made more certain than that,” Talitha concluded. “It is quite clear that foolish people would seek to revive the evil as long as there is a fragment of a body left.”

“That is why when a rogue Time Lord is executed the body is always completely atomised and dispersed,” Valena said almost too casually. “Those sort of cults always tend to grow up around the most notorious, and there ARE ways, for those with deep knowledge.”

“There are?” Marion was not the only one who regarded that statement as peculiarly dark. Of course, as an Inquisitor Valena was more knowledgeable than the other women about these things, but it still surprised them.

“Well, I don’t KNOW what the ways are,” she protested as they all looked at her critically. “I know there are very precise instructions for disposing of the body of an executed Time Lord because it is in the Statutes I had to study to be an Inquisitor. I have never presided over a capital case. I wouldn’t expect to with my relative inexperience. I’d be superseded by somebody like Kristoph.”

She smiled disarmingly, reminding her friends that she was, after all, a woman of Gallifrey as well as an official of the Inquisition.

“Valena is quite right,” Kristoph said. Everyone looked to him as he came from the doorway and took a seat on the sofa beside Marion. “It is EXACTLY why we have such statutes for disposal of criminals. Even the ordinary funerary cremation of a non-offensive Time Lord follows a specific procedure to prevent any sinister behaviour.”

“Are you telling me that the way Dracula was resurrected at the start of this film IS possible with the ashes of a Time Lord?” Marion demanded. “Good afternoon, darling, by the way. Nice to have you joining us. Would you like some soggy crisps or slightly flat cola?”

“Good afternoon, sweetheart. I will pass on the crisps and Caolin is bringing my single malt as we speak,” Kristoph answered. “As for the Time Lord ashes – no, not quite the way the Hammer writers envisaged. Not that I am party to the exact details any more than our dear Valena is, but I know it is more complicated than simply pouring innocent blood on the remains.”

“Still, the fact that there ARE rules about how to dispose of Time Lord bodies for that reason….” Marion smiled grimly. “Whenever I forget that I live under a yellow sky among people who are so very different to me something like this reminds me. I’m only surprised not to find out that vampires are part Time Lord.”

“No, but one of my ancestors piloted a bow ship in the war against the Great Vampires,” Kristoph remarked casually. Marion looked at him half-disbelieving. “Yes, there WERE creatures of the same name and nature in this infinite universe, but long before our people decided we should not interfere in the fates of others we were compelled to use our powers to destroy a species that was utterly inimical to the future of all other life in the galaxy. The Great Vampires are gone.”

“Then why do we have legends on Earth about them?” Marion asked. “Surely that all happened before humans even existed.”

“Race memory,” Kristoph answered. “A remarkably persistent and widespread one. Even on planets with no knowledge of life beyond their own skies a trace has remained. On some worlds it manifests itself in strict rules about cremation of the dead such as we have on Gallifrey. On others, like Earth, where imagination is unbounded, it fuels stories to excite the blood.”

Kristoph picked up one of the lurid Blu-ray boxes and smiled at the image of Christopher Lee with his fangs covered in the Technicolor blood of his victim. “One of the critics on the original cinema release asked ‘why need vampires be messier eaters than anyone else?’”

The women, Marion included, laughed at that remark, as Kristoph intended. Bringing up the fact that Time Lords had once fought a nasty war against vampires had been a mistake. Better that they remained the figment of fertile imaginations put into creatively decorated boxes for entertainment.

Caolin brought his glass of single malt and replenished the other refreshments. Kristoph settled beside Marion to share the home cinema experience with her.

“Is it complete coincidence that you’ve joined us in time for the one that features a school full of very well developed girls in lacy nightdresses?” Marion teased him.

“Complete coincidence,” he assured her. “Besides, I prefer the 1992 Coppola version of the story that tries to keep close to Stoker’s epistolary style and keeps in the classic scenes on the cliffs at Whitby.”

“Our first kiss took place on those same cliffs,” Marion remembered fondly.

“Indeed, it did,” Kristoph agreed. Talitha and Mia who had read the book and understood the reference were suitably impressed. “We owe much to the race memory of the Great Vampires as expressed by an anaemic Irishman.”

“Yes, we do.” Marion replenished her cup of slightly flat cola and leaned close to her husband, listening to his double heartbeat as the disciples of Dracula stopped the hearts of the innocent in gloriously enhanced Technicolor.