**The Man Who Sold The Worlds**

“Sotra, located in the Rekonda System  - A planet with an unusually large axial tilt causing extreme seasonal changes. The planet is home to a technologically advanced species of fish-like creatures.”

“Solaria in the Imdali Nebula System - A small terrestrial planet with low gravity, famous for its swarming insects.”

“Sayoko in the Lammai System - A planet known for its deep oceans and its forests of gigantic mushrooms.”

Sarah-Jane Smith threw down the book from which she was reading about ‘five hundred famous planets in the Milky Way.’

“What rubbish!” she declared. “How can a planet be famous for swarming insects or forests of gigantic mushrooms? Seriously, gigantic mushrooms?”

The Doctor laughed.

“Really gigantic mushrooms. Many of the Sayokon people actually live in houses carved out of the trunks.”

“I still don’t think I want to go there,” Sarah-Jane decided. “Surely you know some REALLY interesting planets, Doctor?”

“How about Miniterra in the Ruushe System.”

Sarah-Jane retrieved the book and looked up Miniterra.

“A small terrestrial planet with low gravity. The curious thing about this planet is that plant and non-sentient animal life has evolved on a miniature scale. The tallest trees are only four feet high, and the largest mammal is only two feet tall. The sentient race is the tallest inhabitant at an average height of five foot four.…”

“You said the largest mammal was only two-foot tall….”

Sarah-Jane thought about that statement again and made a guess.

She was right.

“They are an intelligent race of lizards, The Doctor confirmed. “Very charming people.”

“Ok, that sounds interesting,” she said. “Can we go there?”

“No good reason why not,” The Doctor agreed. He took the book from Sarah-Jane and copied the Galactic coordinate into the TARDIS drive control. “Miniterra, here we come.”

Sarah-Jane didn’t move. Too many times she had changed her clothes in expectation of some special event or climate and been disappointed. She would wait until they actually reached the planet before making any effort. Besides, even if they did reach Miniterra, intelligent lizards could make do with the woollen tights and knee length baggy angora sweater she was wearing already.

She was not completely surprised when she heard The Doctor make an exasperated sound and slap the console in frustration.

“Let me guess,” Sarah-Jane said, looking up at him. “We’re not at Miniterra.”

“We ought to be,” The Doctor responded. “This IS the coordinate. I’ve double checked with the TARDIS database. This is where Miniterra ought to be. But there’s nothing.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say NOTHING,” Sarah-Jane remarked as she stood and looked at the big rectangle viewer on the wall. “It looks like there’s the space equivalent of Newport Pagnell.”

She hummed a fraction of a tune. The Doctor identified it after a few repeats as “They paved Paradise and put up a parking lot” from the song by Joni Mitchell.

If Joni had looked at the TARDIS viewer she would have added several more verses. Even when The Doctor panned the image back the screen was almost entirely filled with space ships and shuttles of all sizes. In the centre of the space park was a rhombus shaped building perched on a slice of asteroid fitted with gravity engines to keep it in place exactly where Miniterra ought to be.

“A hyper-space port,” he admitted with a sigh. “But apart from that detail, it would seem as if you’re right.”

“We got the date wrong? It’s too late for the Intelligent lizards? Did they sell up and go somewhere with height?

“Not according to the TARDIS database,” The Doctor answered. “A book can be out of date, but not a TARDIS computer. It gets regular updates from Gallifrey. And if Gallifrey found out that planets weren’t where they ought to be…..”

He paused and laughed.

“They’d send me to find out why, of course. Technically, the Time Lords don’t interfere, but sending their prodigal son to break all the rules and interfere is so very like them. And here I am, already, without the need for a summons.”

“So we’re going to investigate?” It wasn’t the outing on a magical planet she had wanted, but after all she was an investigative journalist and in many ways this was right up her street. Sarah-Jane felt the adrenaline rush begin.

“Excellent idea, let’s investigate.” The Doctor grinned in his maniacal way and set a short hop for the building at the centre of ‘Newport Pagnell in space’.

In fact, it was a bit more upmarket than Newport Pagnell. The TARDIS materialised in the short stay shuttle park and a space limousine brought them to the foyer of what was a very luxurious hotel and conference centre. The floor was carpeted with what Sarah-Jane could only describe to herself as ‘fluffy gold’. The high ceiling was more gold reflecting the light of twenty crystal chandeliers.

“The Doctor and Miss Sarah-Jane Smith,” The Doctor announced to the receptionist who was very slim and attractive in the hotel’s signature livery of maroon skirt suit with gold trimmings. She was a humanoid lizard with grey-green scales on her face and the other visible parts of her body but that was neither here nor there.

“I don’t…..” the receptionist began. Then she blinked horizontally with thin lids. “Ah, there is your reservation. I see that you are Platinum Guests, Doctor, Miss Smith, staying in one of our Premier Class Presidential suites. You will be conducted to your personal elevator immediately. I see that you have not brought luggage. You will wish to have a line of credit on the boutique floor?”

“Yes,” Sarah-Jane responded before The Doctor could refuse. She was handed a small ‘card’ made of glittering precious metal and indented with very tiny dots that could obviously be read by a computer.

Another lizard in signature livery arrived to escort them to the elevator. It was gold and platinum and the ‘lift music’ came from a hologram orchestra playing Vaughan Williams’ Lark Ascending. Sarah-Jane wondered if there was a tune about ‘descending’ for going down again.

The Premier Class Presidential Suite they arrived at was the most luxurious set of rooms Sarah-Jane had ever seen. The drawing room was bigger than her London flat. The bathroom would not have been out of place in Buckingham Palace. The bedrooms were ‘plush gold’ all round. As The Doctor dismissed the lizard valet she sank into the comfort of the huge sofa and ate a peach from a fruit basket the size of a baby’s bath – a gold and platinum bath, that is.

She pocketed two more peaches in case it turned out that that all this luxury was a big mistake and they were turfed out any moment. At least she would have got some peaches out of it all.

“That receptionist.… She was about to say we didn’t have a reservation, then suddenly we did – a Platinum one that means we have our own elevator, no going up and down with the hoi polloi – assuming they let the hoi polloi in, anyway. This is VERY posh.”

“I remembered to make the reservation retrospectively after we’re done here,” The Doctor explained. “Remind me to do that when we’re back in the TARDIS or the paradox will be terrible.”

“Ok. But how do you afford platinum guest level even retrospectively? Your U.N.I.T. salary isn’t that good.”

“This is the seventy-fifth century by Earth reckoning. My U.N.I.T. salary will have earned quite a bit of compound interest by now.”

Sarah-Jane wasn’t quite sure that was the truth, but he was probably right about the compound interest.

“Well, if it’s all right, then, I might go to the boutique floor and get some Platinum Guest togs. That’s as good a place as any to start investigating.”

“I’ve already started,” The Doctor told her. “As should you, Sarah-Jane. The staff here….”

“They’re descended from lizards. We’re descended from apes. I’m not prejudiced. The universe is a many-splendored thing.”

“The sentient life on Miniterra was lizard descended,” The Doctor reminded her.

“Yes, they were,” Sarah-Jane recalled. “Which means… the planet may be missing, but the people are gainfully employed.”

“Something like that. Though it’s a poor exchange. Miniterra really was beautiful.”

“Perhaps it still is. Maybe there HAS been a mistake,” Sarah-Jane suggested. “By the way, I think YOU ought to take advantage of the boutique credit line, too. When you were the dashing grey-haired one you had some nice clothes.”

The Doctor made a face at her. Sarah-Jane laughed and headed for the private elevator with her Platinum credit card in hand.

The boutique was everything a freelance journalist who lived on a budget could dream of. Sarah-Jane spent some time trying on clothes just for fun before making her choices. There was a cocktail dress to die for in shimmering purple, a skirt suit fit for a U.N. conference in Geneva, a trouser suit, fur coat, a silk nightie she could happily sleep in for a week, and several casual dresses.

Then shoes, handbags, belts, hats, jewellery….

The lady lizard at the counter credited all her purchases to The Doctor’s account. Sarah-Jane felt a little nervous at first, still not sure it wasn’t all a mistake.

But her purchases were accepted. A liveried lizard took most of them back to the suite. Sarah-Jane wore one of the dresses to the coffee shop on the boutique floor. She ordered a long, tall iced coffee and a slice of gateau from the enticing cake array. A lizard woman in waitress uniform brought them to the table.

“Please,” Sarah-Jane said to her. “If you’re not too busy, can I ask you a couple of questions?”

“We are not supposed to fraternize with guests, ma’am,” the waitress replied with a nervous flick of her long tongue against her sharp teeth

“Pretend I’m ordering more cake,” Sarah-Jane told her. “I just want to ask… you’re from Miniterra, aren’t you? Do you go home often?”

“Miniterra?” The waitress’s pale yellow eyes narrowed sideways in confusion. “No, ma’am. My race… we are subjects of the Archetype of Monobi. We are hatched in the training nurseries and taught the skills for our future careers from weaning. We are assigned to Monobian hotels and other service facilities throughout the galactic sector and remain there all our lives.”

“That… sounds like a very efficient system. But you really have no concept of a home world?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Are you happy in your work? Not just you, I mean, but all of your kind.”

The waitress didn’t really seem to understand the word ‘happy’. She worked. She had rest hours. That was her life.

Sarah-Jane thought that was terrible. There were people on Earth who had dull jobs, but at least they knew they did and complained freely about the fact. Job dissatisfaction was a Human right.

But not a lizard right, apparently.

“Ma’am, I do need to get on,” the lizard waitress said.

“Oh, I’m sorry… please… um….” Sarah-Jane spotted a rather remarkable figure coming into the coffee shop. “Can you bring another iced coffee and a really big slice of the apple and almond cake, please. My friend is joining me.”

The Doctor, wearing a grey suit actually tailored to his tall, broad shouldered figure, was an amazing sight. His hair looked trimmed, or at least tidied up a bit, and he was wearing polished leather shoes instead of the boots that looked like they were from U.N.I.T.’s surplus stores. The overall effect was something like a New York gangster visiting his Sicilian cousins, but it was a refreshing change from that coat and scarf, to say nothing of the hat.

He sat down and had coffee and cake. Sarah-Jane told him about the Lizard people.

“NOT from Miniterra?” The Doctor was astonished. “Impossible. The DNA is unmistakeable. They’re pure Miniterran.”

“Not so far as she knows,” Sarah-Jane replied, explaining the career options of the training nurseries.

“Service industry jobs?” The Doctor scoffed. “I mean, somebody has to serve coffee, but the Miniterrans were skilled artisans and artists. They didn’t even make a chair without detailed ornamentation. They were people who knew job satisfaction.”

“But she didn’t even know about Miniterra,” Sarah-Jane pointed out. “It was as if it never existed to her.”

“Yes, that’s the oddest thing.” The Doctor looked at the waitress as she brought coffee and confectionary to another customer. “If I didn’t know better, I’d think she was the Princess Royal of Miniterra.”

He shuffled in his jacket pocket, pulling out his sonic screwdriver, a gold plated yoyo, a bag of jelly babies and a handful of assorted coinage.

Sarah-Jane tutted.

“The junk in your pockets,” she chastised. “Even in a brand new suit.”

There was a point to it all. He shuffled around in the coins and selected a small silver coin. It was real silver, not like a British ten pence that only looked silver. On one side was an engraving of a tree. On the other was the profile portrait of a young lizard woman.

“The Princess Royal,” The Doctor said triumphantly. Sarah-Jane took the coin and looked at it carefully. She glanced casually over at the waitress.

“I don’t know, maybe….”

“How about that one?” The Doctor asked, passing her a gold coin bigger than anything since Britain went decimal. Another lady lizard was in profile. “Queen Lizbetta. And this is her consort, Prince Malci.”

“To be honest, they all look a bit alike,” Sarah-Jane admitted. “I know that’s not a nice thing to day, but it’s true. I don’t know one lizard person from another.”

“Then take it from me, something is extremely wrong around here. We need to snoop around a bit more.”

“Can I snoop in the premier salon and spa?” Sarah-Jane asked. “I might be able to talk to some other guests and see if they know anything.”

“Excellent idea. I was going to try the Gentleman’s Lounge. I know that sort of thing brings out your feminist hackles, but in this case it may well be useful to blend in.”

“You, blend in?” Sarah-Jane laughed. Even in the right sort of clothes there was something about The Doctor that didn’t blend in anywhere. He was built to stand out in any given situation.

And it was true that she had very firm ideas about Gentleman’s Clubs, Lounges or any other sort of male only domain. She had written a whole series of articles for Metropolitan Magazine about why the very concept was wrong.

But right now she really wanted to spend some time in that salon. Yes, the entire suffragette movement were rolling in their graves, but in all the time she had travelled with The Doctor this was the first time a salon and spa had been available.

And it was a great experience. She came out of it several hours later with her whole skin tingling with cleanliness. Her face felt brand new. Her nails, finger and toes had been manicured to perfection, hair was shampooed and conditioned and styled by expert hands.

But as she returned to the Platinum Suite to have a private afternoon tea, she just felt guilty about indulging herself without finding out very much at all that she could honestly call investigative journalism.

“I have never met such an empty headed bunch of women,” she declared as she threw herself down on the big, luxuriant sofa. “What century is this? What was it all for? Trying to be taken seriously in male dominated careers, equal pay, promotion opportunities. Heck, why did we even bother demanding the vote?”

She paused in her rant. The Doctor said nothing. He just offered her a jelly baby bag without comment.

“I just spent three hours with the six wives of the Grand Potentate of Dorusse. They are so idle they don’t just have personal stylists, they have servants to choose what that style should be. Making a choice between bubble perm and loose curls is beneath them.”

“I met the Grand Potentate in the Lounge,” The Doctor said to her as her words subsided. “Nice man. Very charming. He’s here to buy his wives a planet each. He’s celebrating his fifteenth, tenth, eighth, fifth, second and first wedding anniversaries next week and wants to make sure none of them feel less important to him than the others.”

Sarah-Jane’s eyes widened at the thought of one man having to indulge his wives equally in that way. Life was hard for a Grand Potentate.

Then the penny – or the Miniterran bronze quarter – dropped.

“He’s buying them what?”

“A planet each,” The Doctor repeated. “That’s what they do here. As well as a luxury hotel with all the trimmings, the very top floor is an auction room where they sell planets.”

“Sell planets?” Sarah-Jane was appalled. “Is that legal?”

“If there are no sitting tenants and deeds of ownership are confirmed,” The Doctor replied. “Very, very ultra-rich people like to buy their own holiday planets. It’s just like Princess Margaret on Mustique, only a bigger scale.”

“Still sounds weird to me.”

“I talked to the head of the organisation,” The Doctor added. “The Archetype of Monobi. He told me all about how it works. Look.”

He passed Sarah-Jane a glossy brochure from the coffee table. On the back cover was a picture of a huge man with at least three wobbly looking chins. On the front was a cartoon of a planet with a for sale sign on.

“Tomorrow’s lots,” The Doctor explained. “The six the Grand Potentate is planning to bid for are all smaller than Mercury, no sentient life, some charming waterfalls and interesting vegetation.”

Sarah-Jane looked at the brochure. She read first about the Monobin Credit Unit, a virtual currency used exclusively in the Archetype of Monobi’s auction houses. A list of typical exchange rates were provided and the guide prices in Monobin Credits for the planets up for sale by auction.

She passed from that information to the ‘delivery options’ where it described how the purchased planet would be wrapped in an atmosphere shell and transported by warp shunt drive to the system of choice.

“The planets are shrink wrapped and hauled off somewhere else,” Sarah-Jane surmised. Then she reached for something else on the coffee table. She wasn’t sure quite why she had brought the book of ‘interesting planets’ from the TARDIS, but it was there, looking dull and uninteresting next to the glossy magazines and brochures. She spent several minutes studying it before showing it to The Doctor.

“Sayoko in the Lammai System, the one with the big mushrooms, is listed here. You said that people live in the mushroom stalks. It’s down here as ‘vacant possession’.”

The Doctor looked at the book, then the brochure. He frowned deeply with his mouth, his eyebrows and his shoulders. He compared descriptions of planets for several minutes.

“There are fifteen planets from your little book listed for auction,” he said. “Nine of them have sentient life on them. None of them have formal trade or diplomatic relations with other systems, so it is unlikely that anyone has ever registered Deed of Ownership. They should NOT be in this auction.”

“Doctor, if a planet with sentient life is sold, what happens to the people?”

“I have a nasty suspicion. I also think I know how to confirm that suspicion.”

The lizard valet was collecting up the tea dishes. The Doctor called to him. He dutifully came and stood before him.

“Sir, there is something I must do. Please don’t be afraid.”

The valet was too puzzled to be called ‘Sir’ by a platinum guest to question anything. Sarah-Jane said nothing, either as The Doctor held the gold-plated yoyo by a short piece of string and swung it like a pendulum. The gold reflected the light from the chandelier and created a hypnotic effect. Sarah-Jane looked away. She hated being hypnotised.

It wasn’t exactly hypnotism, more like de-hypnotism. The valet stared at The Doctor through the glittering, moving light and then gave a soft sigh.

Then he burst into tears.

“Oh, no!” Sarah-Jane exclaimed. “Oh, no. Don’t cry. Please, sit down here on the sofa. Never mind the rules. You’re upset.”

Sarah-Jane took his hands in hers and guided him to the seat. The Doctor’s reaction was quite extraordinary. He stood before the crying lizard man and bowed his head formally, then actually knelt, his head still bowed.

“Your Majesty,” he said. “On behalf of the Time Lords of Gallifrey, I honour you.”

“Majesty?” Sarah-Jane almost let go of the lizard man’s trembling hands in shock. The greeting made him sob even more at first, then he drew himself up in a more dignified way.

“Sarah-Jane, you are holding the hand of Prince Malci, Consort of Queen Lizbetta of Miniterra.”

Sarah-Jane would have jumped up and bowed or curtseyed, whichever was appropriate, but the Prince held her hand tightly.

“My queen, our children?” he asked The Doctor.

“I believe they are all safe,” The Doctor assured him. “Like you they have been subjected to extreme memory modification and made to believe they were servants of Archetype of Monobi.”

“Monobi!” Prince Malci said the name in a disgusted tone. “He wanted to buy Miniterra. I had him deported. What did he do?”

“It looks like he sold Miniterra from under you,” Sarah-Jane told him. “He had the planet shipped off somewhere and your people turned into virtual slaves. And I think he’s going to do it again. The mushroom planet is up for auction tomorrow.”

“Mushroom planet?” the Prince queried.

“Sayoko... in the Lammai System.” Sarah-Jane showed him the brochure and her guide book to ‘interesting planets’. Prince Malci was outraged.

“He must not be allowed to do this to another civilisation, not even one so absurd as to build its cities in mushroom plantations.”

“What are we going to do about it?” Sarah-Jane asked.

“You and Prince Malci pay a visit to our chum Grand Potentate of Dorusse,” The Doctor said. “Tell him how the planets he wants to buy for his wives are being acquired. I’m going to find the rest of the Miniterran royal family and bring them along. I have an idea, but it will need all of us co-operating together.”

Sarah-Jane found the Grand Potentate of Dorusse a more interesting conversationalist than his wives had been. He was also a just and fair-minded man for somebody who’s title was ‘potentate’, a word she had associated, if she associated it at all, with absolute rulers leaning towards tyranny. When he heard Prince Malci’s story he immediately offered the Miniterran Royal family diplomatic protection until their planet was restored. For the time being that meant gathering all of the dehypnotised members of the family in his suite and making sure they were clothed more appropriately to their true status. The Queen and Prince and their son and daughter the Princess and Prince Royal as well as a dozen other close relatives got over the trauma of the deception and worried instead about their subjects who remained in bondage to Monobi.

“His business empire stretches across the galaxy,” Dorrusse observed. “The Miniterrans must be scattered across all of his space hotels and leisure planets. But if we succeed tomorrow, they will be liberated and Monobi will have the tables turned on him. I will have to find something elsewhere to give my wives as anniversary presents. I fear that personal planet ownership may be seen as unethical once word gets out.”

“I think there might be some hotels in prime locations coming onto the market, soon,” The Doctor suggested. “But first things, first. Have the other bidders for the planets been contacted?”

“They have,” Dorusse answered. “And they are happy to co-operate. They have all realised that they could be the next victims of Monobi’s planet grabbing. None of them wish to see their wives working in hospitality.”

“Then we should all have a quiet dinner and an early night,” The Doctor decided. “Service might be slow since the head chef turned out to be Prince Malci’s younger brother, but I expect they will manage to serve up a decent meal.”

They did, and Dorusse signed for generous tips for all the unwittingly enslaved Miniterrans involved in providing the dinner, a small compensation for their displacement from their real lives. The Royal Family in exile were accommodated in Dorusse’s more than adequate suite while Sarah-Jane and The Doctor returned to their rooms. Sarah-Jane lay in the big, comfortable bed and did her best to enjoy the luxury. It would only be for the one night, and she felt very guilty about enjoying it at all. The only thing that salved her conscience was knowing that Monobi was going to get his come-uppance tomorrow.

The morning started with a swim in the platinum guest pool along with the wives of Dorusse, then a quick hair-do and breakfast. Sarah-Jane wore her new skirt suit and looked business-like. The Doctor gave her a platinum pass into the auction room and her very own paddle with a number on it so that she looked like a genuine bidder.

Even though The Doctor’s plan had been agreed by all, it felt as exciting as a real auction. Sarah-Jane had to force herself to sit still and behave like somebody who could afford to buy a planet. She watched as the Archetype of Monobi entered, a man twice as wide as he was tall, dressed in a purple robe and pushed in a wide bathchair by two Miniterrans. He looked smug and self-satisfied as he took his place beside the auctioneer’s podium and beneath a large video screen.

“You’re going down, horrible man,” Sarah-Jane thought. The auctioneer stepped up next, bowing quickly to Monobi. He was a tall, thin, blue-faced man with a face that define the word ‘lugubrious’ - much to Sarah-Jane’s surprise as she had never attempted to define that word before. He introduced himself as Mr Norbert-Seinberg and introduced the first Lot while images of the planet for sale appeared on the screen.

“Wasp – despite its name, has no sting in its tail. It is a habitable dwarf planet noted for its uniformly warm climate and equal proportions of warm, turquoise seas and verdant, well-fertile plains. May I start the bidding at two hundred billion Monobin Credits?”

The reserve price was three hundred billion Credits. Normally the bidding would be intense and the reserve easily passed. Today there was a stony silence. Nobody moved their hands, not a nod of the head, not a twitch of a cheekbone. Nobody even coughed.

“Umm… perhaps the coffee wasn’t strong enough this morning.” Mr Norbert-Steinberg nervously tried to make a joke. He glanced at the Archetype who was frowning, a facial expression that deepened the folds of extra skin. “Let’s start at one hundred billion Credits.”

Mr Norbert-Steinberg dropped the starting price three more times and was becoming increasingly worried. Driis Mavick, an aristocrat from the planetary state of Fahot where the sentient species were seven-foot tall and five-foot wide with skin like flexible concrete - and were still prettier than Monobi - opened the bidding at three hundred thousand Credits. Mr Norbert-Steinberg sighed with relief, but his troubles were not over, yet. Nobody attempted to outbid Mavick.

“Sold,” he said at last. “To Driis Mavick for the bargain price of three hundred thousand Credits.”

Driis Mavick smiled slightly and nodded to Mr Norbert-Steinberg, urging him to go on.

“Lot number two, Akete in the Aten System, is a lush jungle planet that rotates very slowly on its axis, causing long hot days and short cold nights. A relatively small axial tilt makes for a stable, predictable climate. While the planet's landmasses are heavily forested, there also exist several open grassland regions. The potential for colonisation makes this a high end planet with an opening price of eight hundred billion Credits.”

Again there was silence in the auction room. After a little while, Mr Norbert-Steinberg dropped the opening price.

Then he dropped it eight more times before the Voivode of Dionusi purchased the planet for a quarter of its guide price. The Archetype of Monobi looked askance as he failed to make any profit for the second time.

By the time it had happened twenty times, the Archetype was incandescent with rage. Nearly every bidder in the room had purchased a planet at rock bottom price with a single uncontested bid. He beckoned to Mr Norbert-Steinberg and spoke to him at length. Finally the auctioneer went back to his podium.

“Gentlemen and… er…. Lady… there is an additional lot, outside of the catalogue. This is a large, Class M Planet with multiple climate zones, variable topography and flora and fauna in abundance. Sol III has huge potential for development. Shall we start the bidding at nine hundred thousand million Credits?”

Sarah-Jane squeaked in shock and astonishment. Sol III was Earth. Earth was being sold at auction.

“Ten hundred thousand million,” Sarah-Jane called out, wondering if that was even a real number.

“Eleven hundred thousand million,” responded Monobi, inexplicably.

“He’s trying to up the bid,” Dorusse told Sarah-Jane. “He can’t afford this to be a low bid. Keep bidding against him for a while. He’ll want some of us to join in.”

Sarah-Jane made a counter bid. Monobi responded. Sarah-Jane bid once again.

Then two more bidders joined in. Each time, Monobi counter-bid. Mr Norbert-Steinberg glanced uneasily at him. Sarah-Jane understood perfectly well why. Monobi was breaking all the rules by forcing up the price of his own lot. By rights, Mr Norbert-Steinberg should stop the auction altogether, but the poor man was trapped by his tyrannical employer.

Dorusse had bid fifteen billion-billion Credits, a massive sum even for a man as wealthy as he was. Monobi counter bid. Sarah-Jane was about to make another bid when she felt a hand on hers. It was The Doctor. He was grinning madly.

“Are there any more bids?” asked Mr Norbert-Steinberg anxiously. The bidding stands at sixteen billion-billion Credits, with you, Archetype.”

Nobody bid. Monobi looked around at the businessmen and crowned heads in the room, glaring at them as if that would make them put in a bid.

It didn’t. Mr Norbert-Steinberg waited as long as he dared before giving the ‘going once, going twice’ warning and striking the gavel down.

“Sold to the Archetype of Monobi.”

“No!” Monobi cried. “It’s a mistake. I didn’t want to buy that wretched planet. What use is it? crawling with humans. I just….”

The Doctor stood and walked forward.

“Archetype, are you admitting, in front of all these witnesses that you deliberately inflated the auction by bidding on a lot you submitted yourself?”

“Well, I… er….”

“And that you were attempting to sell a populated Class M planet, strictly against the regulations of the Shaddow Proclamation?”

“I….”

“In fact, a planet that you do not own? Earth has no formal contact with other planets. No external ownership can be claimed. You have, in fact, tried to sell a planet you DON’T own.”

Monobi was speechless, now, but The Doctor had more bad news.

“I think everyone here will be interested to know that, five minutes after this auction began the Monobian Credit crashed on the intergalactic market. A billion Credits are now worth half a galactic crown, or four shillings in old money for Sarah-Jane’s benefit.

“That means we bought those planets for pocket change,” Dorusse said.

“Indeed, it does. Some of your purchases are invalid because they are populated worlds sold under false deeds, but the rest of you have got real bargains. Except for Monobi, of course. Quite apart from the criminal charges he will face when the Shaddow Accountants find out how many other planets he has sold illegally, his entire business empire, hotels, planets and so on is currently worth about thirteen galactic dollars.”

“I bid thirteen dollars and fifty cents,” called out a voice. Everyone turned to see the Princess Royal with Queen Lizbetta and Prince Malci. “I was given that much in tips yesterday afternoon in the coffee shop. I have it right here on my credit transfer card.”

There was a silence, then the sound of a gavel coming down.

“Sold to the lady at the back,” said Mr Norbert-Steinberg. The Archetype of Monobi was incensed and threatened to rain down many painful punishments on the auctioneer, but since he couldn’t get out of his bathchair without the servants who had suddenly left his employment they were empty threats.

“With all due respect, sir, I no longer work for you,” Mr Norbert-Steinberg said. “The lady just bought everything, including this auction house.”

“She bought her own planet back, too,” Sarah-Jane said to The Doctor. “Miniterra is out there somewhere, isn’t it?”

“We’ll find out where, later,” The Doctor confirmed. They can have it brought back here where it belongs. The hotel will make a new, shiny satellite orbiting the planet, as well as a nice little earner for them. People will still pay for the luxury facilities with the added bonus of enjoying a visit to a planet like Miniterra.”

In fact, The Doctor was happy for them to stay in the hotel while he got involved fully in untangling the deceitful business dealings of Monobi and preparing a report for the Shaddow Proclamation. With many of the ordinary Miniterrans staying on to run the place, Sarah-Jane enjoyed the luxury without guilt. She became firm friends with the Princess Royal and with the Dorussen wives as they enjoyed the pool and spa every day.

And when Miniterra was finally brought back where it belonged, the Royal Family and all of the skilled artisans and craft workers back in their homes and workshops, Sarah-Jane finally got to see the planet where everything was in miniature. She got to see a herd of two-foot tall elephants, flocks of birds the size of her thumb and many more wonders before spending the night as the special guest of the Queen and Prince.

“Well, it took a while,” she said to The Doctor. “But we got to see the right planet in the end. It must be a first, even for you, to have to bring the planet back, first.”