**Ludwig’s Alien**

Peri Brown laughed with undisguised enthusiasm for the location The Doctor had brought her to.

“Schloss Neuschwanstein. Brilliant. I came here a couple of years ago for Oktoberfest. I absolutely loved the castle. I could have stayed there for days exploring every nook and cranny and tower. I was hoping I could just settle down in one of the high towers like Rapunzel, well out of the way of Howard and my mother.”

She looked from the castle with its mock medieval gatehouse to the mock medieval dress she was wearing, cinched waist, slightly flared skirt, long slender sleeves and demure neckline.

“This can’t actually be the fourteenth century. Neuschwanstein wasn’t built until the mid-nineteenth century. It replaced an older ruined castle. Neu means ‘new’… obviously.”

She looked at The Doctor’s costume, which was, in fact, a bit more tasteful than usual, a plain blue version of his obnoxious frock coat topping off a trouser and waistcoat partnership that could be from just about any time later than Roman togas.

“It is June 1885 and I… with a plus one… have an invitation to the midsummer ball personally signed by King Ludwig II himself.”

“You have?” Peril took the gilt-edged invitation and checked it thoroughly to see if it was genuine. It certainly looked like it, though the squiggly signature could just as easily have been Ludwig’s chief wallpaper hanger for all she knew.

“So how come I’m dressed as the Lady of Shallot?”

“Obviously, it being Ludwig’s party, guests are wearing costumes from the golden age of chivalry.”

“You know there never actually WAS a golden age of chivalry,” Peril responded as they walked along the wide, smooth path that zig-zagged up the mountain to the castle entrance. The view was spectacular on all sides, whether looking down at the tops of mature pines in the valley or up at sheer ridges with more mature trees so far away that they looked like miniatures. Somewhere in the valley a church bell announced the evening Angelus, telling that it was still only early evening, yet.

She was happy. This promised to be an interesting visit to a fascinating historical period. There was always the possibility that The Doctor would find something weird going on and spoil the tranquillity, but for now all was well.

It wasn’t until they had passed through the gatehouse with the arms of Ludwig’s family emblazoned upon it and men in actual medieval armour on guard that she noticed something that qualified as ‘weird’.

She looked at it for a long time, wondering if she was wrong. After all it was getting on for eight years since she came here as a tourist.

She could be wrong.

And even if she wasn’t, she really didn’t want the weird stuff to start, yet. Could they have the party first?

They were among a small group of partygoers in medieval costumes who were gathered in the lower courtyard before ascending the steps beside the chapel to the upper courtyard. There they were entertained by jugglers and fire-eaters and a dancing bear. Peri harboured worrying thoughts about the treatment of bears in captivity, but there was nobody to make a complaint to. She assured herself that the creature looked well fed and healthy and then looked around at the castle’s mock medieval architecture until a phalanx of heralds in a nineteenth century idea of what the ‘golden age of chivalry’ looked like blew a fanfare on long golden trumpets. More heralds came forward to usher the guests into the ‘palas’, the opulent realisation of Ludwig’s dream of a home fit for a king.

Peri had seen it before as a tourist. She was ready for the ostentatious use of gilding on every non-porous surface, the huge murals depicting scenes from Germanic legends such as Lohengrin, slender columns of vibrant blue material that might have been lapus lazuli if there were that much lapus lazuli in the world.

It was glorious in a mad, indulgent, over the top way. It wasn’t exactly Peri’s preferred kind of interior decoration. She tended towards clean, modern lines, but the sensory overload of the ‘palas’ was mind-blowing. She tried to look at it all at once then reminded herself that this wasn’t a tourist attraction now, but an actual royal palace where she was about to be introduced to an actual king.

They were in the throne room and the ‘actual’ king, Ludwig II was sitting on a gilded throne waiting to be formally introduced to his guests. They included, Peri noted as she and The Doctor stood in line, Ambassadors from various European countries and a sprinkling of royals. A daughter of Queen Victoria was there, and the King of the Belgians. There was also a representative of the Romanovs of Russia and, notably, the several different kingdoms of the newly united nation of Germany. The Prussian king was especially obeisant when he knelt before Ludwig.

There was something about that which struck Peri as odd, but she couldn’t think what it was. History absolutely WAS her strong point, but this era of European history wasn’t really in her field of interest.

There was certainly something odd.

She wondered if it was anything to do with the man who stood to the right of the throne. While they were still three back in the receiving line she looked at him carefully. He was dressed, of course, like a medieval knight in a black and silver colour scheme that spoke of power rather than the wealth displayed by all the flamboyant crimson and deep purple, the ermine and silks in other costumes.

On the whole she approved of the outfit. Having lived with The Doctor’s eye-popping multi-coloured display of bad couture for so long black was restful.

But it was also symbolic of something fundamental. Black was the colour of villainy. The black hats in Saturday morning westerns were the outlaws. Captain Black was the arch enemy of Earth and Captain Scarlet.

She tried to think of a few more literary examples but then got stuck when she recalled that Dumas’s Musketeers wore black while the villain, Cardinal Richelieu, was in Crimson.

Maybe it didn’t mean anything, after all.

But this man looked like an old-fashioned villain. There was something in his sharp features, the way he looked at everyone who approached the throne in such a predatory fashion, the way he watched the King as if he owned him and was jealously guarding him from any other influence.

“The Doctor and Miss Peri Brown of America,” the herald announced. Peri managed something approximating a curtsy as she had seen the other women do ahead of her. The Doctor didn’t bow. He nodded his head as if to an equal. King Ludwig II responded the same way. The black-clad man scowled briefly then adopted a carefully neutral expression.

“Doctor, I am so glad you could come,” Ludwig said effusively. “My dear Doctor. Let me introduce you to my newest friend and confidant. Saul… this is The Doctor, my favourite teacher. He tried to tutor me in mathematics and science. I was a terrible student, but he put up with me magnificently. Doctor, this is Saul Shade.”

“Delighted to meet you,” The Doctor said, though in a stiff tone and without even the hint of a head nod. Shade made a very slight gesture of acknowledgement. He ignored Peri altogether, which suited her just fine. She really didn’t want his attention.

Ludwig didn’t notice the tension between his old and new friends. He was too busy telling Peri a ‘funny’ story about his days as The Doctor’s pupil. It wasn’t funny. It was dull and tedious but Peri laughed out of courtesy before The Doctor took her hand to step back while the next couple were presented.

There was to be a banquet presently in another room, but meanwhile champagne and sweetmeats were being distributed on gold platters. Peri helped herself enthusiastically.

The refreshments, though, didn’t distract her from the feeling that something odd was happening around her. She wandered around the throne room, mingling with the guests, reminding herself that she came from a Republic that had thrown off the shackles of imperialism and she was as good as any of the titled people in the room.

She found her soul mate in the most unlikely of sources. Princess Beatrice, youngest daughter of Queen Victoria, lately known as Princess Henry of Battenberg after her marriage to Prince Henry, heir to the Duchy of Hesse and by Rhine. Beneath all that antique dynasty, Beatrice was a surprisingly unpretentious woman who happily talked with Peri about the company they were keeping at Ludwig’s costume party. She learnt a great deal from the Princess about the tangled web of arranged marriages and uneasy alliances that held northern Europe together in this time.

“Who is Saul Shade?” she ventured as the King left his throne and mingled with the crowd, attended by the black clad figure at all times.

“Nobody really knows,” Beatrice admitted. “It is presumed that he is a nobleman of some Teutonic order, but that is not entirely certain. He may be a commoner who has assumed a position he is not entitled to – though he has a bearing and confidence that suggests otherwise. He… has had a profound effect upon Ludwig, that much is known.”

“Profound… how?” Peri tried, wondering if she was pushing her luck with this kind of interrogation of a member of royalty.

“US citizen,” she reminded herself. “As good as anyone.”

Besides, Beatrice seemed glad of a chance to talk. Perhaps being the youngest daughter of Victoria wasn’t a very good place to be. Her opinions were probably stifled by all those born before her.

“Ludwig was always the ‘joke’ of European royalty,” the young Princess explained. “This obsession of his with medieval romance, surrounding himself with theatrical types and composers, no real interest in politics. As for marriage, I know that my mother and her advisors dismissed him out of hand when two of my sisters came of age. He wasn’t even considered for me, even though Bavaria was always a far richer kingdom than Hesse. But since Shade began advising him, Ludwig has become more of a king, more of a politician, more of a man, even. I still wouldn’t want to marry him, but now he looks like he could make a husband for somebody. And after all, Germany has been united under him. Nobody would have expected that to happen. Prussia was always the strongest of the kingdoms. Ludwig becoming Kaiser was quite a surprise j.”

“Kaiser?” Peri knew enough about the complicated politics of nineteenth century Germany to know that ‘Kaiser’ meant Emperor. The unified German empire that Beatrice was talking about retained most of the kingdoms and dukedoms under the Kaiser who had the ultimate power. It was an uneasy way to run a country. The ambitions of any of the ‘lesser’ kings might topple the man at the top.

But that wasn’t the point.

Even with her incomplete knowledge of European history she now knew exactly what was wrong, here.

But she couldn’t do anything about it, yet. The banquet was due to begin, and she found herself separated from The Doctor in the order of dinner places. He was on the right hand side of Ludwig with Shade on the left, directly opposite him. Beatrice and her husband were up there near the top of the table, too. Peri was several rungs lower on the ladder of ascendancy, between the French and Spanish ambassadors and opposite the Duke of Luxembourg. She got on well with all four, and had the feeling they were competing to fill her dance card, or perhaps for her hand in marriage. It made for an enjoyable few hours of eating and socialising. Her last boarding school had lessons in exactly how to conduct herself in this sort of social setting. But a nagging doubt in the back of her mind slightly overshadowed the fun of being courted by extremely eligible – and in the case of the Spanish Ambassador, extremely handsome – men.

Afterwards when they moved on from the grand dining room to the Hall of Singers where a medieval style orchestra was waiting to play suitable dance music, she disappointed her four suitors by seeking out The Doctor.

“What’s going on, here?” she asked. “My history isn’t THIS bad. Ludwig didn’t become the first Kaiser of a united Germany. He was never powerful enough. He was too busy playing dress up and building fairy tale castles to gain any political power. He’s known in history as the Mad King. He’s an effete, hopeless daydreamer, and by this time next year he should be deposed even from his powerless rule over Bavaria and mysteriously murdered. I remembered that much from visiting here as a tourist. Ludwig’s death is legendary. There’s a whole collection of theories about who killed him and under who’s orders.”

“Yes,” The Doctor answered her. “You are absolutely correct.”

“And all because of Shade? But in that case, how long has been here, influencing him? Because the whole unification thing took decades to negotiate. It didn’t happen overnight. And how….”

“How is less important than why,” The Doctor answered her. “Why manipulate the destiny of one country? Germany is a big deal in Europe, but on a global scale… the USA would be more use to anyone planning world domination.”

“Grover Cleveland is the President right now. He was a Democrat that even Republicans looked up to. Nobody could just come in and influence him. Ludwig is such a sap, he’d be easy. But no way our President could be swayed.”

“I yield to your knowledge of your nation’s history,” The Doctor conceded. “But the fact remains that a malevolent alien force is at work, here.”

Peri had no doubt about the malevolence at work. But she queried ‘alien’.

“Shade is no Teutonic nobleman. He’s alien.”

“So are you.”

That’s why I know he’s alien. Takes one to know one, as they say. He exudes alienness like… like...”

He struggled to find a polite simile and settled for ‘body odour’ with an apologetic smile.

“First of all, yuk,” Peri replied. “Secondly, ok, we’re back round to the first question - why does an alien want to change German history?”

“Let’s get a breath of air before the Spanish Ambassador hones in on you,” The Doctor suggested. “I’m afraid he really wouldn’t do as a husband for you, anyway. He’s too much of a believer in a woman’s ‘proper’ place. You’d be fighting all the time – in Spanish.”

“I wasn’t serious, anyway,” she admitted as The Doctor steered her out of the busy room and out through a side door to the courtyard where the fire eaters’ braziers glowed in the late summer evening. They sat down on an elaborately carved balustrade and looked up at the star filled sky as they both composed their thoughts.

“Doctor… I think I know what changing this part of German history would mean,” Peri said eventually. “Though I still don’t know why.”

The Doctor nodded encouragingly.

“The man who SHOULD have been Kaiser of the unified Germany was the Prussian king Wilhelm I. His grandson, Wilhelm II was the one whose aggressive tactics led to World War One, and according to my history professor it was the defeat of Germany and the abolition of the German empire that allowed the Nazi party under Adolf Hitler to fill the void and ignite the national feeling that led directly to World War Two. The whole domino race starts from the already quite warlike and politically aggressive Prussian king gaining control of the whole of Germany.”

“It is a lot more complex than that,” The Doctor reminded her. “The ambitions of Austria-Hungary and problems in the Balkan States are already coming into play long before the events in Sarajevo in 1914. But your summary is broadly accurate.”

“So.. if Ludwig was Kaiser, and he wasn’t murdered in 1886, am I right in thinking that the dominos would fall differently… the First World War might not haven’t happened and then the Second wouldn’t have followed… And… taking it further… the Russian revolution was partly a response to the hardships of the war. That might not have happened. Soviet aggression might not have affected the world for most of the second half of the twentieth century. The USA would not have emerged as the main opposition to the threat of Communism. It… it isn’t a domino effect, more like a web spreading out from this point in time. Or a crack in a pane of glass….”

“In a century, the whole political picture of this planet would be different.”

“The only thing I can’t figure is why that would be a bad thing. I mean… stopping Hitler from killing millions, stopping the rise of Communism and the Cold War…. Those seem like good ideas.”

“From your perspective, yes,” The Doctor said. “But further down the line… your world’s history goes on past the nineteen eighties. Eventually, you go out into space, you build a human empire across galaxies that really does make Prussian ambitions seem tiny.”

“Oh….” Peri looked up again at the star-filled sky above her. “I forgot about that. German aggression, two world wars, rise of Communism, the Cold War… but those also led to the Space Race… the Soviets and America reaching for the moon….”

“Yes, it did,” The Doctor acknowledged. “Both sides helped by Nazi scientists they pulled out of the war crimes trials and gave safe haven in return for their talents.”

“The Soviets, maybe,” Peril protested with patriotic fervour.

“Both sides, Fraulein Von Braun,” The Doctor replied.

“That’s not true. My family cane from Europe in the nineteenth century… about now.” She saw The Doctor’s sly smile and her anger subsided. “Yes, all right, maybe both sides are to blame in that regard. But OUR space programme wasn’t just for American glory. “We come in peace for all mankind, remember’.”

“And what sort of flags did they leave on the moon?” The Doctor asked, determined to have the last word. Peri gave an exasperated huff and gave up the fight. The Doctor had another point to make.

 “Would it surprise you to know that my people, and some others, always thought that humans started exploring space too early in their technological and emotional development. The space race was prompted not by a desire to reach out and explore, but as a monumental game of one-upmanship between two factions, both of whom had barely held back aggression in spades. That aggression was still in the human psyche when you discovered the secrets of interstellar travel and began colonising. Some of that colonising was peaceful. Sometimes you lived in harmony with indigenous races. But a lot of this time it was plain, simple and downright bloody conquest.”

Peri started to protest on behalf of the Human race, but then she thought about the way the Aztecs had been treated by early European explorers, the way white settlers almost annihilated native American tribes, the British in India….

Yes, she could see how those same traits could make Humans in space troublesome.

“If we’d waited a few more generations to try space travel, we might have been less inclined to push people around?”

“You’re not the worst. That crown definitely goes to the Daleks. But, yes, there are races out there that will come to hate Humans.”

“So… could this… could Shade be one of those… trying to change our history to influence the future?”

“I think so.”

“Then… he’s not completely evil. He’s trying to do some good, somewhere?”

“I’m not sure. But whatever his reason, it has to be stopped. History cannot be interfered with in this way.”

“Says who?” Peri asked. “I still don’t see a downside to stopping two world wars, the Holocaust, nuclear proliferation… even stopping us going into space before we’re ready.”

“Says my people, for a start. Time Lord... that’s what it means. It’s my job to stop this kind of thing.”

“Yes… but….”

“No,” The Doctor insisted. “It doesn’t matter if this interference turned Earth into a peace-loving utopia. The fact is that the war and strife of the twentieth century IS part of your history. As terrible as it all is, you cannot change it, not one moment, not one single life lost or gained, and I have to put a stop to whatever is going on here.”

Peri began to protest again. The Doctor sighed and shook his head.

“When have you ever distrusted my word… except that time when I was regenerating, at least. Can’t you accept that I’m right this time?”

“I guess you are,” Peri admitted. “But it’s still hard to accept. I….”

Her words went unfinished, cut off literally by a sword that struck between her and The Doctor, cutting a sliver of stone coloured plaster out of the balustrade. They both turned to see Saul Shade raising the weapon to attack again. The Doctor leapt to his feet and put himself between Shade and Peri, proving that, despite there never being an age of chivalry, it still existed somewhere in the universe. He reached into his coat pocket and produced a twelve-inch steel ruler that he used to parry the blow.

That shouldn’t have been possible. The sword should have sliced the ruler in two. Instead, to Peri’s amazement and Shade’s utter surprise, the sword broke near the hilt. He dropped the useless section and lunged for the sharp end, but The Doctor had it in his hand already, despite not appearing to have moved. Shade looked at the still deadly length of steel aimed at him, then turned to run. The Doctor gave chase, followed by Peri who didn’t intend to hear about this as a long, dull story, later.

This being Neuschwanstein, the castle Disney based its famous fairy tale castle on, there were lots of places to run, from courtyard to courtyard, up steps and down in a maze Escher would be proud of, onto battlements that overlooked dizzy drops into dark, shadowy chasms.

It was on just such a battlement that Shade stopped running. The king’s guards were approaching from one end while The Doctor blocked him from the other.

“Kill him. He’s the King’s enemy!” Shade ordered them.

“No, I’m the King’s friend. He’s the enemy,” The Doctor called out. “Believe me. Remember before he came, when things were so much different, here. Remember a gentle, opera living king, not an ambitious despot. Shade is the one who changed everything.”

There was a look of indecision on the faces of the guards. It might actually have gone badly for The Doctor as they tried to make their minds up. But Shade lost his nerve. He turned and tried to run at the guards. One of them remembered just in time that he was only dressed as a medieval castle guard. He actually had a late nineteenth century pistol under the cloak. He whipped it out and shot once, hitting Shade in the shoulder. The impact threw him backwards, over the battlements. Peri was the only one who saw his morphic field change from human to something definitely not human before the dark gulf below swallowed him.

“Your King is safe,” The Doctor told the guards. “Go about your duties, now.”

The men did as he said. Peri suspected a touch of hypnotism, because she was sure some kind of written report would have been in order, not just ‘go about your duties’.

“That’s not the end of it,” The Doctor said, turning back towards the courtyard. “There must be a control around here, somewhere.”

“A control?”

“Something like the TARDIS console room, only probably without the relative dimensions. To change this much history, he must have used some sort of reality distortion. It will need a lot of power. There must be a room, maybe a whole building….”

“There is!” Peri exclaimed. “I saw it when we arrived, but I thought it was my memory playing tricks. The lower courtyard… there was going to be a chapel in it, but the plans were cancelled after Ludwig was deposed. It was never built. Only… the chapel is here, now.”

“Clever girl,” The Doctor told her and broke into a jog. Again Peri ran to catch up. Not wanting a broken neck she was a little slower on the steps and reached the lower courtyard in time to see The Doctor break open the chapel door with the same twelve inch ruler he had defended himself with before.

“Alihgerian steel,” he said in explanation. “Hardest metal in the galaxy.”

Inside the chapel was… well, not a chapel. The Doctor was right about it looking a bit like his console room, except with a kind of art deco theme. Machinery hummed and lights blinked. All seven walls and the octagonal central console glowed. The Doctor studied the data on a screen for several minutes.

“Incredible,” he said. “The reality distortion actually covers most of Europe, from as far north as Scandinavia to the rock of Gibraltar. That means everyone within those limits believes that Ludwig really is Kaiser of all Germany.”

“And outside… in the States, for example….”

“There, everything will be as it should be. But if he could have boosted the energy he might have encompassed the planet. As it is, effecting change in Europe would do the damage.”

“Damage?” Peri was still sure Shade’s changes were for the better.

“Look.” The Doctor pulled down another screen and showed her a temporal date – 1985, the year she had left Earth with The Doctor. But the images behind the date were of an Earth turned to a radioactive cinder, the edges of just recognisable continents visible against evaporated oceans.

“How?”

“The arms race happened in the latter half of the twentieth century, just because humans are curious and ambitious. But because people hadn’t seen what total world war was like, because there hadn’t been blanket bombings of London and Liverpool, Berlin and Dresden, atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki … because humans didn’t recognise the horror, and tried to avoid launching the missiles at all costs….”

“They launched them.” Peri turned away sickly. “So we doom ourselves and… we never get out among the stars at all.”

“Not in this reality.”

“So….”

“I told you. It’s my job to stop this and put things back the way they were.”

“You’d better do it, then, Doctor. Do it… to save the human race from its own stupidity.”

She didn’t want to know how. She turned and walked out of the pseudo-chapel. She stood in the dark courtyard and breathed deeply, trying to get the awful image of Shade’s future out of her head.

There was a strange whooshing noise behind her and her hair was blown by an unexpected wind. She didn’t turn straight away. She was looking across the courtyard, noticing the differences. The braziers had gone out. There were less lights on in the castle windows, too.

There was no music.

The Doctor stood beside her. Only then did she look around to see that the chapel wasn’t there any more.

“History is back to normal?”

“It is here. It will take a few hours for the reality to spread out across Europe, catching up on itself. Maybe half a day.”

“Why is it so quiet? What happened to the party?”

“Without Shade’s alterations, Ludwig is a shy recluse who lives in his own dreamworld. Even if he threw parties the sort of people we saw at dinner wouldn’t turn up.”

She knew that, of course. Ludwig’s sad story was told by the official tour guide and in the books on sale in the souvenir shop. But she really wished it didn’t have to be that way.

They went into the palas. They found Ludwig in the empty Hall of Singers. He was sitting on the steps up to the orchestra stage, crying.

Peri forgot all protocol and ran to comfort him.

“Why are you crying?” she asked. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know,” he answered, pressing himself a little melodramatically into her bosom. “I just… felt, suddenly, so very lonely. I feel… as if there had been music in here and then it was gone. I feel as if….”

“I’m sorry,” she told him. “I really do wish it was different for you. I wish you had a friend you could trust.”

“You DO have friends,” The Doctor assured him. “You just need to choose those you keep close to you very carefully. Especially in the next few months.”

One of his courtiers came and brought the King to his bedchamber. His servants were used to his mood swings and knew how to look after him. The Doctor and Peri left them to it, walking away from Schloss Neuschwanstein in the quiet night.

Peri felt like she didn’t want to talk as The Doctor set their course away from nineteenth century Bavaria. She did feel like looking up the biography of Mad King Ludwig. She needed to know if reality had fully swung back into place.

“Doctor….”

“Yes….”

“Not one moment, not one single life lost or gained…. That’s what you said. But you told Ludwig to choose his friends carefully. And he did. He chose the courtier who put him to bed tonight… that night…. The courtier stayed with him when he was deposed and made to move to Berg Castle. The courtier was with him there by the lake when he was meant to be assassinated. The plot was foiled. He didn’t die. He lived another fifteen years before catching typhoid fever and dying in his bed.”

“He died without marrying, having children? His uncle, Luitpold, was still king in his place?”

“Yes, all that.”

“Then those fifteen years changed nothing. History hasn’t been altered except that Ludwig had a few peaceful years, free of the demands of kingship, with a friend at his side. That’s what you hoped for, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but I didn’t think you would… or could. You were so insistent.”

The Doctor smiled and winked.

“If I always obeyed the rules I wouldn’t be a Renegade Time Lord,” he reminded her.