

Soulhunter

by Pierre Schramm

How the Doctor changed my life. Or how I changed his. I do not know quite well - this has been quite confusing. And I have not much time left: I have been sentenced to death by my own people, for my beliefs. Well, for my new beliefs, that is. The more I think about it, the more I think about how the Doctor led to my life's end, well - the less angry at him I become, the less regrets I have. For it is him who triggered that series of rather nasty events.

I guess I should go back to the beginning. My name is Anam, and I met the Doctor on my homeplanet, Anima. There, I used to be considered a worthy person, and a powerful one. In all fairness, I was, and still am one, but I have gone too far, pushed things too quickly.

I was on the TARDIS, en route to France, when I thought I might stop on my way for a quick drink on Gamdeltarus. It had been quite a while since I had last been there, and it is a time and place I quite enjoy. But when I got there, something felt definitely wrong. A few questions later, I gathered the Gamdeltarians were feeling disposessed; all their greatest scientists and strateges had disappeared, and a new star had

appeared in their sky. Further investigation confirmed my fears of an invasion, of a kind I had never seen before. I paid for my drink, and decided France could wait, or I could never come back and enjoy the best drinks in this section of the Universe. I get back in the TARDIS, and set the course for the new "star".

So here I was, on Anima, with a big blue box appearing out of nowhere. Of course, I was interested: the power of appearing and disappearing would make me even more powerful. The TARDIS would be my prey; and once I had absorbed its power I would be invincible, and finally outrank Feudar. At that time, I had yet to grasp the size of its powers - to me, it was just a very impressive conjuring trick to vanish out of a prey's sight. But now the doors open and I see a tall man get out of it. That feels weird, to see a concrete shape actually moving. But his aura is so, well, impressive that I can but stay there, amazed.

Nice planet. Hilly and green. The TARDIS readings show that the atmosphere is enriched in hydrogen, but still breathable. For one moment, it seems so peaceful to me that I have

doubts as to its role in an invasion of Gamdelta. Ah, but then - then I take a look at the energy scans, and they indicate an abnormally high activity on the planet. Definitely worth checking out.

As I step out of the TARDIS, I immediately feel revitalised, but in a strange, odd way - as if something were trying to force me to be cheerful and energetic. The light is brighter than I expected it to be from the TARDIS readings, and the air somewhat fresher. Dazzled, I stop a moment in front of the doors of the TARDIS.

The man stops moving, but his aura keeps expanding, feeding on the surrounding energy. As a hunter, I know this is the time to strike, or it will be too late, or it will be too powerful even for me. So I move forward, take a leap and cover up his aura, wrap it up within me. It is hard, I struggle - for a couple of seconds. And then the man's aura shrinks within me. I have done it, I have absorbed his power, and his knowledge. And it all flows up towards me, and it all floods me. I know who he is now, I know he is the Doctor. All of his previous seven lives come banging against me. And I know everything about time travel, I know everything about the humans.

That knowledge is too much for me. Far too much. For one moment, I wish I had not tried and conquer him. For one moment only, and then the Doctor's voice inside my head tells me about the things that I might still discover.

I feel a spike of energy coming at me. The air I breathe becomes even colder; I gasp. My body struggles against this aggression from the outside. My mind fails to realise what is happening to me, for some time. But the struggle is too demanding, and I will not be able to keep it up for a long time. And then I see that the outcome of my giving in could be beneficial - and frankly enough I do not have much of a choice. So I let go. It takes some effort to make my body's barriers stand down, but after a couple of seconds, I am entirely at the mercy of my predator.

I feel my body collapse behind me, in front of the TARDIS; but my spirit is wrapped up in, absorbed by another one. A weaker one, obviously - my sixth self reminds me - but still an interesting one. I can see what the Animi do, I become part of that one. Its - or is it his? - name is Anam. Seeing what position he has on Anima, he will be a very useful guide to what exactly is happening.

I find myself arguing with myself. Justifying this invasion that we have been planning for so long. Telling myself how Gamdelta is a strategic place, at the crossroads of the galaxy, with many brilliant minds stopping for a drink or for some entertainment. How powerful the Animi - let alone I - would be

if we could stealthily conquer this place. But you do not do it stealthily, I hear myself say. There are people missing out there on Gamdelta, great minds whose absence is noticed. Stealthily is the keystone of our operation: if people know it Gamdelta has been taken over, it will no longer be a port of call.

Now the Doctor, I know it is his doing, calls upon the philosophers that I have absorbed over the last few months. He takes one and makes him say: "You cannot take away people's lives for convenience's sake. They are sacred. Upon their lives depends other people's lives, think of their families." And then the image of one father whose aura I absorbed just two days ago springs up, and he shows me his family - and I can but feel for them, for he is a part of myself.

No, I must focus. This is not my thought, it is the Doctor's, and I can fight it. I am Anam, and I am greater and stronger than the Doctor. "But are you, now?"

Having changed bodies so many times, I did not think it would be so weird to be disembodied. And yet, I cannot quite get used to it. I make mistakes, act irrationally, and rushedly. Granted, I have done it before, but I always had an idea of what I was aiming at. Here it is just a guessing game, and I have made my first error: I have made Anam aware of my presence, and of my strength. I shall act more smoothly now. Let him take over for a while, just to see where this is leading

to.

The voices in my mind seem to have ceased now. I can, at last, think for myself. I have never had, in all my existence, such a tenacious adversary. I am pleased to have been up to this challenge. Or so my pride lets me think. However, being an experienced hunter, I do not lose vigilance. I feel like celebrating this new conquest, however. So I go back to the city, and begin to have some entertainment. Interestingly enough, the spirits we have absorbed over the last week are quite amusing, and I am at ease. This is the single mistake I will ever have made as a hunter. For then, I feel the urge to drink - and let my guard down. The Doctor then stealthily whispers new ideas to me - he gathers information about the Animi, and from this moment, it is over for the invasion.

Anam is, as I expected, only one of many people, the Animi. They are invading Gamdelta to be able to cull more and more souls. From what I have just learned, the Animi society is organised into casts who struggle for reputation and power, which is proportional to the quality and number of spirits they absorb. My sixth self makes me notice how I tipped the balance enormously in favour of Anam's cast. Seemingly, Anam is the leader of one of the two main casts of Anima; the

other being led by a certain Feudar. Interestingly enough, the Animi do not wage war between themselves, or physical war towards other people. My guess is that, quite early in their civilisation, they absorbed the mind of a pacifist and that, at that stage of their development, the absorbed spirits still had an influence. My mind shudders at the very thought of what would have happened if instead of that pacifist, they had taken Atilla in.

Anam's cast is still second-in-power; however, having planned this invasion of Gamdelta, a success would mean certain glory and power, enough to outrank Feudar. Maybe it is time we paid a visit to him.

This mind I have just absorbed is so wonderful that everyone turns to look at me. It is time to aim a blow at Feudar's pride. When he sees me, he looks frightened of me, for a second, then he turns back, very upset, seemingly acknowledging my loss. He is bitter, I can feel it, and it is pleasant. I have achieved what I wanted to do by invading this planet, a voice suggests. And it is true. And then the images of this family come back, and I feel sad about the whole invasion. I decide that, maybe, it is not a good thing for Anima. Still drunk by the feeling of power, I go and hail the people outside, and tell them why and how this invasion is bad, why it is even evil. I open my mind to them, something noone has done in history, and let them know why it is so.

All of them agree, but they also resent me for this action. Soon, I see them shouting at me "Traitor!", and I know the end is near.

It is done then. The invasion is stopped. What will become of me, I do not know. Will I regenerate, even though I am disembodied? But I see Anam has changed, and when he opened his mind, he let me go, and I am now myself again. Well, almost. I shall always remember Anam.

Now I am going to be executed. Feudar has insisted to be the one to give me the final blow, and he intends to make my death as painful as possible. As I see him approaching, fear takes hold of me, but I close my eyes and think of all I have discovered with the Doctor, and of all there is yet to be seen, and I am at peace. Feudar begins the torture, but I shall not give him the pleasure of my suffering. I know the Doctor won't come, and I know why. The mistakes of my people have been corrected, and Gamdelta is now safe from us.

Here it comes, the blackness. Death, I imagine. No such thing as a light in the end of the tunnel, just nothingness.

I feel sorry for Anam. He would have made an excellent companion. Hopefully, he will get mercy from his people, but I doubt it. Was it justified? His death for Gamdelta? This is the kind of questions I hate - but what is done is done, and there is no turning back time. Well, you know what I mean.

Seemingly, a part of me will stay forever with the Doctor. As I died, Feudar saw a spur of light spring from my body, directed to the sky. Directed to Gamdelta, to the planet we were leaving. All I see now is machinery. I feel I am inside the TARDIS, and that it will nurture me in its heart. I just need a little patience, and I shall be able to feel and know of the wonders of the world again.



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