

DOCTOR WHO:
THE
QUANTUM
ARCHANGEL

A novel featuring the Sixth Doctor and Mel set between
Trial of a Time Lord and *Time and the Rani*.

by
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The Quantum Mechanics

Gods...

She had been there for an eternity. Then again, what was eternity to an Eternal? Stars could burn and die, galaxies could collide, timelines could converge and collapse... but Elektra would wait, wait out her long silent vigil in the depths of the Darker Strata. Elektra knew that she would be undisturbed there.

The Darker Strata, the deepest levels of the Time Vortex, were ignored by all – the Eternals, their cousins the Chronovores, the mysterious Time Wraiths with their insane appetites, the Swimmers mindlessly pressing against the multiversal boundaries... All of the Transcendental Beings shunned the darkness, preferring the upper levels or the Realm itself. But the dim, turbid streams of the Darker Strata were the perfect place for an Eternal who didn't want to be found.

And Elektra most certainly did not want to be found.

Like all of the Transcendental Beings, the Eternals had existed since before the universe had formed – an eternity in the most literal sense. Abandoned by their parents, they had been left to forge their own path – but it was a path that Elektra rejected. Not for her the endless hunt for lesser beings to fulfil her life; not for her the need for Ephemeral thoughts and desires to give purpose to her existence. No – Elektra knew what she wanted.

But what Elektra wanted was forbidden, forbidden by the ancient covenants that bound the Transcendental Beings.

Because Elektra wanted fulfilment.

Once, long ago, within the abyssal confines of the Darker Strata, she had found that fulfilment. And she would do again, so very, very soon. Because, for the first time since the remnants of the Big Bang had hung in the Vortex like veils of preternatural fire, since the Transcendental Beings had found themselves in their new home, Elektra had found one *in simpatico* to her needs and her wishes...

As if in response to her reverie, the dark of the abyss began to stir. It began to curdle into patterns of time, space and reality, new regions of space-time bubbling down through the substrates to the closed reaches of the Darker Strata, permitting a heavily built figure of fire and ice to penetrate Elektra's oubliette, his wings outstretched in greeting. Elektra responded, creating a spiral spectrum of turbulence in colours that could only be seen in the Time Vortex, and then only by gods.

But Elektra *was* a god, and so was her consort.

Prometheus.

As he approached, his mind began to burn within hers as hers did within his, minds of unimaginable complexity and reach... but also minds of imagination, a concept that their fellow Eternals and Chronovores simply couldn't comprehend.

For theirs was a marriage that screamed in the face of the Ancient Covenants.

She was of the Eternal caste: those who drifted mindlessly, seeking out other imaginations, other lives, to lead and to leech. Occasionally, if the boredom grew too great, they would be drawn to the Games, where the Council of Guardians or the less aloof Old Gods would organise tournaments and entrapments for them, but the majority of their time was spent looking for others – for those who led *real* lives – who could fulfil that great longing that was the Eternals' curse. But not Elektra. As far as Elektra knew, she was unique – the only Eternal who lacked the great longing for external fulfilment, for the Desire, as it was known.

But there was another longing, another need... one that needed succour from another who could meet her on her own plane. Not from her brethren and sisterhood of the Eternals, but from another source...

The dark caste of the Chronovores.

Segregated at birth, they had been consigned to exile, just because they failed to meet the standards of the Council. *Damn* the Ancient Covenants! She looked at Prometheus, radiant, magnificent... She

found it hard to reconcile that with the Covenant description of the Chronovores.

According to the Covenant's ruling, the Chronovores were nothing but vampires: subsisting on the primal energies of the Six-Fold Realm, only truly living by drawing the life essence from the moments of choice, where they could thrive on the what-ifs and the what-might-have-beens, keeping this cosmos alone in the multiverse. An empty existence, a life of loneliness.

Just like the Eternals.

But not them. Not Elektra and Prometheus. As he approached her through the murk of the Darker Strata, tendrils of thought stroked the outer edges of her mind. Reinforcing her belief in him. Reinforcing *her*. Elektra and Prometheus. Eternal and Chronovore. *They* had broken the rules, because *they* were the future. And their forbidden needs and desires would forge that future. With his imagination and her primal strength, they would lead their estranged families to a common ground, to a place where all of the Transcendental Beings could live together with the races spawned by *this* universe. The humans, the Gallifreyans, the Daleks... they would all have their part to play.

As would those Transcendental Beings that had stolen away into the hidden places, regions of the multiverse that were even more remote than the Darker Strata, beings that had seen the universe as a challenge to be conquered, a people to be raped, an artefact of so high a price that they would destroy everything to possess it. The Great Intelligence, the Nestene Consciousness, the Animus... Especially the darkest and greatest of the Old Ones, Nyarlathotep: after what he had done, Elektra had a special place in Hell reserved for him.

All of them, hiding and waiting like spiders in their vile webs. *They* would be the enemy.

That was her driving purpose. Such evil needed to be fought, and for that, Time would need a champion. A champion that Elektra and Prometheus would give their wonderfully united universe, a champion that grew within her.

Their child.

Avatar.

Their child would be the being who would unite all of sentience under one banner, whose dual heritage would show that this new universe was to be shared for the betterment of all. A mission led by Elektra and Prometheus.

Elektra, my love.

He was with her now, his body conjoining with the radiant aura which surrounded her. Eternals and Chronovores were built from matrices of exotic particles, resonating superstrings that gave them power and majesty, and Elektra gasped as those matrices intertwined. But their feelings... were there particles for that? If there weren't, then Elektra and Prometheus would create them.

The moment approaches, my love. Our child will be magnificent. Prometheus' wings enfolded her, allowing them both to feel the embryonic consciousness within her, communicating with them on a level that was almost impossible to detect. But *they* could detect it. And Elektra could tell that their child's epiphany was imminent. An epiphany for the universe. A new universe, overseen by Elektra and Prometheus. They would be the parents of a new dawn, a new era...

Thoughts of the future and their unborn child were thrown aside as the Stygian gloom of the Darker Strata was suddenly illuminated by a brilliance that defied description. For the first time since the Big Bang had lit the Vortex, the Darker Strata were dark no longer. They were filled by a light that was even darker.

They had found them. Even in the Darker Strata, *they* had found them. Elektra and Prometheus may have been gods, but there were greater gods. Beings at the very pinnacle of existence, at the summit of the cosmic hierarchy.

The Guardians.

Elektra had never seen anything like it in her long, so very long, life. And she knew that few others in the universe had either.

Thankfully.

The entire Council of Guardians, six burning figures of wrath and vengeance, of power and unimaginable majesty. A six-fold God.

A six-fold God for a six-fold Realm.

YOU HAVE TRANSGRESSED THE ANCIENT COVENANT, they said, six voices as one. **YOU HAVE BROKEN THE VERY LAWS OF THE CONTINUUM.**

YOU WILL ALL BE PUNISHED.

Elektra and Prometheus remained silent: there was nothing to say, nothing to do. Together, the Guardians could bend reality, fashion space and time to their whims. To them, a Chronovore and an Eternal were insects – less than insects.

And then Elektra realised what they meant – what they intended to do. She screamed her defiance, her cries tearing through the Vortex, powerful enough to shred matter down to the quark level. But to the Council of Guardians, it was nothing more than a summer breeze.

They had decided. Now they would act. Without further discussion, they handed down their sentence.

Prometheus was the first to be punished for his sins. Acting in metaconcert, the Council of Guardians were the most powerful force in the universe. In many respects, they *were* the universe. Effortlessly, they took Prometheus' timeline and unravelled it, string by superstring, back and back. Elektra could do nothing; even if she had dared to defy the Council, their massed energies were freezing her in stasis. She could only observe as her lover, her partner, her *mate*, was unpicked from the fabric of space-time.

She could feel Prometheus' mind convulsing in agony, reaching out for her in a single long moment of need, before he ceased to exist. Before he ceased to ever *have* existed. The Time Vortex turned inside out as it came to terms with its fundamental nature being disturbed, before finally calming down into the blackness of the Darker Strata.

Painfully, Elektra's attention turned from the nothingness that had been one half of her life, anger igniting within her. Even though Prometheus had never been, his memory – his seed – would live on within her. *Avatar*. Even the Guardians could not rob her of that.

CALM YOURSELF. YOU WILL NOT BE HURT.

YET.

IT IS THE CHILD WE WANT.

No! Not the Avatar.

She was still screaming as the First Host of the Eternals, her *family*, descended from their hiding places and took her away.

They say she never stopped screaming.

... and Monsters

Murder was too small a word for it. “You’ve killed them,” Mel whispered, turning away in distress. She looked at the Doctor through tear-blurred eyes. “All of them.”

The shutters closed over the image on the scanner with a nonchalance that belied the utter carnage that lay outside. Billions of people were now dead or dying beneath the sickly, scintillating green of a poisoned sky, their once verdant planet nothing more than a ball of radioactive slag hanging in space.

The clear blue waters that had once girdled the planet were stinking brown liquid graves, brimming full with the bobbing corpses of all marine life; the fruitful garden belt was blindly glazed with the obsidian residue of countless nuclear ground zeroes; the stately avenues of trees that had lined the capital city were nothing but charred fingers, grasping for a hope that no longer remained. Maradnias wasn’t quite dead, but only the last rites remained.

Even now, Mel wasn’t sure how it had happened. She and the Doctor had arrived on Maradnias full of hopeful optimism, confident of averting the possible civil war that had threatened to disrupt the planet. As the Doctor had commented as they materialised, the civil war was never going to be more than a small-scale affair, a mere bagatelle in his cosmic crusade; he just felt that it was his responsibility to stop even those few deaths. But now? What had gone wrong on Maradnias?

She turned from the blind scanner and stared at the Doctor through moist eyes. His tall figure, incongruously dressed in that tasteless red and yellow jacket, was bent over the hexagonal central console, but the strain was clear, even from behind. His broad shoulders were slumped, his head of curly blond hair was bowed in defeat, despair... But those were purely human emotions. And the Doctor wasn’t human, Mel had to remind herself. However human he looked, however human he acted, the Doctor was anything but. But Mel was, and although the last thing the Doctor wanted was an interrogation, she couldn’t help herself: she

had to know. With the ghoulis interest of someone watching a car crash, she felt the words slip from her mouth.

“What happened?”

The Doctor didn't look up from the console as he answered, his voice low, sepulchral. “I miscalculated,” he muttered to the monitors and keyboards. “I didn't realise how strong the anti-Federalist faction was, or that they'd be idiotic enough to use their nuclear stockpile. I -”

Mel couldn't let him continue. Not any more. “You *miscalculated?*” she exclaimed. “This isn't an exercise in mental arithmetic, Doctor!” The tears were still flowing, but her sorrow was subsiding into uncharacteristic anger. “Billions of people have died because of you; billions of innocent lives – all gone, all because you *miscalculated!*”

This time, he did turn round, and Mel was momentarily silenced by the tears that were streaming down the Doctor's face. “Don't you think I don't feel it too, Mel?” he bellowed, thumping his chest. “Don't you think I won't carry the blame for this for the rest of my lives?” His voice carried the weight of the entire universe on it, threatening to make it crack, threatening to make the Doctor crack. But Mel didn't care – it was no less than he deserved.

In spite of the Doctor's obvious distress, unexpected venom coloured Mel's next words; feelings that had been bottled up for months, now spilling over without restraint, without a care as to their effect. “No, Doctor, I don't. Who knows what Time Lords feel? What *you* feel? You go on about the Daleks, the Cybermen, the Vervoids – creatures that you blame for spreading untold misery and destruction. But if you ask me, you *want* the universe to be filled with evil!”

The Doctor reeled back with the intensity of Mel's words, but this didn't even slow her down. The words needed to be said, if only for her sake. “Those creatures only seem to exist to justify your own *crusade*. If it wasn't for them, you'd have no moral high ground to preach from, would you? And that wouldn't suit the Doctor, great and glorious righter of wrongs, would it?” She span on her heels towards the internal door, but her outburst couldn't be contained, even in retreat. She stopped in

the open doorway, her back to the Doctor, but the words still needed to be said. She turned to face him, her eyes blazing.

“Well, you’re just as bad! No, you’re worse. At least they admit what they’re doing, and don’t try to justify - no, to *whitewash* it like you do.” She pointed at the closed scanner. “A billion people are dead because you thought you could play God, Doctor, and I’m sick of it. Find another disciple.”

Her courage failing, Mel ran from the console room, the heels of her shoes clattering down the sterile corridor. The Doctor made no move to follow her; instead, he reached out and activated the scanner, gazing impassionately at the fatally wounded surface of Maradnias.

Mel had just reached the door to her room when she heard the noise, echoing through the white-walled, roundelled corridors.

It was the Doctor.

Screaming.

Screaming.

It wasn’t until he slammed his fist on the lever and closed the great doors that he realised that the screams that he could hear were coming from his own mouth. Taking a deep breath, he willed himself to fight the pain, reminding himself that he had suffered far, far worse in his many lives. But that was of little reassurance – every nerve fibre burnt with the effects of the blast, every inch of his skin was blistered and blackened.

Forcing his charred fingers to obey him, he operated the controls, and watched as the time rotor began to rise and fall as his TARDIS was once more enfolded in the protection of the Time Vortex. At last he was safe. Stepping back from the ebony control console, the Master slipped into the shadows of a nearby chair, trying to marshal his thoughts. As business deals went, that hadn’t been one of his more glorious successes: his... employers had seen through his ruse, and had double-crossed him, just before he could pull the same stunt on them. But it was time to consign it to experience, to put it behind him and carry on with his quest. Because his quest was far more important than grasping at tiny

morsels of conquest. His quest now was quite literally a matter of life and death.

Slowly, tentatively, he reached into himself, seeking out the almost depleted pockets of energy that still remained, looking for the burning embers of the Source of Traken that still smouldered within his adopted body, its waning glory only slightly bolstered by the Numismaton Gas of late lamented Sarn. But it just wasn't enough for him.

Since stealing both the Source of Traken and the body of one of that benighted world's inhabitants, the Master had gained much compared with the desiccated husk of hatred and revenge that he had once been. Whereas his current injuries would have once forced a regeneration, now he simply bathed himself in the unutterable goodness of Traken, corrupting that purity to his own ends. Part of him still missed the Time Lord heritage that he had mortgaged for this new form of immortality, but that was sentiment, and the Master had no time for such callow, weak emotions. But despite the added support of the Numismaton Gas, the Source of Traken burned dimly now, and his overriding concern was to find a replacement, before his body, his soul, his very existence simply crumbled into nothing, so much ephemeral dust to be blown away by the Time Winds.

Mentally fanning the Source's embers, he began to effect repairs to his burnt and broken body, eking out the remaining energy down nerves and sinews, repairing flesh and bone. Unlike the wild explosion of a regeneration, this was more calculated, more painful... but more controlled. None of the wastefulness of a regeneration, where even the healthy tissue was sacrificed in favour of the new matrix that the limbic gland enforced, a genetic coding decreed by his Time Lord physiognomy. With his powers, he could mould his new body, choose his physical form –

– the impact that rocked the TARDIS knocked him from both his regensis and his chair, throwing him onto the polished black floor and halting the physiological repair at the same time.

His body crying out in pain, the Master dragged himself upright, trying to reach the console to ascertain what was going on, to try to control it.

He didn't make it.

The next jolt hurled him against a black, roundelled wall; he managed to fall forward and grab onto the edge of the console, biting back the scream that rose within him as his burnt flesh cracked and wept with the effort. But there was no time for pain: locking it away, his eyes scanned the readouts... and he looked in disbelief at what they were telling him. His TARDIS was under attack!

But how was that possible? Those bumbling crystalline fools may have been able to injure him, but their asinine Dynatrope certainly didn't have access to the sort of technology that was currently shaking his TARDIS to pieces. To affect a TARDIS in flight demanded time technology of the highest order, and there were mercifully few races who could wield such powers in the Cosmos. Mercifully few rivals, that was.

The Time Lords, certainly, but this brazen attack wasn't their way at all. No, they hid behind agents, lies and half-truths – direct action was anathema to them. And besides, hadn't the new High Council been only too happy to see the back of him once he had been released from the Limbo Atrophier in the Matrix?

The Daleks? Rassilon alone knew, they had every reason to want him dead, but he hadn't felt their evil lurking in the sidelines, and, despite everything, he still trusted his instincts. The Cybermen? The Sontarans? He shook his head. Those pathetic races with their stolen, half-hearted time technology? Bastardised DARDISEs and feeble Osmic Projectors? So who was it? He examined the readings more closely. And froze. He'd been looking in totally the wrong direction.

It was a mistake that he knew he was going to regret.

The energies which were now beginning to tear his TARDIS apart weren't coming from the planet he had just left. They weren't even coming from the Time Vortex. They were coming from the deepest levels of reality, from the Primal Substrate that underpinned the universe – and that could only mean one thing.

The Master gulped back his fear.

He boosted power to the defences, surrounding his Ship with a nigh-impenetrable force field, one stolen from a Farquizi Time Cruiser in the

300th Segment of Time and far more resilient than a TARDIS's standard defences. *There, that should do it.* He stepped back as the console room filled with the reassuring burbling and twinkling of the energy barrier, as it enwombed his TARDIS and protected it. There, safe now –

The Master fell backwards, only managing to roll and protect himself at the very last second, as a gout of flame erupted from the console. The time rotor's movements became unsteady and laboured, and the regular hum of the TARDIS became uneven and raspy. That last hit had penetrated a Farquizi shield – Impossible! Even a head-on assault from a Dalek time fleet couldn't dent that! Even as he got to his feet and staggered back to the console, a horrible theory was taking shape. Whoever was wielding this magnitude of temporal energies wasn't using technology. This was something natural behind it, more like being swatted by some unimaginable power... *Oh no...* He didn't have to wait long for the confirmation. The words burnt in his mind like fire in the abyss.

Kronos.

His suspicions had been correct, panic gripping him tightly.

As flies to wanton boys. The Time Lords saw themselves as gods, but there were greater gods than them, gods who could treat the Time Lords and their vaunted technology as nothing more than irritations to be swatted. Not the Guardians: to preserve the structure of reality, their hand could never be detected. But there were others, beings that inhabited the deepest, darkest depths of the Vortex. And once, a very long time ago, the Master had enslaved one of them, bent it to his will.

Kronos, greatest of the Chronovores.

Even as the words lanced into his mind, the Master knew that he was no longer alone. The dark shadows of his TARDIS were burning with preternatural fire, flames which coalesced into a figure that was almost too bright to look at. Like some vicious firebird, it hovered over him, its radiance banishing the TARDIS's permanent gloom.

Hear me, Lord of Time. The words both hung in the air and burnt in the Master's mind. *We are a vengeful people. Our reach is infinite and our patience is eternal. For your actions, we will have vengeance.*

And the vengeance of the Chronovores is terror beyond imagining.

The visitation ended, the firebird exhausting itself, the console room darkening into shadow once more. But they were no longer the safe and friendly shadows the Master welcomed. They were compromised. Tainted. Corrupted.

With difficulty, the Master began to compose himself, but his tormentor had one more surprise. Before the Master could do anything, his TARDIS was hit by a force so great that it even made the Cloister Bell chime, warning of the imminent destruction of his Ship. Hanging onto the console with his charred weeping fingers, the Master could only wait as his TARDIS was flung across eternity, a hurtling blur through the Vortex, its outer surface pixelating as the stresses overwhelmed the Chameleon Circuit.

And within? For the first time in centuries, the Master was scared. Terrified. Against the power of a vengeful god, what could a simple Time Lord do?