

DOCTOR WHO



BLUE MOON

By Oli Smith

Prologue

20th July, 1969, four days into the Doctor's future.

Earth hung in a state of perpetual dawn over the crater; the turn of the Moon perfectly aligned to its orbit about the planet. The Doctor had once tried to calculate the chances of such a coincidence. But then he'd got bored, or distracted, he couldn't remember. The metal rims of his space suit creaked against the knackered old deckchair as he shifted, trying to keep from dozing off. The near vacuum around him created an unmatched tranquillity. Silence.

Well, not quite. The Doctor jerked his head up as the jovial sound of strings crackled into his earpiece; he reached out and fiddled with the wireless radio at his feet, static flaring as he brought it out of tune. Wrong knob. He turned it back and felt for the volume.

'That was The Archers on Radio 4. And now moving far away from Ambridge, we invite you...'

The Doctor flung his hands up in frustration, 'Is that the time?' This was not good. He leapt to his feet, patting his suit pouches. 'Telescope, telescope. Ah!' He flourished the instrument, snapping it to full extension, and slapped it against his visor.

The flare of the sun on the ring of the crater blinded him for a second, but soon he had the blue orb of his favourite planet in his sights. Sure enough, up to the right was the silver streak; hurtling toward him.

Apollo 11.

Still a few thousand miles away, but closing every second.

Today, for the first time in humanity's history, man would walk on the Moon.

But not for a good hour at least.

'Take your time lads, we're not quite ready yet,' he said, holding up his hands in a 'woah there' motion. He closed the telescope with his palm and patted it against his shoulder impatiently. If there was a time for pacing, the Doctor thought, this was it.

Having decided on the best course of action in the current situation he started to circle his deckchair at top speed, long strides enhanced by the lunar gravity.

On his fourteenth circuit the Doctor realised that this wasn't actually helping anything and slumped back into his seat. He brought the wireless onto his lap and started fiddling feverishly with the tuner.

'Where are you? Where are you?' he grumbled.

Suddenly he hit the spot. A perfect note sung out, followed by another, accompanying an exquisite minor harmony. The Doctor whistled his own response as he laid the radio carefully back down and flung his arms into the heavens, as though offering up the biggest hug in the world.

Light.

The gesture swiftly folded into a shield for his eyes as an impossibly bright beam poured into the crater from above, so strong that the Doctor could almost feel the dust rippling out from around his feet.

His glasses tinted themselves, but it wasn't enough.

Through the tightest squint he could manage, the Doctor thought he could make out the shadow of a disc above the light.

A flying saucer. Classic.

He breathed deeply to recover, puffing out his chest as he stood to address the visitors.

'Thank you for coming,' he said. 'There's something I'd like to say.'

Part One

16th July, 1969.

'Beautiful. Just, beautiful. Do you know who would like this? Monet.' The Doctor gestured with a half eaten cheese sandwich across the tarmac of the Kennedy Space Center. The deep heat of July shimmered a perfect reflection of the blue sky across the ground. A flock of birds overhead.

'Completely wasted on him of course, worst eyesight I've ever seen. He actually thought he was one of the great photo-realists of his age!'

He was distracted by a tap on his shoulder, the old woman sitting behind him held a finger to her lips.

'Sonny, I can't hear the countdown.'

'Sorry.' The Doctor apologised with a mock cringe and turned back to face the launch pad. He started to wrap his sandwich back in the tin foil, but thought better of it.

A gravelly voice over the tannoy echoed across the tiered seating, two miles away from the steaming hulk of the Saturn V.

'Seven.... Six....'

The Doctor scanned across the rows of people he was sat amongst, trying to find a face that could match his grin of excitement, but they were all deadly serious. To be fair to them, he thought, the Apollo missions hadn't always been smooth sailing up until now.

He wished he could tell them, reassure the worried friends and families in the crowd that it was going to be all right. Today was the day, the beginning of humanity's journey toward its first steps on alien soil.

He wished he could tell them.

But why spoil the surprise?

Then, all of a sudden, it made no difference whether they knew or not. The shockwave crashed against the tiers, shattering into a million tiny breezes. The Doctor's fringe flopped across his face to be quickly brushed away again. A deep rumbling filled the air.

'Ignition. We have ignition.'

Birds scattered

The rumble became a roar and he watched as great plumes of pure white smoke billowed from beneath the launch tower, cleanly dividing the sky from the rippling tarmac. It took several seconds for the rocket to clear the red scaffold around it and the Doctor could feel the weight of the beast as it pushed against Earth's gravity, straining to break free.

'Breathtaking,' he murmured.

Finally, when the Saturn V was no more than a gleaming speck in the sky, the frightened hush broke and the crowd erupted into applause, on their feet, cheering. The Doctor turned to the old woman behind him who, previous annoyances forgotten, nearly toppled him over with a massive hug.

'That'll teach those commie Russians,' she said with triumph.

The Doctor felt the emotion of the crowd wash over him. 'Look at you,' he said to no one in particular. 'There are planets out there that would call you all a bunch of looneys for doing this. Packing three men into a tin can filled with a skyscraper's worth of fuel, hurling them out of the atmosphere into the harshest conditions imaginable, with nothing more powerful than a pocket calculator to guide them. For what? Just because you can. That's not lunacy, that's bravery and courage and I don't know what. It's just... brilliant.'

For once the Doctor had run out of adjectives.

He turned back to the tower, now surrounded by fire engines and trucks, people running everywhere. The magical stillness of the morning had been broken and now it was time to clean up. But there was something out of place.

The Doctor squinted.

A long black limousine was gliding across the site, heading toward Mission Control.

'Somehow I don't think you're here to help with the sweeping,' he said, glasses suddenly pinned to his nose.

Not one to miss out on the action, the Doctor quickly wrapped his sandwich away, slipping it into the old woman's coat pocket as he shook her hand goodbye, and started picking his way through the tiers.

'Sorry. Excuse me. Doctor coming through!'

Mission Controller Cliff Boxworth ran a hand through his hair in utter bewilderment at the strange gangly man bouncing around his control room. The solemn façade the Doctor had presented whilst flipping open his access all areas pass had now been replaced with childish glee. Never in his entire career had Cliff met anyone like this.

All of a sudden the Doctor was standing next to him, arm hung lazily about the Controller's shoulders.

'What a team, eh Cliff? Splendid chaps, all of them. A real shame that they don't get the credit they deserve I think. Oh yes, it's Neil and Buzz that land on the Moon and plant the flag and play golf, but without all these wonderful people down here...' He gestured around the room by way of demonstration. 'Without these unsung heroes, none of it would have happened.' He coughed quickly. 'Sorry I mean none of it will happen.'

Cliff's opinion of the Doctor rose drastically. He straightened his tie and stood up a little taller. 'Well, yes, of course. I'm very proud of my team. We're all extremely honoured to be a part of this. True it's not as glamorous as actually going up there, but that's not what it's about, is it, Doctor?'

'Definitely not,' said the Doctor with a smile. 'And nothing says fun to me more than a good graph or chart anyway.' He rubbed his hands. 'So, is there anything I can do to help?'

The controller was taken aback. 'Uh, well I think we've got everything covered, actually.'

'Really, are you sure? I'm very good at, well, everything really and I'd love to help. Tell you what? Who's for a nice cup of tea? Anyone?' He cupped his hands to make himself heard over the radio chatter.

'I said anyone for tea?' he shouted, 'Show of hands please!'

He totted up the total, 'Twenty four. Right, I'll get a tray.' The Doctor turned and started bounding up the steps to the back of the room, Cliff shouting after him.

'Two sugars in mine, please, and easy on the milk.'

The Doctor thumbed his acknowledgement.

As he reached the double doors he nearly ran into the two suited figures from the limousine, waiting patiently in the background. He'd forgotten about them.

They didn't look impressed. An expression that remained even after the Doctor extended his offer of tea.

'No, thank you.'

'Suit yourselves,' the Doctor said. 'I'm the Doctor by the way.' He flashed the psychic paper. 'And you are?'

'Agents Spencer and Milledge, Secret Service.' The taller of the pair replied.

'Really? Me too, never seen you at any of the Secret Service Christmas parties, though. What department are you in?'

'That's classified,' the shorter one answered.

'Fair enough.' The Doctor slipped between them and out through the doors. 'Now if you'll excuse me, I have a tray to find.'

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The following transcript was transferred to the Torchwood archives after the closure of █████; its authenticity has not been verified.

July 16th 1969, 11.57pm, Apollo █████ Cockpit

█████
Can I get a time check please █████?

*Houston:
Yeah sure, eleven fifty seven for you guys up there.*

█████
Thank-

static

What █████ is that noise, can you put it on broadcast frequency?

█████
doing it now.

Unidentified noise, possible music sample.

█████
Some sort of light, █████ outside.

Houston, I'd like to report an intense bright light in the cockpit.

█████
I'm not trying to be funny Houston but it's freaking us out here.

*Houston:
█████ shows clear, can you please identify source of the light?*

██████████
Oh my ██████████ there, I can see them. Positioned at two, five and eight o'clock. More on the other side.

██████████
He's right, there's ██████████ else up here. Houston there are six white shapes flying in formation ██████████ with the Apollo. Objects are unidentified.

*Houston:
Switching to alternative frequency ██████████, please copy.*

*

It was Justin that received the call from Apollo Eleven. His colleagues immediately rushing to their desks as the news broke, desperately tracking for signs of Russian missiles. Tea cups dotted the room, forgotten.

But there was nothing.

'There's a transmission sir, different frequency to Apollo, but I've got no source or trace of any kind.'

Cliff feverishly rolled up his sleeves. 'Put it over the speakers, Justin.'

He pressed a button and the control room fell silent as an unearthly, five note chord faded over the astronauts' panicked messages. The notes alternated at seemingly irregular intervals but always maintaining a pure minor harmony.

The Doctor pricked up his ears. 'That's not the Russians,' he muttered, and darted toward a nearby computer. 'Justin, can you give me the wave spectrum of the signal?'

'Uh, I'll try.' He started tapping at his keyboard.

'Doctor, do you mind telling me what you're doing? You might have the authority to be present here but there's no rank that can let you interfere with our work.' Cliff grabbed the Doctor by the shoulder but he shook him off.

'Quiet Cliff, you need me. This isn't a Russian trick, it's alien, and right now I'm the only person who might have the knowledge to find out what they want!'

There was a quiet click behind his head and Cliff stepped backward to reveal Agent Spencer, revolver in hand.

'I think you might be wrong there, Doctor,' Spencer growled. 'Step away from that computer and raise your hands.'

Reluctantly the Doctor obeyed, ushered to the side of the room by a wave of the pistol. Agent Milledge took the stand to address the frightened crowd.

'We are Agents Spencer and Milledge, Secret Service. Under Code Seven of Revised Project Blue Book, we invoke the rights approved by the late President John F. Kennedy regarding first contact.'

'In short,' added Agent Spencer with a grim smile. 'We are now in control.'

Part Two

17th July, 1969.

The Mission Control that greeted the dawn of July 17th was a very different one to that which the Doctor had so cheerfully infiltrated the day before.

News crews waited impatiently outside the main doors, their press access withdrawn, hefty cameras standing useless outside. Inside the main hall the excited buzz had been drained, radio messages exchanged with the crew on encrypted channels. The only noise came from the back room where the Doctor, Cliff and the agents were engaged in animated discussion.

The Doctor wasn't happy.

Neither was Cliff.

'You told them that all they were seeing was discarded fuel tank debris? Those are my men out there! They could be in danger and you're convincing them that there's nothing to worry about!'

Agent Spencer had the most 'I don't care' look about him possible. 'We don't want radio messages going back and forth about aliens. It'd cause a public panic.'

'What, and throwing out the press isn't going to raise suspicions? You're shooting yourselves in the foot. We're beating the Russians to the Moon and no ones allowed to film it!'

Milledge snorted a dry laugh. 'Mr Boxworth, if this mission was nothing but a propaganda stunt we could have filmed it in the Nevada desert and saved ourselves a few billion dollars.'

Cliff was outraged. 'It means nothing to you, does it? The achievement of those three men. That's what I signed on for, to put a man on the Moon, nothing less. Who needs anything more?'

Spencer couldn't stand idealistic people. 'I don't know if you've noticed, Boxworth, but we are in the middle of a war. At his moment in time America could be nuked

several times over within four minutes and there is nothing we can do to stop it. Planting a flag isn't going to save your life, my life or the lives of every United States citizen. But you know what might? Whoever's flying those spacecraft circling your three astronauts.'

'And what's to stop those 'spacecraft' blowing Apollo out of the sky?'

'I wouldn't worry about that, Cliff. I don't think they're in any danger.' The Doctor had been quiet for so long that the other three men had forgotten he was still there. He stood up from the edge of the table he'd been perched on. Cliff thought he seemed somewhat taller than before.

'You see, I have a special gift. I can understand what that rather beautiful piece of ambient techno is actually saying.' The Doctor was squaring up to Spencer, who was feeling rather uncomfortable about this invasion of his personal space. 'The question is, how do you know? And please bear in mind I have authorisation from the President, so I'd like the truth.'

Spencer growled. 'The President has no idea what's going on here, and I'm pretty sure when Kennedy was approving the Blue Book project he never expected something like this to happen. We knew already, even before that. But he never asked and we wouldn't tell.'

'You've known for a decade? Why wasn't I informed when this mission started?' Cliff was getting more and more confused. His hand clicked the biro in his breast pocket nervously.

'So the Russians could get their hands on the information? Something like this could never have been risked outside of Blue Book; it'll win us the cold war. We had to keep it top secret until we were certain there was no way they could get to the Moon first, six years of frantic research into deciphering the transmission so that when first contact happens it will be with American ambassadors.'

The Doctor turned to Cliff. 'It's a peaceful invitation. The beings in those spacecraft have been patiently waiting on the Moon to begin negotiations with Earth all these years. A selfless offer of technology and knowledge to aid human development.'

'And these men...' The look the Doctor gave to Spencer and Milledge made them shiver. He stepped forward. 'These pathetic, small minded, top secret, classified, expensive suit wearing secret service agents have locked this transmission away in a box for their own ends.' The Doctor nearly spat each word. 'To try and pervert a pure and innocent gesture of faith into a weapon to win a war.' He pointed an accusative finger at the agents. 'How dare you!'

Suddenly he grabbed both of them by the lapels and, before they could protest, he had hauled them out of the doors into the control room like a teacher with two disobedient pupils. A sea of faces turned to look, wondering what all the commotion was about.

'This is what you get for refusing tea from a presidential official.' Milledge muttered to Spencer. His colleague rolled his eyes.

The Doctor ignored them and swept his hand across the room.

'Look at these people. Look at every single face here: Justin, Sean, David, Dan, Colin, Jake, Trevor, Barney... Each one of these people whose only motivation is to test the limits of what humanity can achieve. Imagine what could have happened if you had left them to it. If it was one of these men that had received the message once Apollo had landed. Do you think any of them would have done what you have? Do you think their first thought would have been to use this gift as a weapon? I don't think so. And now you have taken that opportunity away from them.' He paused. 'Who knows, if it had been one of these people, first contact might have unified the world.'

'As it well might, thanks to us.' Milledge was feeling very unappreciated right now. 'It's better if power like this is wielded by people who know what they're doing.'

The Doctor pressed his nose against the agent's.

'I would rather die than live on a planet run by people like you,' he growled. 'I have walked the length of the Berlin wall, Agent Milledge, have you been there? A city divided in two, can you imagine? Neighbours who will never see each other again, a corner shop whose regular customers now reside on the other side of seven inches of concrete. A permanent reminder of impossible peace. Neither side deserve this gift.'

Agent Spencer pushed the butt of his revolver into the Doctor's back. The crowd stopped breathing.

'And what are you going to do about it, Doctor?'

The Doctor's smile held no mirth.

'I'm going to stop you.'

Before anybody could blink the Doctor had ducked away, leaping from desk to desk toward the main speakers.

Spencer raised his gun, only to find it had been replaced with a banana.

'Good job I brought a packed lunch today!' The Doctor yelled over his shoulder, 'Justin, turn the transmission up, turn it up loud!' He was at the front now, dancing anxiously in front of the screen. A Dictaphone in his left hand.

Milledge reached for his gun. 'Nobody move, do not help that man! He is a communist spy!'

The crowd were stuck, unsure of what to do.

'Somebody help me, please!' The Doctor was suddenly worried. Eyes scanning the room, searching for a friendly face.

'Dammit,' muttered Justin and cranked up the speakers.

Every man covered his ears as the chord screamed out. Milledge's gun wavered. Utter confusion took hold, until,

'Everybody on your feet! That's an order!' It was Cliff, pale and sweating. The staff obeyed and suddenly Milledge's view of the Doctor was blocked by a few dozen NASA staff. He yelled in frustration and started pushing toward the front.

Justin was by the Doctor's side, 'I don't know what you're doing, Doctor, but you're not going to get out of here, you know that?'

'Just a few more seconds, Justin, that's all I need.' He clicked the tape. 'Got it!' With a flourish the Dictaphone vanished. The Doctor raised his arms in surrender as the two agents barged up to him.

'Okay, I surrender. Take me away.' He smiled a smug smile which swiftly vanished as the butt of Spencer's gun collided with his face, sending him sprawling across the floor.

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It was several hours later when the Doctor came to. There were no windows in the side office he had been locked in, but he could taste evening in the air. He rubbed his bruised face tenderly then leapt to his feet.

'I haven't got time to be lying around here! Too many things to do!' He said.

'You and me both,' came a voice from the corner.

'Justin?' said the Doctor, 'What are you doing here?'

From his huddle Justin held up his hand. 'Two words: aiding and abetting.'

The Doctor made his sympathetic face. 'Oh right. Sorry about that.' He crouched down to meet the man's stare. 'But if it's any consolation, those few seconds you bought me may have just saved millions of lives.'

What? Just from recording that sound?'

'Exactly! Well, sort of. I have a plan you see.' He tapped his nose slyly. 'But it kind of involved me being on the outside rather than locked in here. Still, a small inconvenience.' He started fumbling for the sonic screwdriver.

Justin sighed and looked away. 'I'm not even sure I've done the right thing. Maybe those agents are right; we do need something to help us win the cold war. I'm so tired of living in fear Doctor; I want it to be over.'

'Ah!' The Doctor produced his screwdriver. He placed it carefully on the table and pulled a plastic chair up by his cellmate. 'Look Justin, I don't know how to tell you this, or whether you'll understand, but here goes. I've seen how the cold war ends, I've been there, lived through it, how it would be without the alien technology.' He clasped his hands together in earnest. 'And it's fine. No-one dies in a nuclear holocaust, you'll live, all of you.'

'But how would you know that?'

'You just have to trust me, Justin. It'll be fine.' The Doctor rubbed his chin and winced. 'But if Milledge and Spencer succeed, a rogue faction of the government. Who knows to what ends they could exploit these extra-terrestrial gifts. A country that could rule the world? Wipe out entire cities? And what happens afterwards, when there are no more people to conquer?'

Justin shivered. 'I've read Nineteen Eighty-four. I think I know what you're implying. But just because they could doesn't mean they will.'

'True, but I'd prefer not to take the risk. Humanity can choose its own path. You don't need an alien intervention to tip the balance.'

'Who are you Doctor?' Justin breathed.

The Doctor stretched his legs. 'Someone who is bored of sitting around here all day!' He snatched the sonic screwdriver from the desk and buzzed the lock. With a smooth click the door opened and he sauntered off down the corridor, leaving behind his incredulous companion.

He bumped into Agent Milledge around the next bend.

'Ah, Milledge, I was just wondering if there was any chance of tea any time soon?' The Doctor used his most disarming of smiles.

It didn't work.

'Do you really think we'd be stupid enough to not keep an eye on where we'd locked you up Doctor? Get back in the office.'

'What, no tea?' The Doctor frowned.

'Office, now.'

The Doctor spun on one leg and walked back the way he had come. Milledge followed. 'We have a few questions to ask you.'

'Really? Well I'm not actually in the mood for question answering at the moment, Milledge. I really should be sleeping off this concussion. It's the best thing for it. Trust me, I'm a Doctor.'

The door slammed and agent Milledge was left standing alone in the corridor.

Inside, the Doctor rested his forehead against the frame.

This wasn't going too well.

Part Three

20th July, 1969.

Justin's weekend had not been one of his best, passing by in sporadic bursts of pointless interrogation, canteen food and listening to the Doctor's incessant chattering.

The Doctor on the other hand had regarded the weekend as a chance to finally have a go at drawing up a list of all the alien races he'd encountered on his travels, ranked according to how much he liked them. He was having a whale of a time.

He chewed his pen and ran a finger up and down the ream of printer paper which was now almost completely full. 'Silurians... Silurians, where shall I put you?'

'Oh for crying out loud Doctor, be quiet! You're driving me nuts!' If there had been a window in the room, Justin would have jumped.

'If you don't have anything constructive to say, Justin, don't say anything at all. We've got until Sunday before I start running out of time, so stop fretting.'

'Doctor, it is Sunday.'

'What? Well why didn't you say so? We have to get out of here!' He strode over to the door and produced a stethoscope. Justin rolled his eyes.

The Doctor listened. 'Doesn't sound like there's anyone on the other side, but then it didn't sound like there was anyone there the last four times.' He turned to his companion. 'Shall I risk it?'

Before Justin could begin releasing a long pent up torrent of abuse, the door opened from the outside, smacking the Doctor in the side of the face.

'Ow! That's my sore side!' he yelped. Justin felt satisfied.

It was Cliff.

'Sorry Doctor, uh, why were you standing behind the door?'

The Doctor sighed. 'If you must know, I was about to commit a daring escape, which you've now spoiled.' He ignored the snort of derision from the corner and gave Cliff a quick hug. 'But thank you anyway.'

'There's a back exit I can take you to, the agents are busy monitoring the descent. I'm sorry I couldn't have come any earlier, but as much as I like you, Doctor, my first priority is to the men in that capsule.'

'Quite right too. How long 'til they land?'

'About eight hours, so whatever plan you have, Doctor, I hope it's a good one. I've just been relieved of duty. Gene's taking over for the last leg. I don't think Spencer or Milledge trust me to keep my mouth shut, so if there's anything I can do to help...'

The Doctor patted him on the shoulder. 'It's fine, Cliff, you've done a brilliant job, don't worry about it.'

For a moment Cliff looked achingly tired. 'It's just, I didn't want any part of this, these secrets and politics and conspiracies. I wanted to put a man on the Moon. That's all.'

He received a much longer hug this time.

'I know Cliff, I know.' He paused. 'Right! To the TARDIS!'

He pointed his hand down the corridor like Superman, only to be halted by a word from Justin.

'But, what exactly is your plan, Doctor?'

The Doctor turned back and held up the Dictaphone. 'Okay, well, in short, on this Dictaphone is the alien language. Now I can understand it, maybe even speak it if I have to. But without the broadcast frequency you couldn't trace, I can't simply contact them via radio, so I need to find a way to get my message across. Luckily I have a time and space ship parked around the corner that is brilliant because, apart from the whole time and space part, it also has a very sophisticated translation computer, which hopefully, when I run this tape through, will be able to produce a visualisation of the sounds we heard. Put that visualisation somewhere obvious where they can see it, and Bob's your uncle. They'll come and find out what all the fuss is about. Hopefully.'

He paused for breath. 'Any questions?' Both men raised their hands. 'Well I'm sorry but we're all out of time. Great to meet you both.' He shook their hands warmly. 'And I'm sure it will all turn out fine. Chin up!'

With that, he was gone.

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The Doctor raced across the tarmac, the heat making it stick to his trainers. After so long under artificial light, the glare of the sun was almost blinding him. He hadn't wanted to tell Justin or Cliff, but he was running out of time.

'It's alright, it's alright, I can go back, I've got a time machine, go back a couple of days, sorted.'

But he knew that that was a dangerous avenue to try. The events in Mission Control may have panned out very differently if he went back too far, Apollo might not have picked up the signal, he may not have had time to record the chord. If the events that had happened were undone, he might not even have been aware of the agents' plans until too late. Better to play it safe, to do it now, the old fashioned cause and effect way.

But he was running out of time.

At last the battered old police box came into view. The Doctor smiled with the greatest of affection before cannoning into it.

'I promise I will never leave you out in the sun for so long again,' he said, fishing for his key. 'Now let's get you into some shade.'

The Doctor disappeared inside the TARDIS and a few seconds later, the TARDIS followed.

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Inside the towering control room the Doctor was searching for the cassette adapter.

'I'm sure I had one somewhere... Ah!' He pressed a button on the console and a small panel flipped open. He slotted the Dictaphone tape inside and pressed rewind. The cassette squealed for a few seconds and then started to play back.

The sequence echoed around the Doctor's head. Without the limitations of nineteen sixties speakers it was more elegant than ever. The Doctor paused to absorb it before engaging the TARDIS language circuits. He checked his watch, found that it was in Tokyo time and quickly did some mental calculations.

Only five hours to go.

'Come on, come on.' He impatiently tapped the screen as geometric shapes swirled out a binary pattern in time to the music.

'Hurry up!' he shouted. The tape stopped its playback.

'I'm sorry I'm sorry, I promised I wouldn't speak to you like that again. Now, if you would be so kind as to continue,' he said patting the console affectionately. The tape restarted begrudgingly.

Eventually the swirling shapes condensed into a few elegant pictograms, concentric circles and minimalist lines.

'Got it!' yelled the Doctor triumphantly and slammed a lever, rocketing the TARDIS toward the Moon.

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The aching stillness of the lunar surface belied the urgency of the Doctor's mission. Here, on the edge of the dawn, the craters were picked out in long shadows and stark highlights. Suspended above the horizon was Earth, a blue Moon.

The TARDIS materialised silently in the near vacuum.

The Doctor stumbled out, clumsy in his space suit. Under his padded arms he carried a broom, a spade and a wireless radio. He surveyed the crater and satisfied, dropped his tools in the centre.

'I hope there's something good on,' he muttered, gloved hands slipping on the radio knobs. He turned the tuner carefully. Static, static, static, wait.

'And now on Radio 4, the afternoon play.'

'Perfect.' The Doctor smiled.

He set to work.

It was the sweeping that took the longest time, carefully brushing away the top layer of fine dust that lined the floor of the crater.

Every time he thought he'd cleared a patch his boots kicked up another cloud. But finally he was satisfied. He propped the broom against the TARDIS and went back for the spade.

The symbol was drawn on a post it note he'd stuck to the back of his glove and he marked the outline with the edge of his tool. Then came the hard graft, digging out the shape.

By the time the Doctor had finished his visor had steamed across with the exertion. He trudged to the rim and surveyed his handiwork. A network of concentric circles and lines spread before him.

'Not bad, even if I say so myself,' he said proudly, hands on hips. 'Almost be a shame when I have to fill it back in.' He looked to the sky at the faded pin pricks of the stars, their colour washed out by the bright glare of the sun reflecting off the Moon's surface. No sign yet. And the afternoon play had ended.

He walked slowly back to the TARDIS in search of his deckchair as the familiar theme tune to The Archers piped across his earpiece.

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Light.

The Doctor folded his arms across his eyes as an impossibly bright haze poured into the crater from above, so strong that the he could almost feel the dust rippling out from around his feet.

'Thank you for coming,' he said. 'There's something I'd like to say.'

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'The Eagle has landed, I repeat, the Eagle has landed.'

The astronaut's transmission was drowned out by the roar of the crowd in Mission Control. Tears, hugs, the odd shirt were thrown around with abandon.

Man had landed on the Moon, nothing more, nothing less.

Milledge looked to Spencer, Spencer looked to Milledge.

'They're not there.'

'I can see that.'

'But how? You think the Doctor-?'

'Don't be so stupid! What do you think he could have done? Flown to the Moon and asked the saucers politely not to contact us after all?'

He turned on his heel and walked out.

Spencer followed.

In the back room, Justin and Cliff were in the chairs they'd been escorted to, broad smiles across their faces.

'So what happens to us now?' asked Justin. Spencer scowled.

'Nothing, you're free to go, we weren't here, nothing untoward ever happened, we're taking the radio transcripts and putting them in a safe place. You won't be able to prove anything either way.'

'Why would I want to?' said Cliff, 'I helped put a man on the Moon! Who could ask for anything more?'

Milledge paused. 'Well, congratulations.'

In an odd sort of way, he meant it.

The agents gone, Justin and Cliff returned to the control room to join the celebrations.

*

'This is one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.'

At 20:17 on July 20th, 1969, Armstrong stepped onto the Moon. Four hundred thousand kilometres away, Earth cheered.

On the rim of the farthest crater, the Doctor watched, a smile tickling his lips. And was that a tear in his eye?

He was glad the saucers had understood; humanity needed to find its own way.

'A very polite race, actually,' he said to himself. He must remember to add them to his list.

The Doctor turned and stepped into the TARDIS.

As Armstrong planted the flag, he thought he heard a sound fading over his earpiece. A kind of wheezing, groaning noise. He felt a tiny breeze inside his space suit as the particles of the universe shifted ever so slightly.

The flag fluttered in his hand.

THE END

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