They call it the Dead Frontier. It’s as far from home as the human race ever went, the planet where mankind dumped the waste of its thousand year empire and left its culture out in the sun to rot.

But while one Doctor faces both his past and his future on the Frontier, another finds himself on Earth in 1996, where the seeds of the empire are only just being sown. The past is meeting the present, cause is meeting effect, and the TARDIS crew is about to be caught in the crossfire.

The Third Doctor. The Eighth Doctor. Sam. Fitz. Sarah Jane Smith. Soon, one of them will be dead; one of them will belong to the enemy; and one of them will be something less than human…

Featuring the Third and Eighth Doctors, INTERFERENCE is the first ever full-length two-part Doctor Who novel.

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  Interference Patterns
- FOREMAN'S WORLD:
  EVENING ON THE SECOND DAY

‘We leave you now with the images of the day…’
– Standard sign-off line from ITN Evening News, as of March 1999
**FOREMAN’S WORLD:**
**MORNING ON THE SECOND DAY**

There was an old riddle about a goose and a bottle. At least, that was what the riddle was about on Earth; the same idea had somehow ended up on any number of worlds across Mutters’ Spiral, from Gallifrey to the rim, and it often involved much more exotic things than geese and much stranger things than bottles. But it was the image of the goose that came to I.M. Foreman while she slept. Perhaps it was the human DNA in her that did it, or perhaps she had bottles on her mind, seeing that she was sleeping on the grass just a few feet away from the most valuable object in the galaxy (possibly).

The riddle went something like this. You take an infant goose, just hatched from its egg, and slip it through the neck of a bottle. The goose grows inside the glass, until it’s too big to slip back out again. The question is, how do you free the goose without breaking the bottle?

I.M. Foreman woke up early, long before the Doctor did. She spent an hour or so sitting on the hillside next to him, watching him sleep while the sun crept up over the valley. More than once, she had to bite her lip to stop herself giggling. Once he switched his face off, and let the muscles around his mouth relax instead of giving the world the full benefit of his gurning, he looked more like a proper person than a complex space-time event. You could see the wrinkles in his skin, and the way the flesh had settled on his bones. You could see all the details that made him human, or whatever he called himself instead of human. I.M. Foreman wondered whether that was the way she looked to him.

He woke up, eventually, and the expression on his face made her laugh out loud. The look of confusion and horror before he managed to get himself back in character again. And then there was that little twist in the side of his mouth, when he finally worked out how he’d ended up going to sleep on the side of the hill.

‘Good morning,’ he said, once he’d found his bearings. He frowned after he said it, pretending he didn’t know why I.M. Foreman was sniggering so much.

They didn’t have breakfast. She’d been hungry, but the Doctor hadn’t even considered eating. Time Lords had more efficient digestive systems than most, I.M. Foreman reminded herself. Anyway, she didn’t want him pottering off to the TARDIS food machine again. Space food was fine, but somehow it seemed to make everything much too easy.

They spent a while lying there on the grass, trying to tell the future from the shapes of the clouds. At one point, a cloud that looked exactly like the Grim Reaper rolled across the sky, so the Doctor accused her of tapping into the planet’s ecosystem and making the cloud herself (just to scare him). I.M. Foreman didn’t remember doing anything like that, but then again, she had a lot on her mind.

‘The TARDIS knew something was going to happen,’ the Doctor said, at exactly the same moment that I.M. Foreman decided the game was wearing a bit thin.

She turned her head towards him, feeling the softness of the grass as it rubbed against her cheek. ‘What kind of “something” were you thinking of?’

‘What happened on Earth. What happened to Sam. What happened to Fitz. The TARDIS must have spotted it. She must have realised there was going to be a disturbance to my timeline. To our timelines.’

‘Really,’ said I.M. Foreman, lazily.

‘I remember how erratic the TARDIS was. More erratic than usual, anyway. It started a few months before we got to 1996. She kept landing on Earth. Sixties London. Scandinavia. San Francisco. The Battle of the Bulge. We do have a habit of turning up on Earth, but four times in a row…’

‘Sounds like she was trying to tell you something,’ said I.M. Foreman. Something in her nervous system, something slippery and human, made her feel slightly jealous whenever he referred to the TARDIS as female. She had no idea why.

The Doctor nodded. ‘That’s just it. I think the TARDIS knew something was going to happen in 1996. Something that was going to change our lives. She was trying to work out what. She kept going back to Earth, landing near any disturbances she could find in the timeline. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially. I think she was taking readings. Like a kind of four-dimensional telemetry. She was trying to gather information for what she knew was going to happen in the future.’

‘So how come you weren’t ready for it when it happened?’ asked I.M. Foreman. ‘Unless you’re going to tell me that you ended up in that prison cell on purpose.’
‘No. No, I didn’t. But I knew Sam was going to leave the TARDIS the next time we got back to Earth. I told you that, didn’t I? And I didn’t want to lose Sam. The TARDIS wanted to take us back there, so she could finish the telemetry, but she must have picked up on my anxiety. She must have known I didn’t want to go back to Earth. So she didn’t. The old girl could never resist my subconscious.’

‘So the TARDIS never finished her survey,’ I.M. Foreman concluded. ‘Do you interfere in everybody’s plans like that?’

‘I didn’t mean to,’ the Doctor protested. ‘It just… happened.’

I.M. Foreman rolled on to her side, and draped her arm over him. ‘Nothing just happens to you. You’re too involved. Everything’s got a reason.’

The Doctor looked uncomfortable, although she wasn’t sure whether that was because of what she’d said or because of the physical contact. ‘Not a reassuring thought,’ he said. ‘Can’t I take a few days off every now and then?’

‘Just finish the story,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘I want to know how you got the goose out of the bottle.’

‘Goose?’ said the Doctor.
WHAT HAPPENED ON EARTH
(PART TWO)

We’re past the halfway point now. Most of the important pieces are still in play, but at this stage it’s hard to see where the game’s going. The board’s so cluttered up with rumours and counterplots that it’d take a grand master to spot the strategy behind it all, to work out how everything’s going to come together in the endgame. Well, perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised. The Doctor’s still trying to play chess, but the Remote are more interested in Trivial Pursuit. The two sides are playing by different rules, and it’s more a case of good-versus-postmodern than good-versus-evil. No wonder things are getting complicated.

So, to resume:

The Doctor’s trapped in a prison cell, a long way from anywhere he might want to call home. He’s running out of options, he’s doing his best to hold on to his sanity, and he’s being slowly tortured to death for no good reason at all. Meanwhile, Sam’s being led to the central transmitter of Anathema by the Remote, who are even now insisting that torture and imprisonment aren’t techniques they generally use. Still, you’d expect them to change their minds about that from minute to minute. And Fitz? Fitz is stuck on an Earth-built colony ship six hundred years in the future, along with the ancestors of the Remote and the representatives of Faction Paradox. How the Remote got back to the twentieth century in the first place, we can’t say for sure. Oh, and let’s not forget Guest, or Compassion, or Kode, the three agents of the Remote who seem determined to do something to the timeline of present-day Earth… but again, the details haven’t exactly been forthcoming.

Then there’s Sarah. Good old reliable Sarah Jane Smith, twenty years older and twenty years more cynical than the woman the Doctor once left on Earth with nothing but a stuffed owl for company. (Although we’re sure she can’t have changed that much; that’d spoil things.) Sarah’s investigating a man called Llewis, whom we’d have to describe as a mere pawn, if we were going to stretch the ‘game’ metaphor to breaking point. The Remote are trying to supply Mr Llewis’s company with the Cold, though, so maybe he’ll be promoted to a more important piece later on.

Ah. The unmistakable sound of a metaphor snapping.

This is what they call ‘the story so far’. In the old days, we’d just reprise the last scene of Part One, the cliffhanger ending where time froze and the characters went into stasis. In today’s world, however, things tend to be a little more complicated. For better or worse.
The Darker Side of Enlightenment
(Sam learns about the birds, the bees and the remembrance tanks)

It was like a set out of *Frankenstein*. The old black-and-white one. But coloured in by the man who painted all the sets for *Star Trek* back in the sixties.

The transmitter building was the same kind of shape as the Eiffel Tower, the outer walls smooth curves, rising to the tip of the building hundreds of metres above the surface of Anathema. And the thing was hollow. From down here on the ground floor, Sam could see all the way up to the top, and she couldn’t make out any joins in the structure of the walls. The ground floor itself was surrounded by archways, one enormous arc on each side of the building’s base.

There was a single shaft of… steel? Plastic? Whatever. A single shaft in the middle of the floor, stretching from here to the peak, a cylinder of pale blue as wide as a decent-sized house. Science-fiction blue, thought Sam. Cybernetic blue. Looking up, she could see discs of transparent might-have-been-perspex impaled on the shaft, ‘floors’ of varying sizes. Many of them were full of Remote people, reclining on see-through furnishings and (literally?) soaking up the vibes. There were no railings around the edges of the discs, though, so either the people around here were remarkably well balanced, or they simply didn’t care if they fell off. See-through veins ran up the sides of the shaft, conduits for the lift platforms that carried the locals from level to level.

The floor of the building was easily the size of a football pitch, albeit the kind of football pitch where a local team might go to play at weekends. There were white room-sized domes clustered around the shaft, a lot like the domes on the floating platforms, although there was no particular pattern to the way they were arranged. Baby buildings, sheltering under the sloping walls of the tower.

And the walls were covered in hardware. Thick cables wound their way up to the top of the building, threading between gigantic receiver dishes and smooth-edged pieces of technology the size of tractors. Sam could imagine lightning striking the roof, and trickling down to ground level, lighting up each piece of machinery in turn. Like the world’s biggest game of Mousetrap.

She spent a good three minutes just standing there, turning round and round, trying to work out what was supposed to be happening. There were people moving from dome to dome, in through the archways and out of the lift tubes, across the floor and across the higher levels. But none of them seemed to be doing anything, much. A lot seemed to be taking a casual stroll, listening to the signals in the air.

Perhaps they just liked being here. Close to the main transmitter, close to the heart of the culture, but shielded from the full strength of the signals by the architecture. This place was like a shrine to them, Sam concluded. Here inside the building, she’d managed to get her head together again, but you could practically feel the transmissions from the top of the tower, humming in the walls, vibrating through every part of the structure.

Again, Sam wondered whether there was any way she could get out of here without being seen. Or, indeed, whether there was any point running for it at all. She didn’t even have the first idea where Anathema was. Bearing in mind its downright peculiar relationship to the rest of space-time, for all she knew the whole city could have been on board the –

She suddenly realised she was on her own.

She turned back to the central shaft, trying to find Compassion among the other passers-by. It wasn’t hard. Most of the Remote wore pure, smooth, SF colours, their clothes looking like uniforms without actually being at all similar. Here, Compassion’s combat jacket stood out a mile. Sam hurried after her.

Compassion stepped up to one of the lift tubes, and waited for the platform to reach ground level. When it arrived, she finally turned back to face Sam.

‘Well?’ she said. ‘Are you coming?’

Was that a serious question? Sam shrugged, to see what the woman would do. ‘Thought I might hang around here for a while. Soak up the atmosphere. You know.’

Compassion didn’t seem concerned. She stepped on to the platform, and straight away it started to rise, carrying her up the shaft. ‘Suit yourself,’ she said. ‘Guest’s going to be here soon. We’ll be on the top level when you –’

Then she was gone, the lift taking her out of earshot. Sam watched her go, and tried to make sense of all this.

She’d been taken prisoner by aliens before. Generally, though, her captors had waved guns at her face, or shouted at her not to ask questions. But Compassion didn’t even seem bothered about keeping an eye on her. Was it just because the Remote knew there was nowhere she could go? Or, alternatively…
Alternatively, the idea of ‘captivity’ might not even have occurred to them. They’d tied Sam up on Earth, but
back then they’d been at the mercy of different signals, picking up the media transmissions of Great Britain. Acting
the way villains would have acted on Earth. Here, the rules were different.

My God, thought Sam. They’re anarchists.

It was true, wasn’t it? There were no rules in Anathema. No laws. Everyone acted on impulse, the impulses in
question being beamed out of the transmitters, but interpreted by each person in his or her own way. A world of
individuals, all having different agendas, but all acting inside the confines of the culture.

Sam thought about her own room, in her own house, on her own planet. She had her own TV set, her own
stereo, her own PC. She liked to tell herself she wasn’t a couch potato, but was there any time, in her own
environment, when she didn’t have some kind of signal nibbling away at her? When she wasn’t watching TV, she
had the radio on. When she was out running in the park, she had the Walkman pulled down over her ears. As if the
universe outside would shrivel up and die if she didn’t keep a direct line to it open.

Back on Earth, they had laws. But the laws were arbitrary. The signals told the politicians what rules to make,
and told the people what rules to believe in. The signals told her how to respond to any stimulus, because whatever
happened to her, the TV and the radio had already prepared her for it. The soap operas covered every eventuality,
from birth to death and everything in between. Even her political streak was based on what she’d seen on the Nine
o’Clock News, or, at the very least, on what her parents had seen on the Nine o’Clock News. And even the Doctor.
The way Sam had adapted to life on board the TARDIS so easily. The way she’d been trained for it by years of
watching old sci-fi serials on BBC 2.

What had Compassion said? That her world was the same as Sam’s, only without the camouflage? Something
like that, anyway. All of a sudden, it seemed to make sense.

Or was this place just making her think like a native?

Sam looked up, towards the top of the shaft. The top level, Compassion had said. Soon, Guest would be waiting
for her up there. And the Remote knew she’d join them, because that was the only possible response to the situation.

Right.

Sam made her way across the floor of the building, brushing past the people in their pseudo-military non-
uniforms, people whose culture was the aftershock of Rassilon’s war, but who no longer had anyone to fight. Yes,
she’d do as Guest expected. She’d go to the top of the tower. But she was going to write her own script. She was
going to use whatever time she had here to find out more about the Remote, to look for some kind of cultural
weakness. If they listened to the signals so closely, it had to be possible to send out a few signals of her own. That’d
throw a spanner in the works. The question was, how?

She stopped at the doorway of the nearest dome, and peered inside. In shape and size, the dome seemed
identical to the one on the floating platform, but its function was evidently quite different.

There were three large boxes on the other side of the doorway, great clunking metal cuboids, lined up next to
one another like coffins in a vault. Sam could see tubes attached to the sides of the boxes, thick rubber feed-lines
connecting them to the floor, as if there were some larger piece of equipment somewhere underground. There were
glass panels set into the tops of the boxes, like big round portholes. Sam’s first thought was that they might be
suspended-animation units, although she couldn’t see any controls. Still, the Remote didn’t seem to go for fiddly
bits.

She looked around. Nobody in the tower was paying her any attention, despite the fact that, by local standards,
hers clothes were positively elaborate. This was the first time in her life she’d been the only one in town wearing high
heels.

Might as well take a closer look at the hardware, she thought. After all, they didn’t have any laws against it, did
they? The worst thing that could happen was for someone to pick up a nasty signal and come at her like a slavering
maniac. Which, to be frank, would almost have been reassuring.

Nobody seemed to notice as she stepped into the dome. She leaned over the first of the boxes, feeling the
warmth of the metal-plastic under her hands as she peered through the window. There was, as she’d expected, a
body in the box. A human male, eyes tight shut, dark hair just beginning to sprout out of his shaved scalp. Sam
couldn’t make out his face in much detail, because…

Well, because there wasn’t much detail there. No subtlety, and no interesting little wrinkles. It was like a sketch
of a face, maybe a computer-generated image of a face.

Sam moved over to the next box. There was another corpse inside, but this one had no features at all. It had a
big grey lump for a body, a smaller lump that could have been a head, things that could have been vestigial arms. It
might have looked grotesque, if it hadn’t been so… empty. It was like a great big blob of Plasticine. No: what was
that word the Doctor used? Biomass. A great big blob of biomass.

The figure in the third box was a woman, her features half finished. Sam got the impression she was at a
halfway stage, between being a biomass blob and being a complete person.

‘Did you know her?’ a voice asked.

Sam yelped, and turned. There was another woman standing in the doorway, her thin limbs wrapped in a blue all-over bodysuit, her skin the colour of coffee. Her hair was dark, pinned behind her head. In her early thirties, by the look of her.

‘Er, not very well,’ Sam said.

The woman nodded, and stepped forward. ‘Me neither. She lived right underneath me. Used to complain about the noise. She used to come up to my apartment and dip her eyebrows at me. You know? Great big eyebrows.’ She shrugged. ‘Thought I’d come and remember that. I don’t know why. Seemed like a good idea. Have you finished?’

The woman stepped right up to the box. Sam took a step back. ‘Um, yes,’ she said. ‘I was, erm, just going.’

The woman didn’t say anything else. She reached out for the surface of the box, and pressed her fingers against a section of the metal-plastic casing at the feet of the body, sliding open a small compartment there. Sam watched, trying not to ask any stupid questions, as the woman pulled one of the Remote’s receivers out of the space. The receiver was attached to the coffin-box by the same kind of rubber cable that linked the box to the floor.

The woman pressed the receiver to her neck, and closed her eyes. There was the faint sound of feedback. Sam wondered if the receiver in the woman’s ear was causing interference.

Then there was movement across the window of the box. For a moment, Sam thought the body inside was starting to move; but the movement was purely on the surface, a rapid succession of flashes and crackles, split-second images flickering across the glass. After a few moments, the woman lowered the receiver, opened her eyes and shook her head.

‘Uhh,’ she said. ‘Don’t know why, but it always hurts when I do this. D’you get that?’

‘Er, sometimes?’ Sam tried.

‘Well… Anyway.’ The woman turned back to the doorway. ‘I hope she’s less fussy this time. I don’t suppose I’ve helped, though, have I?’

‘Well… maybe not.’

‘Hmm. I’ll see you around.’

And then the woman was gone.

Sam looked down at the porthole. The flickering had stopped now. Through the glass, she could just see the face of the woman inside, and it looked… It looked better defined than it had done. As if someone had tried to tune the features in, and made the image a little sharper. The eyebrows were particularly noticeable.

The eyebrows?

The woman who’d been here had left the cable dangling from the end of the box. Sam lifted it up, and inspected the receiver at the end. It looked like any other receiver the Remote might use. But whatever signals the woman had sent down it, they’d gone straight into the box.

_Thought I’d come and remember that, the woman had said._

Memories. The woman had downloaded her memories into the box. No, wait, that didn’t make sense. She said the person she was remembering had died. But the person in the box hadn’t even been born, by the look of her.

_The last Compassion looked more human than I did._ That was what Compassion had said, back on Earth.

‘Bloody hell,’ Sam mumbled.

That was it. The only thing that made sense. The signals were everything, Compassion had said; maybe that was true even when it came to the way the Remote were born. Suppose, for whatever reason, they couldn’t reproduce normally. When one of them died, what happened? They had some kind of telepathic technology, that was obvious. So, all the friends of the deceased would gather round and put together their memories of the late lamented, dumping them into these tanks, as if they were any other kind of transmission. The tanks would be loaded with biomass, and the biomass would be shaped by the memories. Sculpted. They’d make a copy of the dead individual, not as he or she actually had been, but as he or she was remembered.

It’d be a kind of immortality, Sam reasoned. But a dodgy kind. What happened if your friends didn’t have very accurate memories? Or if they remembered only the bad things about you?

‘Miss Jones?’ said Guest.

Sam didn’t jump this time. For one thing, the woman had taken all the yelp out of her. For another, Guest was too familiar to her now. He stepped into the dome, dressed in his shadow armour from his neck to his toes, just the way he’d looked in the last hallucination.

‘Evening wear?’ Sam suggested. All things considered, she did a pretty good job of not sounding scared stupid.

‘You don’t approve?’ Guest looked down at his armour, as if trying to work out what was wrong with it. Then he looked up, and seemed to notice the tanks for the first time. ‘What are you doing here, Miss Jones?’
‘Just taking a look at your nursery. These are dead people, aren’t they? Dead people being remembered.’
‘Of course.’
‘If I ask you why you bother with this setup, will I get an answer I can understand? I mean, why not just use clones? It’s a lot simpler, I should think.’
‘Clones wouldn’t change. Every generation would be identical to the last.’
‘Isn’t that what you want?’
‘No. The culture changes. The signals change. When we remember the next generation, our memories change to suit the culture. We develop. We evolve.’

Wait a minute. This was starting to add up. Sam remembered seeing a programme on Channel 4 just before she’d left Earth with the Doctor, all about history, and the way it changed over time. People would reinterpret the past according to the ideals of the present, or at least that was what the presenter with the stupid tie and the Oxbridge accent had said. In the 1970s, he’d argued, the leading theory held that Jack the Ripper was a high-ranking Freemason involved in some kind of national conspiracy – because, in the 1970s, the British were obsessed with bureaucracy and big government. In the 1990s, on the other hand, the leading theory was that Jack the Ripper was a gay American serial killer – because people in the 1990s had watched too many gay-American-serial-killer movies.

Of course, all this was rendered somewhat meaningless by the fact that the Doctor had already told her the real truth about Jack the Ripper, but that wasn’t the point. She thought about the transmitters, laying down the limits of the culture for the Remote. She thought of them rebuilding their dead comrades, remembering the past the way the culture told them to remember it. Each generation would be born with the latest fashions built in, perfectly in tune with the signals around them.

Evolution by Chinese whispers, thought Sam. Like Sarah’s TV set, back in the hotel room: the receiver mutates to suit the picture. Just as it was on Earth, only much, much faster.

And then Sam knew, once and for all, that, whatever the Cold was, it really wasn’t controlling these people. The Remote were part of one all-consuming culture, eternally feeding off and renewing itself, always changing, never pursuing any real goals. They were the ultimate adaptation of the human race, capable of evolving to suit any environment in a single generation, altering themselves with nothing more than the power of the mass media.

And Guest was staring at her in a funny way.
‘You’re sick?’ he asked.
Sam shook her head. ‘You’re not people. You’re characters. Your whole history’s just one big costume drama.’
‘The ideas are all that matter,’ Guest said, and it sounded like he was agreeing with her. ‘It’s our strength.’
‘You rewrite yourselves. All the time. Just like the Faction rewrote your history.’
‘The dispersion of the past is our speciality,’ Guest announced. Sam seemed to remember him saying the same thing in that promo video the UN had shown the Doctor. ‘Shall we join Compassion? I understand she’s already on the top level.’

He motioned towards the doorway. Without thinking, Sam started moving. Then she stopped herself.
‘Wait a minute,’ she said. ‘You just got here from Earth? How did you know where to find me?’
‘You’re part of the culture now, Miss Jones.’
‘You mean… when I had that receiver strapped to my face?’
‘Our culture is just a development of yours,’ Guest explained. ‘You had an affinity with us long before we found you.’

He motioned towards the doorway again. Sam didn’t bother arguing with that part of the script.

They didn’t have to wait long for a lift platform. Sam was the first to step on to the disc, Guest neatly cutting off her escape route behind her. She wondered whether that had been deliberate, or whether he was expecting her to go along with him whatever happened.

Sam watched the floor sink away, saw the domes on the ground level turn into tiny smudges of white. The patterns of machinery on the walls of the tower became more intricate as they rose, the upper parts of the building ringed with arrays of plastic transmitter hardware. Sam wondered what the signals would look like, if you could convert them into pictures and watch them on a TV set. The transmissions didn’t have any kind of narrative, according to Compassion, no stories or characters or episodes. Just loose images. Moving too quickly to be coherent. Flashes of ideas, of sensations.

And people thought MTV was bad.

Sam watched Guest out of the corner of one eye. He was staring straight ahead, the angles of his bald head looking almost sculpted in the neon light from the walls.
‘Who were you?’ Sam asked him.
Guest didn’t look back at her. ‘I don’t understand the question,’ he said.
‘Who were you, back in the beginning? Before anybody had to remember you. Before you started evolving.’

‘I was Guest. I’ve always been Guest.’

Sam sniffed at him. ‘You’re a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy of Guest. How long’s it been, anyway? Since the Faction put you all here? Wherever here is.’

‘A while.’

‘You don’t know how long?’

‘Does it matter?’

‘No. Of course it doesn’t.’ Sam sighed. ‘You people are hopeless, you know that? All right. When the first Mr Guest came here, what was his function?’

At last, Guest seemed to respond. He turned to look at her – to look down at her – but he didn’t answer the question.

‘Compassion treats you like a kind of leader figure,’ Sam went on. ‘Only you don’t have leaders here, do you? So what’s so important about you that everyone does what you say?’

‘I was the only one who had the coordinates,’ Guest said. Then his eyes went slightly out of focus, as if he were trying to recall things that had never actually been in his head. ‘I think I was some kind of pilot. Or chief technician, possibly. The Faction left me with the task of finding the Cold.’

Sam gave him what she hoped was an annoying grin. ‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘That’s very helpful.’

Guest just turned away, and carried on staring at the walls outside the lift tube.

So. The Remote wanted to find the Cold. They could use their magic doorways to reach the skin of the thing, but obviously the way right through to the Cold’s own realm was beyond them. Whatever and wherever the Cold’s own realm was. Guest seemed to be on some holy mission to find it, but if he was just a distortion of a distortion, then the mission could have been twisted out of shape over the generations. And his answers probably weren’t that reliable anyway.

A few moments later, the lift platform reached the top floor, a transparent plastic disc at least a dozen metres from side to side. As with all the other levels, there was no railing, which gave Sam an interesting idea or two. Compassion stood close to the edge of the disc, her arms folded, a grumpy look on her face. Sam couldn’t see anything else around, no equipment, no other personnel.

It was only when she stepped out of the lift tube that she realised. The central shaft stopped some way below the roof of the tower, and set into that roof, so you could see only the lower half from here, was an enormous sphere of pure black. Actually, it probably had only the same kind of diameter as the platform, but when you looked up at it the thing gave you the horrible feeling that there was some major satellite or other about to crash down on your head. The sphere was firmly embedded in the ceiling, the solid black of its surface breaking the pale-blue wash of the architecture.

And that was it. Just a sphere, totally smooth and utterly featureless. No controls, no visible operating mechanism of any kind. No indication of what it might be.

All in all, it was a bit of a disappointment. Sam had been expecting some kind of master control room, at the very least.

‘We’ve got problems,’ Compassion told Guest. ‘Tune in to Llewis’s transmitter. See what’s just happened back on Earth.’

‘I see,’ he said, in the end.

A bit more of a disappointment. Sam had been expecting some kind of master control room, at the very least.

‘I was the only one who had the coordinates,’ Guest said. Then his eyes went slightly out of focus, as if he were trying to recall things that had never actually been in his head. ‘I think I was some kind of pilot. Or chief technician, possibly. The Faction left me with the task of finding the Cold.’

Sam gave him what she hoped was an annoying grin. ‘Thanks,’ she said. ‘That’s very helpful.’

Guest just turned away, and carried on staring at the walls outside the lift tube.

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Guest apparently did this, because he stood motionless for a few moments, staring at nothing in particular.

‘I see,’ said Compassion. ‘Look, I don’t want to get in your way or anything, but can I join in with this conversation? Or is it zombies only?’

‘If you’d like a receiver –’ Guest began.

‘No,’ said Compassion. ‘She won’t. Not after what happened on Earth.’ Then she looked up at the big black sphere. ‘You may not need one, though.’

‘I’m sorry?’ said Sam.

‘This close to the media, you should be able to get a direct link. Straight into your nervous system.’

Sam gawped up at the sphere. ‘That’s ‘the media’? That’s where all your signals come from?’

‘It’s picking up the transmissions from Earth, as well. Beaming them out to us. You can try focusing on the stuff from Llewis, if you want. You should be able to get something.’

Sam thought about that. She didn’t want to get any closer to the media, not after what Guest had told her about having an ‘affinity’ with the Remote. But, then again, wasn’t it inevitable, coming from twentieth-century Earth? Was she going to try never watching TV again, if she got out of this in one piece?

So she concentrated. Focused. Just a little, so she could pull away if anything bad happened. She wasn’t quite
Sure what she was concentrating on, she just—

Suddenly, she was in a lift. Not like one of the lifts here in the transmitter tower. A real lift, back on Earth, with piped-in music and everything. There was somebody standing next to her, but when she tried to turn her head she found she couldn’t.

The lift doors opened, and Sam felt herself move forward, into a short corridor with beige walls and bad carpeting. She seemed to be approaching some kind of office. Everything shook in front of her, as if she weren’t in complete control of her motor functions.

‘We planted a transmitter inside Mr Llewis,’ Compassion said, muttering into Sam’s ear from somewhere that seemed to be completely out of her reach. ‘You’re only getting visual and audio right now. We didn’t think he’d be touching anything interesting.’

Sam felt her head turn. Or, rather, Llewis’s head turned, and she saw the figure next to him through his eyes. It was one of the Ogrons, all dressed up in suit and shades, Shambling along by his side.

‘Security,’ said Guest’s voice, from out of nowhere.

Suddenly, Sam/Llewis’ attention was caught by another shape, approaching from the office ahead. Sam realised it was Sarah, in the same business clothes she’d been wearing back at the hotel. It took Sam a while to identify her, as Llewis seemed to be looking at her breasts instead of her face.

‘Ms Bland,’ Llewis mumbled. He sounded surprised to see her.

‘Afternoon,’ Sarah said. Without another word, she squeezed past him in the corridor, glancing nervously at the Ogron as she went.

Llewis looked over his shoulder, and watched Sarah disappear into the lift, the doors sliding shut behind her. The Ogron didn’t seem to be taking an interest in any of this.

‘The Ogron was at the warehouse,’ Guest pointed out. ‘Why didn’t it stop her? It knows she’s potentially hostile…’

Compassion tutted. ‘All humans look alike to Ogrons, apparently. Or to that Ogron, anyway.’

‘So she’s just walked out from under our noses.’

‘Right. And she must know more than we thought, if she’s hanging around the office. Like I said. We’ve got problems.’

Sam detached herself from the scene, letting herself pull away from Llewis’s transmitter. For a moment, she found herself floating on the surface of the media, the skin of the big black sphere rubbing against her thought processes. The touch was familiar. It was the same kind of feeling she got whenever she stepped into the TARDIS after a long time away, the sense of something big and old reaching out to her, trying to wrap her up in the folds of its body-mind.

The Faction had built the sphere. And the Faction had TARDISes of their own, or things that worked like TARDISes. Perhaps the media was alive, thought Sam, the same way the TARDIS was alive. As she pulled away from its touch, she felt a brief twinge of contempt, as if the sphere had judged her, just as it had judged every other human being in Anathema, and found her to be beneath its dignity. The TARDIS never did that, Sam noted.

The next thing she knew, Compassion was waving a hand in front of her eyes.

‘You can wake up now,’ the woman said.

Behind her, Guest was standing on the edge of the platform, his hands behind his back, his eyes fixed on the floor of the building, several hundred metres below. ‘It’s not important,’ he said, softly. ‘There’s nothing she can do. The shipment’s already on Earth.’

‘And what if she’s the one we’re waiting for?’ Compassion asked. ‘Then we’ll be ready. The mission objective won’t be affected. We’ll still be able to reach the Cold.’

‘You’re going to do what Rassilon did, aren’t you?’ said Sam. ‘You’re going to open up the holes into the other universe. Let those things out.’

Guest turned to face Sam. So did Compassion. Sam took a nervous step backwards, then remembered that there weren’t any railings here, and stopped.

‘No,’ Guest told her. ‘We’d have nothing to gain by starting another war. We just want to contact one specific entity. The oldest of our loa. The Cold. Once we’ve done that, we’ll close the pathway again. I doubt the rest of the universe will even notice.’

‘Then what do you want from me?’ Sam asked. ‘You want me to fill in the gaps in your culture, is that it? How?’

‘By becoming part of the media,’ replied Guest. ‘How else?’

Sam glanced up at the sphere again. ‘Will it hurt?’

Guest and Compassion looked at each other.

‘We have no idea,’ said Compassion.
Guest touched his ear. Sam didn’t know whether he was receiving a signal from the media, or sending one, but no sooner had his fingers brushed the implant than the sphere above his head began to move, the skin expanding, the surface rippling and pulsing. As if it were taking a deep breath. Sam started to edge towards the central shaft, but the lift platform wasn’t there any more.

‘Why me?’ she asked, not taking her eyes of the sphere. The ceiling seemed to be shrinking back, giving the sphere room to enlarge itself. ‘You could have taken anyone from Earth for this. Why wait until I showed up?’

‘You have experience with other offworld cultures,’ Guest explained. ‘This gives you a particularly useful perspective.’

‘Twenty-first-century culture in the context of a larger environment,’ Compassion added.

‘That doesn’t make sense!’ Sam protested.

Compassion looked disappointed. ‘Doesn’t it? Well, never mind. It sounded good.’

Sam didn’t bother arguing. How were you supposed to fight a race that kept changing its mind, for God’s sake? Aliens were supposed to be fanatical, they were supposed to want to destroy anything that got in their way; they weren’t supposed to alter their invasion plans just because they felt like it. And the sphere was still swelling up, getting bigger with every breath it took, making Sam feel dizzy whenever she tried to focus on it. It was like watching something pushing its way through the sky, eating up the space around her. She wondered whether the thing was making her hallucinate, or whether the altitude was doing funny things to her head.

‘This isn’t what you came here for,’ she said, and talking was hard, now the pressure of the sphere was crushing the air out of her lungs. ‘This isn’t what you want from Earth.’

‘No,’ admitted Guest. His voice seemed light years away, unaffected by the pressure. ‘It’s just a bonus.’

Sam tried to respond to that. Really, she tried. But the darkness was already pressing against her face, wrapping itself around her skin, crackling with disdain as it took her into its body.
Travels with Fitz (VII)

The Justinian, 2596

‘There’s nobody left, Nathaniel,’ said Mother Mathara. She said it softly, but without much sympathy. She sounded bored, more than anything. Fitz got the feeling she was at least trying.

Three hundred years earlier, the Justinian had been the ship that had carried the first of the settlers to the colony. It had been a wreck since then, a relic, buried in the vaults of the planet’s Cultural Experience complex. Typically, it had been the craft the Faction had chosen to spirit its ‘followers’ away from the place. The engineers had patched the ship up, turning it into a corpse-vessel, fit for the living dead. Plus anyone who felt like they ought to be dead, thought Fitz. The walls of the cockpit were the same dirty grey they had been since the twenty-third century, although most of the interior lighting had gone, so you had to find your way around by the blinking of the warning lights. And there were always warning lights. The Justinian still thought it was dead; the fact that it was in flight didn’t change the computer’s mind.

There were four of them in the cockpit now, breathing recycled air that tasted of dust and old churches. Guest sat in the chair that had once belonged to the chief pilot, with Fitz and Tobin at the coding controls behind him. Of the two thousand people the Faction had ‘rescued’ – a couple of hundred from each of the planet’s major cities – Mathara had insisted that Fitz and Tobin were the best suited for navigational duties, unlikely as it sounded. Fitz had a terrible paranoid feeling that she just wanted to keep him in her sights.

The Mother was right, of course, about there being no people left on the planet. But Guest had insisted on piloting the ship back into orbit, once the Time Lord weapons systems had been and gone. Just to see if anyone else had managed to tear themselves away from the medianet for long enough to find a ship and get off the surface.

Guest ordered Fitz to run a scan anyway. Fitz didn’t argue. He tapped the relevant instructions into the coding panel.

‘Nothing,’ he mumbled, once the results came up.

Tobin leaned over him, and checked the results for herself, the stroppy cow. ‘No people, no transmissions,’ she said. ‘It’s just a sphere. Totally smooth. Nothing on the surface.’

Everyone could see that for themselves, though. The planet hovered in the middle of the central viewing screen, a circle of pure black, lit only by the ship’s visual enhancement systems. It was looking a damn sight smaller now as well.

‘Some kind of matter compression?’ Tobin asked.

Fitz scowled, but he tried not to let her see it. Tobin had only been on the colony for the last two years, having been shipped there by her family back on Earth, who’d apparently felt her to be some kind of social embarrassment. Fitz wondered if they’d still have sent her if they’d known what was happening on the planet.

Probably. After all, the colonies were going to be war zones soon anyway, if Earth Central had anything to do with it.

‘No,’ said Mother Mathara. ‘We’re looking at a shell. That’s all. A shell around what’s left of the colony.’

Fitz felt compelled to ask what was left of the colony. Somebody had to, surely?

‘Nothing,’ Mathara told him. ‘That’s why they had to put the shell around it. To make the nothing safe. The High Council used to have a ban on this kind of weaponry. Not now. Not since the start of their war.’

‘So they’re testing their weapons on us,’ said Guest.

‘Yes. We must be more of a threat to them than we thought, Nathaniel.’ Mathara reached out and touched Guest on the shoulder, and Fitz could tell he was trying not to squirm. ‘We can leave now. I’ll give Laura and Fitz our new course. The time jump shouldn’t be difficult, now we’ve… modified the engines. But the guidance systems aren’t very flexible. It’ll take us a few hours to enter all the data.’

Tobin cracked her knuckles. ‘We’re ready. Where are we going, anyway?’

Mother Mathara paused. And even in that pause Fitz was thinking it, the forbidden thought, the idea the Faction had tried to get out of his head ever since they’d found him in the Cold. Please say the twentieth century. Please say we’re going home. Back to Earth. Back to the Doctor.

‘The end of the eighteenth century,’ said Mathara. ‘It’s an important time for us of the faith.’

Fitz didn’t even bother to feel disappointed.

Just like Mathara had said, it took them two or three hours to lay in a course for the eighteenth century. Fitz went for a walk once it was all over, with his legs cracking under his weight as he strode along the crew corridors. He found himself thinking of the Faction’s own warship, the vessel where he’d gone through the initiation. The ship
had been a lot like this one, a skeleton instead of a complete entity. But then, the Faction’s ships were built that way. Stillborn by design.

Not that Faction Paradox would ever have used its warships to move the colonists. The warships were special, solely for members of the family, for the Mothers and Fathers of the Eleven-Day Empire. They stuck to the backways of the universe, keeping out of sight whenever possible. Back in San Francisco, all those lifetimes ago in 2002, the Faction’s agent on Earth had been an ugly little boy with chronic personality problems, nothing more than a baby thug with a few time-travel tricks up his sleeve. One of Faction Paradox’s working classes, Fitz told himself. The crew of the warship would be altogether more elegant than that, and certainly far more civilised than the human refugees on board the *Justinian*.

Everything was aesthetics, that was what the shadow had said during the initiation. Everything was signals. Fitz wondered what kind of world he was going to help these people to build.
Kode lit up another cigarette, slipped it between his lips, and fell back on to the bed. He wasn’t sure what the cigarettes actually did to him, but he’d been having urges to smoke them ever since he’d arrived on Earth, and he didn’t see any particular reason why he should bother resisting. The need to light the things, he concluded, was an undercurrent in the local signals. Perhaps cigarettes were the natives’ way of making time go faster, of speeding up the transmissions.

He hadn’t turned the TV off since Guest had left the hotel. He’d removed the receiver from his ear, and rested it on top of the set’s casing, along with one of his spares. The receivers were definitely having an effect, but it still wasn’t anything like home. The signals from Anathema couldn’t reach this place half as fast as he’d have liked.

Kode considered walking over to the window, and staring wistfully out at the darkening sky. Fortunately, he didn’t have to. The receiver on the TV set must have caught the thought, because it helpfully started flashing pictures of the darkening sky across the screen, so Kode stared wistfully at those instead. He wondered how far away Guest and Compassion were now. How far away the ship was. Close enough to Earth for the weapons systems to start warming up? Quite possibly. None of the Remote had ever seen the weapons systems, of course, but Guest had reliably informed everyone that they’d come on line as soon as the ship was within firing range of the planet.

Kode took a long, long suck on the cigarette. The TV programmes still weren’t enough. Interference or no interference.

Eventually, he persuaded his body to get up off the bed and wander across the room, to the corner where Compassion had left the suitcase. Kode swung the case on to the bed before he opened it up. There were a dozen more receivers inside, all the spares they’d brought with them to Earth. Kode wondered how many he could arrange around the television before the set mutated into something horrible.

It was only when he started scooping the receivers out of the case that he noticed something was wrong. He stared at the contents for a while, trying to pin the feeling down.

The suitcase looked empty. Emptier, anyway. There’d been more hardware than that in it yesterday, when they’d driven back from the warehouse and Guest had gone to see the man Llewis. The case was divided into several dozen small compartments, each holding one component, but they hadn’t all been full to begin with, so Kode couldn’t say for sure how much material was missing.

Then it hit him. The receivers were all there. It was the other hardware, Guest’s surveillance gear, that had gone. For a start, he couldn’t see the thing Guest had said was used to detect tachyon traces. The TARDIS tracker. And there were other things missing, too: pieces of bric-a-brac that were apparently vital to the success of the mission, but that nobody had ever bothered explaining to him.

Guest had taken the equipment, Kode reasoned. He hadn’t seen the man go anywhere near the case recently, but it was the only explanation.

But why would Guest take the TARDIS tracker back to Anathema?

Kode felt the buzz building up behind his ear, his lobe missing the close presence of the receiver. He tried to remember if the room had been empty at any point in the last day or so, or if anyone had touched the case. Even when Kode had popped downstairs to use the cigarette machine, he’d left one of the Ogrons on guard…

Buzz, buzz.

Kode snatched up his receiver, plugged it back into his ear. It cast its sensors around for a few moments, then threw a telepathic hook into his hypothalamus.

Moments later, Kode was seeing the world through the eyes of one of the Ogrons. The Remote had put transmitters into the guards’ heads when they’d been purchased, as a standard security precaution. Guest had hoped to link the Ogrons to the media, to let the Remote experience the perspectives of a whole new alien species, but the Ogrons’ thoughts had turned out to be messy and confused, and had largely revolved around rocks.

Suddenly, Kode was in a room he’d never seen before. A cosy, soft-edged room, full of flowery cushions, bouncy sofas and dim electric lamps. The Ogron was looking down at his enormous feet, where some kind of heavy-duty hardware was rolling backward and forward across the carpet. Kode tried to squint at the device, but the guard’s eyes didn’t respond. All he could say for sure was that the machine looked uncannily like a medium-sized dog.
Sarah turned the object over in her hands. It didn’t look like a real piece of technology to her. There were no buttons, no switches, no endearingly messy wires sticking out of the back of the casing. There was just a single electronic display, a perfect circle covered in bright-green curves, like contour lines on an OS map.

‘And it finds TARDISes?’ she asked. ‘You’re sure that’s what Guest said?’

The Ogron looked up. Lost Boy had been staring at K9 again, presumably still not knowing whether to trust what was, in his view, a talking rock with a blaster in its snout. ‘I’m sure,’ Lost Boy said. ‘Guest wants to know if there’s a TARDIS here. Don’t know what a TARDIS is. But Guest thinks it’s important.’

The alien’s syntax was still slightly out of sync, however hard K9 tried to translate its tummy rumbles. Sarah tried not to dwell on it, although, being a writer, she did have a terrible desire to teach the thing about proper verb conjugation. ‘Well, it’s something to go on. If K9’s right about the range of this thing, it should be even better at sniffing out the ship than he is. Now we just have to work out where to start looking.’ She put the device down on the nearest bookshelf, next to her prized collection of Puffin originals. ‘Let’s look at this logically. Wherever the Doctor is, the TARDIS should be nearby. If we can get to the TARDIS, we can use it to rescue the Doctor. True?’


Sarah ignored that. ‘So our first step is to find out where the Remote are keeping the Doctor – just roughly – and use the tracker to find the ship. So far, so good.’

‘Negative,’ said K9.

‘What d’you mean, negative?’

‘Logical flaw, mistress. Analysis suggests an eighty-two-percent chance the Remote will be keeping the Doctor imprisoned in a location not on this planet. The TARDIS will be required before the Doctor can be found. Logic dictates –’

‘Thank you, K9, you’ve made your point. But the Remote must have some way of reaching… what’s that place called again?’

‘Anathema,’ said Lost Boy.

K9 spun his ears at her. ‘Negative, mistress. Chances of successfully gaining access to Remote transportation without detection by the Remote –’

‘I don’t want to know.’

‘– negligible.’

She nudged the robot with the end of her foot. ‘I said, I don’t want to know.’

‘I did not tell you, mistress. I merely summarised.’

Sarah turned her attention back to Lost Boy. ‘When I saw the Doctor, he was being tortured. Trying to escape from some kind of prison. You know Anathema. Any ideas?’

The Ogron screwed up his face. It was like watching an alien gurner, thought Sarah. ‘No prisoners on Anathema. Never seen anyone tortured there. Maybe at the main transmitter.’

‘So can we get to the main transmitter? Using the Remote’s route?’

‘There are machines,’ said Lost Boy. ‘Back at the hotel. Machines to make holes in the air.’

‘You know how to use them?’

Lost Boy rumbled uneasily. ‘No. But the Remote sold machines like them to humans on Earth. If humans can use them, they must be simple.’

Sarah glared at him. ‘I resent that. Erm… wait a minute. The Remote sold these transporter things to humans? When?’

‘When they came to Earth. They wanted to sell their equipment to your… council of old women.’

‘The UN?’ Sarah suppressed a snigger. ‘Old men, mostly. But yes, I know.’

‘They changed their minds. They decided to sell to smaller tribes. They talked to the leaders of one of your countries. Gave them some samples. Some vials of the Cold. Some machines for transportation.’

‘And?’

‘And then they changed their minds again. That was when they went to COPEX. To spread their hardware around the Earth.’

A nasty thought suddenly struck Sarah. Not just the thought of some government or other already having teleporters in its armoury, although that was bad enough. It was the unexpected feeling that she’d been missing something obvious. Which, for a journalist, was one of the worst sensations imaginable.

‘This country,’ she said, slowly. ‘Do you remember what it was called?’

Lost Boy shook his head. ‘All human names sound the same. There were… two words. None of them made any sense.’
‘Try to remember,’ Sarah urged. ‘It’s very important.’

So Lost Boy thought, and thought, and thought. Sarah could almost see the muscles straining inside his head.

Finally, he remembered. He mangled the words when he spoke them, but they were familiar enough for Sarah to work out what he meant.

‘I have to make a phone call,’ she announced. ‘Lost Boy… help yourself to anything in the kitchen. But don’t try biting into any more hot pop tarts, all right? Trust me, you won’t survive a second time.’

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20 August, 17:24

Kode watched the woman Bland walk out through one of the doors. Then the Ogron started staring at the metal dog again. Kode ended the transmission before the guard’s thought patterns started to infect him.

He glanced at the telephone in the hotel room. He could try calling Guest. There wasn’t a direct line from here to Anathema, but he was sure he could get in touch with the media, ask it to rewire the local communications network. Guest would want to know what the woman was up to.

Then again, why should he care about Guest? He could deal with this himself, couldn’t he?

Kode stubbed his cigarette out against the nearest available piece of furniture, then picked up the telephone. He concentrated again, telling his receiver to tune in to the signals from the local communications net. Actually, he probably didn’t need to hold the phone to do that, but it helped him focus. Besides, he liked the way it purred in his ear.

The receiver started sucking words out of the telephone line, feeding them straight into Kode’s skull. Kode experienced a moment’s disorientation, as he found himself suddenly involved in a hundred different conversations across the planet, random sentences plucked out of the network by the hardware. He was ordering a pizza in Maine, talking dirty to a man in Hanworth Park, listening to the cricket scores in New Delhi. For a moment, it was just like being back at home.

Then the words faded, and were replaced by a heavy throbbing sound, the ringing tone echoing through the fibres at the top of his spine. The receiver had found the right connection, at last. There was a click at one end of the line.

‘Hello?’ said a particularly weak-sounding voice. Kode could hear several dozen other voices, burbling away in the background.

‘Jeremy,’ said the voice of Sarah Bland. ‘It’s me. Sarah.’

‘Oh.’ A pause. ‘Look, I’m sorry, Sarah. I’m actually quite busy at the moment.’ The man sounded nervous, as if he’d been born apologising. Kode detected what the local signals had told him was an upper-class English accent.

‘Don’t be silly, Jeremy. You’re in the Prince Leslie.’

‘Er. How did you –’

‘Because it’s almost half past five on a Monday afternoon. Please stop moaning, Jeremy. There are a couple of things I need to know.’

‘Oh dear.’

‘Firstly… This isn’t the most important thing right now, but I’m curious. You’ve got friends in the Home Office, haven’t you?’

‘Um… no comment.’

‘Thought so. Tell me something. A little bird told me that the police are in the process of testing forty-thousand-volt electric riot shields. Is that true?’

‘Sarah! Even if I knew, I couldn’t possibly –’

‘Jeremy.’

Kode flinched. The woman had said the name as if it were some kind of warning. And if even Kode had flinched, the poor man in the pub must have been wetting himself.

‘Well, I’ve sort of heard –’ Jeremy began.

‘So it’s true.’

‘No! I mean… I’ve heard…’

‘That it’s true.’

Kode could hear Jeremy moping even from here. ‘All right. Yes. It’s true. But there’s nothing… you know. There’s nothing funny going on. They’re just testing them for use against dangerous dogs. That’s all.’

‘Dangerous dogs. That’s what Michael told you, is it?’

‘Um… yes.’

‘And you believed him?’

‘Yes. I think so. I mean, why would he lie?’
The man sounded serious, too. Sarah sighed at her end of the line. ‘I see. Like you believed the Royal Ordnance when they told you they definitely hadn’t supplied arms to any Middle Eastern terrorists.’

‘It was an accident! They said so.’

Sarah clicked her tongue down the phone. ‘All right, here’s my second question.’

‘Sarah –’ the man Jeremy whined.

‘Shush. This one isn’t in breach of the Official Secrets Act. I just haven’t got time to use the library. You’ve worked in the Middle East, haven’t you?’

‘Well, yes.’

‘Suppose I gave you a name. A foreign-sounding name. Do you think you could tell me what country the owner’s likely to come from?’

‘Er… I could try I suppose.’

‘Good. The name’s “Badar”. I don’t know whether it’s a first name or a surname. Ring any bells?’

Badar? Kode wondered what the significance of that was. ‘Um, well,’ blustered Jeremy. ‘Um. It sounds Middle Eastern all right. It’s hard to say, you know. For certain.’

‘Could it be Saudi Arabian?’

‘Yes,’ said the man. ‘Yes, it could be. Why?’

‘Just a name a friend told me,’ Sarah said. ‘It’s not important.

‘Oh. So… that’s it, is it? That’s all you want to know?’

‘That’s all. Thank you, Jeremy. I would stop and talk about old times, but I’m really in a bit of a hurry right now.’

‘Ah… that’s all right. Listen, you won’t… you won’t tell anyone we had this conversation, will you? I mean, what with you being a journalist –’

‘Cross my heart,’ said Sarah. ‘Bye-bye.’

She hung up before Jeremy could respond. Straightaway, the receiver started to drag Kode back out of the phone system, pulling him up through the strata of conversation. His mind burst through the speaking clock, then was returned to his body, in the hotel room near Sandown Park.

Saudi Arabia. That was where the Remote had sent its samples, before it had found out about COPEX and changed its strategy. Guest had thought about giving both Saudi Arabia and Iraq the Cold, hoping to stir up a handy war or two, but the plan had been full of holes from the start. Around here, Compassion had pointed out, they sold torture hardware units by the thousand, not by the dozen. They needed a proper distribution network, not a couple of one-off deals with local governments.

And now the woman Bland was following the loose ends they’d left behind. Kode listened to the signals around him, the cultural background noise of the planet Earth. Whichever way he cocked his head, the message was the same. Images of action, images of violence.

The woman had talked about a TARDIS. If Kode could get his hands on the machine, before Guest even got back from Anathema…


Kode closed the briefcase on the bed, stuffed it under his arm, turned off the TV, and hurried out of the hotel room. A few moments later, he hurried back into the hotel room, went over to the desk, took out a fresh packet of cigarettes, dumped them in his jacket pocket, and went out again.

20 August, 19:06

They took the Ogron’s car to the hotel. Lost Boy drove, while Sarah sat in the back seat, keeping her head down. According to Lost Boy, both Guest and Compassion had gone back to their own home planet (which wasn’t actually a planet, apparently, although Lost Boy wasn’t sure exactly what it was), which left Kode on his own at the hotel. Lost Boy doubted whether Kode would be able to tear himself away from the TV for long enough to find them messing around in the Remote’s downstairs room. Even so, Sarah wasn’t taking any chances.

They’d left K9 back in Croydon. K9 had objected, as ever, but Sarah had insisted that he’d be too unwieldy. ‘Suggestion,’ he’d barked, just before they’d left. ‘Remote have developed a transmission-based culture. Disturbances to any medium may be detected. Chances of Remote not noticing unauthorised use of their matter transmission facility –’

‘See you later,’ Sarah had said, as she’d slammed the front door.

The car came to a halt. Sarah peeked out of the window, and saw that they’d pulled up on the pavement directly opposite the hotel. They were parked on a double-yellow, but she doubted anyone would bother arguing with Lost Boy.
‘Sure?’ said Lost Boy. Without K9 to translate property, the Ogron seemed to be talking in grunts again.
‘Sure about what?’ asked Sarah.
‘Doctor Lord in Sau-di… Ar-a-bi-a.’

Sarah blew through her lips. ‘I hope so. It makes more sense than anything else. The Doctor had been tortured,
and the Saudi police use torture all the time. Even against minor offenders, if they think they can get away with it.
And Badar had his head cut off, which is how they’re supposed to do things over there. I’ve seen the newspaper
stories. It didn’t click until last night. I should have realised before. The Saudis buy tons of stuff from fairs like
COPEX. Britain’s been supplying them with shackles since the eighties.’

Predictably, the Ogron’s response was to grunt. It was probably a very eloquent grunt, though, if you knew how
to appreciate it. He climbed out of the car, and Sarah followed him, the doors autolocking behind them.

Nobody gave them a second glance as they crossed the hotel lobby, although the other guests did move out of
Lost Boy’s way quite quickly. There were about half a dozen people clustered around the reception desk, all
complaining about the TV reception in their rooms. Some actually looked shocked by what they’d seen. Others were
demanding to know why they could get only the Sci-Fi Channel.

The Remote’s room was numbered 1.16, and Lost Boy opened it without any kind of caution, turning the door
handle until it snapped right off. It was, Sarah realised, the room where the Remote had been keeping Sam, after
she’d been knocked out by the stun gun. There were no signs of life here now, and all the furnishings were still piled
into one corner, to make space for the silver claw things that had been arranged in the middle of the carpet.

The machines were smooth. Perfectly smooth. No flaws, no controls, just moulded hooks of pure silver.
‘Terrific,’ said Sarah.
‘Nnnh?’ queried the Ogron.
‘You said they gave equipment like this to the Saudis? To the other humans?’
‘Nnnh,’ affirmed the Ogron.
‘I don’t suppose they also supplied them with instruction manuals? No, I suppose not.’
‘Nnnh,’ mused the Ogron.

Sarah stood back, and put her hands on her hips. ‘K9 was right. I bet he’d have this sorted out in a second.
Can’t you remember anything about the way the Remote people use this stuff? Some movement they make, maybe.’
Lost Boy thought about this. ‘Move their heads,’ he said. ‘Touch ears.’

Just at that moment, the door to the bathroom seemed to explode.
It was pushed open from the other side, hard enough to snap it off its hinges and splinter the panels. There was
another Ogron in the bathroom, taller than Lost Boy, darker in skin tone. The one who’d been at the office a couple
of hours earlier. He’d punched the door open, wrecking it in the process.

Lost Boy moved forward, ready to strike out at his brother. The other Lost Boy barely reacted. He raised his
arm, and Sarah saw the blunt end of a gun.
‘Don’t –’ she began.

The other Lost Boy squeezed the trigger. A dart of plastic leapt from the end of the gun, on a strand of
microfine wiring. The dart embedded itself in Lost Boy’s chest, tearing open his badly fitting shirt. There was a
spark. A crackle. Lost Boy stumbled backward, his huge body slamming into the wall, shaking the whole structure
of the room.

The other Lost Boy stepped forward, pressing a switch on the side of the gun to retract the dart. A second figure
stepped around the Ogron. Kode, still in his business suit, a happy smile on his face.
‘Hi,’ he said. ‘Sorry, was that OK?’

Sarah’s jaw bobbed up and down a bit before she could find an answer. ‘You were waiting for us,’ she said
‘Yeah. We’ve got transmitters inside the Ogrons. Saw you coming.’ The other Lost Boy gave him a funny look,
which Sarah didn’t feel up to trying to interpret. Kode shrugged at him. ‘It’s a basic security precaution,’ he added.
‘Honest.’

Sarah looked over at Lost Boy. Her Lost Boy. He was obviously alive, and at least partially conscious. He lay
sprawled against the wall, his arms flailing as though he couldn’t quite control them properly, the pupils rolling up
under his eyelids. Sarah considered going over to him, but the other Ogron was waving the gun about in a vaguely
menacing fashion, so she gave it a miss.

Kode tweaked his ear. Instantly, the silver machines started to throb, humming with a soft, steady pulse. The
sound of static filled the air. Moments later, a doorway did indeed appear in the middle of the room. Sarah tried not
to look at it too closely, just in case it gave her a migraine.

‘You’re supposed to use the Cold to do this,’ Kode mumbled, as if Sarah cared about the technical details. ‘But
there should be enough on the carpet already. It’s not like we’re going far. Just a couple of thousand klicks.’
‘Where to?’ Sarah asked.
‘Where you wanted to go. Saudi Arabia. I’ve set the coordinates for the same place as last time, when we dropped off the samples. One of the big cities there, I think.’ He kept smiling. ‘We’ve got the same aims here, you know that? You want to get to that TARDIS, and so do we.’

‘You’re saying we should work together? Is that it?’

‘Actual I was kind of thinking about holding you at gunpoint and forcing you to lead us there.’ Kode nodded at the gun in the Ogron’s huge hand. ‘I got the idea from the local signals. Using a weapon as a threat instead of just killing people with it. We don’t do things like that where I come from. The zombie ships just blow places up.’

Lost Boy finally regained his senses, and got to his feet, his big arms thumping against the walls as he steadied himself. Sarah wondered if any of the other hotel guests would come to investigate the racket.

No, probably not. Most of them were English.

The other Lost Boy covered his brother with the stun gun. ‘Don’t try anything,’ Kode said. ‘We’re armed. Besides, my Ogron’s bigger than your Ogron.’

‘Oh, grow up,’ said Sarah.

Kode looked genuinely hurt.

20 August, 22:31 (Saudi time)

The city was called Riyadh, but it looked just like every other Earth city Kode had seen. The air was less wet than it had been in Britain, and there were a few minor differences in the local architecture, but it gave Kode the same feeling that – say – London had. Squat buildings, all of them looking as though they’d been damaged in some war or other, the walls rough and covered with pockmarks. The air smelled funny, probably not exactly the same as the air in London, but still full of rotting people and rotting food. There was oil in the air, too much grease for the lungs to handle properly.

What set Riyadh apart were the signals. There weren’t so many in this part of the world, and the impressions they left Kode with were… odd. Fragmented. As if the locals hadn’t got the hang of transmitter technology yet. The images were cut up into strange orders, coloured with bizarre flashes of local culture. There were religious icons sewn into the signals, centuries of dogma worked into the media.

Fear. That was what he could feel. Fear of some god or other? Maybe. Or maybe the people just knew how protective the media could be of that god, and knew how much they’d have to suffer if they offended it. Curiously, though, the underlying themes of the media weren’t that different from those in Britain, even if the surface noise was wrong.

London and Riyadh were the same, Kode decided. But London thought it was different. London thought it wasn’t scared. The people there had used the signals to cover everything up.

They’d been walking through the backstreets of the city for some time now, trying to find their way in the dark, navigating by the lights of the buildings. There were hardly any locals on the streets, not at this time of night. The few people they’d passed had hurried on by, never even looking Kode in the eye. Sarah and the traitor Ogron were walking ahead of Kode and his guard, Sarah clasping the TARDIS tracker in one hand, letting the machine guide them. Brilliant green contour lines were flickering across the display, and every now and then a brightly coloured blip would indicate the target’s position.

Finally, they found the right building. They had to wander down a blind alley to reach it, the old walls around them blotting out the light from the rest of the city. Kode didn’t have a problem, not with the receiver changing the light frequencies as they went into his head, but Sarah and the Ogrons seemed to be struggling a bit.

The building looked ancient, half demolished. Whole sections of the outer wall had been pulled away, and lengths of wood had been nailed over the gaps. There were strips of coloured plastic stuck over the planks in places, engraved with words in the local language. Kode got the Ogron to pull the wood away from the walls, then ordered Sarah and her accomplice through the entrance with a nod of his head.

The interior of the building was just as shoddy as the exterior. One of the holes in the wall let in light from the other side of the structure, apparently enough for Sarah to see by. Kode inspected the decor. There were cracked tiles under his feet, pieces of shredded electrical wiring sticking out of cracks in the walls.

He noticed the disruption at almost exactly the moment that the TARDIS tracker went ‘bloop’.

It was sitting in the corner of the floor space, fooling the naked eye into thinking it was part of the architecture. But it felt… heavy. A great dark weight dropped into the local transmission pool, making ripples that Kode’s receiver couldn’t possibly ignore. It was touching him, stroking him, the same way the media did back at Anathema. The media always felt something hostile, though, whereas the thing in the corner was simply dispassionate. Curious, but not ready to judge anyone.

‘I don’t understand,’ said Sarah. She was standing in front of the object, not quite daring to touch it.
‘It’s the TARDIS, isn’t it?’ said Kode.
Sarah nodded, very slowly. ‘What’s it doing here, though? All right, maybe the Doctor left it in a condemned building so nobody would notice. But that was a police cordon stuck to the side of the building.’
‘You can read the local language?’
‘I can now.’ The woman risked another step towards the box. ‘If the authorities have got their hands on the Doctor, why not take the TARDIS into custody as well? Or, if they’re going to leave it here, why not guard it? They must have some idea what it is.’

Something suddenly occurred to Kode. His hand shot up to his ear, and he ordered his receiver to filter out the background scream of the TARDIS.
‘There’s another transmission,’ he snapped.
Sarah spun around to face him. ‘What?’
Kode tuned in to the transmitter. Video pictures, that was what he was getting. He saw the TARDIS, from a slightly different angle. He saw Sarah, and the Ogrons, and… and there he was, standing in the middle of the room, a stupid look on his face.

He pointed into the corner. The image of himself raised its hand, too. ‘There’s a camera. Hidden Surveillance. There.’

Then there was static. Filling up the camera image, pumping random signals through the receiver. Another doorway was opening, right in front of him, but when the half-dozen armed and armoured figures poured out of the static and into the room, Kode saw them as the camera saw them. He saw the first of the men raise his gun, and aim it at the image-Kode’s face. He saw the expression image-Kode adopted, a look of sheer panic, with maybe a hint of dopey-eyed confusion. He saw Sarah, diving towards the TARDIS machine. Another of the armed men raised his weapon. So did the Ogon guard.

There was gunfire. A crackling of electricity. Then the camera image started to break up, until all Kode could see was interference, and all he could hear was the sound of angry men shouting.
Scene 35. Space

[We pan across the void, eventually focusing on two nearby objects. The first is a planet; it seems to be about the same size as Earth, but its surface is almost entirely made up of water, with one or two strips of grey-brown land at the equator. Every now and then, we see tiny specks of light glimmering across the oceans, though there’s no indication of what may be causing this.

[The second object, in the foreground, is a spaceship. The ship is small, squat and black, apparently of human manufacture. In fact, it’s a standard twenty-sixth-century vessel, all economy and no style.]

Scene 36. The Control Section of the Ship

[The interior of the ship, like the exterior, is pure black. This makes the control section look much smaller and much more claustrophobic than it actually is. A display screen takes up most of the far wall, and there are several control panels set beneath it, covered in exactly the kind of oversized levers, switches and readout panels you’d expect from a retro-futurist imperial society.

[The DOCTOR sits in the pilot’s seat, fiddling with the controls for no good reason. The copilot’s seat is empty, but SAM stands by the open hatchway that leads to the rest of the ship, looking bored. The DOCTOR glances up at the screen.]

DOCTOR: Ordifica. The oldest colony planet in this part of the galaxy. Your descendants have got a lot to answer for, Sam.

SAM [squinting at the screen]: What are those lights?

DOCTOR: Cities. Hydrodome communities. Each of those little dots must house a good million people, I should think. The humans have been doing quite a lot of breeding, these last three hundred years.

SAM: Lucky them. So how are the aliens going to try taking the place over if the cities are so far apart? Is there some kind of public transmat network or something?

DOCTOR: As a matter of fact, there is. But the aliens are going to be a bit more subtle than that, I’d say. The only way this society can hold itself together is with its media network. The planet’s almost totally dependent on its communications systems. That’s how the aliens are going to try taking over. It’s going to be a war of ideas.

SAM: How close are we now?

DOCTOR: We’ll be touching down in about twenty minutes. Thrusters permitting.

SAM: Shall I go and check on the TARDIS?

DOCTOR: I’m sure it’s quite safe in the hold, Sam. It won’t be going anywhere on its own.

SAM [unconvinced]: Right.

[SAM leaves the control section.]

Scene 37. A Corridor on the Ship

[The corridor is in semidarkness, the lighting system dimmed, presumably to save power. There are closed hatchways all along the passage, and the walls are lined with numbered service panels. The floor is covered with a metal grating, which clangs in a satisfying manner as SAM walks across it.

SAM passes a recess in one of the walls, a small hatchway leading into a tiny black chamber on the other side, the fluorescent yellow stencil above the entrance bearing the legend CAUTION: AIRLOCK. She’s obviously heading for a hatchway beyond the airlock, but then she stops, and turns.

[We see that one of the service panels has been dislodged, and is now hanging off the wall at an angle. Noticing this, SAM steps over to the panel and peers into the exposed space; it seems to be a shaft of some kind.

This all seems very, very wrong to SAM.]

SAM: Doctor?

[She turns. But as she does so, something moves towards her, a shape which until now has been hidden by the shadows of the darkened passage. It’s quite possible that the thing has been camouflaged by some form of optical technology. FX?]
SAM [shouts]: Doctor!
[The shape lunges. We get a glimpse of a dark face, its mouth frozen into a permanent scream, its eyes sunken into a bloated, skeletal head. Then we cut away.]

Scene 38. The Control Section of the Ship

[The DOCTOR has obviously heard SAM’s cry. He leaps to his feet.]

DOCTOR: Sam?

Scene 39. The Corridor

[The DOCTOR hurries through the hatchway, then comes to an abrupt halt. Halfway along the corridor, SAM is being held by the CREATURE. It’s still shrouded in darkness, so we can make out only dim outlines: bony limbs, rough skin and what may be large, leathery wings, folded around SAM’s body. The CREATURE’s face is not unlike one of the faces of the Cold, but frozen into position, like a death mask. Its features – what we can see of them – are vague, half finished.

SAM struggles, but the CREATURE’s clearly too strong for her. The DOCTOR takes a step forward, and the CREATURE instinctively takes a step back, into the airlock recess. It raises a claw to SAM’s throat. The DOCTOR gets the message. He stops moving.]

DOCTOR [cautiously]: What do you want?
CREATURE [FX on voice]: This ship will not dock at Jumpstart Island. We will make landfall at the Ordifica central transmitter. You will take us to the operational centre of this planet’s mediant.

DOCTOR [puzzled]: The transmitter?
SAM: Don’t listen to it, Doc–
[The CREATURE clamps a hand across SAM’s mouth.]

DOCTOR: I’ll take you there if you like. But I warn you, it won’t do you much good. They’re very keen on protecting their property, the Ordificans. They’ll shoot you down as soon as you show your face. If that is a face.
CREATURE: We will overrun the transmitter. We will take control of this world.
DOCTOR: ‘We’?
CREATURE: We are here. All of us. In the ventilation system of this vessel. We will free ourselves. We will take the transmitter. We will become one with this planet’s media.

DOCTOR [slapping his forehead]: Of course! The SOS… it was faked, wasn’t it? This ship –
CREATURE: Our ship. You will take us to the transmitter. Now.
DOCTOR: I’m sorry. I can’t allow that.
[The CREATURE’s claw hovers over SAM’s throat. The DOCTOR looks uncertain.]
CREATURE: We can hurt her. Cut her. Infect her with our being. She will be one with us.
[We focus on SAM. She seems to be looking at something inside the airlock recess, but we don’t see what.]

DOCTOR: All right. I’ll do it.
[The DOCTOR retreats, back towards the control section, not taking his eyes off the CREATURE. The CREATURE seems to relax a little.]

[Instantly, SAM moves. She breaks free of the CREATURE’s grip, hurling herself at the wall of the airlock.]

DOCTOR: Sam –
[But it’s too late. SAM slams into the airlock wall, ramming her fist into a small control pad set into the black panelling. Immediately, a dark metal shutter slides across the airlock recess. The DOCTOR springs forward, but the shutter has already closed, cutting him off from SAM and the CREATURE.]

[He bangs his fist on the shutter, to no avail. A small computer display on the shutter lights up with the words, OPENING SEQUENCE ENGAGED.]

DOCTOR: No!

Scene 40. Inside the Airlock

[We see SAM and the CREATURE, shut into the tiny space between the shutter and the outer hatchway. The
CREATURE hisses, and throws SAM aside. It presses itself against the shutter, clawing at the metal with its skeletal fingers.

SAM [softly, to herself]: Sorry Doctor. Couldn’t let you do it.

There’s a loud clicking noise, then the grinding of heavy machinery. The CREATURE freezes, and listens. Slowly, a grin breaks out across SAM’s features.

SAM: Goodbye, Doctor. Goodbye, everyone.

Then the outer hatch of the airlock slides open. The CREATURE shrieks, a high-pitched, almost ultrasonic sound, as the air floods out into the vacuum. The CREATURE is flung across the airlock, clawing desperately at the walls.

It’s sucked out of the ship. SAM follows it, not even trying to resist. We can still make out the hint of a smile on her face.

41. The Corridor

The DOCTOR hammers at the shutter. We can hear the sound of the hatchway opening on the other side of the barrier, the whoosh of escaping air.

DOCTOR [scream of anguish]: Sam!

Scene 42. Space

Utter silence, as two humanoid shapes float out of the ship and into the void. The first of the shapes thrashes wildly, trying to get a grip on the hull, but failing miserably. The second seems calm, drifting gracefully out into the darkness.

Then both shapes buckle and twist, their bodies depressurising in the vacuum.

‘I don’t get it,’ said Compassion.

‘Sacrifice,’ said Guest. They’d moved to one of the lower platforms in the transmitter tower, for the simple reason that there were seats here, overlooking the ground floor of the building. You were supposed to be able to relax on this level, but Compassion didn’t feel any better than she had half an hour ago. She and Guest were both tuned in to the part of the media that had absorbed Sam, and now they were monitoring the signals the sphere was dredging up out of the girl’s head.

‘The images are in a kind of order,’ Compassion pointed out. ‘This is what they call “narrative”, isn’t it?’

‘Yes. The media’s extracting the concepts we’ve lost over the years. Finding out whether there’s any point reintroducing them to the culture.’

‘Pff,’ said Compassion. ‘Anything we’ve already got rid of can’t be worth having.’

‘Possibly. Possibly not. Evolution is never straightforward. Right now, the media seems to be focusing on the concept of “sacrifice”.’

‘I know what sacrifice is.’

‘You know what the word means. I doubt you understand the complexities.’

Compassion scowled at that. She couldn’t stand it when Guest got messianic.

‘The girl has principles,’ Guest went on, more to himself than to her. ‘She believes in causes. We don’t have any causes, which is why our understanding of sacrifice is so limited.’

‘We’ve got a cause,’ Compassion protested. ‘We want to find the Cold.’

‘Would you die for that cause?’

‘Don’t be stupid.’

‘But in the… narrative the girl Sam sacrificed herself. An exaggeration of what she’d do in those actual circumstances, I’m sure. But even so…’

Compassion wasn’t impressed. ‘Any idiot can do that. Even animals do it. They don’t mind getting themselves killed to protect their own kind. Personally, I thought we’d grown out of that kind of thing.’

Guest nodded. ‘Yes. The scenario was too primitive. Too simplistic to tell us anything. Perhaps the media’s building up to something better.’

Scene 43. Hydrodome Corridor

A corridor ‘on board’ one of the ocean-bound cities of Ordifica. The passage is bathed in pale blue-green light,
shimmering and rippling like water. As there are no windows actually looking out on to the ocean, however, this must be an artificial effect, perhaps designed to relax the inhabitants.

[They're not relaxing now. A large number of PANICKING PEOPLE stampede along the corridor, as many extras as the budget can afford. They seem to be perfectly ordinary human colonists, though an undue number of them are pregnant women and cute children with rag dolls. They’re presumably hurrying towards some kind of emergency exit, as there are klaxons sounding in the background.

In the middle of the crowd, we see SAM, hurrying the PANICKING PEOPLE along the passage. Finally, the last of the extras move out of sight, and the noise subsides. Clearly exhausted, SAM heads up the corridor, in the opposite direction to all the others. The klaxons don’t stop blaring.

[Just up the corridor we find the DOCTOR, opening an access hatch in the floor of the passage with his sonic screwdriver. As he works, SAM’s attention is caught by a weapons rack fixed to the wall behind him. There are various pieces of Aliens-style hardware on display, including what look like flame-throwers, and an interesting variety of grenades.

[SAM takes one of the grenades off the rack, and inspects it.]

DOCTOR [not looking up]: We need to seal off the lower levels. They’re getting in through the filter system, so if we can block off the pipelines…

[He notices what SAM’s doing, stands, and takes the grenade out of her hands.]

DOCTOR: You don’t know where it’s been.

SAM: You said we’ve got to seal off the tunnels, didn’t you? We’ll need explosives –

DOCTOR: This isn’t an explosive, Sam. It’s a chemical grenade. Anything within range when this goes off is going to lose an awful lot of skin. And muscle. And nervous tissue, come to think of it.

SAM: Oh.

[The DOCTOR puts the grenade back on the rack, then kneels down again, and tugs at the access hatch. After some grunting and groaning, he manages to pull it to one side, revealing the maintenance tunnel below the corridor.]

DOCTOR: There. Is everyone heading for the escape boats?

SAM: Everyone I could find.

DOCTOR: Good. [He looks up, and smiles.] Now. Feel like a bit of spelunking?

SAM: A bit of what…? Doctor!

[Just up the corridor we find the DOCTOR, opening an access hatch in the floor of the passage with his sonic screwdriver. As he works, SAM’s attention is caught by a weapons rack fixed to the wall behind him. There are various pieces of Aliens-style hardware on display, including what look like flame-throwers, and an interesting variety of grenades.]

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DOCTOR: Good. [He looks up, and smiles.] Now. Feel like a bit of spelunking?

SAM: A bit of what…? Doctor!

[Just up the corridor we find the DOCTOR, opening an access hatch in the floor of the passage with his sonic screwdriver. As he works, SAM’s attention is caught by a weapons rack fixed to the wall behind him. There are various pieces of Aliens-style hardware on display, including what look like flame-throwers, and an interesting variety of grenades.]

[He notices what SAM’s doing, stands, and takes the grenade out of her hands.]

DOCTOR: You don’t know where it’s been.

SAM: You said we’ve got to seal off the tunnels, didn’t you? We’ll need explosives –

DOCTOR: This isn’t an explosive, Sam. It’s a chemical grenade. Anything within range when this goes off is going to lose an awful lot of skin. And muscle. And nervous tissue, come to think of it.

SAM: Oh.

[The DOCTOR puts the grenade back on the rack, then kneels down again, and tugs at the access hatch. After some grunting and groaning, he manages to pull it to one side, revealing the maintenance tunnel below the corridor.]

DOCTOR: There. Is everyone heading for the escape boats?

SAM: Everyone I could find.

DOCTOR: Good. [He looks up, and smiles.] Now. Feel like a bit of spelunking?

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SAM: Oh.
DOCTOR [whisper]: Please…

[SAM raises her thumb above the end of the grenade, where the triggering mechanism is set into the plastic.]

CREATURE: All ours.

[SAM screams. It sounds more like a war cry than anything else. As she screams, she presses the trigger and drops the grenade.]

[We hear the sound of the grenade hitting the lower level. The CREATURE hisses, and lets go of the DOCTOR.]

DOCTOR [whisper]: Sam…

[There’s a burst of light from the hatchway, like a magnesium flare. For a second, we see the CREATURE in every detail, its half-formed features illuminated by the flash. We also see the DOCTOR as he falls to the floor, his face supernaturally calm.]

[Then SAM turns away from the hatchway, eyes tight shut. The next thing we hear is the sound of the CREATURE screaming, as the chemicals from the grenade eat away its flesh.]

[Not opening her eyes, SAM begins to run, tearing away from the hatch and along the corridor.]

[She looks as though she wants to be anywhere in the universe but here.]

‘She sacrificed her companion,’ Guest noted. ‘The thing that means the most to her.’

Compassion snorted. ‘You mean she let him get it in the neck while she made a run for it.’

‘No. It wasn’t a question of personal survival. It was a question of principles.’ Then Guest narrowed his eyes. He looked as if he were trying to remember something. ‘The Doctor, though…’

‘Know him?’

‘No. I think I knew the name, before I was remembered. The Faction may have mentioned him.’

‘He’s got a TARDIS,’ said Compassion. ‘That’s the important thing.’

‘Yes. It’s interesting, don’t you think? This scenario. Ordifica. The colony planet. The alien intruders.’

Compassion furrowed her forehead. ‘Am I missing something?’

‘Perhaps. Doesn’t the name “Ordifica” mean anything to you?’

‘No.’

‘Then you’ve forgotten even more of our history than I have.’ Guest stroked the receiver in his ear. ‘The media hasn’t finished with her. It’s still trying to understand the sacrifice concept. Or to make us understand.’

‘So far, we haven’t learned anything,’ said Compassion. ‘Just that the girl’s people are good at throwing away their lives and killing their friends.’

‘We’ll see,’ said Guest.

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Scene 44. Space

[We see Ordifica again, and the small black ship in its orbit. However, there are other shapes moving into the picture now. Sleek golden needles, taking up strategic positions around the planet. Time Lord vessels, not unlike the ships from Scene 30.]

Scene 45. The Control Section of the Ship

[SAM sits in the pilot’s seat, hunched over the control panels. She’s talking into some kind of communicator.]

SAM: Doctor? Doctor, can you hear me?

[There’s no reply. SAM continues to fiddle with the controls, trying to make it look as though she knows what she’s doing.]

SAM: Doctor, it’s me. I’m on the transporter. Doctor? Come in, Doctor.

DOCTOR [voice, through the static]: I’m here.

SAM: Yeah? Where’s ‘here’?

DOCTOR [voice]: On board one of the Time Lord ships. Some of the aliens tried to follow me off the planet, but I, er… dissuaded them.

SAM: The Time Lord ships. What are they?

DOCTOR [voice]: Automatic defence system. The Time Lords programmed them to track the aliens through the vortex. They’re already in position. Just waiting for the order.

SAM: Order? What order?

[There’s a long pause from the communicator.]

SAM: Doctor? Did you hear me? I said –
DOCTOR [voice]: The order to open fire. To destroy Ordifica.
SAM: What?
DOCTOR [voice]: There doesn’t seem to be much of a choice, Sam. The aliens have taken over the transmitter network. They’re giving instructions to everyone on the planet.
SAM: There are three hundred million people down there!
[There’s a burst of static from the communicator. SAM plays with the controls a bit more.]
SAM: Doctor?
CREATURE [voice]: We control this transmitter now. There will be no further messages from the Time Lord.
SAM: Listen, you morons. There’s a fleet of Time Lord warships out here, ready to wipe out the whole planet.
Is that what you want?
CREATURE [voice]: Unimportant. We control the transmitter system. We can transmit ourselves to any point in the physical universe. The planet is of no further strategic significance.
SAM [to herself]: So that’s what they wanted.
CREATURE [voice]: We will transmit ourselves to Gallifrey. To Earth. To Andromeda. We will inhabit every media network in this continuum. There will be nobody to stand against us. The fate of Ordifica is unimportant.
SAM: Wait. The Doctor said it’d take you nearly an hour to take over the whole media system. And you’ve still got – I don’t know – another couple of minutes to go. You’re not in complete control yet, are you? You don’t have total power. You can’t start transmitting.
[A long pause.]
SAM: Did you hear what I said? You can’t start –
CREATURE [voice]: Transmission will occur shortly. We will be universal. We will be ubiquitous. All life will be our receiver. All space will be our transmitter.
SAM: Not if I can help it.
CREATURE [voice]: You have no option. All life will be –
[SAM twiddles the knobs, and the voice fades out.]
SAM [under her breath]: Let’s hope you’re listening. [Loudly.] This is Samantha Jones to the Time Lord fleet. Samantha Jones to the Time Lord fleet. Can anybody hear me?
[No response.]
SAM: Come on. You must be keeping a check on all the frequencies, or you wouldn’t have known what was happening on the planet. Can you hear me, Time Lord fleet?
[No response.]
SAM: OK. So you can’t talk. Well, I’ll just have to assume you can speak English, then. The Doctor says you’re waiting for an order. And I’ve got an order for you.

Scene 46. Space

[There’s a brief moment of stillness, all the Time Lord ships having taken up position around the planet. Then the bows begin to crackle, black light burning across the metal.]

Scene 47. The Control Section of the Ship

[SAM stares at the screen, watching the Time Lord warships.]
SAM [to herself]: Three hundred million people.
[A pause.]
SAM: I can’t even imagine what three hundred million people look like.
[She leans over the communicator.]
SAM: Fire.

Scene 48. Space

[The black light continues to crackle and spark across the vessels. There’s the traditional hum of power, finally reaching a crescendo.]
[The ships open fire. There’s a flash of pure black, big enough to blot out the planet, the ships and everything for light years around.]

‘The whole planet,’ said Compassion. ‘Three hundred million people.’
‘Does that bother you?’ asked Guest.
‘No. Why? You think the girl’s starting to infect me?’
‘Her ideas are part of the media now. Although I wouldn’t have expected them to have an effect so soon.’
‘She did it so easily, though. She just… pushed the button. Killed off a whole race.’
‘True. Another exaggeration, I’m sure. If she had to do it for real, there’d be more… angst. But you heard what she said. She couldn’t even imagine what that many people looked like.’
‘So?’
‘She seemed to find it easier to kill a planet than to kill her friend. The planet was more distant to her. A less well-defined image.’ Compassion felt a pulse run through her receiver, and she realised that the media was listening to Guest’s words, changing its plans accordingly. ‘Perhaps the media was wrong when it raised the stakes,’ Guest continued. ‘Perhaps if it makes the scenario more personal, we’ll get a stronger reaction from her. A single individual may mean more to her than a whole culture.’
‘That doesn’t make sense.’
‘It doesn’t have to. The imagery is all that matters.’
‘Oh, yeah,’ said Compassion. She wasn’t sure how she’d forgotten a thing like that. Something to do with the new transmissions, probably.
‘If we want to understand her principles, we have to understand the contradictions,’ Guest concluded. ‘The images that define her culture. However meaningless they may seem. We have to understand why you’re allowed to eat cows, but not horses. Why some poisons are acceptable, and some aren’t even legal. We have to understand all these things. Fully.’

Compassion leaned back in her seat, ready to listen to the next wave of transmissions. ‘Right,’ she said. ‘So, who’s it going to ask her to kill now?’
The planet couldn’t have been real. Or, if it was, then someone had done something deeply peculiar to the landscape. When the first of the landers had touched down on the surface, and the refugees from the colony had poured out into the light, they’d found themselves standing on ground that was perfectly smooth and perfectly black. No mountains, no forests, no rivers, not even the occasional bump, although there were one or two cracks in the ground, which seemed a lot deeper and a lot darker than anybody felt comfortable with.

There were buildings, of course. The Faction’s engineers had started work on a city, planting grand towers at strategic points over the non-landscape. Their construction machines were already stomping and trundling across the much-too-close horizon, excreting slabs of grey polymer-rock from their stomachs, so by now there were just enough buildings to house the colonists. Fitz himself had been allotted a place of his own near the centre of the city-to-be, although he’d hardly spent five minutes there in the hours since they’d touched down. He’d been wandering around the landing site for most of that time, threading his way between the people and the lifting drones, watching the colonists as they unloaded their possessions from the landers.

Most of the Faction’s machines were being brought down to the surface from the belly of the Justinian, and installed in the buildings close to the heart of the settlement. While the ship had been in flight, Mother Mathara had shown him something called a ‘biosphere-manipulation system’, which she claimed allowed the Faction’s followers to tap into the ecosystems of whole planets. Fitz hadn’t been sure exactly what that meant. Something to do with being able to alter the environment from the inside, to change the patterns of the weather and the biological limits of the animals. And so on.

‘Even we don’t know how to use the full potential of the systems,’ Mathara had purred, admitting to a gap in the Faction’s knowledge for the first time since Fitz had met her. ‘But we can make small changes to the ecosystem. We find it makes things easier for our colonists.’

Fitz had been told all about the Eleven-Day Empire, the hidden homeland of Faction Paradox, where the Mothers and Fathers had held their parliament ever since the Time Lords had wiped out their old homeworld. He’d been told about the things that had been done to the sky there, about the jungles of raw bone that were supposed to grow under the earth. The Mother had tried to make all this sound like an achievement, but Fitz guessed that the design of the Eleven-Day Empire had been an accident, a result of the Faction people messing around with ‘biosphere manipulation’ even though they didn’t know how to use the technology properly.

‘I still don’t get it,’ Fitz heard Tobin say, as he made his way back towards ‘his’ lander. He guessed she wasn’t talking to him, so he didn’t bother looking up. ‘Why now? Why the eighteenth century?’

There was a sigh. The sound of cold breath scraping against bone. Mother Mathara, Fitz realised, still in her mask. ‘I’ve explained everything to Nathaniel,’ Mathara said, wearily. ‘I’m sure he’ll tell you our plans when he feels it’s time.’

‘Plans?’

‘The Faction’s got our future mapped out for us,’ said a voice that could only have been Guest’s. ‘They want us to have access to the twentieth century.’

Fitz stopped walking. And very nearly stopped breathing.

‘It’ll be another two hundred years before you can reach Earth from here,’ Mathara explained. ‘Two hundred years to build your colony, to establish yourselves in Anathema, before you’ll have the opportunity to meet your ancestors.’

‘Before we can reach Earth?’ queried Tobin.

Fitz risked looking up. The three of them were over by the lander, watching the lifting machines haul hydroponics gear out of the cargo hold. None of the three were looking his way, unless Mathara was doing funny things with her eyes behind her skull-face.

‘The family has other plans, Laura,’ the Mother said, in a voice that was probably supposed to be soothing. ‘We’ll leave you to your own devices, once you’re settled. You have to develop on your own. You have to form a self-sufficient culture, or you’ll be no use to… anybody. We’ll teach you everything you need to know about your new world, don’t worry about that. We think of you as our children.’

‘Or your remote drones,’ said Guest. Mathara didn’t respond to that.

‘What happens when the Time Lords come for us again?’ Tobin asked.

‘They won’t,’ the Mother told her. ‘Trust me, Laura. This place is out of reach of the High Council. Somewhere they won’t be able to risk looking. I’m sure Nathaniel will explain.’
Fitz hated the way Mathara did that. The way she’d casually drop your first name into a conversation, whether she needed to or not. Some kind of low-level brainwashing technique, Guest had told him, designed to make you think that the powers that be were communicating with you on a personal level. Guest was happy – no, wrong word: content – to work with the Faction, just for the sake of the colonists, but he didn’t want the family to get any closer to him than was absolutely necessary. Given the chance, thought Fitz, ‘Nathaniel’ would forget his first name altogether.

‘I suppose we’ve always got the ship,’ Tobin grumbled. ‘We can get away again if anybody comes looking for us. I mean, we’ll take as many of the others as we can. Obviously.’

‘You’re all heart,’ Fitz heard himself say.

Three pairs of eye sockets were suddenly pointing his way, and one of them didn’t even have any eyes in it.

‘Compassion is my middle name,’ Tobin told him, without a great deal of humour. ‘So where are we, anyway?’
There was a prison. It was a place of the lost-beyond-hope, a wonderland of psychological torture and infallible interrogation machines. The prison was run by robots, who removed prisoners from their cells according to a strict timetable, dragging them into darkened rooms where terrible neural devices would be planted in their heads. It was a nightmare of person-processing, of cold, unfeeling, inhuman efficiency.

And when he woke up, it was much, much worse.

‘He’s done the place up a bit,’ Sarah said. She couldn’t really think of anything else to say. The TARDIS console room wasn’t the way she remembered it, even given that her memories of her time with the Doctor weren’t as clear as they should have been, and she kept getting her Krynoids mixed up with her Pescatons. In the good old days, the room had been quite small, for what it was. Intimate. Homely. Now it was a great big Batcave of a place, stuffed with oversized control banks, massive electrical cables, items of mismatched furniture, and (most notably) an S-reg Mini Metro. The car was parked in one of the corners – and the room had far, far too many of those – with a VW badge from an old Volkswagen glued to its bonnet. Someone had left a handwritten note under one of the windscreen wipers, which read, it’s just not the same, doctor. get rid of it.

‘Big,’ Lost Boy said, neatly summing everything up.

Sarah wasn’t sure what had happened outside the ship. The doorway had appeared in the middle of the condemned building, and she’d caught only the briefest glimpse of the armoured men when they’d poured out of the static. She’d thrown herself at the TARDIS, not because she’d expected to get into it, but just for protection.

She’d brought the TARDIS key, of course. One of the TARDIS keys, anyway. When she’d first met the Doctor, the key – like the ship itself – had been masquerading as something far less interesting, a bog-standard twentieth-century Yale job, which had hung on a silver chain around the Doctor’s neck. But, while she’d been on board the TARDIS, the old duffer had experimented with a variety of other models. After his regeneration, he’d gone overboard, devising a number of increasingly complex alternatives, always sulking at the finished products and invariably leaving them lying around the ship’s workrooms.

They’d been more like sculptures than anything else. Sarah’s favourite had looked like a DNA stream, a double helix of plastic that hadn’t had a hope of getting into any lock in the known universe. Ultimately, the Doctor had told her that the delicate fusion of TARDIS engineering and post-classical design he was after was obviously impossible, with the tools at his disposal. And he’d gone back to using the old Yale-type key, extra grumpy.

Sarah had taken one of those spare keys with her when she’d left the ship. Looking back on it, she couldn’t say exactly why. She’d left in a hurry, after all. No, more than that: she’d left accidentally. She’d packed all her things, but only because she’d thought the Doctor would talk her out of going at the last minute. She could still remember dumping her possessions into the carrying case, taking everything from the clothes she’d brought from home to the stuffed owl the Doctor had bought for her at a jumble sale in Brighton in 1948.

She hadn’t hesitated when she’d picked up the key from its shelf in her quarters. She’d been using it only as a decoration anyway, like one of those ornamental paperweights you bought for your friends when you went on skiing holidays.

But this time the key hadn’t been necessary. The TARDIS doors had been open. Once she and Lost Boy had found their bearings, Sarah had hurried over to the console, and pressed the switch that locked the entrance. Like everything else, the door control had changed since Sarah’s day, but you couldn’t miss it. It was, as it always had been, the most obvious switch on the console.

‘The door was open,’ she told Lost Boy, who was still trying to fit the whole ceiling into his head. ‘Think about it.’

The Ogron did. The results didn’t seem particularly worthwhile.

‘The Doctor can’t have had time to lock the door,’ Sarah pointed out. ‘The Remote must have known someone would come poking their nose in if they gave their technology to the Saudis. They must have passed on some way of detecting the TARDIS. The soldiers must have been waiting for the Doctor even before he stepped out of the ship.’

Lost Boy gave an affirming grunt. ‘Bad weapons,’ he said, whatever that was supposed to mean.

‘But if that’s true, they must know he’s not human,’ Sarah went on. ‘And they must know what the TARDIS is. So why leave it here? Why not cart it off to some defence installation somewhere?’
‘Trap,’ suggested Lost Boy.
‘You mean, leave it where it landed and see who else turned up looking for it?’ She frowned, and made it a big frown, so even the Ogron could read it. ‘It’s possible, I suppose. But the TARDIS must be years ahead of anything the Remote could have sold the Saudis. They’d want to investigate it, wouldn’t they? Try to find out how it worked…’

The obvious conclusion suddenly hit her. As ever, the revelation came about a second too late to be useful.

‘Don’t move,’ said a voice, which somehow managed to sound both hostile and slightly terrified at the same time.

Sarah jumped. Lost Boy grunted. Two figures had appeared in one of the archways on the other side of the console, the way into one of the TARDIS’s posh new vaulted corridors. They were both men, both dressed in black. The uniforms were definitely military: Saudi intelligence, maybe, although the outfits weren’t exactly conventional, so the men were probably attached to one of those special units people weren’t generally supposed to talk about. And, of course, they were both wearing helmets. Shiny and black, Darth Vader-style. There were visors fitted to those helmets, moulded to look like hi-tech gas masks. Remote technology, Sarah guessed.

The closer of the two men had his visor pulled up. Under the bulk of the helmet, it was hard to make out much of his face, but he was definitely a local. Sarah saw two big white eyes staring out at her, and spotted the sheen of sweat on his skin. He was fairly young, and there were tiny hairs sticking out from the flesh under his nose, a moustache that hadn’t quite taken root yet.

‘Don’t move,’ the man repeated. ‘Don’t say anything.’

‘Why not?’ asked Sarah.

‘You are now in the custody of the Special Internal Taskforce,’ the man said. He’d obviously remembered the phrase parrot-fashion, and Sarah guessed this was the first time he’d ever had the chance to use it. ‘You will make no attempt to escape. You will make no attempt to speak. You have no rights under Saudi law. You are to be considered alien agents, and therefore threats to the security of the kingdom.’

‘When you say “alien agents”, do you mean alien agents, or just alien agents?’

The man nudged the air in front of him with the barrel of his gun. The gun looked like it was made out of plastic, so either the men were using stun guns, or the Remote had given the Saudis a few ideas about side arms.

‘Is that an answer?’ Sarah persisted.

‘You are now in the custody of the Special Internal Taskforce,’ the man repeated. He’d obviously remembered the phrase parrot-fashion, and Sarah guessed this was the first time he’d ever had the chance to use it. ‘You will make no attempt to escape. You will make no attempt to speak. You have no rights under Saudi law. You are to be considered alien agents, and therefore threats to the security of the kingdom.’

‘When you say “alien agents”, do you mean alien agents, or just alien agents?’

The man did some more air-nudging. ‘Shut up!’ he barked.

Sarah took a step towards him. ‘Why?’

The soldier looked as though his eyes were going to pop. His friend nervously shuffled back into the corridor.

‘I’ll shoot you!’ he announced.

‘No you won’t,’ said Sarah. ‘This is a TARDIS. TARDISes come fitted with something called temporal grace. The Doctor showed me once.’ She took another few steps towards the man. ‘What have you done with the Doctor, by the way? I know he’s in prison. Somewhere near here, is he?’

‘Stay back!’ was all the soldier could say.

‘Temporal grace,’ Sarah went on. ‘Weapons don’t work inside the TARDIS. Well, guns don’t. I’m sure you’d feel it if I got Lost Boy over there to give you a wallop round the ear.’

Lost Boy seemed to appreciate this concept, because he started to cross the floor. ‘Which gives us the advantage,’ Sarah concluded. ‘Lost Boy’s bigger than either of you. Actually, he’s almost bigger than both of you. So you’d better drop those bits of plastic you’re holding, before he gets angry.’

Sarah stopped, not three feet away from the soldiers. Lost Boy shambled to a halt by her side.

The first soldier’s hands were shaking. He pointed his gun at Sarah, then at Lost Boy, then at Sarah, then at Lost Boy. His lips were trembling, and he didn’t seem to know what to say.

‘Uhhn,’ said Lost Boy, succinctly. Then he reached out for the gun.

‘I’ll shoot you!’ he announced.

Lost Boy fired.

There was, in spite of everything, an explosion.

He was starting to lose track of time. Ironic for a Time Lord. When he’d been younger, some friends of his had learned the skill of internal chronometry, of being able to tell the exact time, to the nanosecond, without the need for any kind of measuring device. Just another way for Academy students to show off, really. Sometimes, the students would ‘borrow’ the Cardinals’ TARDISes, taking the show-offs to randomly chosen points in the galaxy’s history, just to see if they could keep track of two relative time interfaces at once.

The Doctor had never had the knack of internal chronometry. It had all seemed a bit pointless, somehow. But, even so, he couldn’t help feeling that he should at least know what day it was. Especially as he’d been here for only… well, for a number of days in single digits, anyway. If this had been going on for years, fair enough. But
He decided that more sleep might be a good idea. Sometimes he had peculiar dreams when he slept, and imagined that one of his former regenerations was hovering over him in the cell, but he doubted it was important. Besides, on the one occasion when he'd tried to warn his previous life about Faction Paradox, the old boy hadn't understood a word of it.

It was the surprise that knocked Sarah off her feet. Lost Boy had already been gripping the soldier’s arms when he’d pressed the trigger, so the gun had been pointing up at the ceiling of the console room. Sarah saw sparks fizzing across the ceiling, where the blast had severed one of the many power cables that dangled from the rafters.

Lost Boy started panicking. As she hit the floor, Sarah saw the Ogron tugging at the soldier’s arm, trying to wrench the gun away from him. The man was screaming, making a noise that suggested he was about to cry. Sarah glimpsed a blur of grey, Lost Boy’s fist swinging through the air. The screaming stopped.

Then the gunfire started in earnest. Sarah pressed her head against the floor. The other soldier had opened fire with his own gun, and the shots were zipping over Sarah’s head, impacting against the far wall of the console room. The man was whimpering, Sarah realised. He wasn’t any more used to actual combat than his partner. He was pressing down the trigger of the gun, forgetting to actually aim it.

Lost Boy was just out of his line of fire. There was another blur of grey, and a hint of burning cloth. Then everything went quiet.

Sarah swallowed, hard, and pulled herself up off the floor. The two soldiers were lying in a big black heap at the entrance to the corridor, and Lost Boy was kneeling over them, removing their weapons. One of the Ogron’s sleeves had been singed, but that was about the extent of the damage.

‘You said –’ Lost Boy began.

‘I know,’ Sarah told him. ‘Look, it’s not my fault if the TARDIS isn’t working properly. Blame the Doctor.’

Lost Boy offered her one of the guns. Sarah shook her head. ‘Did you… you know. Did you hit them… very hard?’

Lost Boy nudged one of the fallen men with his boot. ‘No. Sleep.’

‘They’re unconscious?’ Sarah tried her best to look cynical, but she suspected she didn’t have the right kind of face. ‘How do you do that, anyway?’

‘Hnn?’

‘Do you know how hard it is to knock a human being out cold without doing permanent damage? It’s almost impossible. Ask any doctor, he’ll tell you. But you aliens do it to people all the time. One touch, and they’re out like a light.’

‘Rrrh,’ said Lost Boy. Sarah interpreted this as Deep Ogron for ‘it’s a talent’.

She crossed the console room again, and circled the console, inspecting the controls as she passed them. ‘All right. Let’s see what we’re going to do with them. Where are the scanner controls these days? Let’s try… this one.’

She pressed a likely-looking switch on the console, the one that looked most like a TV control. It had always worked before. Besides, what was the worst that could happen? The TARDIS didn’t have a self-destruct system, although the Doctor had once claimed that it did have a pretend self-destruct system, just for scaring people.

Sure enough, part of the ceiling began to shimmer, and soon a three-dimensional image resolved itself up among the rafters, a hologram of the building outside the ship.

‘He’s beefed that up as well,’ Sarah noted. ‘I wonder if he’s got NICAM.’

On the ‘screen’, she saw the other men in black surrounding the TARDIS, a couple of them aiming weapons at the door, a few others trying to interrogate Kode.

‘It’s not my ship, though,’ Kode was explaining.

‘You came here to steal it,’ one of the soldiers insisted.

‘Well, yeah. But it was the woman’s idea. She’s the only one who can get into it.’

The man pointed his gun at Kode’s chest. ‘You try.’

Sarah saw Kode stare blankly at the man for a moment or two, probably listening to his receiver. Then he shrugged, and wandered over to the TARDIS. The men guarding the ship stood aside for him.

Sarah reached for the door control.

‘Nuh?’ asked Lost Boy.

‘Trust me,’ Sarah told him.

Outside, Kode started running his fingers across the TARDIS, paying special attention to the lock. After a while, he pushed against the door. Nothing happened.

‘See?’ Kode told the soldiers.

The man who was presumably the Saudi unit leader prodded him with the gun again. ‘You came here to steal it,’ he insisted.
‘I told you,’ Kode protested. ‘I just… oopf.’
Sarah looked up, in time to see Kode stumble into the console room. On the scanner, the other soldiers looked at each other, then headed for the open TARDIS doors. Sarah pressed the switch again. The doors shut in their faces.
Lost Boy grabbed Kode’s arm, and twisted it behind the boy’s back. Kode screwed his face up.
‘Oh, leave him alone,’ Sarah said. ‘He’s harmless. Look, his hired help’s not going to do anything.’ Sarah nodded at the scanner, at the prone form of Lost Boy’s big brother, sprawled across the floor of the old building. The Ogron seemed to be in shock, rather than dead. Even from here, you could see his massive chest going up and down, in heaving Ogron snores.
Lost Boy paused, then let go of Kode’s arm. Kode promptly fell over.
‘Thanks,’ he mumbled.
‘You could be useful,’ Sarah said. ‘You know all about Remote technology, don’t you?’
‘Well, yeah.’ Kode started to pick himself up, and it was only at this point that he seemed to notice his surroundings. He looked bewildered. Not at the size of the ship: the actual architecture didn’t seem to phase him at all. But the look on his face…
‘Can you hear it?’ he hissed.
‘Hear what?’
‘It’s so fast. It’s faster than Anathema. The signals in here. There’s so much going on, it’s…’
Sarah crossed her arms. ‘Never mind that now. We need to find the Doctor. We know he’s in the area, somewhere. We have to steer the TARDIS to him. The problem is, getting the coordinates.’
Slowly, Kode began to shake his head. ‘No. The TARDIS says… there are too many places to look. It can’t home in on the Doctor. He’s shielded. All Time Lord biodata’s shielded. Some kind of… security measure.’
Sarah was genuinely surprised. ‘The ship’s talking to you?’
‘Of course it’s talking to me. Doesn’t it talk to you?’
Sarah considered this. Sam had suggested that the receivers didn’t give the Remote orders at all: they just gave the aliens raw material, and let them interpret it as they saw fit. That being true, Sarah could easily imagine how Kode might think the ship had something to say to him.
‘There’s another way of finding the Doctor,’ she pointed out. ‘He’s got a piece of technology on him. A piece of Remote technology. From Llewis’s office. A focus, the Doctor called it. I slipped it into his pocket when I met him.’
Kode looked blank. ‘I don’t understand. When did you –’
‘It doesn’t matter. Just ask the TARDIS if it can home in on the focus.’
‘Yes,’ Kode said, without a pause. He tapped his ear. ‘Our technology’s screened as well, but we can use my receiver to tune in to it. We’ll have to make the receiver part of the TARDIS, though. It’ll take a while to do the rewiring.’
Now, that was curious. Kode had said ‘we’. Suggesting that the mission to rescue the Doctor was now his first concern, as well. Presumably, he was starting to act on the signals the TARDIS was giving him. The TARDIS cared about the Doctor’s wellbeing, so now Kode did, too. While he was here in the console room, anyway.
‘Fine,’ said Sarah. ‘You start work. If you need any tools… well, you can ask the TARDIS where to find them, can’t you?’ She glanced at the corridor entrance, where the two soldiers still lay sprawled out on the tiles.
‘Meanwhile, we’ve got to find somewhere to put these two.’
Lost Boy seemed agitated by this. ‘I stay here,’ he said. ‘Guard Kode.’
‘That’s all right,’ Sarah told him. She nodded towards the pretend Volkswagen. ‘I won’t be needing your help. I don’t think I can resist this.’

He was woken by the sound of screaming. That happened sometimes. It was the other prisoners, in the other cells, although frankly he was starting to doubt whether those other cells actually existed. All of this was probably an illusion. The result of some terrible mind-probe experiment or other.
No, no. That couldn’t have been right, or he’d have escaped by now. This was real. Too brutal to escape from, too random. That was what he’d told… the other prisoner, whatever his name had been.
Three! That was it. He’d been here three days now. Good grief, was that all? Surely the other prisoners didn’t lose track of things this quickly? He wasn’t exactly inexperienced, when it came to captivity. He’d been in trouble before, after all.
Ah, but he was a Time Lord, wasn’t he? Used to dealing with alien environments. Put in an environment he couldn’t quite cope with – like this one, for example – any Time Lord was well within his rights to lose his mind. It was a question of cultural pride.
‘I’ve been in trouble before,’ he told the ceiling. ‘But the right kind of trouble.’
The new improved TARDIS corridors turned out to be almost exactly the right width for the Mini Metro. Sarah wondered if that was why the Doctor had renovated the ship, so he could go for a drive without all the fuss of having to go outside. But then, that didn’t make a lot of sense, did it? Why settle for the gloomy old TARDIS when you had the finest open roads in all of space and time to choose from?

That was the thing about being able to go anywhere in the universe. It made most hobbies seem so pointless. Once, in the days when she’d been one of the Doctor’s roll-on roll-off companions, Sarah had stumbled across the TARDIS library: a nigh-endless corridor stacked with books, computer records and odd triangular things that went ‘poin’k’ when you touched them. It had seemed perfectly logical at the time for the Doctor to have such a big collection. It was only afterwards that Sarah had started to question the sense of it.

Why keep a library of your own, when you could visit any other library anywhere in history at the flick of a switch? However many books the Doctor owned, he couldn’t possibly have all the great works that had ever been published in his collection. The library was pointless. Totally pointless.

In the end, she’d come up with three possible explanations. One: the Doctor kept a library just for the sake of it, for the sheer love of collecting things, the same impulse that made fans of science-fiction TV shows buy the videos even though they’d taped exactly the same programmes off the television. Two: the Doctor enjoyed filing things, simple as that. Three: the TARDIS had built up the library itself, just to keep itself occupied.

Sarah was reminded of the library now, as she pottered through the corridors with the two out-of-it soldiers in the back of the car. She hummed to herself as she drove, an extract from her great unfinished opus, *Concerto for People Running Up and Down Corridors*. The passage ahead of her was full of magazines, whole stacks of publications that didn’t seem to have anywhere better to go. After a while, navigating the stacks became too much like hard work to be fun, so Sarah stopped the car, popped the keys into her pocket (cheeky, really, as she’d found them in the ignition), and got out.

There were several doors leading off the corridor, although Sarah couldn’t immediately see anywhere suitable to dump the soldiers. She stopped as she passed one of the magazine stacks, and flicked through some of the Doctor’s old back issues, none of which seemed to have been printed on Earth. One particularly thick publication bore the title *House and TARDIS*, and, even though Sarah was pretty sure the ship was translating it into English for her benefit, she didn’t understand any of the other words on the cover. Several small pieces of card fell out when she opened it, inserted ads for products that probably weren’t very useful even if you were a Time Lord. Sarah tutted, and shook the magazine, more of the ads falling to the floor with every flutter.

It was starting to feel wrong, being back here on board the TARDIS. When she’d (inadvertently) walked out on him, her life had begun to normalise, to smooth itself out at the edges. K9 had upset the balance a little when he’d turned up, but soon he’d become just another part of domestic life, like any other PC. Even those little ‘incidents’ in ‘83 and ‘95 hadn’t ruffled her, much. And the fact that her memories of the Doctor were starting to blur at the edges? The fact that she couldn’t even remember his regeneration properly any more? The fact that she kept thinking about what had happened on Dust, even though she wasn’t sure she’d ever really been there? Well, that was nothing. Just the kind of psychological side effects you’d expect, if you’d spent so much of your life running face first into big fuzzy monsters.

But being here, in the bowels of the TARDIS, trying to get in touch with the Doctor again… that changed things. You could never get him out of your life, Sarah reminded herself. For some reason, she found herself thinking about mathematics, about equations and subequations.

Two months ago, she’d started getting pains in her stomach. There’d been peculiar dreams – more peculiar than usual, anyway – and a sticky, uncomfortable feeling when she’d woken up in the mornings. As if her hormones had been shifting, very, very slightly, doing things to her body her brain didn’t want to know about. It had been during one of those periods when she’d been seeing a lot of Paul. An awful lot of Paul.

And the pregnancy test had come up positive. She didn’t remember how she’d felt about that. She seemed to recall walking around in a kind of trance, sleepwalking her way through things until she’d finally managed to get to the GP. The GP had run tests, and told her that she definitely wasn’t pregnant, whatever the Boots test said. Sarah didn’t remember how she’d felt about that, either. She’d gone for a second opinion, then a third, then a fourth. All the doctors concurred. She was clear. But there was something wrong with the make-up of her hormones, something in her chemistry that was confusing the basic urine test. Clouding the waters, pardon the expression.

When she’d started travelling with the Doctor, he’d insisted on giving her an injection. A universal vaccine, he’d said. Sarah hadn’t spent a day sick since, apart from the time the Cybermen had pumped that venom into her system, and a couple of cases of food poisoning in the mid-1980s. The Doctor had assured her the shot was safe, that there were no known side effects.

No known side effects. But the Doctor wouldn’t have looked too closely into the workings of the human
reproductive cycle, would he? It wasn’t his style. Besides, she’d heard him say there weren’t any children on Gallifrey, not real ones, so she doubted that the notion of making babies had even crossed his mind when he’d vaccinated her.

Something wrong with her hormones, the doctors had said. Nothing dangerous. But they couldn’t say what the effects would be on any children she might want to have.

No way of telling that to Paul.

Of course, the dreams had got worse after that, even though the sickness had gone away. The imagery had come straight out of The Fly. She’d imagined herself giving birth to horrible mutant things. Blobs of living matter that couldn’t survive on their own, that had to be wrapped up in metal shells just to live through childhood. Her offspring, the next generation of humanity. For all Sarah knew, the Doctor had been lying, and the injection was the Time Lord method of reproduction. A way of planting their DNA in the bodies of their human victims. Like old B-movie monsters, wanting Earth for the women there.

Yuk. Yuk yuk yuk.

Sarah looked down. She’d been a million miles away, and in her absence a great pile of advertisements had built up around her feet, all of them inserts from House and TARDIS. The ads were up to her knees by now, and they were still slipping out from between the pages. She stopped shaking the magazine.

‘Bigger on the inside,’ she muttered. Then she put the publication back down on its stack, and headed for the next doorway along the passage, still searching for somewhere to put her prisoners.

After a while – one of those seemingly endless whiles that didn’t seem to be connected to any known system of temporal measurement – the guards came back. This time, they were all carrying shock batons. The Doctor didn’t struggle as they dragged him into the middle of the room. How often had he saved this planet? How many times over did these men owe him their lives? The lives of their families, the lives of their descendants? And how many of them would care, even if they knew?

Today, they seemed to want to know something specific. He wondered if he’d be able to survive long enough to find out what. Or, indeed, to remember the answers to any of their questions.

Sarah was driving the car back to the console room when she felt the ship land. It was the subtlest feeling there was, the sense of everything around you becoming suddenly attached. You noticed it only after you’d spent a while on board, but it was there, no question. She’d finally found somewhere to dump the soldiers, having discovered, in her travels, such diverse wonders as a room decked out as an Italian restaurant and a grand hall in which several thousand volumes of the TARDIS instruction manual were kept. Sarah seemed to remember the Doctor having a much smaller version, one big hardbacked book, but presumably that had just been the Time Lord equivalent of one of those ‘read this booklet first’ manuals you got at the top of the box when you bought a new computer.

The Doctor had always hated being around computers, back in the old days. It had taken Sarah ages to figure out why. It was for the same reason that she hated being around monkeys.

Monkeys always made her feel icky. They were too much like people. Too much of a reminder, maybe, that there were only two or three short genetic hops between the humans and the baboons. And the TARDIS? Not just a computer, not just a ship, but the Doctor’s best friend. It must have made him squirm, to have to deal with an Earth-made machine. With something that still relied on piggy-back boards and memory wafers. No wonder he’d made his pet robot look like a dog, thought Sarah. Anything to hide the wiring.

When she finally got back to the console room, Kode was standing over the control panels, looking dazed and bewildered. Lost Boy hovered nearby – if a word as graceful as ‘hovered’ could be applied to anything an Ogron did – keeping a close eye on him. The scanner had been activated, and outside the ship Sarah could see what looked like a prison cell. In the middle of the image stood several uniformed men, their clothes rumpled and covered in sweat. They were gathered around something on the floor, occasionally poking it with long black batons and swearing at it in the native dialect.

It took Sarah a depressingly long time to figure out what was going on.

‘The Doctor!’ she shouted. ‘They’re killing him!’

Kode stared at her stupidly. Lost Boy looked embarrassed.

‘Why aren’t you helping him?’ Sarah demanded.

‘Wait for you,’ Lost Boy explained.

‘Um,’ said Kode.

The boy’s eyes were cloudy, not focused. Sarah looked down at the stem of the console, where he’d opened up a service panel and wired his receiver into the workings. Of course. Without the receiver, he wasn’t picking up the TARDIS signals properly. Right now, he wasn’t even sure whose side he was on.
Sarah’s eyes settled on one of the soldiers’ guns, which Lost Boy had rested on the edge of the console. She picked it up, weighed it in her hand.

‘Right,’ she said. ‘Do these things have some kind of stun setting? Only I’d quite like to score a moral victory.’

On… what had that planet been called? Ha’olam. On Ha’olam, the implant had predicted that he’d go mad, eventually. He’d heard it whispering to him in the night, telling him that if he didn’t find a way out – and there was no way out – he’d end up losing control. But he’d been in that prison for three years, and he’d kept hold of his sanity right up until the very last day. Sort of.

Ten days he’d been in Saudi Arabia. A week spent in processing, being pushed from one military base to the next. Three days here in the cell. Three days, and he’d already fallen further than he had on Ha’olam. This, he reminded himself, was the hard edge of history, not part of anybody’s equation. You couldn’t get away from it, not without help from the other world. From the TARDIS world.

Except that the TARDIS world didn’t make sense. That was what Badar had said, and the Doctor had agreed with him, in the end.

So, as the guards began beating him in the chest, the Doctor decided to let it make sense. And he wasn’t surprised, not even a little bit, when he heard the engines straining against the sheer weight of space-time, the TARDIS finding a space for itself in the corner of the cell.

The guards were so busy trying to rupture his lungs, they didn’t even notice it.
Sacrifices, Episode Two
(could you then kill that child? Well, yes, actually.)

Scene 49. The Nursery

The architecture is futuristic, twenty-sixth-century Earth. The walls, doors and fixtures all have a kind of cheap plastic quality to them, and everything’s the same shade of blue, as if part of a colour-coded sequence of rooms. We’re evidently looking at a nursery, possibly part of a medical complex. The room is large, and incubators are arranged at regular intervals across the floor. The word ‘incubators’ is used loosely: they’re plastic-glass cabinets, mounted on pedestals, but each one’s attached to so many display screens and monitor systems that the machines’ exact function can only be guessed at.

In each of the incubators is a human baby, none more than a few days old. All the babies are silent and still, but obviously breathing. Their eyes are closed, and there are face masks over their mouths and noses, hooked up to the incubator machinery.

As we watch, one of the doors slides open. The DOCTOR enters, followed by SAM. The DOCTOR is holding something in one hand, and, though we don’t see exactly what it is, the way he’s holding it suggests that it must be quite delicate.

DOCTOR: Here we are. I told you we just had to follow the blue line.

The door slides shut behind SAM. SAM looks around the nursery, surprised and a little alarmed. The DOCTOR starts checking all the incubators, perhaps looking for name tags.

SAM: These… machines…

DOCTOR: Incubators. Well, they’re a bit more than that. All the newborns spend a few days here. The systems check them for genetic defects before they’re allowed to leave the hospital.

SAM: And what happens if they find any?

DOCTOR: That depends on the parents. Genetic modification’s quite fashionable in this era.

SAM [looking a bit nervous, now]: Doctor?

DOCTOR: Yes?

SAM: Does this kind of thing make you feel… uncomfortable, at all?

DOCTOR [looks up]: I’m a Time Lord, Sam. I can’t afford to be too judgemental. Besides, it’s no worse than the way we do things back on Gallifrey.

The DOCTOR finishes inspecting the incubators, and heads for an open doorway at the side of the room.

DOCTOR: Through here, I think.

The DOCTOR steps into the next chamber, SAM at his heels.

Scene 50. The Nursery (Section 2)

Much the same as the first section, but this time colour-coded violet. Again, the DOCTOR starts checking the incubators. SAM hangs around nearby, looking helpless.

SAM: Where are we, anyway? I mean… when are we?

DOCTOR: Earth, 2569. Twenty-seven years before the alien attack on Ordifica.

SAM: Twenty-seven years before?

The DOCTOR doesn’t reply. He keeps checking the incubators. Finally, he seems to find the one he’s after. He looks up at SAM.

SAM: You’re trying to change the future, aren’t you?

DOCTOR: Sam Sam Sam. That would be grossly, unforgivably irresponsible.

SAM: But?

DOCTOR [sighs]: You saw what happened before we left. The aliens had complete control of the planet. Of the planet’s media. And they’ve managed to disable the Time Lord fleet, somehow. With the transmitter equipment on Ordifica, they can broadcast themselves to any communications network in the universe. They’ll move to Earth next. They’ll try to destroy the causal nexus there. They’ll turn the whole of future history into one big television show, with themselves in the producer’s chair.

SAM: You said there were some rules that couldn’t be broken…

DOCTOR: There are some rules that have to be broken.
SAM: So what are we going to do?

[The DOCTOR beckons her over. SAM joins him by the incubator.]

DOCTOR: Listen. If someone knew the future pointed out a child to you, and told you that child would grow up to be totally evil – to be a ruthless dictator, who’d destroy millions of lives – could you then kill that child?

SAM: What?

[The Doctor indicates a name plate set into the side of the incubator’s casing. SAM reads it.]

SAM: Mark Lessing? [Realising.] But he’s the one who –

DOCTOR: Who sold the Ordificans out to the aliens. Who will sell the Ordificans out to the aliens. Who will, twenty-seven years from now, arrange for them to be placed on board the carrier ship to the colony.

[The DOCTOR looks at the baby inside the incubator.]

DOCTOR: We always expect them to be so innocent, don’t we?

[He raises his hand, and we see what he’s holding. It’s a syringe, full of something red and slightly fluorescent.]

SAM [shocked]: What are you…? I mean, how…?

[The DOCTOR looks at her, but doesn’t answer.]

SAM: No. No, you can’t seriously –

DOCTOR: We don’t have a choice. If the aliens transmit from Ordifica, we lose everything. Earth. Gallifrey. Every civilisation in this continuum, and probably quite a few others.

SAM: There’s got to be another way of doing this! Some other change you can make… anything…

DOCTOR: It has to be this. It has to be now. It’s all in the equations.

[SAM shakes her head. She doesn’t seem able to speak.]

DOCTOR: He’s destined to die anyway, Sam. We saw what happened to Mark Lessing back on Ordifica. The aliens betrayed him, just as he betrayed the colony. We’ve already seen him lose his life once. And nobody seemed sorry then.

SAM [quietly]: I know.

DOCTOR: If you want to go back to the TARDIS –

[The DOCTOR is interrupted by a quiet hissing noise, the sound of one of the doors opening. Startled, both he and SAM peer through the doorway into the first nursery chamber.]

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**Scene 51. The Nursery**

[One of the other doors in the blue room has opened. We get a glimpse of two dark, leathery shapes entering the nursery, folding up their wings as they step through the doorway. Then we cut away.]

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**Scene 52. The Nursery (Section 2)**

[The DOCTOR grabs SAM’s hand, and presses the syringe into it, not taking his eyes off the doorway. SAM looks at the thing in her palm, obviously horrified.]

DOCTOR: Hold that.

[Then the DOCTOR dashes across the violet section, and disappears through the doorway.]

SAM: Doctor!

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**Scene 53. The Nursery**

[We see the scene from the doorway where the CREATURES entered, so we’re looking straight at the DOCTOR as he hurries into the room. Hence, we don’t get to see the CREATURES face on: we can just see their wings flexing in the foreground, at the edges of our vision.]

[The DOCTOR stops halfway across the floor, between the rows of incubators. Faster than we can comfortably follow, he reaches into his pocket, and draws out the sonic screwdriver. Then he holds it up in front of his face, aiming it at the CREATURES.]

DOCTOR: Stay back. You know I’m not afraid to use this.

FIRST CREATURE [FX on voice]: We also know it’s not a weapon.

DOCTOR: Well, of course it’s not a weapon. That’s why I’m not afraid to use it.

SECOND CREATURE: Drop the sonic device, Time Lord.

[The DOCTOR thinks about this for a few moments.]

DOCTOR: No.

[He presses the trigger on the screwdriver. Immediately, the air is filled with a high-pitched – almost ultrasonic]
– screeching sound.
[The DOCTOR screws up his face, the noise evidently causing him some discomfort. The effect on the CREATURES is far greater, though. We get the impression they’re swaying on their feet, falling to their knees.]

Scene 54. The Nursery (Section 2)

[SAM holds the syringe in her hand, which is quite clearly shaking.]
SAM [shouting]: Doctor –
DOCTOR [shouting back]: They’re more receptive to high-frequency noise than we are, but it’s not going to hold them off for ever.
SAM [shouting]: Doctor, I can’t –
DOCTOR [shouting back]: Sam, please! The power cells are almost drained. I can’t keep this up for much longer.
SAM: You mean… you want me to…?

Scene 55. The Nursery

[The DOCTOR holds down the trigger, a pained expression on his face. The CREATURES are writhing in agony, making ugly grunting noises.]
DOCTOR: Please, Sam. We don’t have a choice.
SAM [shouts]: I can’t!
DOCTOR: Sam, you have to! Think about Ordifica. Millions of people are going to die. Including Mark Lessing. Billions more will be turned into slaves. You’ve seen how they work, Sam. You know it’s true.

Scene 56. The Nursery (Section 2)

[SAM gets a grip on a syringe. She stares at the baby inside the incubator.]
The infant Mark Lessing is sleeping peacefully, his eyes closed, his tiny chest moving up and down as the machinery helps him to breathe.
SAM: It’s just a baby. That’s all.
[The screeching starts to waver, and change pitch. The noise is, if anything, harsher than it was.]
DOCTOR [shouts]: Sam… the power cells…
SAM stares at the baby in the incubator. Every part of her body is shaking now.

Scene 57. The Nursery

[The DOCTOR looks over his shoulder at SAM. In front of him, the CREATURES seem to be recovering.]
DOCTOR: Sam! Please!

Scene 58. The Nursery (Section 2)

[We see the baby again, his face perfectly peaceful, not aware that anything’s going on. Then we see SAM, as she raises the syringe.]
SAM [whispers]: I’m sorry. I’m sorry.
[Her hand trembling, she reaches out for the glass-plastic lid of the incubator, and swings it open.]
[She pauses, staring at the baby for a few seconds more. Then, very slowly, she moves the hand holding the syringe towards the tiny form of Mark Lessing.]

Compassion felt dizzy. Very, very dizzy. Which wasn’t good, because she happened to be standing on the edge of the platform. She didn’t remember how she’d come to be so close to the brink, so her body had obviously been doing strange things while her mind had been tuned in to the media.
‘Well?’ said Guest.
Compassion didn’t turn. ‘That was revolting.’
‘Really? Why?’
Compassion tried to find the words, but for once the media wasn’t giving her any clues. ‘She did it, didn’t she? She killed the baby.’

‘Yes. She killed the baby. Does that bother you?’

‘Obviously!’

‘But you watched her destroy an entire planet,’ Guest noted. ‘You weren’t horrified by that. Not to this degree. And there were thousands of infants on the colony world. Possibly millions.’

‘But I couldn’t see them,’ Compassion said.

She turned, at last, and made her way back to her chair. Guest was pacing the platform nearby, hands clamped behind his back, as ever. ‘I think I’m beginning to understand,’ he said. ‘We were assuming that principles had something to do with a greater moral purpose. But I don’t think that’s true.’

Compassion sat. ‘Is it important?’

‘Yes. Think. The Earth-born humans still live in complex, highly politicised societies. But they’re starting to turn into us, into people like our ancestors. Signal-dependent. And the two systems of thought, the politics and the transmissions, are causing a kind of schizophrenia. You understand?’

‘No,’ said Compassion.

‘Principles are just sequences of images. Sequences they use to make sense of the signals around them. That’s why one baby can be more important to them than a whole planet. This is what the media’s been trying to understand. They’re not that different from us at all.’

‘It’s not possible, anyway,’ Compassion scowled. ‘You can’t change time, not the way the Doctor was trying to do it. Besides, he wouldn’t do a thing like that.’

‘How do you know?’

Compassion paused, and shrugged. ‘I just know.’

Guest stopped pacing. ‘Impressions from the media, taken from the girl’s memories. The Doctor must be very important to her. And I think you’re right. I don’t think he’d do what he did in the scenario, not even if he could. The media’s using the girl’s mind as raw material, that’s all. And it’s still using parts of our history.’

‘Mixed up, though,’ said Compassion. ‘Even the Faction couldn’t have taken out a whole Time Lord fleet. Anyway, if we really could have transmitted ourselves across the universe like that…’

‘I know. It’s the basic concepts the media’s interested in. The details aren’t important. You saw how contrived the scenario was. How it had to get the Doctor out of the way, to put the syringe in the girl’s hands. And I doubt there was ever a real person called Mark Lessing. At least, not on Ordifica.’

Compassion narrowed her eyes at him.

‘What are you doing, Guest?’ she said.

‘I’m sorry?’

‘You haven’t been telling me everything, have you? You were expecting the sphere to start telling us about this “sacrifice” idea. You gave the girl to the media for a reason.’

‘To fill in any gaps in our knowledge. I told you.’

‘You’re lying. There’s something else. I can tell. It’s the way you’re talking.’

‘Not important,’ said Guest, far too quickly. ‘We’ve almost finished the programme. We’re close to understanding the girl’s principles. Close to understanding the imagery. A baby is more important than a planet, because a baby symbolises everything pure and innocent about humanity. An implicate human, if you like.’

He looked up, towards the roof of the tower. Compassion followed his lead. At the top of the transmitter, the media was still pulsing, still breathing.

‘One more scenario to come,’ said Guest. Compassion wondered how he knew that.

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Scene 59. A Corridor

[The corridor seems to be part of a scientific complex of some kind, although it’s too dark to make out much of the decor. As we pan around the passage, we see a spot of yellow light dancing across one of the walls, a torch-beam sweeping the area.

[Finally, we focus on SAM as she creeps along the corridor. Though she’s dressed in her standard jeans and T-shirt, she’s carrying what looks like a flame-thrower, quite possibly one of those from Ordifica (see Scene 43). The weapon is connected to a heavy backpack by a thick rubber tube. There’s also an unusual item of jewellery on her arm, but we’ll deal with that later.

[The torch is taped to SAM’s shoulder, the beam shaking whenever she takes a step forward. Having scanned the corridor, SAM stops moving. She reaches into one of her pockets, and pulls out a walkie-talkie. It takes her a few moments to work out which buttons to press.]
SAM: Greyhound X to Greyhound Y. Come in, Greyhound Y. Over.

[There are a few crackles from the device; then we hear the voice of the DOCTOR.]

DOCTOR [voice]: Greyhound Y to Greyhound X. Hello, Sam. How are things at your end?

SAM: Over.

DOCTOR [voice]: Pardon?

SAM: You’re supposed to say... never mind. I’m inside the complex. They’ve got guards on the perimeter, but there’s no signs of life in here. How about you? Over.

DOCTOR [voice]: I’m at the orbital station. I’m just planting the bomb now. No problems so far.

SAM: You’re sure this is going to work? Over.

DOCTOR [voice]: Absolutely. The aliens may have taken control of Ordifica, but at least we can stop them getting their claws into Earth. With both of their stations out of action, they won’t be able to transmit properly.

SAM: Yeah, I meant to ask you about that. How long have they had agents on Earth, anyway? This place looks like it’s been here for years. Erm, over.

DOCTOR [voice]: They have agents everywhere, Sam. Don’t forget that. If they manage to pervert Earth’s history, the whole of space-time will be open to them. Just get to the centre of the complex and use the chemothrower. The fire’s going to be chemically enhanced, so they won’t be able to put it out in time. Once you’ve done that, use the time ring to take you back to the TARDIS. With any luck, I’ll see you there.

[SAM touches the jewellery on her arm, probably to make sure it’s still there.]

SAM: OK. Doesn’t look like there’ll be any trouble. I’ll see you in a couple of minutes.

DOCTOR: And don’t dawdle. The aliens could start transmitting any time now.

SAM: Gotcha. Greyhound X, over and out.

DOCTOR [voice]: Pardon?

[SAM smirks, switches off the walkie-talkie, and stuffs it back into her pocket. Then she turns her attention to the various doors set into the walls of the passage.]

SAM: Centre of the complex. Let’s see. If I came from that way… right.

[She picks one of the doors, opens it, and steps through.]

Scene 60. Another Chamber

[The room is in total darkness. As SAM enters, we hear a variety of peculiar whimpering noises, but there’s no way of telling what’s causing them. SAM stops, alert, as she walks into the room. When nothing tries to attack her, she turns, casting the light from the torch around the walls.]

[The beam falls across the face of something living. SAM gasps, and stumbles. Then she recovers herself. Nothing seems to be pouncing on her, so she refocuses the beam.]

[The living thing is a dog. A beagle, probably only a couple of weeks old. The dog is trapped in a wire-mesh cage, its body small and sickly looking. It’s doing a fair amount of whimpering, suggesting that it’s in some pain.]

[The cage is at shoulder height. SAM adjusts the torch, moving the beam down towards the floor. The beam illuminates several other cages on the way, all containing identical animals, none of them with the strength to even bark properly.]

[SAM turns, sweeping the torch around the room. There are more cages, all containing captive animals, too weak to move around much. Most of the animals are small dogs. We can make out dozens upon dozens of the cages, and at one point the beam falls across a doorway, leading to another chamber beyond. We can’t be sure, but we get the impression that the far room is much the same as this one.]

[By now, SAM’s breathing is heavy and rapid. She reaches for her pocket, and activates the walkie-talkie again.]

SAM [panicking]: Greyhound X to... Doctor? Are you there?
[There’s no response. Just a crackling sound.]

SAM [almost shouting]: Doctor! Doctor, where are you?

DOCTOR [voice, through the crackling]: Sam… this isn’t a good time…

SAM: Doctor, there are animals here. Hundreds of them. You didn’t say anything about this.

DOCTOR [voice]: The aliens must be experimenting on biomass. Trying to find out how Earth-born tissue responds to their technology.

SAM: Doctor, I can’t do this. The fire –

DOCTOR [voice]: Sam, listen to me. I’ve got to detonate this bomb now. The aliens are...
[The crackling gets worse, drowning out his voice.]

SAM: Doctor! You’re breaking up! Doctor!
DOCTOR [voice]: …got time to argue, Sam. They’ve… me. I have to detonate… soon as…
SAM: Doctor, please…
DOCTOR [voice]: –n’t talk any more. They’ll… transmitting any minute. It has to be now. Before… come through… any later. Grey… over and…
SAM: Doctor! Don’t you dare hang up on me now!
[No response. The crackling is louder than ever.]
SAM: Doctor!
[But again, no response.]
[And at this point, a sudden wave of calm seems to sweep over SAM, because her body goes limp, and the walkie-talkie falls from her hand.]
[She moves the torch around the room again. In their cages, the beagles continue to whimper, a few of the fitter animals scratching at the mesh with their claws.]
[Her expression entirely blank, SAM raises the chemothrower. She doesn’t seem to be aiming it at anything in particular.]
[She isn’t aiming the torch, either. The beam bobs up and down against the walls, the light glinting off the dark, helpless eyes of the things in the cages.]
[SAM’s expression remains blank as her finger tightens on the trigger. She doesn’t speak. She doesn’t look as though she can think of anything to say. For a moment, there’s nothing but darkness, and the sound of frightened animals.]
[Then the room fills up with fire.]

‘Stop it!’ yelled Compassion.
She realised she was standing on the edge again, with the ground floor blurring in front of her, the people becoming meaningless points of colour down below. Her head was spinning. So was her stomach.
She had no idea what this sensation was supposed to be called.
‘Why?’ said Guest.
‘It’s sick.’ Compassion couldn’t feel her limbs any more, and she wondered how long it’d be before she lost her balance. ‘We can’t do this any more. I can’t do it any more.’
‘You’re picking up Sam’s perceptions,’ Guest noted.
‘No. Yes. I don’t care.’ She turned, and felt her feet slip on the edge of the platform. ‘It doesn’t mean anything. What the Doctor said about the aliens having two stations on Earth. It doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just pointless cruelty.’
‘Not pointless.’ Guest was still looking up towards the ceiling, contemplating the surface of the media globe.
‘Small helpless animals. The ultimate implicate humans. The essence of vulnerability, and therefore the hardest sacrifice to make. Especially bearing in mind the girl’s own… political beliefs. Billions more animals must have died on Ordifica.’
‘What is it you’re doing?’ Compassion demanded. ‘What is it you’re so interested in?’
Then Guest looked at her, at last. His eyes met hers. It wasn’t a comfortable experience.
‘I want principles,’ he said.
‘What?’
‘I think you heard me.’
Compassion shook her head. ‘Principles are the one thing we can’t afford. You said it yourself. We’ve grown out of politics. We’ve grown out of morality. We’ve got the signals. If we start getting principles, our whole society’s going to fall apart. Isn’t that obvious?’
‘You’re missing the point,’ said Guest, quite calmly. ‘Think. For generations, our people have had no objectives. No aspirations. Except for one.’
Compassion stared at him.
‘To find the Cold,’ Guest elaborated. ‘It’s the only ambition any of us can remember. Then again, perhaps it’s my crusade more than anybody else’s. The more I’m remembered, the stronger the impulse gets. I’ve become… I think the word is “obessional”. The Cold has to be found. Found and set free.’
‘So what –’ Compassion began. But Guest cut her off.
‘Don’t you see?’ he said. ‘I want to find the Cold because that’s my function. But you’re helping me to do it. You, Kode, a few of the others. Why?’
‘I don’t know why,’ snapped Compassion. ‘Who needs a reason? It sounded like a good idea, that’s all.’
‘Exactly. Because of the signals from the transmitter, and because of the way you interpreted those signals. You don’t really care. Even I don’t really care. I’m just doing what seems appropriate. Or I was, until a few
moments ago. You understand? Our presence on Earth has been noticed, we know that. There are people who want to stop us. Before, we probably would have let them. We wouldn’t have cared enough to see the plan through. But that’s not true any more. Now we’re determined. Principled. We will reach the Cold. No matter what we have to sacrifice. Even if it kills us.’

‘You had this planned right from the start, didn’t you?’ growled Compassion.

‘No. But I had… an idea. An idea it might be necessary.’

Compassion looked up, towards the great black mass of the media. ‘It’s too late, isn’t it?’ she said, and she was surprised how quiet her voice sounded. ‘The “sacrifice” idea. It’s already in the media. Being broadcast to everyone else in Anathema. You’re going to tear this city apart, Guest.’

‘Not important. The Cold is the only thing that matters. Nothing can stop us now. Nothing.’

Compassion stepped back towards the edge of the platform, her legs a little more solid this time. Down on the ground, the people were looking around, confused, trying to figure out what was different. Trying to figure out why they suddenly seemed to care more about the environment around them.

‘I won’t die for you,’ Compassion said, quietly.

‘But you’re sure you won’t die for me?’ Guest asked.

‘I’m sure.’

‘Well, at least that’s something.’ Compassion heard his footsteps behind her, moving towards the lift shaft. ‘And the girl’s thoughts have told us something else, remember. Wherever this Doctor is now, he’s got a TARDIS. Which is the most important part of the plan, after all.’

Compassion heard the slight whoosh of the lift platform as it arrived on this level. She didn’t turn. She was listening, still tuning in to the receiver. Feeling the buzz in her ear.

‘It’s not over,’ she said.

‘What?’ said Guest. He actually sounded startled, for once.

‘There are more signals. Listen. From the girl.’

‘Not important. Sacrifice is already part of the media. Anything else is just… background noise.’

‘Isn’t everything?’ said Compassion.

‘Not any more,’ said Guest.
They’d been working on the tower for almost a year now. The building itself had been planted by Faction Paradox, before the colonists had even arrived, and the thing at its peak was part of the city’s inbuilt fixtures and fittings. But the place had turned out to be the dead centre of Anathema’s culture, so the colonists had decided to redecorate from top to bottom. A single enormous shaft had been built from the floor to the roof, while complex new transmitter systems had been sewn into the walls, supposedly to boost the signals from the media, although Fitz was sure nobody really knew exactly what the hardware did.

And nobody knew exactly what they were doing, either. The Faction had given the city a self-replenishing food supply, and made sure everyone had a place to live, so there was no need for anything like an economy. Nobody had a job. The people helped with the work on the tower, simply because… it seemed like the thing to do. Even Fitz had found himself doing it, over the last few weeks. Giving orders to the construction machines, feeding new code sequences into the computer systems. He was good with the computer systems. Around here, computer science was more like music than mathematics. If there was such a thing as a vocation in Anathema, then that was Fitz’s. He just imagined he was playing the guitar, and his subconscious did the maths all on its own.

What worried him was that it all seemed so natural. He’d had two ‘proper’ relationships since he’d arrived here – not many, but then there was something about this place that seemed to make people lose interest in romantic liaisons – and he’d for one moment stopped to think about the kind of creatures he was sleeping with, or about the kind of friends he’d chosen to have around him. It was the media, he decided. And the receivers didn’t help. They’d been Mother Mathara’s last gift to Anathema; everyone used them now, and these days Fitz tended to wear his for weeks at a time. At first, he’d told himself that he was just keeping in touch with the media, in case anything happened that might help him get out of here. He’d convinced himself he was fighting its influence, not giving in to the signals from the top of the main tower. Over time, though… well, he’d realised that the receiver wasn’t trying to brainwash him at all. At least, no more than the TV sets in his own time, or in 1996, or in the twenty-sixth century. The media was a product of all human life. You couldn’t fight it, because you were it.

Besides, he knew now that he was never, ever, ever going to escape. Not in the usual sense of the word, anyway.

Mother Mathara hadn’t left behind all the Faction’s technology for them to play with. That ‘biosphere-manipulation system’, for example, the machine that apparently let you tap into the veins of the world and change everything from the inside. They wouldn’t be needing it, Mathara had insisted. Not here. Everything had been laid out for them already, so there was no reason to change the environment at all. Anyway, the biosphere of Anathema wasn’t a natural one, and she obviously felt that it wasn’t something Guest and his friends should be messing about with.

That hadn’t made Tobin happy. She was still expecting the Time Lords to swoop down from the skies at any moment, whatever Mathara had told her. She wanted as many defences as she could lay her hands on. According to the stories, one of the first things Faction Paradox did when it ‘colonised’ a planet was to tap into that planet’s ley lines, and use them to send its own power supplies across the world. Mathara had said that once, when two Time Lord agents had accidentally stumbled across a Faction colony on the far side of Earthspace, the Mothers and Fathers had fed raw time along the local ley lines. Burning out the time-sensitive nervous systems of the Time Lords, but leaving the natives unharmed. Or at least, that was the story.

Antipersonnel ley lines. God almighty.

The important thing was, Fitz was stuck here now. When he’d found out that the Faction wanted its ‘children’ to reach the twentieth century, he’d held out some hope. He’d imagined himself getting back to the Doctor on the same day he’d been put into the Cold, or showing up just in time to save Sam from some terrible menace that the Remote –

– his own people –

– had sent to Earth. But Faction Paradox had taken the secrets of time travel away with them, so the only way of getting to the twentieth century was by the long route, one day at a time. Fitz had considered using the Cold on himself, putting himself into ‘Cold storage’ for the next two hundred years, but he’d soon spotted the flaw in the plan. How could he tell the people of the twentieth century to get him out again? The Remote wouldn’t help him, he knew that for a fact. No, the only way would be to send some kind of message to Sam and the Doctor, two centuries in the future…

That was when he’d figured it out.
Fitz Kreiner was now thirty-three years old, not counting the time he’d spent in the Cold. The last four years had been wasted in the company of the Faction and the Faction’s followers. That was a huge chunk of his life he’d lost, a huge chunk of himself he’d given up to the cult. Even if he made it back to the Doctor, then so what? He’d never be the ‘complete’ Fitz again, the person who’d joined the TARDIS crew. And, if that were true, then it hardly mattered what lengths he went to now, did it? He was already dead, more or less.

So Fitz stood on the ground floor of the great transmitter tower, and watched the people around him, the technicians and builders in their multicoloured uniforms, as they put the finishing touches to the little white dome buildings. Soon, he told himself. Soon, I can take the only way out that’s left.

It didn’t matter what the media said. It didn’t matter how much of him was real, and how much was just interference. He was going to get back to 1996, even if he had to die to do it.
The Nature of the Beast
(Mr Llewis gets down to business)

When Alan had been young – ‘young’ not meaning any particular age, really, other than ‘longer ago than he might like to think’ – there’d been a big walk-in cupboard under the stairs of his grandmother’s house. In the mind of ‘young’ Alan, the cupboard had been important for two reasons. First, it was where the dolls had been kept, in a big cardboard box next to the gas meter; boy’s dolls, soldier dolls, the things his cousin had left behind after he’d been killed by some people called ‘wogs’ in a place called ‘Suez’. Secondly, there’d been a gas mask there. It had belonged to his grandfather during World War Two, and it had been nailed to the cupboard wall as a kind of memento.

Whenever Alan had visited the house, his task had seemed straightforward. Get to the dolls without looking at the gas mask. Whatever happened, it was vital not to look at the gas mask. Because the gas mask – as Alan knew full well, even though nobody else had ever noticed it – looked back.

Alan Llewis was finally in control. And, predictably, he was hating every minute of it.

He steered the car along one of the twisty-turny roads between London and Newbury, past damp fields, damp slopes and damp sheep. One look in the wing mirror told him that the vans were still behind him, three grey smudges in the morning light, following his every move. He was in charge of those vans, theoretically. If he wanted to, he could tell them all to turn around and go home, and never get within a mile of Guest’s warehouse.

Theoretically.

Yesterday, when he’d finally gone back to the office, he’d given the details of the deal to Peter Morgan (Llewis didn’t have the strength to think of him as Peter bloody Morgan any more), and Morgan had – amazingly – been satisfied. He’d had a lot of questions, of course, and he’d probably guessed that Llewis had been covering something up, but he hadn’t pushed the point. Llewis wondered if it had been anything to do with the Ogron, who’d been following him around like a huge puppy with raw meat on its breath.

Llewis had spent last night at home, the first time he’d done that in almost a week. Leanne had barely noticed him. She’d watched television, taken a bath, dried her hair and gone to bed, hardly saying a word all evening. Llewis imagined that was pretty much the way she acted when he wasn’t there. She’d moved around the house like a little blonde machine, changing course whenever he got in her path, but other than that never really noticing him. Llewis had spent half the evening trying to attract her attention, without wanting to risk actually starting a conversation, in case his voice cracked and he started telling her about the Cold and the aliens. He’d spent the rest of the time peering out of the windows, or at least thinking about peering out of the windows. Looking for Ogrons. Wondering if they’d be watching the house.

Ten minutes later, the car reached the warehouse. It was part of an old Ministry of Defence station, all high fences and barbed wire, sprawled over several acres. Oddly enough, the main gate was open when Llewis drove up to it, and there were no signs of any guards. When Llewis slowed the car to a halt, he realised the gate was hanging from its hinges, the metal horribly mangled.

Should he go back? Call somebody?

No. Stupid.

He drove the car through the gates and into the complex, the three unmarked vans pottering along behind him. Right, Llewis told himself. This was it. No messing about, straight down to business. The Cold would be loaded into the vans, and taken back to the office, where Peter Morgan and the others would give it the once-over, probably just to see if Llewis had done his job properly. Guest would invoice them by fax, and payment would be sorted out later. In and out, thought Llewis. Don’t hang around here, don’t wait to see if any UFOs turn up.

The second he steered the car into the warehouse, however, it became clear that things weren’t going to be so simple.

The cupboard under the stairs had been dark. But the darkness had grown a face, and that face was the gas mask. When you walked into the cupboard, you couldn’t make out any of the details, except for the huge round eyes and the great big snout. You could just see the outline, a head pushing its way through the dark, trying to bite its way free. The circle of the snout had looked like an enormous mouth, set into a permanent scream.

In his attempts to retrieve the soldier dolls without looking at that face, Alan had often tried closing his eyes. But closing his eyes had never helped. He’d still been able to see the gas mask, even through his eyelids. In fact,
There were holes in the warehouse, that was the first thing Llewis noticed. Bits had been eaten out of the floor, great chunks of concrete torn from the architecture for no obvious reason. Those parts that were still intact had been showered with splinters of glass, or what looked like glass. There were several hundred cardboard cartons in the warehouse, presumably containing the Cold, but many of them lay scattered around, torn and half empty.

Llewis suddenly figured out where the missing parts of the floor had gone.

In the middle of the warehouse, several pieces of bright silver machinery had been set up in a loose ring, and at the exact centre of that ring was what looked like a screen. A large, flat, rectangular screen. Llewis took it to be some kind of television, but it couldn’t have been tuned in properly, because it was buzzing with static. It was only when he got a little closer, and pulled the car to a stop just in front of the machinery, that he realised the truth.

It wasn’t a screen. It was a hole. And there were people gathered around the hole, working on other pieces of machinery. Llewis didn’t recognise any of the workers, but there were about half a dozen of them, all dressed in different uniforms. The costumes seemed to be colour-coded, though Llewis had no idea why.

Llewis opened the door – having to pull at the handle several times, as his sweaty hands kept fumbling it – and got out of the Fiat. Annoyingly, none of the uniformed people took any notice of him. As he watched, two of them carried another of the silver machines, over from somewhere in the corner of the building, and, when they finally lowered it to the ground, they made sure its big sharp claw was pointing straight at the warehouse entrance.

‘Er,’ Llewis began.

One of the workers, a man in a one-piece blood-red uniform with impossibly sharp creases, turned to wave at him.

‘Can’t stop,’ he said. Then he went back to whatever it was he was doing.

Llewis glanced over his shoulder. The three vans had come to a stop behind his car, and from here he could see the driver of the nearest vehicle staring out at him through the windscreen, drumming his fingers against the steering wheel in a ‘what-are-we-waiting-for?’ kind of way. Llewis clenched his teeth, and turned back towards the workers.

‘I’m here for the Cold,’ he tried.

That got a reaction. Mr Blood-Red exchanged glances with one of his comrades.

‘I’m sorry,’ Mr Blood-Red told Llewis. ‘That won’t be possible.’

‘Won’t be possible? What won’t be possible?’

‘The Cold. I’m afraid we can’t let you have it.’

Llewis felt the Sweat bubbling up to the surface of his skin, and heard, somewhere off in the distance, the ghostly sound of Peter Morgan calling his name. ‘You don’t understand. The Cold. We did… I did a deal. With Mr Guest. We’re supposed to take delivery, it’s all arranged –’

‘The plan’s been changed. Sorry.’ Mr Blood-Red shrugged, and turned back to the machinery

‘Wait a minute!’ Llewis exclaimed.

‘Yes?’

‘What do you mean, the plan’s been changed? We had an agreement. Mr Guest said so.’

‘Oh, I believe you. It’s all right. We’ve just changed our agenda, that’s all.’ Mr Blood-Red nodded to himself, and smiled cheerily. ‘The plan was to give the Cold to Earth. To change the, ah… what do you call it? The political balance, that’s it. Maybe even set off a war. I mean, we’re not really sure what would have happened, but it would’ve been something like that, I should think. As long as there was a bit of damage to the timeline, that was the main thing.’

The man tapped his ear. Llewis saw there was one of those radio-valve earring things set into the lobe.

‘But we don’t have to do that now,’ he continued. ‘There’s already a TARDIS on Earth.’

‘A… TARDIS?’ said Llewis.

There was the sound of a van door opening, then slamming shut. The next thing Llewis knew, the driver was standing next to him, chewing the end of a Silk Cut. The driver was a big man, flabby but powerful-looking, with the kind of muscles you get from loading trucks all your life, not from working out at the gym. Bizarrely, the man was wearing a baseball cap, as if he thought it’d make him look younger.

‘We got a problem?’ the driver asked.

‘No,’ said Mr Blood-Red, quite cheerfully. ‘It’s like I said. There’s already a TARDIS on Earth. That’s all we need. So we don’t have to complete the deal.’

‘Right, then,’ said the driver, clearly not understanding a word. ‘Shall we be off?’

Llewis felt a bloody great sigh burst out of his lungs. Why not? Why not turn around and go home? He didn’t want anything to do with the Cold anyway. Let them take it back to their own planet or wherever. It was no skin off
his nose.

Except…

What would they say back at the office? What would they say if he came back empty-handed? If he admitted
that, yes, just as Peter Morgan had expected, the deal had fallen through?

‘Hold on,’ said Llewis, not really knowing what he was going to say until the words plopped out of his mouth.

‘Hold on, hold on. What’s this TARDIS thing?’

The uniformed man seemed happy to talk about it. ‘Oh, it’s a complex space-time capsule. We can’t reach the
Cold without it. That’s what Guest says, anyway.’

‘Relative 101 by 4E,’ one of the other workers added, unhelpfully. Llewis looked at the boxes around him.

‘But… I thought the Cold was here.’

‘Well, this is just the skin of the Cold, really. What it leaves behind. We can’t reach the real Cold, because it’s
not in this dimension, or something like that. We need a TARDIS to get to it. And that’s why we came here to
Earth.’

‘Because there’s a TARDIS here?’ asked Llewis.

‘Are we going, or what?’ asked the driver.

‘No, no,’ said Mr Blood-Red. He touched his earring, as if checking the facts. ‘Earth’s a… sensitive area. Yes.
And if anybody interferes with it, then… well… it’s quite likely the Time Lords would notice. Especially if the
Faction’s involved.’

‘Stands to reason, doesn’t it?’ said the van driver. Llewis hoped to God he was joking.

‘So we thought… I mean, Guest thought… if we gave the Cold to Earth, the Time Lords would have to send
someone to sort it out. Which means we could steal their TARDIS. You see?’

‘No,’ said Llewis.

‘Oh.’ Mr Blood-Red looked a bit upset about that. ‘Well, I’m sure it all makes sense. The thing is, we were
never really interested in Earth, much. So, the deal’s off. We’ve got instructions to take the Cold back to Anathema,
seeing as you won’t be needing it.’

‘Fine,’ said the van driver. He looked over his shoulder as well, and waved to the two other drivers, who’d also
climbed out of their vehicles. ‘No worries,’ he told them. ‘Looks like we’re knocking off early.’

Llewis shook his head. He kept shaking it until everybody noticed him. ‘You can’t do this. It’s… it’s not
professional. It’s not done, it’s –’

‘There’s an old human saying,’ cut in Mr Blood-Red. ‘“He who has never gone back on a promise has never
lived.”’

‘There’s no such saying!’

‘Isn’t there? Ah. I’m Sorry. We’re used to inventing old human sayings.’

Llewis thought of Peter bloody Morgan, sitting at his smug desk in his smug suit and his smug shoes. He
thought of the man making bets with the others in the office, laying odds that Llewis would mess up, that all this
business about the Cold would turn out to be hot air.

Come to think of it, he wasn’t entirely sure what ‘smug shoes’ were. But if they existed, then by God, Peter
bloody Morgan would be the one to wear them.

‘We won’t let you,’ he hissed, practically spitting in Mr Blood-Red’s face. ‘We’re taking the Cold. We won’t
let you take it away from us.’

‘We’ve got our orders,’ the alien said. ‘We’ve got to take the Cold back. It’s all part of our plan.’

Then he paused, as if the next few words were difficult for him to put together.

‘We’re quite prepared to die for our beliefs,’ he added.

The van driver sniggered. Llewis just sweated.

‘Take the Cold!’ he snapped.

‘You what?’ said the driver. The other drivers were standing behind him now, muttering darkly.

‘Take it,’ Llewis repeated. ‘Put it in the vans. We’re not leaving without it.’

‘We can’t let you do that,’ said Mr Blood-Red. ‘If you try to take any hostile action, I’m afraid we’re going to
have to…’

He glanced back at his colleagues. They seemed to have finished adjusting the machines, and now they were
standing around the static screen, apparently waiting for something. One of them nodded at Mr Blood-Red.

‘…kill ourselves,’ Mr Blood-Red concluded.

‘Or our immediate family groups,’ one of his friends added.

‘Yes. Anything we think might stop you, really. We do have principles, you know.’

‘You’re mad,’ said Llewis, his voice finally cracking. ‘You’re all stark staring mad. How is killing yourselves
going to stop us?’
Mr Blood-Red didn’t seem sure how to answer that. He turned, and took a few steps towards the other aliens. They discussed the topic among themselves for a while. Eventually, they seemed to reach a decision.

‘Activate,’ Llewis heard one of them say.

All of a sudden, there was a low hissing in the air, which Llewis seemed to feel with his spinal column rather than hear with his ears. He realised the noise had been there all the time, the crackling, splitting sound of the static window, but now it was getting louder, getting harsher, vibrating through the floor of the warehouse. The aliens all turned, as one, to face the entrance. Behind him, Llewis heard one of the van drivers cry out. He wasn’t sure what the man said, but it was almost certainly obscene.

He turned. Outside the warehouse, another static window had opened up, hovering in the air above the perimeter fence of the factory complex. It widened out as Llewis watched, becoming a gigantic flickering rectangle, a good forty feet from side to side. He turned again, and saw the aliens nodding to each other, looking pleased with themselves.

‘We were going to call a fighter to take the Cold back home,’ Mr Blood-Red explained. ‘But we can tell the pilot to launch a suicide attack if you like.

‘Fighter?’ the first of the van drivers said. Then his jaw dropped, and the cigarette tumbled out of his mouth.

There was something coming through the window. Llewis could see its outline, big and dark and heavy, pushing against the static from the other side. And now the static was tearing, the thing ripping it open, forcing a sharpened black nose into the air above the complex. For some bizarre reason, Llewis started thinking about gas masks.

The next four seconds passed very, very slowly, and many strange and interesting things happened.

For example:

The static window split down the middle, the black thing finally pushing its way through the haze.

The van drivers turned back to their vans, their mouths still hanging open.

The black thing began to dive. Towards the warehouse. Fast.

Some of the aliens started to mumble in a generally concerned fashion.

The black thing hurtled out of the sky and through the warehouse entrance, faster than Llewis could follow. Free of the static, it was moving at full velocity, its undercarriage scraping the concrete floor.

For the briefest of all possible moments, Llewis managed to focus on the thing, on the perfect lines of its body, on the black metallic skin stretched across its fuselage. It was roughly triangular, he could see that now, its surface unmarked, its underside ribbed with what looked like bone.

Somebody said, ‘Are you sure this is a good idea?’

There was a screaming, wrenching sound, as the bottom of the fighter ploughed along the warehouse floor. Its flank impacted against one of the vans, shunting the vehicle up against the wall. One of the drivers, who’d been perilously close to the van at the time, started screeching something about not wanting to die.

Llewis turned away, his body moving much, much too slowly, his beer gut lurching as he spun around. He felt himself stumble forward, towards the aliens, who were standing around with gormless looks on their faces as the fighter tore towards them.

There was another big crunch, as a second van was pushed aside by the fighter. Towards the other wall this time.

Llewis focused on the thing behind the aliens. The other window, the smaller one. All of a sudden, he couldn’t see anything but blue fuzz and flickering pictures.

Another crunch. So much for the Fiat.

And Llewis threw himself past the aliens, his weight knocking them aside, his own body fat forcing him to keep running or fall over, Some part of his brain telling him that, realistically, he had only the one chance.

The screaming got worse. The fighter was tearing up the floor.

Llewis hit the static.

Every now and then, the gas mask had followed Alan out of the cupboard, and all the way home. Not that his grandmother would ever have taken it down off the wall, of course: that would have dishonoured her late husband’s memory, somehow. But sometimes, when Alan had climbed out of bed in the middle of the night to use the toilet, there’d been a cold, wet feeling under his skin, and he’d been careful not to look out of any windows on the way to the bathroom.

It had been dangerous to go too near the glass, to get too close to the night outside. He might have seen the gas mask there, pushing its way through the darkness. The bed had been safe, because Alan had kept the transistor radio underneath it, and he’d switch it on if ever the gas mask got too close, letting the room hum with the sound of the BBC, the World Service and the shipping forecast. The babble would ward off the darkness, like an old wizard.
chanting to keep away the living dead. Safe in the grip of the transmissions, Alan had been able to sleep.

Llewis didn’t know how long it took him to come to his senses. He wondered if he’d actually been unconscious, or whether he’d just stopped doing anything for a while, like a videotape put on pause. He was lying down, he was sure of that much. Sprawled out on his stomach, his belly pressed against a cold, hard surface. His eyes were open, but he seemed to be staring at something black. Pure black.

That’d be the floor, wouldn’t it?

Then he made the mistake of looking up. He closed his eyes as soon as he figured out where he was, and lay there for another ten minutes or so, not risking another look.

Finally, he felt he was ready to deal with things. He even managed to get to his feet, somehow.

There were buildings towering over him, gigantic grey and blue buildings, sheer spires that cut into a muddy red sky. There were steeples, and the steeples were linked by walkways, with dark triangular shapes swimming in and out of the spaces between the levels. Like sharks, thought Llewis. Like great black bony sharks.

It was the city he’d seen on his TV in the hotel room, the one that had made him put his hand through the screen. Something was wrong with the perspective, though. When Llewis looked up, he wasn’t seeing the towers from ground level. It was almost as if he were seeing this city from below ground level…

He took a good look around, and figured out exactly where he was standing.

The city, he realised, was built on a series of platforms, huge grey plates of concrete, supported by pylons of steel and cement. The platforms must have stretched across the whole city, judging by what he could see from here. Because he wasn’t standing on any of those platforms: the smooth black surface under his feet was the ground. He didn’t know what kind of planet was smooth and black, but then he wasn’t Patrick Moore, and, besides, it wasn’t the first thing on his mind. He was standing a good five yards beneath the very lowest level of the city, the foundation pylons rising around him on all sides. And, directly overhead, a huge square hole had been cut into one of the platforms, letting him see the sky. The hole had to be at least a hundred feet along each edge.

Llewis concentrated on the underworld around him. As far as the eye could see, there were pylons, the guts of the city. No signs of life down here, no signs of habitation. Nobody had come to welcome him.

But there was one thing of interest. Well, of sheer, stark, stomach-turning horror, anyway. It was one of the fighters, and it was parked just a few yards away, directly under the hole. Llewis guessed the hole was some kind of launch area, allowing the fighters to take off and land at ground level. After a while, he worked out how to work his legs again, and he started to move, heading towards the vehicle. He wasn’t sure why, but then he wasn’t really sure about anything any more. There didn’t seem much point being frustrated, or angry, or confused. He briefly wondered if this was what they called ‘shock’.

As he got closer to the fighter, he saw that it didn’t seem quite finished. The thing that had come out of the sky back at the warehouse (they’d probably all be dead, back there… no, don’t think about that: it’s another world anyway, it’s not your problem) had been perfectly sleek, perfectly functional, as if the craft had been stripped down to its most basic design elements. This one was different. There were bright metallic plates stuck to the fuselage, wires and cables drooping from the undercarriage.

Llewis stopped. Was that a noise he could hear? Not the background hiss of the city, not the drone of the vehicles overhead. More like…

Voices. From the other side of the fighter.

‘…talking about setting up a colony on Earth, once the plan’s been seen through.’

‘You mean a “settlement”. You can’t have a “colony” on the planet your ancestors came from.’

‘I don’t care. I like the word “colony”. It reminds me of insects.’

Llewis froze. His sweat froze, too. There were people working on the fighter. It was probably being repaired.

It was only when he thought about this that Llewis worked out what was wrong with the craft. It didn’t look damaged; if anything, it looked as if it had been beefed up, as if spare parts had been bolted on to the surface for no good reason. Or rather –

The thought was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a head. It was a woman’s head, her face sharp and angular, dark hair pulled back behind her skull. The head had popped over the wing of the fighter, the eyes wide open and curious.

Llewis screamed. The woman just blinked at him.

‘Is there a problem?’ she asked.

‘No,’ squeaked Llewis.

‘Oh. Good.’

Then the head disappeared again. The muttering went on from the other side of the fighter.

‘Anyway, if Earth’s where we started out, won’t living there cause some kind of paradox or something?’
‘Maybe. Does it matter?’

Alan had been told something in a history lesson once, something he’d thought might have explained his fear of the darkened windows. In olden times, the teacher had said, people had believed that flies came from rotting food. They’d thought that, when the food decomposed, it actually turned into maggots. The teacher had said this was a ridiculous idea, but it had made a kind of sense to Alan. Perhaps that was what happened to darkness, he’d thought. Perhaps, when the darkness got particularly old and thick, things started hatching out of it. Gas-mask-faced things.

What other reason would he have had to be scared?

Llewis didn’t move. He spent a few moments quite deliberately not moving, in case his body did anything rash and stupid. The woman hadn’t cared about him. She’d sounded just like the uniformed men in the warehouse, not giving a toss about what anyone else thought of them.

If these people were as dependent on TV signals as Guest had said, they probably had remote controls for each other’s heads. They could probably change from being friendly to being hostile at the touch of a button. So it was pointless trying to second-guess them, wasn’t it?

Slowly, Llewis began to circle the fighter, until he could see the woman in full. She and her companion were standing on a raised platform, working on the right flank of the craft. The man was holding some tool or other, maybe a spanner, prising away a piece of grey plastic plating from the fighter’s skin. When it was free, the woman grasped it with both hands, and lowered it to the ground. She caught Llewis’s eye as she did it.

‘It was a Drahvidian battleskimmer,’ she said, with a slight smile. As if that explained everything.

‘What was?’ Llewis heard himself say.

‘The fighter… the Drahvidian… battleskimmer…’

The woman nodded at the fighter. ‘This. But we’re almost finished with it now.’

Llewis looked at the side of the craft. Where the panel had been removed, various electronic components had been revealed, the wires sprouting from the surface of the fighter like a tuft of unwanted facial hair. As Llewis watched, the male mechanic reached down and picked up what looked like a small fire extinguisher. He aimed it at the electronics, and pushed down the trigger.

The spray didn’t look like foam to Llewis. It was black, for a start, the same kind of black as the fighter itself. And the substance slithered as it covered the systems. Not Cold, but something like Cold. Something wrong. Something alien.

Seconds later, the wires had gone, eaten away by the goo. The substance began to smooth out across the side of the fighter, until it had blended in with the skin of the craft, becoming totally smooth, totally featureless.

‘What…’ said Llewis. He wasn’t sure how he could finish the question.

The woman looked at him. ‘Sorry?’

‘The fighter… the Drahvidian… battleskimmer…’

The woman slapped the side of the fighter. ‘Oh, it crashed a couple of klicks away. On the edge of the city. The Drahvidians are always doing that. There’s something about this ship that attracts their probe systems. Probably the way the Time Lords built it. We keep having to scrape the wreckage off the ground.’

‘Ship? What ship? The Drahvidian skimmer… crashed here?’ Llewis asked. ‘In the city?’

‘Well, yes.’

‘And you’re… you’re turning it into… one of yours?’

The woman knitted her eyebrows. It was the man who answered. ‘Well, yeah. Where else d’you think we get the parts for the zombie ships from?’

‘Zombie?’ said Llewis.

He took another look at the shape of the fighter. Those spare parts hadn’t been added, he realised. They were bits of the original design, which hadn’t been eaten away by the black stuff yet. He looked at the underside again, at the ribbed part of the craft. Yes, that was the word. Ribbed. From some angles, the fighter looked almost like the skeleton of a vehicle. Like a dead, decomposing thing.

Ships crashed here, in the city. The aliens would take them, use the Cold – or whatever it was they used – to give them a new skin. They turned the ships into zombies, the hi-tech equivalent of the living dead. But, dear God, the kind of technology that could do this kind of thing… all the junked RAF planes and navy ships you could resurrect, the sheer profit you could make…

‘What is it?’ Llewis asked, trying to keep his voice steady. ‘In that. In that can. What is it?’

He pointed at the fire extinguisher. The man frowned. ‘It’s just zombie sealant. Why?’

‘How… does it work? The skin. The new skin. How can it make a new skin like that?’

The mechanics exchanged glances. ‘Um… well, because it’s alive,’ said the woman.

‘Alive?’
They were both staring at him now, looking worried. Llewis didn’t care. It didn’t matter if he had been brought to another planet. He could still do something. He could find out the secret of the zombie ships. How would Peter bloody Morgan like that, eh? Never mind the Cold, this was going to change everything. Military transport, civilian transport, the works. Stuff Microsoft, this was a real technical leap forward.

‘Where do you get it from?’ Llewis demanded. ‘The sealant. Where does it come from?’

‘From the Cold,’ said the woman, cautiously. ‘It’s a by-product. You really don’t know any of this?’

The Cold…? No, never mind. That didn’t matter. Right now, Alan James Llewis had something to prove.

‘Show me,’ he said. ‘Show me the Cold. Show me where you get it from. Please.’

Now, it might seem that the gaze of the gas mask had been too much to risk, just to get at some old toy soldiers. But there was young’ Alan’s pride to consider. All the other kids had soldiers. The boys, anyway, and they were the only ones who really mattered. Ergo, all the other kids must have had gas masks of their own to be afraid of and none of them had ever said anything. If Alan hadn’t gone into that cupboard, he would have had nothing, and if he’d had nothing everybody else would have known why.

The fear was everywhere, and the fear was a terrible, crippling thing. But Alan had worked out the truth, and worked it out all by himself. You couldn’t come out of the darkness empty-handed. Even if you were wetting yourself and retching up your breakfast.

You had to bring something out with you.

It was the only thing that really mattered.
He had, for a while, honestly believed he was going to die.
He didn’t recall ever feeling that before. Right at the end, as the guards had pinned him to the floor and run the shock batons down his spine, he’d finally been convinced that his time was running out. As if the sheer pointlessness of things had made all his internal defences – psychological and biological – turn themselves off in disgust.
When everything had gone quiet in the cell, he’d thought it had been the end. He didn’t remember the moment when he’d realised the guards were all unconscious, and he didn’t remember how he’d felt when he’d seen Sarah, and the boy, and the Ogron, and known he’d been rescued. He had the horrible feeling he hadn’t even said ‘thank you’. All he remembered was seeing the TARDIS, throwing himself at the doors, with the last of his strength burning up in his legs. He recalled being vaguely surprised that the console room wasn’t shiny and white. For some reason, he’d been expecting roundels.
He’d set the controls. Waited for the others to follow him on board, then set the ship in flight. The next thing he’d known, he’d been swimming alongside strands of numbers, diving in and out of logical gaps in the temporal equations, so, unless he’d unexpectedly been strapped to some kind of bizarre virtual reality machine, he’d obviously lapsed into unconsciousness at that point.
He’d slept the sleep of mathematicians, the sleep of engineers, the sleep of Rassilon and Omega and Chung Sen and Stattenheim and Waldorf. While his higher brain had rested, his subconscious had been busy, putting together the equations symbol by symbol. No effort needed this time, no attempts to take himself out of space-time. It was all pure theory.
Until he told the TARDIS about it, of course.
Once the numbers had finished swimming by, he started dreaming proper dreams again. He dreamed of the planet Morestra, and saw himself standing on the surface while the gravitational machines of the natives began to tear the world apart.
‘No, no, no,’ he told the Morestrans, as their civilisation collapsed in front of their eyes. ‘I said, why don’t you try harnessing the kinetic power of gannets?’
‘I know you’re awake really,’ he heard someone say. ‘Your breathing goes funny when you’re asleep.’
The Doctor opened his eyes. He found himself staring at a blank cream-white ceiling, and for one terrible moment he thought he was back in the room with the fountain, shut out of the rest of the TARDIS. There was, however, the unmistakable aroma of mothballs.
And James Stewart was hovering over his bed, looking down at him with a happy little smile.
‘We weren’t sure what to do with you,’ James Stewart said. ‘We just dumped you in the nearest room with a bed. We were thinking of giving you medical aid, but we thought we’d probably end up killing you by accident.’
The Doctor tried to sit up. In the end, however, he decided that the whole project was far too ambitious.
‘James Stewart,’ he said, ‘1908 to 1997. Hollywood actor, noted for his performances in westerns, Hitchcockian thrillers and charming whimsical comedies. Hello, Mr Stewart. What are you doing in my TARDIS?’
The actor frowned. ‘James Stewart dies in 1997? That’s a shame. I’ll have to go and interview him when I get back.’
The Doctor squinted up at the man’s face. Something was very, very wrong here. For one thing, James Stewart had a woman’s voice. And he was wearing a dress.
‘I’m confused,’ said the Doctor.
So James Stewart put a hand to his own chin, and started peeling away the skin. As the man’s face came off, his features became cold, blank and rubbery. Soon, the face was nothing but a piece of plastic, and the female features underneath were revealed in all their middle-aged glory.
‘Ta-daa,’ said Sarah Jane.
‘Oh,’ said the Doctor. ‘You know, that’s a terrible thing to do to somebody recovering from a mental illness.’
Sarah stuck her tongue out at him. ‘You’re no fun any more,’ she said. She threw the mask on to the bed, and it landed on the Doctor’s chest with a plop. ‘I found it in one of the storerooms. I think it was a storeroom, anyway.’
‘All rooms on the TARDIS are storerooms,’ the Doctor told her. ‘Even if they’re only storing air.’
‘Oh, and that’s how you see oxygen, is it? Just another piece of stuff to carry around.’
‘You get these insights, when you’re a Time Lord. Personally, I never travel anywhere without a good supply of air. I’ve got pockets full of it.’

Then he remembered his jacket. More specifically, he remembered how he’d used it to clean the floor of the cell, making space for his equations. He looked down at himself, and saw he was in his shirtsleeves, his clothes covered in blood, dirt and something he didn’t like to think about.

It could have been worse. In some parts of the world, the authorities would have had him dissected, not thrown into prison. The Saudi forces hadn’t even bothered testing his DNA, so the scientific approach obviously wasn’t in vogue there. He’d been a security risk. Nothing more. To be kept out of the way until they’d finished surveying the TARDIS, until they’d thought of some decent technical questions to ask him.

‘How does it work?’ Sarah asked.

The Doctor stared at her for a moment or two. ‘Ah. You mean the mask? It’s made from an intelligent memory polymer. Quite clever, really. More the Master’s kind of thing than mine, though. Zoe picked it up from the Grand Festival of Zymymys Midamor. A bit out of character for her, I always thought. I think I’ve got a Kim Novak somewhere as well.’ He shook his head, but gently. ‘I have no idea why ape descendants are so obsessed with pretending to be other people. Speaking as someone who’s been plenty of other people, I’d say the whole thing’s overrated.’

Sarah smiled, one of those little childish smiles she was so good at. It very nearly broke the Doctor’s heart.

‘You know what I think? I think you don’t really regenerate at all. I think you just keep taking off masks.’

‘Are you speaking figuratively?’

‘No. And I may be an ape descendant, but we’ve all got to start somewhere.’

‘Time Lords aren’t descended from anything even remotely embarrassing. That may be why we’re so arrogant, I suppose. How long have I been asleep?’

‘A couple of hours,’ said Sarah. ‘Doctor… do you know where we’re going? When you set the controls –’

‘Nowhere,’ the Doctor told her. ‘Or everywhere. The vortex. I’ve set the ship adrift. I just wanted to get away from… you know.’

Sarah nodded. ‘They hurt you, didn’t they? Badly, I mean.’

The Doctor did his best to flash her a smile, and Sarah did her best to look as though she believed it. ‘It’s good to be tortured once in every lifetime. It gives you a sense of perspective. Can I ask how you found me? Steering the TARDIS…’

‘Look in your left pocket,’ said Sarah.

So he did, digging his hand into the folds of his trousers until he felt something cold and plastic-smooth against his fingertips. He held the object up in front of his eyes, and tried to focus on it.

‘Receiver,’ he announced. ‘How did that get there?’

‘When you… did whatever it was you did. When you started fading out. I slipped it in your pocket when you started fading out. I thought it’d help.’

‘You should have said! If I’d known I’d had this on me, I could have used it to build an implicite sonar waveloop, and –’

‘Doctor!’

‘Yes?’

‘Relax. Please.’

The Doctor let his head sink back on to the pillow. ‘You’re right. I need rest. We’ve got work to do.’

Sarah nodded, turned and moved out of range of the Doctor’s eyes. He heard her shoes tapping away across the floor.

As they reached what he guessed was the doorway, she stopped.

‘Just one thing, though,’ she said.

‘Yes?’

‘What you said. About recovering from a mental illness…’

‘Oh. Just a joke. I’ve been under a lot of stress recently.’

A pause. ‘You don’t remember what you said when we rescued you?’

The Doctor grimaced. ‘I’m afraid not.’

‘We knocked out the guards. We tried to pick you up off the floor. And then you looked up at us, and you said, “I’m afraid you’re too late. I’ve already gone quite mad.”’

The Doctor mulled this over.

‘A figure of speech,’ he said.

There was another pause, before Sarah stepped out of the room and walked away down the corridor.
He stopped off in the wardrobe room – in one of the wardrobe rooms – before he headed back to the master console. His legs were moving properly now, but he was still feeling numb and itchy, as if his skin wasn’t quite the right size for his body. Really, he needed more rest. Time being relative, he could have spent whole months in the vortex before going back to Earth to rescue Sam, but that felt… wrong, somehow. Even apart from the fact that it breached at least six of the minor time-travel etiquettes. It’d feel as though he were putting his own convenience before his principles.

Principles, thought the Doctor. Yes, I’m sure I’ve still got those.

The clothes in the wardrobe room were filed alphabetically, although the TARDIS often seemed to change its mind about which alphabet it was supposed to use. Finding the ‘Earth’ section wasn’t difficult, but narrowing it down to the Edwardian era was harder. He couldn’t find anything like the jacket he’d left in the cell, so in the end he settled on a big leather overcoat, the kind of thing he could imagine old naval heroes wearing. The coat was grey and loose-fitting, designed to flap about dramatically if you stood on the prow of a ship with the wind blowing into your face. Of course, any decent captain would try to get the wind behind him, but that wasn’t the point. The Doctor slipped the coat on, then went to find a mirror.

He hadn’t seen his face in so long that it actually came as a surprise. As with the TARDIS, he’d almost been expecting to see an earlier model. There were no scars, but he could see burst blood vessels under the skin, making his features look beaten and blotchy. One of his cheeks was scraped raw, where he’d rubbed himself against the cell wall in a desperate attempt to get his hands on more blood.

Faced with all this, he completely forgot to check out his new costume. He just stuffed the James Stewart mask into one of the overcoat’s pockets, then walked out of the wardrobe.

When he finally reached the console room, the only person there was the boy Sarah had told him was called Kode. She’d visited him a second time while he’d been in bed, and told him everything she knew. Kode was acting on the instructions of the TARDIS, according to Sarah, although personally the Doctor doubted the ship would descend to that level of communication.

Kode certainly had a puzzled look on his face, though. When the Doctor walked into the room, the boy was flipping through an old hardbacked novel, which had been resting on a chair in a quiet corner of the room for about, oh, seven years now.

‘The Time Machine?’ asked Kode.

‘I try to read it at least once in every regeneration,’ the Doctor told him. ‘After all, it is where everything started. It’s amazing how different it looks each time. Where’s Sarah, by the way?’

Kode seemed to be listening to something as he answered. ‘She said she was going exploring,’ he said. ‘To find someone called Kim Novak. She took the Ogron with her.’

‘Good.’ The Doctor crossed over to the console and started tapping at the navigational systems. ‘I wouldn’t want Sarah to see this,’ he said, under his breath. ‘I’ve no idea whether she’d approve. There’s an etiquette to time travel, you know. Most of the rules are only there for the sake of decorum. That’s what I’d like to think, anyway. Do you know why the Time Lords don’t interfere with the causal nexus more often?’

‘Er… no.’

‘Because it’d be rude.’ Then he stopped tapping, and looked up. ‘Have we met?’ he asked Kode. ‘Before, I mean?’

The boy looked startled. ‘No.’

The Doctor shook his head, then turned his attention back to the keypad. ‘No. Well, you must have one of those faces.’

‘Yeah, maybe. So where are we going?’

The Doctor finished keying in the sequence. ‘Shoreditch,’ he announced. ‘I’ve got promises to keep.’

He’d stepped back into the TARDIS at almost exactly the same moment that Sarah and the Ogron had walked into the console room. The Doctor had quickly closed the doors and punched the dematerialisation switch, sending the ship into the vortex before he’d even laid in a new course. Sarah had looked puzzled, but hadn’t asked any questions. She’d probably thought he was just going mad.

With everyone assembled in the console room, the Doctor had asked Kode about Guest. Kode hadn’t tried to hide anything.

‘You mean, you never really cared what happened on Earth?’ Sarah had asked.
Kode had shaken his head. ‘We just wanted… I mean, Guest just wanted the Time Lords to notice us. Or a
Time Lord, anyway. To get hold of a TARDIS. We knew they wouldn’t risk blowing up the planet this time, so…’

‘So you tried to cause a massive wrinkle in space-time,’ the Doctor had muttered. ‘You can tell who taught the
Remote about time travel. It’s a typical Faction Paradox tactic. It doesn’t matter how much damage you do, as long
as you get results. And expecting the Time Lords to get involved might have been a bit optimistic, as well.’

After that, he’d decided that the first step was to get rid of the Cold on Earth. There’d been an old OS map of
the Berkshire area in the TARDIS systems, so the Doctor had called it up on the scanner. The map had been made in
1952, recent enough for the MoD station to be marked out, though not actually labelled. The Doctor had promptly
set the coordinates.

‘We could have just used the receiver to home in on the Cold,’ Kode had pointed out.

The Doctor had patted the console defensively. ‘I don’t want her relying on your technology any more than she
has to, thank you,’ he’d said.

Now the four of them were crossing the factory complex, heading for the warehouse from the crippled main
gates, where the TARDIS had chosen to land. Long before they reached the building, they could tell there’d been
trouble. There were huge furrows in the ground, as if something had crashed here. As they got closer to the
warehouse entrance, they could see that the tracks ended halfway across the floor of the building. Some kind of
vehicle had fallen out of the sky, the Doctor concluded, but now it had been spirited away again.

There were no people anywhere. There wasn’t any Cold, either.

‘We’re too late,’ said Sarah, once they were inside. ‘They’ve taken the boxes. Llewis must have been and
gone.’

The Doctor knelt down, inspecting the furrows a little more closely. ‘Possibly. Tell me something, Kode. Are
there any of your vehicles on Earth? Atmosphere vessels, maybe spacecraft?’

Kode said nothing. He was looking dazed, blank-eyed. The Doctor stood, and took a few steps towards him.

‘Doctor,’ said Sarah Jane. It was obviously supposed to be a warning. ‘He’s only been helping us because of
the TARDIS, remember? Now we’ve left the ship –’

‘Ah. Yes.’ The Doctor waved his hand in front of Kode’s face. Kode followed the movement, but he didn’t
look as though he knew why he was doing it. ‘Retuning yourself, Kode? Reverting to type, maybe?’

Kode shook his head. ‘No. No. It’s just… everything’s changed, you know?’

‘You’re picking up new signals from Anathema, aren’t you?’ the Doctor suggested. ‘New orders from Guest,
possibly. What’s happened to the Cold? Did the Earth people take it?’

‘Erm… no. I think it went back. Back to Anathema.’ He started rubbing his ear ‘They’ve been here. The others.
They’ve taken everything away. All the wreckage.’

‘Right.’ The Doctor clapped his hands, making Sarah jump and causing the Ogron to rumble ominously.
‘Change of strategy. Back to the TARDIS.’

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Trip Four: Newbury–Esher

He made sure the TARDIS took the long route to Esher. Strictly speaking, conventional distance meant nothing
on board the ship, seeing that she had to leave normal space-time to get anywhere. But some routes through the
vortex were quicker than others, and yes, he’d told himself not to dawdle, to get on with the business of tracking
down Sam. But surely nobody was going to judge him too harshly if he took some (relative) time out? He was very,
very tired.

So he spent the journey in the bedroom Sarah had found, lying flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling. He
remembered Badar, sleeping through most of the day in his cell, simply because there was nothing else to do.

He suddenly became aware that someone else had walked into the room.

Kode was standing in the doorway, hands tucked behind his back. The Doctor couldn’t read the boy’s
expression. ‘Neutral’ would probably be the best word for it.

‘Kode,’ said the Doctor, attempting a friendly smile. ‘We’ll be arriving back at the hotel soon. Lost Boy says
there’s machinery there. He says you can open up a direct route to Anathema. We’ll need your help, I should think.’

‘No need,’ said Kode, and his voice was as flat as his expression. ‘We can use the receiver to tune in to the
media. We can take the TARDIS straight there.’

The Doctor tutted. ‘We’ve already been through all this. I don’t want to expose the TARDIS to your
technology. Faction-built equipment has a nasty habit of rebuilding the matter around it. That’s why you’re still
picking up signals now, even though the receiver’s been taken out of your ear. It must have rewired your nervous
system.’

Kode responded to this by drawing a gun from behind his back and pointing it at the Doctor’s head.
The Doctor squinted at the weapon. Black, short-snouted, plastic-looking. Sarah and the Ogron had used guns like it to rescue him from the cell, hadn’t they?

‘Take the TARDIS,’ said Kode. ‘We have to go. Now.’

‘You’re talking in short sentences,’ the Doctor told him. ‘It’s the sure sign of an unbalanced mind. Listen to me, Kode. I know you’re confused, but it’s just because you’ve taken out your receiver. Trust me. Listen to the TARDIS.’

‘No,’ said Kode.

‘Kode –’

‘No.’ The muscles in his arms tensed, as if demonstrating how easy it’d be to press the trigger. ‘New signals. New ideas. Can’t you hear them?’

‘Oh dear. No, I can’t hear them, Kode. I think you’re hallucinating.’

‘No! I heard them when we went outside. New signals. From Anathema.’

One side of the Doctor’s brain exchanged glances with the other side. The signals from the TARDIS should have been stronger than any signals from the Remote’s media. Unless something new had been programmed into the transmitters. Some new operating procedure, perhaps.

‘Principles,’ Kode explained. ‘I’ve got my principles.’

The Doctor thought it sounded unlikely, but he didn’t argue. ‘I see. And what do your principles say?’

‘Bring the TARDIS. Bring the TARDIS back to Anathema. Use it to find the Cold.’

‘That’s not a principle, Kode. It’s a mission objective.’

‘But I believe in it.’ Kode’s voice sounded determined, more stable than it had ever sounded before. ‘I have to bring the TARDIS to Guest. It’s vital.’

‘Doctor?’ said Sarah Jane.

Kode shrieked, and turned to cover the corridor behind him. Sarah stepped into view, but stopped dead in the doorway.

‘Don’t move,’ Kode said, swinging the gun back towards the Doctor. ‘I’m not afraid to use this.’

‘I knew it,’ Sarah tutted. ‘Just listen to him. He’s like something out of The Professionals.’

‘It’s probably being repeated somewhere near here,’ said the Doctor. ‘We must have reached Esher. But you won’t shoot, will you, Kode? You need my help to get the TARDIS to Anathema. She won’t respond to you, if she knows you’ve killed me.’

‘I’m not going to kill you,’ said Kode. His voice wasn’t quite as steady as it had been a moment before.

‘Then you’re not much of a threat,’ Sarah pointed out.

Even as she said it, Kode was raising the gun. ‘You… believe… life is sacred,’ he said, addressing the Doctor.

‘I know you do. It’s in the media. Sam told us.’

Yes. That explained quite a lot. ‘You’re quite right,’ the Doctor told him. ‘But I don’t see… oh.’

Kode was pointing the gun at his own head, pushing the nozzle into his neck, right under his chin. His finger tightened on the triggering mechanism.

‘Take the TARDIS to Anathema,’ said Kode. ‘Take it straight to Guest. No attempts to rescue Sam.’

‘Is he doing what I think he’s doing?’ asked Sarah.

‘I’m ready to die for my beliefs,’ Kode told her. ‘So do as I say. Or I get it.’

She looked at the Doctor. ‘He can’t be serious.’

The Doctor cleared his throat, as if that’d get the embarrassment out of his voice. ‘I’m afraid he is. As a matter of fact, I’ve tried the same trick myself. The difference is, I think Kode really means it.’

‘But we can’t –’

‘I don’t think we’ve really got a choice, Sarah. We’re going to have to do as he says.’

‘That’s insane,’ said Sarah.

‘That’s principles,’ said Kode.

‘Quite,’ said the Doctor.

Trip Five: Esher–Croydon

He’d managed to persuade Kode to let Sarah go. After all, he’d argued, she wasn’t important to Guest’s plan. And taking her back home would only delay the journey to Anathema by a minute or two. The Cold had waited for millennia, so surely it’d wait until he’d had a proper chance to say goodbye.

Now the four of them were assembled in Sarah’s living room: the Doctor, Sarah, Kode and K9. On Kode’s instructions, Lost Boy had stayed on board the ship. Kode was still holding the gun to his own throat, threatening to compromise the Doctor’s code of ethics at the touch of a button.
‘Do you know, I don’t think I’ve ever been here before?’ the Doctor said, sweeping his arms around the room. ‘I seem to remember hearing you’d moved away from London.’

‘I did,’ Sarah said. She was sitting huddled up on a beanbag, K9 by her side. ‘But I got fed up, so I moved back again. You always end up going back to your roots in the end, don’t you?’

‘So I’m told,’ said the Doctor.

Sarah leaned over to whisper in K9’s ‘ear’. ‘It’s really him, you know,’ she told the dog.

‘Affirmative,’ said K9. ‘Subject’s anatomy falls within accepted parameters of Doctor-normal. However, extraneous non-Gallifreyan DNA suggests –’

‘Yes, yes,’ the Doctor cut in. ‘We know. Not having any trouble with him, are you, Sarah Jane?’

‘Who, K9? No. But my cousin wants to know how you managed to build an artificial intelligence out of ZX81 parts.’

‘Oh, that’s nothing. You should see the mark-four version.’

Kode prodded himself in the face, hard. Just to make a point. ‘We have to go,’ he said, nodding towards the TARDIS.

The TARDIS was parked rather neatly between the speakers of Sarah’s stereo system, and looked somehow at home among all the twentieth-century hardware. The Doctor shot Kode another little smile. ‘Yes. It was nice seeing you again, Sarah Jane. If everything turns out all right, I’ll pop by again in a day or two. And don’t forget, there are still a few loose ends to be sorted out here on Earth. I’ll leave that up to you and the UN, I think.’

‘Loose ends?’ Sarah asked.

‘The Saudis are using alien technology, remember. Too complex for them to learn anything from, I’d say, but it still might cause a few problems.’

‘And they’ve got an Ogron,’ Sarah noted.

‘And that. But it isn’t the first one to get stranded on Earth, and I’m sure it won’t be the last.’

Sarah nodded glumly. ‘I suppose I should get to work on the new book. Or article. Or whatever it’s going to be. By the way, there are two Saudi soldiers on board the TARDIS. I locked them in a cupboard near the billiard room.’

The Doctor frowned at her. ‘A cupboard? Isn’t that against the Geneva convention?’

‘It was the best I could do,’ Sarah retorted.

K9 shuffled slightly, his motors carrying him a few inches backward, then a few inches to the right. The Doctor realised what he was doing. Getting himself in a good enough position for his defensive systems to lock on to Kode.

‘K9?’ said the Doctor, softly.

‘Master?’

‘Bad dog.’

K9 lowered his head. ‘Apologies, master.’

‘We’re wasting time,’ said Kode.

Trip Six: Croydon–Anathema

The Doctor looked up at the sky, and sniffed. It looked as if the entire sky had been set alight, as if the city had been burning for so long that there was nothing left of the air but dust and smoke. He didn’t smell smoke, though. He wondered what kind of atmospheric disturbance might cause a thing like that.

‘I don’t like it,’ he said.

Lost Boy stepped out of the TARDIS behind him, and grumbled in agreement. Kode was the last one out. The Doctor watched him as he walked away from the ship and looked around, at the smooth black ground and the supporting pylons. Then the boy raised his head, to stare through the great crack in the city foundations above his head.

‘This isn’t the main transmitter,’ he said.

‘The TARDIS can be a little erratic,’ the Doctor lied. ‘We may have landed a few hundred yards out. We’re here, though. You can put down the gun.’

Kode’s hand kept shaking. ‘Not yet,’ he decided. ‘Wait until we find Guest.’

The Doctor sighed. ‘All right. Why don’t we go and see if those people over there have seen him?’

Before Kode could reply, the Doctor swept past him, heading across the slippery black surface between the pylons, Lost Boy following his lead. Not far away he could see three figures huddled together in a tight group. Two of them were tall, dressed in what he assumed were traditional Remote uniforms. The third was crouching, looking at something on the ground.

‘Llewis,’ rumbled Lost Boy.

‘Llewis?’ said the Doctor. ‘You mean, the man from COPEX?’
The Ogron growled in the affirmative. The Doctor took another look at the crouching figure. The shape did indeed seem to be a middle-aged human, overweight from too much yeast and office work, his features framed by a fuzzy grey beard. The two Remote people looked up as the Doctor reached them.

‘Good afternoon,’ he said. ‘I’m the Doctor. I understand you’ve been waiting for me.’

‘Umm…’ said the woman.

‘Erm…’ said the man.

The Doctor waved their objections aside, and tapped the crouching man on the shoulder. ‘And you must be Mr Llewis. Good. I’ve come to take you back to Earth.’

‘No you haven’t,’ said Kode.

Llewis didn’t look up. Whatever he was staring at, it seemed to be utterly fascinating. The Doctor peered over his shoulder.

‘Look at it,’ said Llewis, in a broad West Country accent he was obviously trying very hard to keep under control. ‘Just look at it.’

In front of Llewis, there was a crack in the ground. The surface of Anathema had ruptured there, forming a narrow fissure, no more than two or three inches across. You had to squint to see it, but the fissure seemed to be quite long, winding its way between – maybe even under – the supporting pylons of the city.

The fissure was dark. Darker, in fact, than the Doctor felt it had a right to be. He knelt down by Llewis’s side, and took another look.

There was something bubbling up from the crack. Like liquid, but thicker, squirming around as if it had a mind of its own. With a start, the Doctor realised it was making faces at him.

At last, Llewis looked up at him. His eyes looked huge, and not entirely sane.

‘It’s like oil,’ the man said. ‘The Cold. It’s in the ground here. My God. D’you know what they do with this stuff? D’you know the kind of profit we’d be talking about, if we started drilling for it? My God.’

The Doctor wasn’t sure how he was supposed to respond to that. So he didn’t bother. The next thing he knew, Kode was hovering at his side, trying his best to look ominous.

‘We have to go,’ the boy whined. ‘We’ve got to find the Cold. We’ve been waiting for two hundred years. It’s important.’

‘Not as important as this,’ croaked Llewis. The Doctor patted him on the head in a reassuring manner.

‘Why are you people all so stupid?’ he said.

The Doctor opened his mouth, to say something facetious and distracting. Then it dawned on him.

He looked at Kode. Kode looked back at him. So he looked at Llewis instead. Then at Lost Boy. Then at the other Remote people, who were busy exchanging worried glances a few yards away. Finally, he tried looking at the sky. Nothing helped.

‘Say that again,’ he told Kode.

‘Why?’ said Kode.

‘Just say it. Please.’

Kode stared at him for a moment or two. Licked his lips. Swallowed. He didn’t let the gun waver for a moment.

‘I said… why… are you people… all… so… stupid?’

The Doctor stuffed his hands deep into his coat pockets. ‘Ah. Yes. I see. Oh dear.’

‘What?’ said Kode. ‘What did I say?’

‘It’s not what you said, exactly. It’s the way you said it.’

‘Nff?’ queried Lost Boy.

The Doctor cleared his throat. All of a sudden, the fact that he was the centre of attention made him feel distinctly uncomfortable.

‘Your people,’ he said, not quite daring to look Kode in the eye. ‘They reproduce through a memory-sensitive biomass imprinting system, don’t they?’

Kode kept staring at him.

‘Just a guess,’ the Doctor explained.

‘So?’ said Kode.

The Doctor sighed. ‘I have a horrible feeling I know who you are,’ he said. ‘Or who you were, anyway. I think we’d better go and find Guest, don’t you?’
Travels with Fitz (X)
Anathema, 1801

He was sterile, apparently.
A while ago, Fitz would probably have had something to say about that. Not that he’d ever thought about
breeding, but it was nice to keep your options open, wasn’t it? Besides, it wasn’t as if the Faction had given the
colonists any warning.

The receivers didn’t just open up your nervous system to the media. They also had a small but significant effect
on the DNA of their users. Faction Paradox had felt it important for the Remote to be prepared for time travel, so the
engineers had programmed the receivers to pump something called ‘active temporal biodata’ into the colonists’
bodies. Fine-tuning the biologies of the Remote, just in case they ran into any temporal disturbances. Or, Fitz
concluded, in case they ran into any Time Lord weapons systems.

What the Faction hadn’t mentioned was that this new biodata had a peculiar side effect when introduced to
human subjects. To wit, it made them incapable of breeding naturally. It probably hadn’t been programmed to have
that effect, but Fitz knew the biodata had been copied from the files of the Time Lords themselves, so presumably
the information had been corrupted somewhere along the line. The people of Anathema hadn’t figured it out until
eighteen months after the Faction had left, when Fitz himself had asked why he no longer seemed to have much of a
sex drive, and the more scientifically minded colonists had run a few experiments. Fitz had expected some kind of
outcry when the results had come through. He’d expected the Remote to turn their backs on the Faction’s
techniques, to hate Mother Mathara for taking away their prospective children.

But nobody had cared, much. And – this was the killer – Fitz hadn’t cared much either. What did it matter?
He’d lost most of his life anyway, so what difference did it make if he couldn’t pass on the family curse?

Now he stood in one of the sub-buildings of the transmitter tower, the largest of the white polymer domes he’d
helped plant there. The place where the remembrance tanks were kept. Mother Mathara had said that the equipment
might be useful in an emergency, but that sounded like bull to Fitz. The cult had known, right from the start, that the
Remote would lose their breeding potential. It was all part of the great plan.

There was no one else around, so Fitz crossed over to the nearest of the tanks, and peered through the glass
panel.

Biomass. A big pink lump of it, just about the right size to be sculpted into a human being. Only the tank next
to it was currently in use, the systems regrowing a woman who’d fallen from the top level of the tower. At least, her
friends said she’d fallen. Fitz was convinced she’d jumped, but it hardly mattered. The ‘remembered’ version of her
would be happier, the way her friends thought she’d been. She wouldn’t jump again.

‘Stop it,’ said Fitz.
‘Stop what?’ said Tobin.
‘Lurking,’ said Fitz.

In the doorway, Tobin crossed her arms. ‘I’m not lurking. I’m just standing here. You’re lurking.’

Fitz looked up at her, and turned on his best ‘earnest’ expression. ‘Can I ask you a question?’ he said. ‘I’m
warning you now, it’s going to be a serious one.’

‘I don’t know. Shallow. Annoying. Good at your job. Reasonable human being, but nothing to get excited
about. Why?’

‘That’s not my fault,’ said Tobin. Fitz had a nasty feeling that this was as sympathetic as she got.

‘This machine’s going to turn us into stereotypes,’ Fitz told her. ‘You know that, don’t you? We’ll get simpler
and simpler every time we’re remembered. To you, I’m just someone who’s good at his job, and who gets on your
nerves. I don’t want to get pigeonholed like that.’

Tobin tutted. She had a tut that could cut through cheese. ‘There’s always someone who says that, isn’t there?’
she said. ‘There’s always someone who says he doesn’t want to be pigeonholed, or classified, or summed up. Look,
face facts. There’s so much information in the universe, we’d go mad if we couldn’t pigeonhole things. We wouldn’t
know where to start. We wouldn’t be able to make any sense of the culture. Don’t try to deny it.’

‘I don’t want to end up as a cartoon character,’ Fitz muttered.
‘Why not?’ said Tobin. ‘The more we get stripped down to our basics, the more we turn into who we really are. We get stronger that way. We get more real, not less. That’s the whole point of this lifestyle.’

It was true. There was no denying it. The Remote weren’t being dehumanised: they were being turned into something beyond human. The ultimate cultural development of mankind, more icon than animal. Everyone knows who Wile E. Coyote is, thought Fitz, but nobody knows who I am. Coyote’s immortal, and I stopped being important over six hundred years ago. So which of us is stronger? The one with the big floppy ears and the unlucky streak, that’s who.

Sarah Jane Smith cried when she saw ET. But when those two hundred thousand people died in East Timor…?

‘Supposing I died tomorrow,’ said Fitz. ‘Would you remember me as a good person, d’you think? As someone who’d want to be near his friends?’

Tobin shrugged. ‘I suppose.’

‘Good.’ He looked down at the biomass again, a big fat blob of flesh just gagging for a face. ‘That’s good. That’s all that really matters.’
Scene 61. London

[We pan across a futuristic, possibly post-apocalyptic, landscape. We watch a montage of scenes from the streets of London, the air heavy with toxic gas, the buildings pockmarked by shellfire. There are no living people to be seen, but the streets are littered with debris and rubbish, and it’s conceivable that some of it may be made up of human remains. A few of the buildings are surrounded by barbed wire, suggesting that the survivors of the calamity may have taken shelter there. The corpses of dead birds hang from broken windows, signifiers of some unknown – and unseen – urban tribe. Occasionally, a personal helicopter will fly overhead, but none of them stay around for long.

[Finally, we focus on one particular building. We see that it’s the old BBC TV centre, but it’s in ruins. Parts of the building have been demolished, the windows are shattered, and the lawn surrounding it is horribly overgrown. The place clearly hasn’t been used in years.]

Scene 62. A Disused Television Studio

[The studio is mostly in darkness. We can make out the shapes of old machines, the skeletons of ancient camera rigs surrounding the bare studio floor. For the first few moments, there’s silence. Nothing moves.

[Then we see a light. A figure steps into the middle of the floor, an electric lamp in his hand. The figure is young, his hair cropped short, an earring in one lobe. He’s dressed in combat fatigues, though the fashion is unfamiliar, again suggesting a future setting. He also wears some kind of small plastic oxygen mask, or maybe it’s just a filter. Also, there’s a black seedling pinned to his jacket, although there’s no indication of what this might mean.

[This is DONOVAN. He turns, sweeping the lamp across the camera equipment, and bows theatrically.]

DONOVAN: Good morning, Great Britain. It’s ten o’clock on the fifth of November, and this is Donovan’s Happy Half-Hour. In NICAM digital holography, where available. Coming up –

VOICE [off]: Donovan!

[Another figure steps out of the darkness, lamp in hand. It’s a woman, her body stooped and emaciated, probably in her mid-seventies or early eighties, although she moves like someone much older. She’s wearing an automedical survival jacket, so at least one of her major organs must have failed during her lifetime, and she’s wearing the black seedling emblem as well.]

SAM [for it is she]: Don’t touch anything. We don’t want to do any more damage. And you can take that mask off if you want. The air’s clean in here.

DONOVAN: I won’t take the risk, thanks. [Looks around.] I don’t think much of the hardware. Not a lot here we can use.

SAM: We can find the equipment. We’ve got the contacts.

DONOVAN: Still don’t know why we have to broadcast from here, though. There’s no way we can keep up security in a place like this. We’d be better off using one of our bunkers.

SAM: No. It has to be here. You wouldn’t understand.

[SAM gazes around the studio, and nods.]

SAM: When I was little... this building was important. They broadcast whole worlds from here. Everything that was good, everything that was special, came from places like this. And it’ll be like that again, soon. When we’re finished.

DONOVAN: If everything works.

SAM: It’ll work. We’ve got the equations on our side.

DONOVAN: The what?

SAM [waves the question aside]: Did I ever tell you about my father? He died the same day as the old King. The same day the Royal Family finally gave up the ghost. ‘I’ll live to see this country turn into a republic.’ That’s what he said. And he did. Just for a couple of hours. He always was political, my father. He thought everything would get so much better, once the royals were out of the way.

DONOVAN: Didn’t work out, did it?
SAM: No. No, it didn’t. It’s politics, Donovan. All the parties, all the corporations. All the same. Little packs of animals, doing whatever the chief gorilla tells them to do.

[There’s a silence. DONOVAN doesn’t seem to know what to say.]
SAM: They’ll make the same mistakes again. More gorilla packs, more power blocs. In twenty years’ time, we’ll be on the brink of war, just like we were in the old days. Nothing will have changed. That’s why we have to do this, Donovan. That’s why we have to start broadcasting.

DONOVAN [still embarrassed]: I know. Look, I wasn’t arguing. I just mean… I don’t see how it’s going to work, OK? Even if we can transmit to everyone –
SAM: But I’ve seen it work. Back when I was your age. The Remote… they were aliens…
DONOVAN: Aliens? You mean, like –
SAM: Like the Cybermen. Yes. No politics where the Remote came from. No corruption. No lies. Wasn’t what you’d call a perfect world, mind you, but only because of the people who’d built their transmitter systems. We’re going to do things differently. We’re going to do things our way. The Remote were right, you see. Their world was stronger than ours. It just needed… fine-tuning.

[SAM seems to find this funny, and starts laughing. The laugh turns into a terrible crippling cough. DONOVAN edges closer to her, presumably wondering whether she needs medical help.]
SAM [recovering]: I’m… sorry. The lungs again… just goes to show… seventy years of a healthy vegetarian diet, and this is how my body pays me back for it.
DONOVAN: Are you going to be OK?
SAM: I’ll live. You know why I turned vegetarian? It wasn’t a question of principles. It was just disgust. I was ten years old, and one day I worked out that ‘lamb’ was the same thing as ‘lamb’.
DONOVAN: Er, what?
SAM: You know what the English language is like. Lots of words mean more than one thing. I suddenly figured out that ‘lamb’ the animal and ‘lamb’ the food were the same thing. Never ate meat again. Except for a bacon sandwich in 2009, and that was only because… I’m sorry, what were we talking about?
DONOVAN [slightly thrown]: The… plan. Can we call it that?
SAM: I’m sure we can. Don’t worry so much, Donovan. There are too many of us for it to go wrong. Besides… look what we’re ready to sacrifice.
DONOVAN [uneasily]: Erm… ourselves?
SAM: More than ourselves. More than our families. More than our whole species. I know how history’s supposed to work, and we’re putting a… a spanner in the works, if you like. We’re doing just what the Doctor did, all those years ago. We’re sacrificing the timeline.
DONOVAN: I don’t get it. The Doctor –
SAM: It’s not important. We just have to remember. What somebody told me, a long time ago, when I needed to make sense of the world. We’re bound to keep making the same mistakes, unless we take away the system that helps us make those mistakes. It’s not enough to get involved in politics. You understand? We have to get rid of politics. To get rid of all the monkeys in suits who want to give us orders. To get rid of the corruption, and the lies, and the petty power structures. To get rid of all of it.
DONOVAN: Sam?
SAM: Yes?
DONOVAN: We don’t stand a chance.
SAM pauses, and looks around the studio.]
SAM: We do now. Now we’ve come home.
[Fade out.]

‘Welcome back, said Compassion.

It took Sam a few moments to work out that she wasn’t in the media any more. At least, she didn’t think she was in the media, but it was getting harder and harder to spot the differences between the real world and the transmissions. The world had Frankenstein architecture and a Star Trek colour scheme. Nothing made sense any more, unless she had some way of comparing it to her own native signals.

But her knees were pressed against something hard, and there was nothing that solid inside the sphere. She heard the sounds of screeching engines somewhere in the distance, and felt the smoothness of the platform under her hands. She was pleased to see that there were no wrinkles on the backs of those hands.

‘It’s 1996,’ she said, just to see if the world disagreed with her.
‘Obviously,’ said Compassion.
Sam looked up. She was back on the top level of the transmitter building, the sphere having shrunk back into
the ceiling above her head. Compassion stood in front of her, arms crossed. Sam wasn’t sure, but the place seemed louder than it had before she’d been swallowed. Apart from the sounds of passing fighters, there were shouts from down below, the voice of the masses on the ground floor of the tower. Sam couldn’t imagine the Remote rioting. It just wasn’t what they did.

‘I saw things,’ said Sam. ‘I can’t remember… I was trying to do something, but… it was the future. I was old.’

‘You don’t remember anything else?’ asked Compassion. She was glancing over the edge of the platform, evidently nervous about what was going on down at ground level.

Sam tried to remember the details. There’d been other things in the media, it was true. She seemed to recall being on board a spaceship. Giving an order into a radio. Something about fire. Something about…

…beagles?

‘I’m going to be sick,’ Sam said. ‘I’m going to be very, very, very sick.’

‘No time.’ Compassion pointed over the edge of the platform. ‘We have to leave. Now. Things are getting serious.’

Sam took a couple of steps forward, nearly falling over her feet in the process, and peered over the brink. Down at the bottom of the tower, little person-shaped splodges of colour were darting to and fro, tiny smears of black cradled in their arms. Weapons, Sam realised. The Remote were taking up arms, and rushing out through the grand archways of the transmitter building.

‘The city’s being attacked?’ Sam asked.

‘Kind of. I think this is what you call a civil war.’ Compassion turned away, and headed for the lift shaft in the middle of the platform. ‘We built those weapons for raiding missions, so we could pick up supplies from other planets. We never thought they’d be used inside Anathema.’

The lift platform bobbed up to Compassion’s level. The woman stepped on to it, then looked back at Sam, clearly impatient. Sam decided to go along with her. Not that she had much option, mind you. ‘I don’t get it. Why a civil war? What’s happening?’

‘You’re happening, that’s what. Everyone in the city’s suddenly found a cause. They’re all receiving the same basic data from the transmitters, but they’re all dealing with it their own way. Half the population’s siding with Guest, saying we’ve got to get at the Cold whatever happens. The other half’s saying it’s against their principles to follow orders like that.’

The moment Sam stepped on to the lift platform, it started to sink. She wondered how Compassion was controlling it. ‘But that doesn’t make sense. If they don’t want to follow Guest, why don’t they just ignore him? Why the fighting?’

Compassion rolled her eyes. ‘Because they’re dead set on getting killed for their beliefs. You’ve gone and given them all martyr complexes.’

Sam scowled. ‘It’s not my fault. I didn’t ask to be put into your stupid machine.’ The building shook as she said it, and she got the feeling that something had just crashed into the side of the transmitter. ‘Was that one of the fighters?’

‘Probably. Some of the pilots are trying to attack the transmitters. They’re an affront to free will, apparently. Not that anyone cared before.’

‘And what about you? What do you believe in?’

‘I believe in getting out of here,’ Compassion said. ‘Freeing the Cold, fine, but my principles aren’t telling me it’s worth dying for. The city’s falling apart. Guest’s vanished. Nobody knows what’s going on. By the end of today, either Anathema’s going to be in ruins, or the Cold’s going to be loose and it won’t really matter. So I’m leaving. And you’re coming with me.’

The lift reached the ground floor, where people in multicoloured uniforms were scurrying between the white domes, joining their comrades under the entrance arches. Sam could see whole lines of armed figures arranged around the building, pointing their weapons at the city outside, occasionally firing at passers-by. She wondered how they knew which of the passers-by were friends and which were enemies. Perhaps they didn’t. Perhaps it wasn’t important.

Compassion started to head off across the floor, but Sam grabbed her arm, and pulled her to a stop. ‘Wait a minute. Where is it we’re supposed to be going?’

‘Earth. That’s why I want you with me. If I’m going to have to live there, I want to know as much about the culture as possible.’

‘So what makes you think I’ll help you?’ Sam asked, noticing slightly too late that she was actually arguing against going back to her homeworld.

Compassion shrugged. ‘I haven’t got any better ideas,’ she admitted. ‘Come on. I know where we can find a long-range fighter. Just keep your head down once we’re outside, that’s all.’
She headed towards one of the archways, and Sam hurried after her. ‘I thought you had to use one of those window things to get to Earth,’ Sam said, as she jogged.

And it was at this precise moment that something large and entirely horrible lunged at them from the doorway of one of the domes.

Once Sam had finished taking a few giant steps backward, she realised it was humanoid. Or vaguely humanoid. But it seemed to be in several places at once, its body made larger than normal size by three ghost images of itself, which hung around its silhouette in a halo of red, blue and green. The thing was blurred, its details fuzzy, as if slightly out of tune with the world around it. Sam could make out a face – lots of faces, if you counted the ghost images – the jaw hanging open, the eyes nothing more than smudges of black.

The thing shambled forward, and raised its arm, its fingers flickering as it reached out for her.

Sam gawped.

There was the sound of hi-tech gunfire.

The thing fell to the ground, clearly not dead, its body flashing in every colour of the TV spectrum. Sam could hear it screaming, but the scream was made up of several hundred other sounds, split-second clips from the transmissions of Anathema, chopped together to make one long shriek of noise. The Remote people who’d shot at the thing began to gather around it, still brandishing their weapons, not sure whether they should give it another blast.

Sam felt Compassion tugging at her sleeve. Not taking her eyes off the creature, she let herself be pulled across the floor.

‘Too much interference in the transmitters,’ Compassion said, her voice barely audible against the background murmur. ‘Anybody tries using the windows now, that’s what’s likely to happen to them.’

‘That was a person?’ asked Sam.

‘It was a glitch.’

‘But… they shot it…’

‘Of course they shot it,’ snapped Compassion. ‘The enemy faction are sending people through the windows to get into the tower. They’re trying to sabotage it from the inside. They must know they’re likely to come through scrambled, but it’s not going to stop them, is it?’

The ‘glitch’ vanished from Sam’s view, hidden behind the people and the domes as she was manoeuvred across the floor. The next thing she knew, Compassion was steering her through a line of armed guards, and suddenly they were outside, under the dirty red sky. Sam looked up, to see the fighters swirling overhead, swimming between the tops of the other high buildings around the transmitter. They looked like they were on guard duty. Keeping enemy vessels away.

‘Keep moving,’ said Compassion. ‘We’ll go down into the foundations. We should be safe there.’

There was a labyrinth under the city, a whole new world of pylons and supporting arches. Sam wasn’t sure why the city had been built on stilts. The ground seemed smooth, totally solid. Too smooth and too solid, actually. But she did notice a few cracks in the surface, so maybe there was some kind of instability down here. Or maybe the Remote needed to get at the cracks for some reason.

Finally, they reached their destination. It was a kind of subterranean quadrangle, where a big square hole had been cut into the ceiling, letting the red light burn down from the sky overhead. Parked in the middle of the quad was one of the fighters, several pieces of silver plating stuck awkwardly to its flanks. Compassion stopped when she saw it.

‘Odd,’ she said. ‘The mechanics should have finished it by now.’

Sam looked around, but she couldn’t see any mechanics. She wondered how people ended up with professions, in a world where there wasn’t any economy.

‘They must have gone off to fight,’ she suggested.

Compassion stepped up to the fighter, and started climbing on to one of its wings. There was a cockpit, Sam saw, although the glass was so dark that you could barely make out the join with the rest of the machine. The cockpit opened when Compassion rested her hands on it, the glass sliding back across the fighter’s body, rippling in a fashion that Sam found horribly reminiscent of skin. Dead skin, being pulled away from a wound.

‘It was a Drahvidian battleskimmer,’ Compassion explained. ‘Even as a zombie, it should be enough to get us to Earth from here.’

With some apprehension, Sam stepped up the vehicle. ‘Where is “here”, exactly?’

‘Right now?’ Compassion looked up at the sky, as if that’d tell her anything. ‘Only a couple of million klicks from Earth. The ship’s nearly reached the end of the journey.’

‘Ship? What ship?’
‘Let’s get strapped in,’ said Compassion.

Minutes later, they were several kilometres above the surface of Anathema.

There was only space for two people inside the cockpit. The seats were black and leathery, as were the controls, and the substance seemed to wriggle whenever Sam shifted her weight from buttock to buttock. Meanwhile, the seat belt gave her the impression that it could strangle her at any minute, if it felt the need to.

The cockpit was positioned so you could see everything above you, but very little ahead, and almost nothing to either side. Sam guessed that the pilots did their navigating with their receivers, not with their eyes. Even so, the glass seemed much more transparent from the inside than it had from the outside. She watched the sky getting closer as they rose, a solid wall of red, striped with bands of smoke.

Suddenly, they hit that wall. There was a flash of pure scarlet, then blackness. Sam blinked.

They were out in space. The sky was a perfectly ordinary night sky, speckled with stars. If Compassion had been telling the truth, one of the larger points of light was probably Earth.

The sky over Anathema was artificial, Sam reasoned. An engineered layer of gas, the red membrane being some kind of field to keep the air in.

‘Can we see the city?’ Sam asked.

Compassion ground her eyebrows together, but didn’t take her eyes off the view. ‘We’ve just come from the city. Why do you want to look at it?’

‘I want to see it from a distance. If it’s not a problem.’

Compassion paused, then shrugged, and tugged at the control column. Sam felt her stomach do something funny, and all of a sudden the view out of the cockpit was completely different. The blackness was replaced by a stretch of grey, tinted with clouds of red and black. The fighter had turned upside down, she concluded. She was watching Anathema as the fighter moved away from it, seeing the city getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller. She didn’t seem to be falling out of her seat, so they were evidently out of Anathema’s gravity field.

From up here, Sam could get some idea of the scale of the place. The fighter was too far away for her to be able to make out any individual buildings, but she could see the patterns in the city, the ripples of architecture around the points where the transmitters had been planted. She could make out the edges of the settlement, as well; the whole of Anathema had to be about forty kilometres from side to side, the same kind of size as London. And around it… blackness. The smooth black surface of whatever it was the city had been built on. No other cities, no suburbs. The city ended, and beyond that, zilch.

So what was it the city had been built on? As the fighter got further away, Sam began to get some idea. She kept staring out of the cockpit, watching the settlement shrink, until it was just a tiny spot of grey against the blackness.

And the blackness was a rectangle. Sam didn’t know what to make of that. An enormous oblong, with Anathema at its dead centre. If the city was forty klicks from side to side, then the rectangle had to be… oh, say, six or seven thousand kilometres long, and about a thousand wide. The rectangle was just hanging there in space. No planets or satellites around it. Just hanging there.

‘It’s the ship,’ Compassion said, helpfully

‘You said that before,’ Sam muttered. ‘It still doesn’t tell me anything. Anathema’s part of a ship, is that it?’

Compassion snorted. ‘No. It’s built on the side of a ship. The ship was around for billions of years before the Faction got to it. It’s supposed to have a force field covering the whole surface, but the Faction found a couple of flaws in the structure. Age, I suppose. They sniffed out a gap in the force field, set up Anathema on the hull there. They had to put an atmosphere bubble around it, obviously.’

‘Obviously,’ agreed Sam. ‘I still don’t get it. Why build the city on the side of a ship?’

Compassion sighed. ‘Wait a minute. I’ll show you.’

She did something else to the controls. The fighter stopped moving away from the ship – stopped moving ‘up’, away from the city – and started to move forward. Sam kept her eyes on the rectangle, and saw it begin to change shape, to widen, to...

Oh God.

It wasn’t a rectangle. The thing had been so black, she hadn’t been able to get a grip on the perspective, but now she could see it. It was a disc. The rectangle was the side of a disc, and, as the fighter changed position, the upper side of the shape slowly became visible. A disc, six or seven thousand kilometres across, with a surface area of… well, why bother with the maths? With a surface area of millions and millions and millions of square kilometres. And it was just a few million kilometres from Earth, right inside the solar system. Bloody hell. There had to be planets in the system smaller than this thing. A great black coin that seemed to have gone completely unnoticed by every astronomer on Sam’s homeworld.
By the light of the stars, she tried to make out the details of the disc. She saw stars shining through its mass, and for a moment she thought it was hollow, maybe a hoop, maybe like one of those ‘space wheels’ the Americans were talking about setting up, a big spoked bicycle wheel in the sky. But no, it was more complex than that. The disc was engraved with a pattern, a glyph that must have been etched with tools the size of Australia. Several vast sections of the disc’s body had been cut away to complete the pattern, letting the starlight shine through from the other side.

The pattern was a lot like the symbol Sam’s maths teacher had told her meant ‘infinity’. A figure eight, inside a circle. There was a smaller figure eight inside the larger one, though, and there were other embellishments around the edge of the disc, most of them barely visible with the naked eye. If the fighter got any closer to the thing, thought Sam, would she be able to see even smaller details? Whole continents of symbols, stretching across the face of the ship? How many generations had been spent designing the disc, carving out the markings?

But the basic shape was unmistakable. It was a shape Sam had seen all over the TARDIS, moulded into the reliefs in the Doctor’s precious cloister room, laid out in mosaic across the floors in the deep corridors. A symbol for which even the Doctor, even a renegade like him, had the deepest reverence. Almost as if he’d been afraid of what might happen if he showed any disrespect to it. A symbol that, according to the Doctor, had been the mark of his people for millions of years.

‘The Seal of Rassilon,’ Sam whispered.

Compassion nodded, quite casually. ‘It’s a Time Lord warship,’ she said.

‘A… no. No, it can’t be.’ Sam looked at Compassion, simply because she thought she’d be sick if she stared at the disc for much longer. ‘I’ve seen Time Lord warships. In that… that costume drama of yours. Rassilon used them to fight the things from the holes.’

‘The bowships? Oh, that was years ago. This is a modern Time Lord warship. Made for the big war.’

The big war. Everything suddenly clicked.

‘We think they made the prototypes years ago,’ Compassion went on. ‘When they were fighting the things from the outer planes, like you said. Only that war finished before Rassilon could use them. That’s why the Seal’s the shape it is. The pattern has a kind of… I don’t know. A kind of negative effect on some of the species from outside this universe. Something to do with the way their neurosystems work. Just looking at the detail would’ve been enough to make them go into spasm. Must have taken the Time Lords years, designing something like that.’

‘Like a crucifix,’ Sam said, trying to concentrate on several things at once.

‘If you say so. I think they call it an omniscate. Guest knows more about it than I do.’

The war. The big war. That was what Compassion had said. Four years ago – on the same occasion that Sam had first met Faction Paradox, as it happened, although she doubted it was a coincidence – the Doctor had accidentally stumbled into the future of his own species, something that was supposed to be against all the Laws of Time. At some point in the future, he’d learned, the Time Lords would be at war with an enemy too big and nasty to even contemplate. The Doctor had said he didn’t want to know the nature of the enemy, that he had no right to learn too much about the Time Lords’ destiny. That was what he’d said, anyway, although Sam doubted he’d have been able to resist a sneaky peek or two.

Now she’d stumbled right back into that future. She was looking at one of the weapons of the war-to-come. And it was right here, in –

Hold on.

‘Why’s it here?’ asked Sam. ‘Why in Earth’s solar system?’

Compassion looked thoroughly fed up with having to explain things. ‘So it can destroy Earth. Why else?’

Eek.

Ah.

‘Sorry?’ said Sam.

‘Listen. Earth’s a major historical nexus, all right? And the twentieth century’s the turning point, when the planet starts to turn itself into a serious galactic power. If Earth’s destroyed, the whole casual nexus of the universe – or whatever it’s supposed to be called – falls to pieces.’

Sam found herself nodding like a mad thing. ‘So why would the Time Lords want to send a warship there?’

‘So they can tell the enemy about it, obviously. If Earth goes, the Time Lords would probably get wiped out in the big crunch. But so would the enemy.’

‘Oh God,’ said Sam. ‘Mutually Assured Destruction, they call that. It’s like nuclear weapons. You don’t use them, you just threaten to blow everything up with them.’

‘That’s the idea,’ said Compassion. ‘Besides, the enemy came from Earth to begin with, so there’s probably a kind of grudge thing going on as well. That’s what the Faction said.’

‘I don’t think I wanted to know that,’ said Sam.
‘Whatever. The warship’s on automatic, there’s no crew. It’s just a great big weapons system. It’s all in the Faction’s history. The Time Lords knew they couldn’t put the ship straight into Earth orbit, not without the enemy noticing the glitch and putting a block on it. So they let it get to the planet on auto. They sent it out from one of their bases about three billion years ago, and let it drift towards Earth at sublight speed. It’s almost there now. After three billion years of travelling.’

‘And when it gets there?’

Compassion shrugged. She did that a lot, Sam had noticed. Almost as much as she said ‘obviously’. ‘They’ll sit back and wait. To see if they’re going to have to activate it. I mean, that’s if there are any Time Lords left by then. Most of them are supposed to be getting out of this universe. Something about a universe in a bottle. Don’t know the details.’

‘Wait. Wait. There’s a bomb the size of a planet heading straight for Earth, but you want me to help you live there? You can’t be serious about this.’

‘It’s as safe as living in Anathema. Might as well live on the target as on the side of the bomb. Besides, the chances are it’ll never be used. I’ll take the risk, thanks.’

Sam was going to ask Compassion if it didn’t bother her that her ancestors’ homeworld might be wiped out in the flick of an eyelid. But she decided not to waste her breath. The Remote had learned everything they knew from Faction Paradox, and Faction Paradox probably would have approved of that kind of thing. The cult must have put Anathema on the hull of the ship because it knew nobody would ever look there, because it knew the Time Lords couldn’t interfere with the vessel without drawing attention to themselves.

‘This is horrible,’ Sam whimpered.

‘Obviously,’ said Compassion.

‘Three billion years, that’s been coming? No, wait a minute. Is that three billion Earth years, or…?’

‘Time Lord years,’ said Compassion. ‘Same as Earth years, though. The Time Lord planet’s got the same kind of cycle as Earth. Don’t know if that means anything.’

Then something seemed to distract Compassion, and her hands tightened on the controls. Some kind of signal, thought Sam, something ordinary human senses couldn’t pick up —

And then Sam heard it as well. Faint, at first, but getting louder. Something that could only accurately be described as a wheezing, groaning sound.

‘Tachyon signals,’ Compassion murmured. ‘And there’s something else. There’s… noise…’

‘The TARDIS,’ said Sam. She looked around, wondering how the police box could land in a space this small. A moment later, it dawned on her. The vision of the warship was fading away, solid walls slowly creeping into existence on the other side of the cockpit.

‘It’s materialising around us,’ Compassion said. She sounded more than a little anxious about that.

Sam relaxed, for the first time in hours. The seat squirmed under the weight of her collapsing muscles, but she ignored it. The silhouette of a tall humanoid figure appeared outside the fighter, watching the craft and the TARDIS embrace each other.

‘He’s back,’ said Sam. ‘And it’s about time.’

A few moments later, however, she had to face the fact that the man wasn’t the Doctor. It was Guest.
[The programme opens with footage of an office building, evidently taken with a small portable camera. We see a car pull up in front of the building, and its single occupant climb out of the driver’s seat. This footage is obviously fly-on-the-wall, taken without the subject’s knowledge.]

[The man drags an enormous suitcase out of the passenger seat before he closes and locks the car door. The suitcase is of the ultra-high-security variety, the kind you need two keys and a passcode to open.]

REPORTER [voice-over]: This man works in a perfectly ordinary office building in London’s Barnes Road. He’s a thirty-eight-year-old businessman, with a wife, one child, and a home in the suburbs of Twickenham.

[The man crosses the pavement and heads towards the office, not once looking in the direction of the camera.]

REPORTER [voice]: He also happens to be an international arms dealer.

[As the man vanishes through the office doors, the view changes. We’re looking at the same building, but now the camera focuses on the first floor up. We can’t see through the window; it looks like it’s tinted, maybe some kind of one-way glass.]

REPORTER [voice]: In this building, tucked away between a pizza restaurant and an office-supplies shop, he and his colleagues buy and sell technical equipment the British government doesn’t even like to admit exists. Over the next three weeks, we’ll be revealing evidence which proves, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the people in this office have been involved in sales of military hardware to countries such as China and Iran, sales which are not only illegal under British law, but also in breach of every European code of human rights.

[The camera zooms in on the window.]

REPORTER [voice]: But what’s disturbing isn’t the fact that the dealers are operating from a location as innocuous as this one. Nor is it the fact that our subject, and others close to him, are also responsible for selling instruments of torture to countries as diverse as Algeria and Colombia, countries well known for their appalling civil-rights records. What’s disturbing is that this office is just one part of an entire underground subculture of illegal and morally suspect technology, at work right in the heart of suburban Britain.

[Scene change. We see the reporter, standing in front of the House of Commons, facing the camera.]

REPORTER: This is a story of corruption, deceit and hypocrisy. It’s not exactly the story of a conspiracy, but it involves the complicity of the British government, not to mention the involvement of several paramilitary organisations under the control of the United Nations. And at the centre of it all is a clique of people so secretive, it can only be described as a cult.

[Scene change. We see the silhouette of a man’s head against a dark background.]

REPORTER [voice]: His name is Peter Anthony Morgan. And, to discover the truth about the strange and disturbing world he inhabits, we had to go undercover.

[Scene change. We see the silhouette of a man’s head against a dark background.]

REPORTER [voice]: This man used to work in Britain’s ‘internal-security’ industry, and is familiar with the methods employed by operators like Peter Morgan. For his own protection, his words are spoken by an actor.

WITNESS: Well… I don’t know what you want me to say. They can do you anything, if you can pay for it. I mean, they sell arms, but it’s not really their line. It’s more a defence thing. We do… I mean, we did nerve gas. Fragmentation grenades. But that wasn’t, you know, it wasn’t what we liked to specialise in. It was more the police kind of angle we were into. Electric riot shields, cattle prods, that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER [off]: Was any of this material illegal?

WITNESS: Oh, the police gave us the nod. You know. Nobody asks questions, do they?

[Scene change. We’re watching footage that seems to have been taken by a hidden camera, so the picture’s blurred and shaky. We’re walking around the COPEX exhibition, the camera squeezing between businessmen from several continents. We see people inspecting oversized handcuffs, and testing the weight of (unloaded) machine guns.]

REPORTER [voice]: ‘Nobody asks questions’. During our investigations, we discovered the frightening truth of this claim. For example, nobody asks about the ethics of allowing the world’s largest ‘internal-security’ fair to be
annually held in Esher, no more than fifteen miles from London. Nobody asks why representatives from some of the 
most brutal regimes on Earth are allowed to visit this fair, at the expense of the British taxpayer, and rub shoulders 
with people chillingly close to the heart of this country’s government. Nobody asks what kind of merchandise is sold 
here, or to whom.

[We see the REPORTER again. She’s still standing in front of the House of Commons.]
REPORTER: The government – or those close to the government – know exactly the kind of material Peter 
Morgan and his friends deal in, and how little control there is over the trade. But they don’t expect anybody to ask 
questions.

[Beat.]
REPORTER: We did ask questions. And what we’ve learned goes beyond party politics. In fact, it goes right to 
the heart of the British establishment, an establishment which is, bizarre as it may seem, riddled with cults: cults 
with their own codes of ethics, their own initiations, and their own items of worship. What’s alarming is not that 
these groups exist, but that they’ve existed for so long without being noticed, simply because they disguise their 
activities in the jargon and bureaucracy of ‘free trade’.

[Close-up of the REPORTER.]
REPORTER: To coin a phrase used by an ex-President of the United States, this is voodoo economics.
[Cut to Seeing Eye opening titles.
[We then return to the freeze-frame of Peter Morgan.]
REPORTER [voice]: The claim that people like Peter Morgan will supply anything to anybody seemed to be 
backed up when I contacted him posing as an agent for a company called IPS. Later on, we’ll hear about IPS’s role 
in procuring electric-shock weaponry for a multitude of foreign governments. But, having already introduced myself 
to Morgan, the following telephone conversation should shed some light on his attitude towards ‘free trade’.

[Cue a recording of the conversation, played over the freeze-frame of Morgan.]
MORGAN: Oh, hi. Yeah. Listen, ah, sorry you had to leave like that last time –
REPORTER: Um, doesn’t matter. I just wanted to ask you about those, those riot shields you showed me.
MORGAN: Oh yeah. The shields. Thought you looked, you know, kind of interested…
REPORTER: Yes. Yes, I was. I wanted to know Was it true, what you told me? About them being tested by the 
British police?

[A subtitle appears on-screen: THE HOME OFFICE DENIES THAT ANY BRITISH POLICE FORCE USES, 
OR EVEN OWNS, ANY FORM OE ELECTRIC-SHOCK WEAPONRY.]
MORGAN: The Met, yeah. But they’re… they’re the big thing right now. They’re a popular design. We shift 
’em all over the world.
REPORTER: Like…?
MORGAN: I think the last… you know, the last really big shipment we did was to Colombia. They wanted the 
voltage turned up, but…
REPORTER: Colombia? The Colombian police?
[Subtitle: COLOMBIA HAS BEEN AN AREA OF CONCERN FOR INTERNATIONAL CIVIL-RIGHTS 
CAMPAIGNERS FOR SOME TIME. ITS DEATH-SQUADS’ ARE KNOWN TO BE SPONSORED BY THE 
COUNTRY’S GOVERNMENT]
MORGAN: Yeah. Yeah, I think so.
REPORTER: And the voltage on those shields would be… what?
MORGAN [sharp intake of breath]: You could take it up to a hundred and fifty thousand if you wanted. That’s, 
you know, they’re not likely to get up after that. [Laughs.] If you’re interested, though… we could send you the 
literature. It’s a good product, good and solid. They’ve been testing them in Ireland for years. All kind of on the 
quiet.
REPORTER: The government’s trying to keep this quiet, you mean?
MORGAN: Yeah. You know. Political bad news, but the police love this kind of stuff, and… the RUC can get 
away with murder, pretty much, but on the mainland, you’ve got to be careful. A lot of the hardware’s been tested 
by the UN. UN troops.
REPORTER: UN…?
MORGAN: Well, there’s a couple of UN paramilitary bases in Britain, so you know what the bureaucracy’s 
like. Nobody’s sure who’s supposed to be running what, whether it’s British or international or whatever. You can 
slip some of the, erm, some of the dodgier stuff in the cracks. You know. Nobody asks questions.

[Scene change. We see an old government building, presumably in England, surrounded by a wire fence. There 
are no signs of life inside.]
REPORTER [voice]: ‘Nobody asks questions’. Again, this is the key to all these suspect operations.

We see the reporter strolling around the perimeter of the fence, alongside a middle-aged woman in a fashionable business suit.

REPORTER [voice]: Today, this building on the outskirts of London belongs to the British civil service, nothing more than a storage facility for government paperwork. But in the 1970s, it was the headquarters of a paramilitary task force, under the jurisdiction of the United Nations. Carol Bell was a member of the organisation at the time. She left the military for a business career in 1979.

BELL: There were weapons tests here, definitely. I don’t think anybody thought about it much at the time.

REPORTER: Was this supposed to be a weapons research centre?

BELL: God, no. The setup was purely… defensive. That was the idea, anyway. But the government had… I don’t know how to put it. The government had got hold of some new technology, and they wanted to test out the military applications. I can’t really talk about the details, it’s still under Official Secrets. But yes, a lot of the tests were done here. I think the Ministry hoped nobody was going to notice, seeing as the base was supposed to be under the UN’s control.

REPORTER: What kind of weapons were they?

BELL: I can’t really say. I mean, it’s enough to know that…, they’d probably be illegal under one of the conventions these days. We weren’t sure about some of them back then.

REPORTER: But new technology?

BELL: Yes. Yes. It’s hard to describe the way these people… look, I’ll try to explain. In the mid-eighties, I did some work for a weapons development company. Private, but under contract from the government. And these people, these weapons design experts, were sitting around the office all day watching SF movies on video, getting ideas from the hardware in Star Wars and Robocop and what have you. I mean, it wasn’t anything to do with the equipment the government needed, it was just… fetishism, I suppose you’d call it. That’s what it was like in the seventies, as well. The people who dealt with the technology were like a little boys’ club, their whole lives revolved around these pieces of plastic they were being given by the MoD. It’s the same now, with UNISYC coming in.

REPORTER [voice]: UNISYC is a new UN security group, founded two years ago. The purpose of the group is to research ‘cutting-edge’ technology, supposedly for ‘defence purposes’. Access to UNISYC’s Security Yard installation in Geneva is denied to nonmilitary personnel, but time and again UNISYC was mentioned by people we came in contact with during our investigations.

[Rostrum camera shot of a letter, on notepaper headed UNITED NATIONS INTELLIGENCE. The letter comes from one Corporal Belize of UNISYC, and reads:]

Due to UN security regulations, we are unable to grant your request for an interview with UNISYC personnel. However, with regard to your queries, we can deny any connection with COPEX, and with the international trade in equipment that can be used in breach of internationally accepted codes of civil conduct. UNISYC is a UN operation, and therefore wholeheartedly endorses all UN resolutions regarding civil rights and civil-rights abuses.

REPORTER: UNISYC claims it has no links with the security subculture. Yet Corporal John Belize, UNISYC’s public-relations liaison, is known to have attended COPEX in both 1995 and 1996. Furthermore, in a private conversation, Peter Morgan claimed to have ‘connections’ in UNISYC, as well as the British constabulary and the RUC.

[More footage of the office on Barnes Road. This time, we see Peter Morgan being led from the building by two policemen, towards a police car parked on the pavement.]

REPORTER [voice]: At the end of last August, the information uncovered by the Seeing Eye team was made public in the national press. As a result, on the second of September 1996 Peter Morgan was arrested by officers from the Metropolitan Police. Although questioned, he was never charged. His company claims that Morgan has been ‘suspended’, pending an investigation into his behaviour. The implication seems to be that the company denies any connection with illegal weaponry or torture equipment, claiming instead that Morgan was a ‘rogue operator’.

[Morgan is bundled into the car, looking slightly shell-shocked. The camera zooms in on the door of the office, where a third policeman is leaving the building, two large suitcases under his arms.]

REPORTER [voice]: But, if this is true, then why has Morgan never been prosecuted? We know for a fact, from footage we’ll see later in the programme, that electric-shock batons were kept by Morgan in his office, batons that can’t legally be held in this country without special dispensation from the Home Office. Dispensation which, needless to say, Morgan has never had. Again, the authorities seem to be banking on nobody asking any awkward questions.

[Back to the witness in silhouette.]

WITNESS: Oh, the police are in on it. I mean, they’ve been after proper riot shields for years, haven’t they? There’s always a lot of police at COPEX. That’s what Peter bloo– That’s what Morgan says, anyway. Said. UN
intelligence people as well.

INTERVIEWER [off]: Why should the UN be interested in the kind of equipment on sale at COPEX?

WITNESS: I dunno. Because they don’t want to be behind everyone else, I suppose. Look, once you get into this stuff… it’s like an end to itself, isn’t it? The hardware’s all that matters. You don’t worry about how people are using it.

INTERVIEWER: Amnesty International says some of that ‘hardware’ is being used for torture in foreign police cells. And that a lot of it’s made by British companies.

WITNESS: They’re always saying something, aren’t they? Civil-rights people. I mean, maybe they’re right. It’s not the point.

INTERVIEWER: What is the point?

WITNESS: Sorry, what?

[There’s a long pause.]

INTERVIEWER: Tell us about Cold.

WITNESS: I don’t want to have to think about that.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us what it was?

WITNESS: It was some kind of chemical agent, though.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose. It made people vanish, if that’s any help. State-of-the-art material, Guest’s people said.

WITNESS: I don’t know. Nobody did, did they? Some stuff Guest’s people were trying to sell. It was like… like it was everything to them. Like they worshipped it or something.

INTERVIEWER: Did Peter Morgan have anything to do with the Cold?

WITNESS: God, he would have loved it, wouldn’t he? He would have gone down on his bloody knees to get that stuff in the office.

REPORTER [voice]: The exact nature of the product called Cold isn’t known. Sources we’ve talked to have suggested that it may be a new type of nerve agent; such substances are common in the security underground, despite many of them being banned under international law. Certainly, our witness showed signs of exposure to a nerve agent of some kind. During the interview, he seemed nervous, and unusually erratic. He told us disturbing stories of his encounters with Guest, many of which can only have been hallucinations. We asked the United
Nations – not UNISYC, this time – to comment on this equipment, and on the suggestion that some of it may already be in the possession of the Saudi Arabian authorities.

Rostrum camera shot of a letter, on notepaper headed UNITED NATIONS. The letter reads:

In response to your query, it is true that much of the material you describe may be in breach of UN civil-rights resolutions. You have our assurances that this matter will be thoroughly investigated, and any violations dealt with in the appropriate manner.

REPORTER [voice]: The UN claims that it’ll look into these allegations. And perhaps they will. After all, it’s only cliques like UNISYC that seem to be involved with the technology underground. But how effective can any investigation possibly be, if parts of the UN organisation are themselves involved in the supply and research of illegal, or at the very least morally suspect, hardware?

Freeze-frame shot of Morgan, being led out of the office by the police. Over this, we hear more of the reporter’s telephone interview with him.

REPORTER: I was wondering about the kind of, um, official sanction that’s involved here. These connections of yours…

MORGAN: The police?

REPORTER: I was thinking more of… the DTI.

MORGAN: Oh, well, you know… it’s not… ‘connections’ isn’t the word. The DTI people are pretty close to COPEX. You’ve probably met some of them. You can’t help running into people like that.

REPORTER: It’s just that, if, um, if I want to supply any of my clients with those riot shields of yours –

MORGAN: These’d be your clients out in the Gulf, yeah?

REPORTER: Possibly.

MORGAN: Right. Right. I get the picture.

REPORTER: I want to know if there’s any chance of… of any problems. With the government.

MORGAN: No, no. Nothing like that. The government’s interested in free trade, that’s all. As long as you can brush the mess under the carpet…

REPORTER: Does the Cabinet actually know about this kind of thing?

MORGAN: Yeah. Yeah, I’d say so. But it’s not them we have to think about, you know? Because, obviously, whoever’s in Number 10, it’s the same people who are really running the show. There are… well, maybe I shouldn’t say this, with you being a woman and all, but there are groups. You know what I mean by that?

REPORTER: You mean, like the Masons? That kind of thing?

MORGAN: No, I… well, no, it’s not that formal. But the kind of people we’re dealing with, the cream of the cream, if you like. They’ve got their own little clubs and things. There’s this one group, meets on Baker Street… they’ve got shock batons there, you know? Strictly off the record. They use them on each other.

REPORTER [shocked pause]: They…?

MORGAN: On each other. Not at full voltage. It’s kind of like an initiation. They get a new member, they give him a little burst, just enough to… you know. Tickle. Then they turn the voltage up, bit at a time.

REPORTER: I don’t… I mean, that’s just…

MORGAN: It’s sick. It’s pretty sick, yeah. But that’s… what can I say? That’s the kind of world we’re getting into here. It’s all on the quiet, all very cliquey. We have to stick together, everyone knows everyone else. The DTI, UNISYC, everyone. You get into that mentality, and –

REPORTER: You start to go mad.

MORGAN [laughs]: Well, no. That’s not what I’m saying. It’s just the way things are. You get these groups…

[More footage from COPEX. We see businessmen congregating at the bar, talking among themselves and swapping brochures. It all looks quite chummy.]

REPORTER [voice]: Wherever people get together, the same old patterns repeat themselves. At COPEX, we were reminded of voodoo cults, or of medieval black-magic cabals. Though most of the torture trade is entirely legal – it’s against the law to manufacture unlicensed electric-shock weapons in Britain, for example, but that doesn’t stop them being exported by British companies from locations like Mexico City – these people aren’t unlike drug dealers, or pornographers. They have their own languages, their own codes of practice, and they resent any attempt by outsiders to regulate them.

[Beat.]

REPORTER [voice]: In this case, however, the members of the ‘cult’ just happen to be among the most powerful people in our society. And they’re answerable to nobody. When we requested an interview from the DTI, they didn’t even deign to send us a refusal. The subculture operates under a veneer of respectability. These days, even the Church of England invests in companies like GEC, known for supplying ‘defensive’ weapons to genocidal regimes like that of Indonesia.
Scene change. We’re looking at a face we haven’t seen before, a woman sitting in front of the camera in the BBC studio. She’s glamorous, athletic-looking, and apparently in her early thirties, with honey-blonde hair and a large amount of green eye-shadow. She’s also wearing a silver catsuit.

REPORTER: We spoke to the part-time special scientific adviser to Unit Nations Intelligence in the UK. Though she was prepared to appear on camera, we can’t reveal her name for security reasons.

SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC ADVISER: How do I look, by the way? I did try to dress down, so –.

INTERVIEWER: You look fine. Really. What were you saying before, about…?

SSA: About what?

INTERVIEWER: Questions.

SSA: Oh, that. Well, there’s a lot of questions you’ve got to ask yourselves. Forget the civil rights thing for a minute, you’ve got to ask where the technology’s coming from. And where it’s going.

INTERVIEWER: Can you explain what you mean by…

SSA: Technology’s meant to be there for the good of all… [grimaces] …humanity. But it’s not being used by anyone who’s answerable to the rest of the human race. It’s not even being used by your governments, officially. It’s being put together by cults. In… what’s that place called? Japan, that’s the one. A bunch of fanatics dropped a nerve agent into the subway there. Killed a lot of people like that. And now the UN’s getting reports that the same cult’s building Tesla machines in Australia. We’re talking about machines that can cause earthquakes –

INTERVIEWER: But what about the internal security market?

[The SSA lights up a cigarette. Slowly.]

SSA: Nobody on your… nobody on this planet’s trying to find out who’s building what. Or why. Think about all the money these people must have put into the research. I could’ve cured half a dozen minor diseases by now, if you’d given me funds like that and a decent lab to work in. The point is, all this new technology’s in the hands of some self-interested maniacs whose names you’re not even allowed to know. The security market’s one of the ways they communicate, that’s all. And you know what the scary part is? The scary part for you, I mean. The scary part is how close these people are to the ones who’re supposed to be running things. It’s almost like you’re living in the dark ages. You know what I mean. The priests get to know all the big secrets, but the rest of you have to manage by yourselves.

INTERVIEWER: You think there might be defence risks involved?

SSA: Isn’t that obvious? The ‘security’ market’s supposed to be there to protect people, but it doesn’t, and everyone knows it doesn’t. It’s a law to itself. Just think about UNISYC, hiding away in that Security Yard of theirs. They won’t even tell me what’s going on. Nobody outside the voodoo cult’s allowed to know anything. If I were you, I’d be worried. One day, cults like that are going to have the hardware to take over the world. Or blow most of it up.

INTERVIEWER: You really mean that?

SSA: Think about it this way. Technology’s your future. You don’t need me to tell you that. The ISC’s already started work on that stupid ‘space wheel’ project, and there are a couple of people in Geneva who keep asking me how easy it’d be to put a base on the moon. So who’s going to control that kind of technology? Who’s going to control that kind of future?

[She sucks on the cigarette.]

SSA: Will that do?

[Cut back to the reporter.]

REPORTER: Nobody asks questions. Nobody has a right to ask questions. According the UN, a forthcoming report is due to reveal exactly what Guest may have supplied to the Saudi authorities, but it’s difficult to say whether we should be optimistic about that. The Saudis are hardly likely to be cooperative, and the upper echelons of their society already have access to high-level technology which, for all we know, may be too powerful for any government to own. It’d be nice to think that this programme may be the start of something big, of a movement to discover the full extent of the techno-cults’ influence. But it doesn’t seem likely. The cults will continue to wield power, to get away with murder – perhaps literally – until a lot more people ask a lot more questions.

[Beat.]

REPORTER: Nobody we’ve spoken to has felt any need to answer for their actions. Perhaps it’s time we made them answer…
Fitz stood on the highest level of the tower, gawping down at the floor several hundred feet below. The media was throbbing away above his head, and the ant-people were mumbling to themselves as they wandered in and out of the dome buildings. Fitz doubted either the people or the media had noticed him, but he imagined that they were both saying don’t jump, on the grounds that it made him feel better about himself.

He couldn’t really do this.

Could he?

Theoretically, it made sense. These last few months, it had seemed like the only thing to do, like the final, inevitable part of the plan. It hadn’t even been an issue. Now, with the vertigo chewing up his stomach lining and the ground bobbing up and down in front of his eyes, things were starting to catch up with him. This was death, for God’s sake. Not your first time doing something exciting and dangerous, not the day of your driving test, or the day you lost your virginity, or the day you took the exam that you were a hundred per cent sure settled your destiny once and for all. Two minutes more, two minutes of sweating and gulping and heavy breathing, then zip. Nothing else.

Fitz couldn’t even imagine that. He felt like he was waiting for the cop-out, for death to say ‘only joking, here’s the afterlife’ at the last minute.

He had to die. Nothing else made sense. He’d die, then Guest and Tobin and all the others would remember him, and in a couple of days he’d be hanging around the city again. Except that it wouldn’t really be him, of course. It’d be someone like him, someone close enough to the original to make the sacrifice not matter. One day, the new version would die, and be replaced by Fitz part three. And Fitz part three would die, and so would part four, and part five, and… and eventually, Anathema would get to Earth, and whatever version of Fitz was left could find the Doctor again. It was the only possible way out.

He didn’t have to die now, though, did he? He could live out the rest of his life in Anathema, surely. Hang around the place, get lost in the transmissions –

No.

He’d already thought this through. It had to be now. He was changing already, becoming more like the other colonists, getting caught up in the culture. If he died in ten years’ time, or twenty, or thirty, then his ‘friends’ in the Remote would remember somebody else, not him. People’s memories of him were already going to be flawed, memories of someone he didn’t quite recognise. If he died of old age, then it wouldn’t be Fitz who’d be regrown in the tanks. It’d be… who? ‘Code-boy’? If he died now, every version that came after him would still have some Fitzness built into it, a little nugget of his true self buried somewhere in the biodata. Simple as that.

Besides, there was another factor involved now. When Mother Mathara had left Anathema, she’d made a speech that had surprised everyone. She’d told them she’d come back, just the once, in two years’ time. There’d be one final visit from Faction Paradox before the family left the Remote alone for good. To see how everybody was getting on, so to speak.

Fitz had known, as soon as she’d said it, what the Faction had been planning. They’d opened the door to him, and probably to a lot of the other refugees from Ordifica. They’d never actually said it out loud, but the cultists had given him a straight choice. Either he could stay with the Remote, and die a hundred times over in Anathema. Or he could join Faction Paradox full-time. Become a Little Brother in the family. Enter the house of the Grandfather.

Mother Mathara was coming back to see if any of the Faction’s potential children had changed their minds. To collect Fitz, and any other ‘chosen ones’ here who felt like leaving Anathema and sodding off to the Eleven-Day Empire. If she’d been telling the truth, then Mathara’s return trip was due within months. Maybe even weeks.

If Fitz didn’t die now, he’d end up running to the Mother when she came. He knew it’d happen that way. He had to get away from Anathema, to get away from the transmitter before he lost his identity for ever and became something more than human. If the Faction offered him a way out, then he wouldn’t be able to resist it. However grim that way out might be.

He couldn’t let the Faction give him that choice. He had to end this now. While part of him was still Fitz Kreiner.

He was still looking down, but the ground didn’t feel like a problem any more. The drop was just something that happened to be there. Fitz shuffled forward, and let the toes of his boots hang over the edge of the platform.

This was it. The one sure-fire way for him to stay alive was by dying now. And of course there was no hope of rescue. When the Doctor met that future version of Fitz in the twentieth century, he wouldn’t be able to come back here in the TARDIS to stop him jumping. Because that’d be a paradox, wouldn’t it? If Fitz didn’t jump, the Doctor...
could never have known he was going to jump, and so on and so on.

_I will, In a very real sense, be history._

So. Out of options, and out of time. The Remote had short-range scout craft, and even long-range teleporters that linked the city to certain prearranged supply points around the universe, but there was nothing he could use to get away from Anathema for good. The city would always draw him back, unless the Doctor could help him find a way out of the loop. He was part of the colony now. Part of the media.

Fitz stood on the highest level of the tower, gawping down at the floor several hundred feet below. The media was still throbbing away above his head, and the ant-people were still mumbling to themselves as they wandered in and out of the dome buildings.

He couldn’t really do this.
Could he?
Could he?
Indestructible, Ms Jones? You Don’t Know the Meaning of the Word (finally, the Cold)

The TARDIS’s cloister room had materialised around the fighter. Like all the rooms that contrived to be close to the TARDIS doors, the cloister room was a great big Gothic chasm of a place, the walls lined with crumbling stonework, the ceiling alive with mathematically modelled bats. Guest stood on the mosaic floor by the side of the fighter, gun in hand, covering Sam as she climbed out on to the wing. The craft was neatly perched on the dais at the centre of the room, with its belly covering up the Eye of Harmony.

‘Is someone going to explain this to me?’ Compassion said, sniffily.

Guest kept the gun trained on Sam. ‘This is the Doctor’s TARDIS. Kode brought it to Anathema.’

Sam jumped down on to the floor. Guest still didn’t take his eyes off her. ‘So… we’re really going to do it?’

‘Yes. Finding you wasn’t difficult. The TARDIS is a very advanced machine.’

‘The girl,’ Guest pointed out. ‘The Doctor will be more cooperative if he knows she’s safe.’

‘Oh,’ said Compassion.

‘It’s time,’ Guest concluded. ‘I have to enter the coordinates into the navigational system.’

‘Good luck,’ Compassion told him, weakly.

‘Thank you,’ said Guest. And with that he left the cloister room, his footsteps echoing away along one of the big stone passageways.

Sam waited until he was well out of earshot. Then she turned to Compassion.

‘You’re not really going to use that, are you?’ she said.

Compassion kept staring down at the gun in her hands, clearly not following any of this. ‘You made the Doctor pick up our ship?’

‘Yes. Finding you wasn’t difficult. The TARDIS is a very advanced machine.’

‘I didn’t know I was that important to you.’

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‘You’re not really going to use that, are you?’ she said.

Compassion kept staring down at the gun. ‘Don’t ask me. I suppose I’ll have to. You heard what Guest said. We’ve nearly completed the mission objective. We can’t let anyone stop us now.’

‘But you don’t care about the mission objective, remember?’

‘I said I wouldn’t die for it,’ Compassion told her. ‘Still seems like a good idea, though.’

‘Why?’

There was a long pause from Compassion.

‘Because it makes things more interesting?’ she tried.

Sam was just composing a witty riposte to that when there was a chattering, skittering noise from one of the far corners of the room. Compassion turned, training the gun on the ceiling. Just the bats, thought Sam, getting worked up about something.

Getting worked up about what, though?

She squinted into the corner. There was a shape, lurking in the darkness at the edge of the cloister room, only half visible in the artificial light from the artificial torches. It was a man, clearly doing his best not to be noticed. He was standing, but his posture was slumped and tired-looking.

The man must have realised he’d been spotted, because he started to stagger forward, into the sharper light in the middle of the room. He was, quite clearly, a businessman, with a beer gut that looked like it had evolved to fit the folds of his suit.

‘Look at it,’ he said, in a kind of gargling whisper. ‘Just bloody look at it.’

‘Don’t move,’ said Compassion, prodding the air in front of her with the barrel of the gun.

‘High-level surveillance and security technology,’ the man croaked. He sounded like one of the Remote now, pulling the words out of the air at random. ‘The very latest in state-of-the-art hardware. Bigger on the inside. Bigger on the inside.’

‘Oh dear,’ said Sam.

‘We have to take this back with us,’ he said. ‘Think. Think of the profits. Microsoft? Damn ’em. Damn IBM. Damn… all those bloody kids with their bloody computers. Look at it.’

Compassion sighed. Then she lowered her gun, and slipped it into one of the pockets of her combat jacket.
‘This is pointless,’ she said to Sam. ‘I’m not going to shoot you, and he’s a grade-one basket case.’
‘We have to take something back,’ the man gurgled. ‘We have to take something out of the dark. I’m right, aren’t I? Think. Just think.’
‘Good choice,’ Sam told Compassion. ‘Shall we go and see how Guest’s getting along?’
‘Why not?’ said Compassion. ‘That’s what I’d do, if I had free will.’

When Guest got back to the console room, nobody was there to meet him. The doors were open, and one look at the scanner told him that the Doctor, Kode and the Ogron were standing outside, the Doctor inspecting the transmitter tower around him with a puzzled look on his face.

Guest had ordered the Doctor to materialise the TARDIS on the top floor of the tower, right underneath the media. He wasn’t sure why. Some impulse, some buried memory that had almost got itself lost over the generations, had told Guest that if he wanted to find the Cold, then this was where he had to start.

When Guest stepped out of the TARDIS, the Doctor was staring up at the media globe, his one good arm behind his back. Kode hovered by the TARDIS doors, the gun still pressed to his own neck. The Ogron was skulking nearby, keeping well out of the way.

Down on the ground, the people were still arranging themselves around the archways, defending the walls of the building. There was the screeching of fighter engines from somewhere in the distance.

‘It’s a component from a TARDIS,’ the Doctor declared, not bothering to look down at Guest. ‘Or something a lot like a TARDIS. Part of a translevel communications system, I think. Telepathic circuits and all. Did the Faction leave it there?’

‘I seem to remember it that way,’ Guest told him. Careful, he thought. Never tell a Time Lord more than you have to.

‘And now we’re off to see the Cold. Is that it?’
‘Yes. To release the Cold into this universe.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘That may not be a very good idea. I’m not sure what this Cold of yours is, but if what you’ve said is true it’s probably better off staying outside N-space. I know the story Guest. I know about the things Rassilon let into the universe, before the start of the official history. I’ve even met a few of them. Vampires, and worse. If the Cold’s in the same kind of league…’

‘Rassilon let a lot of things into the universe,’ Guest countered. ‘Not all of them were hostile. The Cold only wanted to spread its own word across our universe. To send its signals to any of us who might want to listen. While the monsters were swarming over the Time Lords’ colonies, the Cold was still on the outer planes, getting ready to make its move into our continuum. Rassilon stopped up the holes before it could come through. It’s all in the history. It’s all in the transmissions. And I promise you, the Cold isn’t dangerous. It’s just a loa.’

At last, the Doctor looked at him. The Time Lord’s eyes flashed in the neon light of the transmission tower, a colour that could almost but not quite be described as blue.

‘If you open a hole into the universe next door, you won’t let just the Cold through,’ he said. ‘There’ll be other things. Things utterly inimical to life. Things that’ll try to kill us all.’

‘No. There’s a special pathway, directly between the Cold and our world. Only the Cold can manifest itself. Nothing else.’

‘A pathway? What kind of pathway?’

Guest considered the question for a moment, then finally decided to tell the truth. ‘I don’t know. I can’t remember. Doctor… I only want to reach the Cold. To let my people reach the Cold. Because it’s in my nature, because it’s in every part of me, to complete the mission objective.’

‘But you don’t know why,’ the Doctor insisted. ‘You’ve got reasons, but you don’t understand them. You really are a television zombie, aren’t you?’

‘Let me finish,’ Guest protested. ‘I don’t have any interest in terrorising the universe, and neither does the Cold, I’m sure. Even the Faction didn’t have anything to gain by starting another war between the Time Lords and the outer planes. We’re going to free our loa. Then… we’ll leave Earth alone. I promise.’

‘And can you keep your promises?’ the Doctor asked.
‘It’s in my principles to.’
‘Ah,’

Guest heard Kode clear his throat. ‘Can we get on with this now?’ the boy asked. ‘My neck’s starting to hurt.’

Guest nodded, and turned. ‘You’re right. It’s time we were leaving. The Cold’s waited long enough.’

‘I won’t do it, you know,’ said the Doctor. His voice was low, but Guest could hear it even over the sound of screaming voices and screaming fighters. ‘I can’t be party to this. It’s against my principles. Even if Kode tries to kill himself, I won’t set the controls for you. I can’t help you any more, Guest.’
Guest stopped in the entrance to the TARDIS.

‘I don’t need your help,’ he said. ‘I can lay in a course myself.’ There was a shocked pause from the Doctor.

‘The TARDIS navigational system… it’s incredibly complex…’

‘I know the coordinates,’ Guest pointed out. ‘And I know enough about TARDIS systems to use them. You see, Doctor? I do know what I’m doing.’

The Doctor muttered something else. Guest couldn’t make it out over the background noise, but it didn’t sound very constructive.

Guest was standing at the controls when Sam stepped into the console room. She’d felt the TARDIS take off and land again while she’d been in the corridor, so she knew she was too late to stop him. One of the Ogrons stood nearby, as did Kode, who—curiously—seemed to be using his gun to re-enact the best bit out of Blazing Saddles. And standing next to him, watching proceedings with a tired and cynical eye, was a figure Sam very nearly didn’t recognise. His hair was matted with dirt, his face was a mess, and the overcoat just didn’t suit him at all.

‘Doctor!’ Sam yelped.

Before he could even speak, Sam had bounded over to him and engaged him in a massive God-Emperor–Teletubby-sized hug. He smelled funny, but she didn’t let it spoil things. The Doctor made a variety of embarrassed noises, which wasn’t exactly reassuring, and Sam had no idea why he didn’t hug her back. Perhaps he thought she might break.

Or perhaps he thought he might break.

‘Where’s Fitz?’ she burred.

The Doctor cleared his throat. ‘Yes. Well. I’m afraid the answer to that might turn out to be rather complicated.’

‘And what happened to you, anyway? Come to think of it, what happened to your coat?’ Sam detached herself from him, then took a step back and examined what he was wearing. ‘That coat, it’s… hang on a minute.’

The Doctor looked away, a little hurriedly. ‘Sam—’

‘No, wait. That coat. I know it from somewhere. Isn’t it—’

‘Sam!’ snapped the Doctor.

Sam jumped. When she looked up at the Doctor’s face, it was set in stone. Battered, rough-edged stone.

‘Time for another costume refit,’ he said. ‘I know a nice little boutique in the 1960s. I’m sure they’ll have something in my size.’

Sam smiled too. The Doctor nodded towards the scanner. ‘Anyway, there are more important things to think about than my dress sense. Unbelievable as it may seem.’

So Sam followed his gaze. Her jaw promptly dropped.

The scanner was full of faces. The same faces she’d seen in the Cold, when the skin of the stuff had swallowed her up and told her the Faction’s story. Half-finished features were pressed against a sticky black membrane, moaning and wriggling, but never breaking through. The scanner image was in 3-D, so it almost looked as though the things were growing from the ceiling of the TARDIS, eating their way into the ship.

‘That’s what’s outside?’ Sam asked.

‘That’s what’s outside,’ said the Doctor.

‘Perhaps you’d better point that at the girl,’ mused Guest.

He was talking to Kode, apparently. Kode considered the idea for a moment, then lowered the gun from his own face, and aimed it at Sam instead. Sam turned to Compassion, but the woman was staring up at the scanner image, an enormous frown pulled across her big freckled cheeks.

Guest stroked the door control, and the doors swung open with their usual polite hum. Sam half expected the faces to come rushing into the ship, but nothing happened. There was pure silence from outside.

‘You can join me if you like,’ Guest told them. Then he stepped out of the TARDIS.

The Doctor looked at Sam. Sam looked at the Doctor.

‘After you,’ he said.

‘No, after you,’ she said.

Even by the standards of Anathema, it was breathtaking. It took Guest’s eyes a few moments to adjust to the perspective, but he soon realised he was standing inside an enormous sphere, probably half a kilometre from side to side. The walls were smooth and dark, speckled with tiny globes of light. There were millions of the globes, possibly billions, forming a precise pattern of twinkling stars across the sphere interior. The TARDIS had materialised on a platform, a disc of perfect black, which hovered a few hundred metres away from the curved outer wall. It felt like
there was gravity here, which was surprising. Guest looked around, but he couldn’t see any more platforms. Evidently, the ‘ground’ had been put here purely for his benefit.

The Cold was in the dead centre of the sphere, in defiance of the local gravity, a pure-black globe inside a pure-black globe. He didn’t even try to estimate how big it was, how many hundreds of metres in diameter, how much mass it must have. He found his eyes sinking into its body, hypnotised by the things that pulsed and wriggled across its surface. As he watched, a face the size of a Drashig pushed against the sphere from the inside, its huge teeth trying to bite through the membrane. Two enormous clawed hands thrashed around under the skin, doing their best to break the surface tension. Gigantic black wings flexed in skeletal sockets.

Then the apparition was gone, lost in the mass of features, its body disintegrating into clusters of snapping mouths. And yet, somehow, the sphere remained a sphere. There were thick black tendrils sprouting from its surface, great sticky arms that bored through the inner surface of the chamber, but other than that the globe kept its shape, an unbroken ball of biomass and transdimensional engineering. Guest had no idea where the tendrils went to. He doubted he’d ever find out.

‘Oh,’ said the girl. He didn’t know how long she’d been standing next to him. Come to think of it, he didn’t even know how long he’d been here, staring at the Cold.

‘My,’ the girl went on.

‘God,’ she concluded, after a pause.

Guest looked over his shoulder. The Doctor stood next to the girl, his one good hand on her shoulder. The others were huddling in the TARDIS doorway behind him, peering out at the closest thing to God they’d ever see.


‘What is this place?’ asked the Doctor.

Guest swept his arm across the vast expanse of the sphere, taking in the massive arc of the wall. ‘The barrier Rassilon built, when he locked all the greater loa out of the universe. Look at it. The Cold’s straining against some kind of field, you can tell.’

The Doctor didn’t look convinced, though. ‘And this is all in some other dimension?’

Guest ignored him. Why was he asking such unimportant questions at a time like this?

‘Slightly odd,’ the Doctor muttered.

‘How slightly odd?’ the girl Sam muttered back.

‘Extremely slightly odd.’

‘So, how are you going to free it?’ asked Compassion.

A good question. A very good question. Guest looked around, searching the walls – wall – for some kind of control mechanism. He couldn’t see anything, and of course, there was nobody he could ask –

Wait.

The Faction’s rituals. The Cold was one of the creatures of Paradox, true? One of the loa. The Faction hadn’t told Guest anything about communicating with it directly, but surely, it couldn’t be hard.

Guest spread his arms wide, and concentrated on the faces of the Cold. He didn’t know whether the loa would understand the gesture, but he had to try.

‘Can you hear me?’ he asked.

And suddenly there were signals flooding through his receiver, a whole cavalcade of transmissions, on every frequency he could imagine. The voice of the Cold, flooding his synapses. Talking on all possible wavelengths at once.

Yes, said the Cold.

Guest heard voices behind him. The sound of a struggle. He wondered whether Kode and Compassion were hearing it, too, whether the Doctor was taking the opportunity to disarm them. It didn’t matter. It was too late.

‘I want you,’ said Guest.

Something else swept through the receiver. Another message. Silent, but deafening.

Look up, said the Cold.

So Guest looked up.

There was a tentacle. Stretching out from the body of the Cold. Filling up all of Guest’s senses, so he couldn’t see anything else, not the rest of the loa’s body, not the wall of the prison, not the platform under his feet. No, not a tentacle: a tube. A passage. A perfect cylinder, reaching out for him, extending towards the edge of the platform. Guest took a step forward, and felt the surface of the cylinder beneath his feet, the flesh of the Cold giggling and writhing under his weight.

‘Back to the TARDIS,’ Guest heard somebody say. It was the last real sound he heard before he walked into the heart of the Cold.
Sam watched the Doctor punch the door control. Kode, Compassion and the Ogron had all shuffled back into the TARDIS, a variety of shocked expressions on their faces. In any other circumstances, Sam would have found the Ogron version of a shocked expression quite amusing. Kode had lowered the gun, clearly not knowing what he was supposed to be pointing it at. Meanwhile, the businessman had curled himself up into a ball in the corner, and was now whimpering.

The Doctor adjusted the scanner controls, to get a better view of the Cold. The black sphere hung below the TARDIS ceiling, bubbling and gibbering, with its tendril sliding back into its body. Even from here, it was enough to make you want to wee yourself.

One of the Doctor’s hands was flying across the controls, but his eyes were fixed on the image. Sam guessed his fingers were moving automatically, trying to keep themselves busy, not actually doing anything useful. ‘This is wrong,’ the Doctor was saying, and there was an edge of sheer panic in his voice. ‘Wrong, wrong, wrong. He can’t free the Cold like this. Can he? Doesn’t make sense. Doesn’t make any sense at all.’

Then he stopped. Sam saw him look down at the navigational display.

‘What does this say?’ he asked.

It took Sam a while to realise that it was a serious question. He seemed to be asking Kode and Compassion.

Kode shuffled over to the console. ‘What’s the problem?’

‘The algorithm Guest fed into the console. The coordinate equation. It doesn’t make sense. Look at it. It’s too simple. Even coordinates for a basic planet-to-planet hop would make more mess than that, let alone a transdimensional jump. What does it say?’

‘Relative 101 by 4E’, Kode said.

The Doctor stared at him. ‘What?’

‘Those are the coordinates of the Cold,’ Kode explained. ‘Guest told me.’

‘He told you that?’ Compassion said, cynically.

Kode looked at his feet. ‘He just mentioned it. Y’know. In passing.’

‘Shh! Shh!’ The Doctor waved his hand at them until they shut up, but he kept his gaze fixed on the console. Sam glanced nervously up at the scanner. The tendril had vanished now. The Cold had swallowed Guest whole.

‘Anathema,’ the Doctor said. He still sounded like he was panicking. ‘Your city. Where is it? What planet?’

Compassion opened her mouth to reply, but Sam beat her to it. ‘It’s not on a planet. It’s on a ship.’

‘Ship?’

‘A Time Lord warship. Listen, Doctor. I’ve seen it. It’s like a giant Seal of Rassilon. And it’s heading –’

‘That’s it!’ The Doctor thumped the console, and it duly warbled at him. ‘Don’t you see?’

‘No,’ said Compassion.

‘Ugh,’ said the Ogron.

‘I have to talk to Guest,’ the Doctor snapped. ‘I have to talk to him before he can talk to that… thing properly.’

He pointed at the monstrosity on the scanner. ‘His receiver. I’ve got to open a link to his receiver. Fitz, can you program the TARDIS to… no. Never mind. No time. We’ll have to use the transmitter back in Anathema. Hold tight.’

‘“Fitz”?’ queried Sam.

The Doctor ignored her, and let his one good hand tap-dance its way across the navigational panel. Sam folded her arms.

‘Hold on,’ she said. ‘We’re in another dimension, remember? The transmitter won’t be powerful enough to reach him.’

‘Oh yes it will,’ the Doctor grumbled. Then he gave the dematerialisation switch a massive whack, and the rotor at the centre of the console began to move.

Guest had lost all sense of space, but he doubted he’d be needing it for much longer anyway. The Cold seemed to be parting around him, making way for him, letting him get right to the heart of its body. He’d lost all sense of physical form as well, and there was nothing left of the world but the voice of the Cold. Screaming and yelping into what was left of his head. He wasn’t sure whether he was walking, as such, or swimming through the blackness.

‘Touch me,’ said the Cold.

So Guest touched, reaching out for the centre of the darkness, nerve endings wrapping themselves around the heart of the Cold. His thoughts joined with its thoughts. Guest gasped, and the rest of the Cold gasped too.

‘And now?’ asked Guest.

‘Your choice, the Cold told him.

‘Can I set you free?’

Oh yes. If you want to.
The Doctor rushed out of the TARDIS without even checking the scanner. Sam hurried after him, to find herself back on the top level of the transmitter building. She could hear gunfire from the ground floor, and the tower trembled slightly as she stepped on to the platform, so the fighters were obviously still having a go at the place.

The Doctor hardly seemed to notice. He stared up at the media globe, a look of absolute concentration on his face.

‘It’s telepathic,’ he mumbled. ‘It’s got to be. All part of standard TARDIS design. Come here!’

He shouted those last two words. No sooner had he spoken than the sphere began to pulse, and expand, the surface stretching towards the platform. Sam shrank back, only to bump into Kode and Compassion, hovering in the door of the TARDIS.

‘It’s going to absorb him,’ Compassion said.

‘No,’ said the Doctor. The sphere was huge now, almost touching the top of the TARDIS, but it stopped growing before it could swallow him. He reached up, carefully placing his hands against the surface. The globe rippled as he touched it, the blackness slurping at his skin. Sam saw the kink in the Doctor’s right arm, and wondered what had been happening to him recently.

‘There,’ muttered the Doctor. ‘There. Now. You can hear me, can’t you? You can hear me.’

Down below, the sounds of gunfire subsided. Sam wondered if everyone in Anathema had heard the Doctor’s voice, if they were already tuning in to the new signals from the media.

‘Guest,’ the Doctor said. ‘Can you hear me, Guest?’

Guest opened his mouth, or what he thought was his mouth, to give the Cold its instructions. Odd, really. He’d expected it to order him around, not the reverse.

Then he noticed it.

Something was coming through the receiver. Something from outside the Cold. A signal, filtered through the transmitter. A will strong enough to make ripples in the media just by brushing its surface.

Well? said the Cold.

‘Listen to me, Guest. Listen to me, because I’m about to tell you the most important thing you’ve ever heard.

‘It’s like this.

‘Many years ago – or sometime in the future, from my point of view – the Time Lords went to war. I don’t know the details, because it’s not my place to, but the Time Lords made some very powerful enemies, and it didn’t take long for the fighting to start. And the Time Lords knew a thing or two about high-level technology, so the weapons they built were very, very advanced. I know that much. Not because I’ve seen the future, but because I know how the Time Lords think. I know how Faction Paradox thinks, too, so it’s not hard to put the pieces together.

‘The Time Lords built a ship. A warship, capable of destroying whole planets. Your city was built on that ship, but I suppose you know that. Now, I don’t know what planet the ship was aimed at. The enemy’s homeworld, possibly. It’s not important right now.

‘Guest, shh! I’m busy.

‘The important thing is, the warship was armed with what the Time Lords considered to be the ultimate weapon. Think about it, Guest. How do you destroy a planet, when your enemies know as much about weapons technology as you do? It’s no good trying to just blow it up. There are devices that can prevent that kind of physical damage. No. The Time Lords fitted their ship with a weapon that could remove things from the continuum, remove entire worlds, beyond any hope of recovery.

‘You see, they remembered their own past. They remembered how Rassilon had punched holes in the universe, and let some terrible things in from the places outside. So that was what they built the weapon to do. To poke a great big hole in the space-time continuum, and let the target planet get sucked through into the universe next door, to be torn to shreds by the things that live there. Complete destruction. You understand? Complete annihilation.

‘So, at the centre of their warship, they built their weapons system. They engineered a substance – I don’t know how it works, exactly – that exists on the boundary between the two worlds, our world and the other universe. If you look at that substance, you can see the things from the outer planes, trying to get through to our side of reality. It’s probably validium-based, I should think. The ship’s been damaged over the years, so some of the material’s started seeping up to the ship’s surface. But you know that, don’t you?

‘You call that substance the Cold, Guest. The Cold.

‘Remember what you said, in that video you gave to the UN? “The dispersion of the past is our speciality.” At the time, I thought it was advertising copy. A way of selling the Cold to your customers. But it’s more than that, isn’t it? It’s a truism of Faction Paradox, and it’s a truism of your people, as well. You don’t just change yourselves
whenever you’re “remembered”. You change your history, too. Every generation rewrites the story a little, until the original meaning’s lost. Think, Guest. Just think.

‘The substance you call the Cold is part of the Time Lord warship.
‘Just think about what that means.’

Guest hesitated.

There was something coming through the receiver. Something he couldn’t identify properly. He caught flashes of thought, brief images. Words?

But what kind of person would transmit words through the media?

‘I know you can hear me, Guest. So listen.
‘At the dead centre of the Time Lord warship is an enormous mass of the Cold material. When the order to detonate the weapon comes from Gallifrey, the cellular field that keeps it stable will be taken away. The hole will be opened. The target planet, the warship, everything for millions of miles around, will vanish into the other universe. I wouldn’t be surprised if there’s a second ship on standby somewhere, ready to seal up the hole again once it’s all over. I can’t imagine the Time Lords leaving a whopping great gap like that lying around space-time, even if they are getting desperate.

‘Don’t you see? The coordinates for the Cold. Relative 101 by 4E. Relative. Those aren’t coordinates for a fixed space-time location, they’re coordinates for the centre of the ship, relative to the position of the main transmitter. The Faction must have told you the numbers generations ago, but somewhere along the line you must have forgotten what they really meant. The thing you call the Cold isn’t in another dimension at all. It’s in the middle of the warship. That’s why only a TARDIS could reach it, because the ship’s security systems would only let a Time Lord get into the internal workings. The place you call the skin of the Cold must be a kind of buffer zone, between the surface and the core. But it’s still in this universe. Right under your nose.

‘Over the years, the memory’s been corrupted. Once upon a time you probably knew what the Cold was, but the idea’s been distorted every time you’ve been “remembered”, until your mythology’s turned it into some kind of god.

‘You’re not reaching one of the loa, Guest. You’re inside the ship’s systems. And you’re not about to release the Cold. You’re about to detonate the weapon.
‘You’re about to kill us all. Us, everybody in Anathema, and anyone who happens to be in the vicinity of the ship.
‘Do you see now?
‘Do you?’

Well? the Cold repeated.

Guest tried to shake his head, but his head had been stretched out of shape, and every piece of his consciousness had been wired into the substance around him. There were definitely words. He couldn’t interpret them properly, though. Besides, how important could they possibly be?

The Cold surrounded him completely now. Every part of the darkness was tuned in to his body, and every part of his body was tuned in to the darkness.

Will the universe be opened? the Cold asked.

Guest nodded. The nod shook every cell of the Cold’s being.

‘Go free,’ he said.
Cool
(eleven characters, eleven loose ends)

The Doctor:

‘It’s not working,’ said Kode.

The two Remote people were standing in the doorway of the TARDIS, watching the Doctor sink his hands into the surface of the media. He shook his head, with some vigour. ‘It’s got to work. We’ve got to get through to him.’

‘Yeah, but it’s not working,’ Kode insisted. ‘Can’t you feel it?’

‘He’s everywhere,’ Compassion added.

Everywhere. The Doctor listened. No, that made the process sound much too focused, much too hard-edged. He opened up his senses, let the city speak to him. There was no way he could see the world the way the Remote saw it, but his nervous system was more adaptable than most. He should at least have been able to pick up some kind of background noise, or –

Go free, said Guest.

The Doctor jumped, and his hands came away from the sphere with an ugly schlopping sound. Sam stared at him, obviously alarmed.

‘She’s right,’ the Doctor muttered. ‘That thing at the centre of the ship isn’t just the weapons system. It’s a complete controlling intelligence. Guest’s tuned in to the whole ship. He’s practically omnipresent.’ He looked at his hands, to see if there was any residue from the sphere, but they were clean. ‘I don’t understand. I told him the truth about the Cold. Why isn’t he listening?’

‘Because you’re using words,’ said Sam.

The Doctor looked up. Sam’s attention was fixed on the sphere now, her eyes fixed on the black surface as it pulsed and wriggled. ‘Sam…?’

‘The Remote don’t use words in their transmissions,’ Sam said. ‘They don’t even have narrative structures. They just use images. You’re being much too sophisticated.’

The Doctor kept shaking his head. ‘No. It’s too complex an idea. It’s a story. I don’t know how to communicate it any other way.’

‘You’re much too cerebral, you know that?’ said Sam. ‘Take me.’

It took the Doctor a few moments to work out that the last sentence hadn’t been directed at him. Sam had been talking to the sphere, and now it was responding to her, growing again, until its surface pressed against the roof of the TARDIS. Kode and Compassion both shrank back inside. The Doctor had to duck to stop the bottom of the sphere eating his head.

‘Sam!’ the Doctor yelled.

But it was, unsurprisingly, much too late.

Guest:

This must be how the loa feel, thought Guest.

The Cold stretched out across the body of the ship, its flesh bubbling under the surface, occasionally breaking through the cracks that three billion years of wear and tear had opened up in the hull. The Cold was the lifeblood of the ship, Guest understood that now, linking together all the systems, keeping the vessel alive throughout its long voyage. He still didn’t know how the Cold had come to be on board a Time Lord warship, but he guessed it had probably sought refuge there at some point during the journey, perhaps existing in both the material world and its own dimension at once.

Perhaps. The details weren’t important.

Now the Cold was beginning to tremble, its mouths gurgling Guest’s praises as they realised they were going to be set free. There was a kind of tension in the heart of the loa, something that pressed against every part of his nervous system. The walls of the prison, straining under the weight of the Cold.

(Several million years in the past, Rassilon was punching holes in space-time.)

Are you sure? the Cold asked.

‘I don’t understand,’ said Guest. ‘Don’t you want to be free?’

I have to ask if you’re sure. It’s part of the programming.
(The Time Lords were creating terrible weapons, preparing for war.)
‘All right,’ said Guest.

As he said it, the Cold brought back more impressions from across the ship, pushing the images straight into his nerve endings, without any need for the technology of the receiver. Guest felt the presence of enormous engines, of energy linkages the size of small moons, of emergency drive systems capable of pushing the ship through colossal holes in the continuum. And he felt Anathema, a gleaming patchwork of signals stuck to the edge of the vessel, its media buzzing with images, ideas and principles.

(There was a world, being sucked through a gap in time, the souls of its people devoured in the jaws of immortals.)

There was something else, Guest realised. Alien images that seeped through the Cold and hovered on the edges of his consciousness. The pressure increased, and teeth made of nuclear fusion punctured tiny holes in the skin of the Cold.

(Immortal monsters. Alien monsters. Many things, not one thing. Universes full of horror. Endless agony, endless slavery, endless entropy.)

All around the ship, the pressure was getting worse. The people of Anathema were falling to their knees, barely able to breathe, the tension crushing the delicate machinery of the receivers, filling their heads with nightmares of the future.

(And the people. The people on those worlds. Screaming. Black light in the sky. Six billion human minds, bent out of shape, wrenched out of existence.)

The limbs of the Cold convulsed, contracted. All across the ship, the hull began to buckle, the black nonmetal crumpling as the Cold took a deep breath and prepared to scream into the vacuum.

(The Time Lords were building weapons.)

The ground under Anathema cracked, and
(There was a planet about to die.)
the surface began to collapse, the people
(All the people, all the animals, all the babies, all the beagles, all the kittens, eaten alive by the Cold.)
running for cover, trying to work out which way to run,
(One girl screaming, her family being sucked into the sky, their faces blank and empty.)
but the buildings were shaking, bending, not just the ground but space-time itself starting to collapse in on itself,
(Billions of souls, billions of bodies, eaten by the Cold.)
the effect of the same technology that millions of years ago had been used by the Time Lords to open up the universe next door, now let loose on Anathema,
(But there was no Cold.)
on Earth,
(There was no Cold, not really.)
on humanity,
(Do you understand, Guest?)
on the entire future of this galaxy,
(There-is-no-Cold.)
on the future of every galaxy,
(THERE-IS-NO-COLD!) because of a stupid war that nobody understood anyway, and –
– and Anathema was bending, and –
– the pressure –
– the ship cracking open –
– and the weapons system, seconds away from detonation, less than seconds –
– and –
‘There is no Cold!’ screamed Guest.
– and the ship paused.
Anathema stopped shaking.
I’m sorry? said the ship. Was that an instruction?
Guest let himself relax. Let his mind reach out across the decks of the ship, through the power systems, into the bowels of the engines.
‘Go,’ he said.
So the ship went.
The Media:

Scene 63. Space

[We pan across the skies, and it isn’t difficult to work out that we’re in Earth’s solar system. We see the sun, then Mercury, then Venus, then Earth itself. Soon we focus on another object, just a few million kilometres from the third planet. It’s the Time Lord warship, a vast disc drifting through the vacuum, heading for its age-old destination.

Then there’s sound. It’s a wheezing, groaning sound, but so loud, so fundamental, that it’s audible even here, even where there’s no air and noise is supposed to be impossible. Like the grinding of a hundred thousand TARDIS engines.

[Slowly, the warship fades away, until there’s nothing in front of us but empty space.]

Sam:

Sam watched the warship dematerialise. She didn’t know how she could see it, how there could possibly be a camera out in space to take the pictures. But then this wasn’t real, was it? It was just the media.

She glimpsed images of scared people, crawling from the ruins, staring into huge gashes in the ground. She saw the atmosphere above Anathema, the red sky boiling and crackling as the ship moved through the vortex. And she saw the thing at the heart of the world, the big black mass of the control system, extending a tendril towards a simple black platform.

Then her face broke the surface of the media, her lungs tasting air again and suddenly remembering that they needed oxygen. The next thing she knew, her body was free of the sphere. She felt her knees crack against the platform, soon followed by her elbows.

There were people around her. Shadows falling across her body. She looked up, and found herself staring into the face of the Doctor, eyebrows raised, features all crumpled up with concern. Kind of cute, really.

Compassion was there, too. And Kode. And the Ogron.

Sam smiled at them all.

‘Gave him a piece of my mind,’ she said.

Naturally, it was at this point that she passed out.

Compassion:

The rest of the day was… interesting.

At the Doctor’s insistence, Compassion spent the first few hours surveying Anathema in one of the fighters, checking out the damage. For the most part, it seemed pretty superficial. The ‘ground’ under the city had burst open in a couple of places, and some of the buildings had started to slide into the gaps, where the architecture was now being slowly nibbled away by the Cold.

It was the psychological damage that worried her, though. There were no signs of fighting now, but wherever she took the fighter she saw people wandering aimlessly in the wreckage, not knowing how to react. This kind of thing was the inevitable result of principles, Compassion told herself. The Remote had no idea what to do next. Before, a bit of bloodshed and wreckage wouldn’t have bothered them. Now, they found it shocking. Disturbing.

This city, she thought, was going to go very mad very quickly.

That evening, the Doctor took the TARDIS back to the heart of the ship, and both Kode and Compassion went along for the ride. The Doctor wanted to check that the control system was stable, or at least that was what he claimed. But when they reached the central sphere they found Guest there. He looked perfectly calm, perfectly normal. He was just standing around on the platform, waiting for them.

The Doctor was surprised, and said so. Then Guest politely asked for a lift back to Anathema, and the Time Lord was very surprised indeed.

Half an hour later, Guest lay on a bed in one of the TARDIS’s many spare rooms, staring blankly at the ceiling. Sam was doing much the same thing, a little way down the corridor. The Doctor had said they’d both been through an awful lot, and deserved some rest. Whether they wanted it or not. Compassion stood in the doorway of Guest’s room, watching her leader – yes, that was what he’d been, just for a while – as he stared and breathed and didn’t do much else.

‘Well?’ Compassion asked him. ‘What do we do now?’

Guest didn’t answer. Compassion hadn’t heard him say more than a few words since they’d left the control
system.

‘The Doctor says the weapon’s safe,’ she went on. ‘It’s not going to go off by accident or anything. He’s
talking about putting some kind of security lock on it, just to be on the safe side.’

‘Is he going to let us stay?’ Guest asked.

Compassion narrowed her eyes at him. ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

‘Our city. The ship. It’s a Time Lord weapon. And he’s a Time Lord. They won’t want anyone knowing their
secrets. Especially not us.’

‘I don’t think the Doctor’s that kind of Time Lord,’ Compassion told him.

For a while, Guest was silent again. Compassion was just about to walk out of the room when he said, ‘I nearly
killed all of us.’

Compassion snorted at him. ‘We had a utopia here, for a while. The last thing a utopia needs are causes. I told
you, didn’t I? Principles are just the lapses in logic these people use to stop themselves going mad.’

‘I was doing what we’ve always done,’ said Guest. ‘Listening to the loa.’

‘There aren’t any loa.’

‘That’s not what the Faction told us.’

‘All right. Then there aren’t any real loa. There are just the transmissions. The signals.’

‘That’s all the Cold was? Just an idea?’

‘Obviously.’ This conversation was starting to make Compassion feel itchy. Guest wanted her to give him all
the answers. Now he’d had his god taken away from him, he needed somebody else to tell him what to think. Just
like the people down on Earth, thought Compassion. Stuck halfway between free will and signal dependence.

But then wasn’t that true of her, too?

‘So, what do we do now?’ Compassion asked. She wasn’t expecting a decent answer, obviously; she just
wanted to hear what Guest would say.

But Guest didn’t say anything.

So she turned away, and walked out of the room.

Lost Boy:

The sky was blue. That was the main thing. Lost Boy stood in the middle of the plaza, the walkways of
Anathema crisscrossing the air above his head. Blue, pure blue. No clouds, no smoke. The buildings seemed to shine
in the daylight, the grey domes and archways made bright and shiny by the new sky. The spires looked proud,
almost optimistic, as if they couldn’t wait to reach the heavens. The buildings basked.

‘It’s actually quite pleasant,’ somebody said.

Lost Boy turned, with a grunt of agreement. The alien they called the Doctor was standing right behind him, the
girl Sam by his side. They both looked a lot more healthy than they had yesterday, so perhaps the new sky worked
on people, too, although Lost Boy noticed that one of the Doctor’s arms had been wrapped up in a piece of thick
white cloth. Around them, the people of Anathema walked to and fro, doing nothing but staring up into the blue.

‘Clean air,’ Lost Boy said. But neither the Doctor nor Sam was wearing a receiver, so he knew the words
probably just sounded like mindless rumbles to them. ‘Like home.’

Nonetheless, the Doctor nodded, and put his free arm around the girl’s shoulders. ‘And Guest wiped the ship’s
navigational program, so it’s not going anywhere now.’

‘Not that old blue-eyes here is telling anybody where we are,’ said Sam, nudging the Doctor in the ribs.
The Doctor looked wounded, so Lost Boy wondered if the girl’s elbow might be stronger than it looked. ‘Now,
what on Earth makes you think I know?’

‘Because you’re claiming not to. If you really don’t know something, you just bluff. Look, there’s air here,
right? Real air.’

‘Yes. No need for the atmosphere field any more.’

‘But we can’t be inside another planet’s atmosphere. This ship’s the size of Pluto as it is. And there’s light, but
there’s no sign of any sun. Explain that.’

‘No,’ said the Doctor.

Lost Boy nodded. ‘It’s good, that no one knows.’

‘Quite,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘Now, what about you, Lost Boy? We could take you back to your homeworld, if
you like. Or Earth. I understand your brother’s still there.’

‘No,’ Lost Boy said. ‘My brother would be… hurt if I tried to help him.’

‘By the Saudis?’ asked Sam.

‘I think he means “hurt” as in “insulted”,’ mumbled the Doctor.
‘Don’t want to go home,’ Lost Boy went on. ‘Things are different there. Here, nobody cares how long my arms
are.’

Both the Doctor and Sam looked at him in a funny way, so Lost Boy guessed that last bit hadn’t translated very
well. It didn’t really matter. ‘So you’re staying here?’ Sam asked.

‘Yes. This is a better place, now.’

Sam and the Doctor exchanged glances. Then the Doctor looked... embarrassed? Was that the word humans
used? ‘Well, yes,’ the Doctor said. ‘Actually, Sam and I have been talking about that.’

‘I think he should reprogram the transmitter,’ Sam explained. ‘Give the Remote a new agenda.’

‘We really don’t have that right, Sam. Compassion was telling the truth, in a way. This is a kind of utopia…’

‘They blow things up for no reason!’

‘It’s still safer than Earth. And at least they don’t torture people.’

‘So what are you saying? Blowing things up is a good idea?’

The Doctor rolled his eyes, which was something Lost Boy had never seen a non-Ogron do convincingly
before. ‘Sam Sam Sam. I said it was a utopia. I didn’t say I liked it. We can’t go around the universe dividing people
up into good societies and bad societies. There’s no good and bad. There’s just… politics.’

Sam raised her eyebrows. Lost Boy wondered whether he was missing the subtleties of this conversation, the
aliens using their faces the way Ogrons used their diaphragms. ‘When did you suddenly get all political?’

‘It won’t last. And I’ve interfered too much already.’

‘I still say we should give them a good reprogramming.’

The Doctor sighed. ‘In future, remind me to ignore everything you say.’

‘D’you want a logical analysis of that sentence?’

‘Absolutely not.’

‘There’s a name for people like you, y’know.’

‘Oh? Is it complimentary?’

‘Not really. But it’s three letters long, and it only makes sense in Haitian.’

The Doctor gave the girl a funny look. She just grinned back at him. Lost Boy shook his head.

‘You make no sense at all,’ he pointed out.

‘Good,’ the Doctor and Sam said, as one.

K9:

Sarah-mistress was in the bath when K9 picked up the Artron disturbances. He waggled his ears, as was his
custom when he had to calculate bioform-based probabilities. His memory banks informed him that the last time
he’d called the mistress while she was submerged she’d thrown a sponge at him. So he decided to wait and see what
happened.

Soon, a pattern began to develop in the disturbances. Something was materialising in the front room, right in
the middle of the Persian rug. K9 calculated an 89 per cent chance that Sarah-mistress would get a bit irate about
that.

By the time the pattern completed its materialisation, K9 had already worked out what the object was, and what
its crew complement was likely to be. Sure enough, the first figure to emerge from the big blue box had an
unmistakable biological signature, in spite of the DNA discrepancies (and K9 calculated a 91 per cent chance that
the subject really didn’t want to talk about those at all). Despite the discrepancies, the Time Lord still had the telltale
69 chromosomes, divided into 23 homogeneous triads, instead of the more usual pairs.

‘Hello, K9,’ the Doctor said. ‘Is Sarah in?’

‘Affirmative,’ K9 chirped. ‘Sarah-mistress currently in “damp” mode.’

It was supposed to be a joke, but the Doctor didn’t laugh. That was hardly surprising. After all, he’d never even
worked out that K9 had a sense of humour.

Alan Llewis:

He’d insisted on meeting the Bland woman, or whatever her name was, in a car park. That was where you were
supposed to have secret meetings, Llewis had seen it a million times on TV. Besides, there was something nice and
normal and grubby about a multistorey in Croydon.

It had been two days since the space machine had dropped him off in London.

‘Nothing,’ he said, as he stared out through the windscreen. He’d rented the car that morning; he wouldn’t have
driven around in the Fiat, even if it had survived. He wasn’t entirely sure who might be following him, but he hadn’t
been back to the office since he’d got back to London, just in case. ‘Bloody nothing. You don’t understand, do you? Peter bloody Morgan’s got it all. All his toys. He’s selling them to the police, d’you know that?’

In the passenger seat, the Bland woman nodded. ‘It was my bloody business,’ snapped Llewis. ‘You saw the kind of… the kind of things they had in that… that other place…’

‘You’re upset,’ the woman said.

‘All the way there.’ Llewis wasn’t sure he was making sense, but he wasn’t sure he cared, either. ‘All the way there. And nothing. Nothing. I can’t… I can’t tell you. What it’s like. What it feels like. It was dark, and… the faces…’

‘Maybe you’ve got more than you think,’ the woman suggested.

‘Like what? Bloody self-awareness?’

‘No. Information.’ Bland sighed, deeply and pitifully. Or pityingly, maybe. ‘You’re never going to be able to go back to the office, are you? In fact, you’re never going to be able to show your face anywhere like COPEX again. Am I right?’

Llewis looked away. The woman took a deep breath.

‘I’m making this documentary…’ she began.

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Kode:

The Remote are not by any means the only media-dependent culture in our galaxy. However, they are unique among humanoid races in that each society is held together by a single media system, which the Remote have very nearly elevated to the status of godhood. The closest comparison we can find in our galaxy is one of the planets in the Voora Marinii group, whose inhabitants were for many years controlled by a ‘conscience’ not entirely unlike one of the Remote’s transmitters; but even that world had its counterculture, a secondary media system which, it’s believed, eventually led to the fall of local civilisation. Indeed, some have suggested that the entire planet may have been an experiment in sociology, engineered by whatever beings were responsible for scattering the Remote throughout known space. One would certainly have to note the fetishistic apparel worn by the followers of Marinus’s counterculture, and the receiver aerials they carried on their foreheads. In many respects, these ‘alien Voord’ might be considered the Remote’s direct ancestors…

The book was called *Genetic Politics Beyond the Thirdzone*, and Kode wasn’t sure why he’d bothered taking it out of the TARDIS library. Maybe because he’d believed, just for a moment, that some grubby old paperback could tell him what was supposed to happen next.

They’d been on Earth for three days now. The Doctor and Sam had been spending time with some friends in a place called Croydon, and, although they’d offered to take Kode and Compassion back to Anathema, Kode hadn’t felt up to the return journey. Compassion seemed to feel the same way, but she hadn’t said anything. She’d spent her time clearing up the Remote’s loose ends, removing the remaining hardware from the warehouse and tidying up at the hotel. Meanwhile, Kode had been hanging around inside the TARDIS, pretending to be fascinated by the architecture. He’d taken the receiver out of his ear, but he was still picking up the signals, and he felt a lot more comfortable in here than he did outside.

He wondered what Guest would be doing now, back in Anathema. Hatching more plots, or just picking up the pieces? The Doctor had seemed confident that the man wouldn’t cause any more trouble, anyway. The two of them had talked for hours when Guest had been recovering in the TARDIS, although Kode didn’t have a clue what they might have said to each other.

Kode was in the console room when Compassion came back, pacing the floor while he tried to make sense of the *Genetic Politics* book. Compassion was still dressed in that stupid combat jacket of hers, but now there was a great big pack on her back, presumably full of the leftovers from the hotel room.

‘The Doctor says he’s almost ready to go,’ she said. ‘He’s got a couple of goodbyes to do, then we’ll be off.’

‘We can’t go back,’ said Kode.

‘Don’t start that again.’

‘You don’t get it, do you? We’re not the same. Neither is Guest. Why doesn’t anyone understand that?’

Compassion wrinkled her face at him. ‘Meaning?’

‘We’re changed.’ Kode tapped his ear. ‘You know what the signals from Anathema do. They rewire us. Shift our nerves around. Look, when Guest started putting all that stuff about principles into the media, it… it made us more like our ancestors. We’re crossbreeds now. Right?’

‘So’s everyone else in Anathema.’

‘No!’ Kode considered banging his fist against the console, but decided it might look a bit melodramatic. Or
make the whole ship blow up. ‘We were right in the middle of it. The others are just going to go back to normal, after a while. Not us. We were too close. Can’t you see that?’

Compassion shook her head. ‘How do you know all this, Kode?’

‘I just know. That’s all. Listen to the signals. You’ll know it as well.’

‘We don’t have to go back to Anathema. We could ask the Doctor to take us somewhere else. There are other Remote colonies out there, the Faction always said so.’

‘What difference does it make?’ said Kode. ‘We don’t fit in anywhere. Not now.’

Compassion didn’t seem to know what to say to that.

Sarah Jane Smith:

Paul had phoned four times over the last three days, finding a new excuse every time. And Sarah had come up with four different reasons to stop him coming over. When the Doctor finally announced his intention to leave, she couldn’t help feeling relieved.

She couldn’t let him get any closer to Paul. Not while their relationship was this tenuous, anyway. God only knew what kind of damage the Time Lord could do, what changes he could make. She didn’t want to spend the rest of her life wondering if her future husband –

– I can’t believe I just thought that –
– might turn out to be stuffed full of secret Time Lord hormones.

The night before, Sarah and Sam had been up until 4 a.m., swapping companion stories. They had a frightening amount in common. Sam had been particularly interested in the circumstances of Sarah’s departure from the TARDIS, which was problematic, as Sarah couldn’t really remember much. It had all been a bit rushed, actually.

The truth had come out at about two o’clock. Sam was getting ready to leave the Doctor, she’d said. And he knew it. The Doctor had vanished earlier in the evening, saying he had to pick up a new jacket from somewhere in April 1963. Sarah suspected he hadn’t wanted to face the embarrassment of spending one last night with his outgoing assistant.

Now the TARDIS was parked in the dining room, after Sarah had complained about the mess it made of the Persian rug, and last goodbyes were being said. The Doctor was still reeling from the shock of what Sam had just told him.

‘You can’t stay here,’ he spluttered. ‘Not in 1996. You won’t even meet me until next year. There’ll be two of you running around London. Think of the consequences…’

‘You know what I told you,’ Sam said, sternly. ‘The next time the TARDIS goes to Earth, I get off. And this is it.’

‘But surely –’
‘No.’

‘I could take you forward –’

‘No.’ Sam grinned at Sarah. ‘We’ve figured it out. I’m going to be staying here. Sarah’s got a couple of big projects lined up in the next year or so. She’s going to need help. And there’s a spare room here, so I won’t get in the way of… you know. Her private life.’

‘I’m hoping there’ll be a Nobel Prize in this somewhere,’ Sarah added.

‘Either that or we’ll end up bringing down Western civilisation,’ said Sam.

The Doctor’s eyes looked like they were ready to pop. ‘But your parents…’

‘I’ll go back to them. The same day I left. Next year.’

‘You’ll look six years older!’

‘I’ll tell them I’ve had my hair cut. What can they do? If your daughter comes home from school looking older than she’s supposed to, you don’t start asking yourself whether she’s been off in outer space, do you? You just put it down to puberty.’

The Doctor looked up at the ceiling. Sarah wondered if he might actually be praying. ‘This must be in the equations,’ he muttered. ‘Careless.’

‘I’ll look after her,’ Sarah said. ‘I know a thing or two about Time Lord hangovers. When I was with you, back in the seventies…’ She tailed off, and frowned. ‘Hang on. Or was it the eighties?’

‘Temporal slippage,’ said the Doctor. ‘My fault, I’m afraid. I think it’s currently the 1970s, but –’

‘Enough of the technobabble,’ said Sam.

She walked up to him, then, and put her arms around his waist. He responded, without hesitation. This Doctor, thought Sarah, was so much more tactile than either of hers had been.

‘I’m going,’ said Sam. ‘I mean… I’m staying.’
'I'll miss you.'
'I know.'
And then she looked up at him, right into his eyes. Their faces, noted Sarah, were about an inch away from each other.
'I love you,' said Sam.
The Doctor looked up at the ceiling again.
'Do you know, I know exactly what you mean by that,' he said. So Sam let go of him, and took a few steps back. They quite deliberately and carefully didn’t kiss. Not even in a friendly sort of way. The Doctor suddenly seemed to notice Sarah again.
'Well, goodbye again,' he said. 'Goodbye, K9.'
K9 trundled out from under the dining-room table. ‘Master.’
'Where? Oh, I see.' The Doctor shook his head. ‘You know, I still can’t believe I programmed your vocabulary bank to say that.’ He turned back to Sarah. ‘I’ll come to your wedding one day. I promise. I will receive your invitation, don’t worry.’
‘No hurry.’ Sarah stepped forward, gave him a brief – cautious – hug, and moved away again. ‘You’d better go. You’ve got two grumpy Remote people in your TARDIS, and they’re three days overdue.’
‘You’re sure you’re going to be OK with them?’ asked Sam. ‘They might hijack the ship or something. They’re arms dealers, remember. Not your usual kind of company.’
‘Oh, I’m sure they’ll be fine,’ the Doctor said. ‘After all, some of my oldest acquaintances are entirely unethica.’
‘With enemies like that…’ said Sarah.
‘…who needs friends?’ finished Sam. ‘Listen, there’s one more thing, OK?’
‘Yes?’ said the Doctor.
‘Fitz.’
Sarah tried to read the look on the Doctor’s face. Confused, worried, maybe even a tiny bit scared. ‘I know. I have to go and, ah, collect him.’
‘He’s dead, isn’t he?’
The Doctor actually took a step backward. It was as if Sam had slapped him in the face with… well, maybe not with a wet fish, but certainly with something quite damp and unpleasant.
‘You won’t tell me where he is,’ Sam went on. ‘You won’t even let me say goodbye to him. There’s got to be a reason for that. And the only reason I can think of is –’
‘Everybody’s dead,’ said the Doctor. ‘That’s one of the problems with time travel. Everybody’s always dead, and everybody’s always alive. It’s all a question of where you’re standing.’
‘You know what I mean.’
The Doctor kept his eyes fixed on the floor. ‘Fitz isn’t dead, Sam.’
‘Then I want to say goodbye.’
He shook his head. ‘I’ll bring him back one day. I promise. But he’s been through a lot since the last time you saw him. He needs time. Time to recover. I don’t think he’ll be able to cope with goodbyes for quite a while.’
Sam looked like she wanted to scream at him. ‘All right,’ she said. ‘All right, I’ll take your word for it. Just don’t forget, OK? He’s important to me. I mean, we did have sex and everything.’
The Doctor didn’t seem to know how to react to that. But then Sarah wasn’t exactly sure where to look, either. Sam flashed her a quick smile. ‘Not properly,’ the girl explained. ‘It was a parallel-universe-alternative-reality kind of thing.’
‘We’ve all been there,’ Sarah told her. It was the best line she could come up with.
‘Hmm,’ said the Doctor. And with that he stepped up to the TARDIS.
When he reached the door, he paused. Sarah half expected him to turn back, maybe to beg Sam to come with him. She risked a sideways glance at the girl, but Sam just looked… relaxed, really. Not what you’d expect at all.
‘It’s funny,’ said the Doctor, not turning around. ‘I’m sure there’s something I’ve forgotten. One loose end left dangling.’
Then he shook his head, and vanished into the ship.
The door closed. Sarah felt herself go limp. She hadn’t realised how tense she’d been.
‘Welcome to the real world,’ she told Sam.
‘This isn’t the real world,’ Sam said. ‘It’s just a cheap Japanese copy.’ Suddenly, she slapped herself on the forehead, a habit she’d almost certainly picked up from the Doctor. ‘Of course! I forgot to tell him!’
‘Tell him what?’
‘Where the warship was going. I never got round to it. He doesn’t know what the Time Lords were planning.’
‘Oh,’ said Sarah. ‘And what were the Time Lords planning?’

Sam opened her mouth to reply, but the TARDIS was already starting to dematerialise, and the sight of it seemed to distract her. The two of them – all right, three, including K9 – watched the box fade out of existence, until there was nothing left of it but an unpleasant dent in the lino.

‘I wonder if that was the lose end he mentioned,’ mumbled Sarah.

‘Probably,’ said Sam.

Rifa Ibn Jeman:

They’d been trapped on board the alien spaceship for the best part of a week now, if Hammad’s watch was accurate. But time felt different here. When they’d recovered, they’d found themselves in some kind of storage area; Rifa would have called it a cupboard if it hadn’t been so big. It was stuffed with rubbish, with cricket balls and chewed slippers, ancient clothes and faded children’s books. Hammad had suggested that these were things the aliens had stolen from humans, as research material. Which made a kind of sense.

The door had been barricaded from the other side, although there’d been a shaft in the wall, some kind of ventilation system. It had taken them several hours to prise away the circular grille, and they’d spent almost a day crawling through the smooth, white, flawless tunnels on the other side, looking for a way out. When they’d found one, they’d emerged in a corridor. One of many. Just another part of the labyrinth.

They would have starved if Hammad hadn’t found the machine. At first, Rifa had thought it was some kind of robot, but it was really only an American-style vending device, albeit one on wheels. It trundled through the corridors, looking for people to serve, and often it’d follow them around as they searched the ship. After five days in the labyrinth, Rifa still hadn’t seen any signs of life. He had the terrible feeling they’d been heading away from the control room, not towards it. Even if they found someone, what then? Their weapons had been taken while they’d been unconscious. They still had their body armour, but it hadn’t protected them so far.

‘Dealing with Devils.’ That was what Hammad had said when they’d been assigned to the special-weapons unit. Rifa hadn’t listened, of course. If the guns made them invincible, like the unit commanders said, then why worry about where they’d come from? When the unit had been ordered to make that strike on the UN base in Switzerland – the Saudi military had covert contacts in UNISYC, and one of the generals there had wanted a prisoner at the base to ‘disappear’, for some reason – it had turned out to be the easiest operation Rifa could remember. The guns, the armour, the Cold, the magic windows… the Europeans didn’t have anything to match hardware like that.

But Hammad had been right, after all. If you made alien allies, you had to expect alien enemies. It was obvious, wasn’t it? So why hadn’t the government realised it before they’d signed the contract?

Still. They had to find a way out of the labyrinth, that was their priority now. Somewhere, they were bound to find weapons. Even a penknife would be a start. They could always improvise.

So Rifa Ibn Jeman and Sati Hammad, formerly of the Saudi Special Internal Taskforce, kept moving. For the time being, they’d just have to think of the spaceship as their home. There was really nothing else they could do.
He was in the remembrance tank.
Kode was in the remembrance tank.
Wait.

He remembered being on board the Justinian, in orbit around the planet that had been killed off by the Time Lords. Before that, he remembered being rescued from the Cold on Ordifica, pulled out into the light by two of the Faction’s engineers. He saw it all from their point of view, and saw his own face, confused and scared, as he was dragged back into normal space.

His name was Kode…

No. His name was Fitz. He’d been remembered as Kode, because of Tobin’s stupid nickname. Distorted over the generations, turned into a cardboard cutout of himself, a character from a TV show instead of the real Fitz. So badly misremembered, even his best friends hadn’t recognised him.

He picked the most recent memory from the folds of Kode’s brain, and let it roll around his head for a while. Kode was standing in the dome, the same dome where Fitz had spoken to Compassion, two centuries earlier. No, not Compassion: Tobin. Kode was talking to… yes, to him. Him, after all these years.

‘What’s going to happen to me?’ Kode asked.

The Doctor looked up at the ceiling. Down at his feet. Anywhere, really, as long as he didn’t have to look Kode in the eye. ‘Not as much as you might think. The machine’s designed to shape raw biodata, but I think I’ve managed to modify it. With a little help from the locals.’

‘I’m not going to be me any more, am I?’

‘You’ll be who you were,’ the Doctor told him. ‘Who you were in the beginning. Generations ago.’

‘Will I look different?’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I’m afraid your friends exaggerated some of your worst features. You’ve put on weight, as well.’

For a while, Kode didn’t say anything. Fitz got the feeling he was staring at the glass panel of the remembrance tank, but the memory wasn’t too clear on the point.

‘Will I be better?’ Kode asked.

The Doctor didn’t answer. Instead, he took a step forward, and gently rested a hand on Kode’s shoulder. To Fitz, the gesture looked forced. Unconvincing.

‘You don’t have to do this,’ said the Doctor. ‘I can’t make you change yourself It’s got to be your decision. There isn’t really anything wrong with the way you are now.’

‘But I’ll know.’ Kode looked up at the Doctor, and the Doctor finally had to make eye-contact with him. ‘Don’t you get it? I don’t belong in Anathema any more. If I stay this way, I’ll spend my life wondering how close I am. How close to the real thing. And he’s got a place, hasn’t he? He’s supposed to be with you. And you want him back.’

‘That’s not the issue,’ said the Doctor.

‘Yes it is. Look… I won’t be him. Not properly. I’ll be a copy, that’s all. Made out of your memories.’

‘Not just mine, Kode. I’ve linked the machine to the TARDIS, and she’s got a better memory of Fitz than either of us.’

‘I’ll still be a copy.’

‘No. A man is the sum of his memories, that’s all. Every cell in your body has died and been replaced a million times over. There isn’t a human being alive who’s the same person they were a year ago, or a month ago, or even a week ago. The continuity’s all that matters. Believe me.’

So Kode believed him. And so, for that matter, did Fitz.

‘You’ll all remember me, won’t you?’ Kode asked. ‘I mean, you’ll remember who I was. Who I am now.’

‘Oh yes,’ said the Doctor.

Oh yes, thought Fitz. I’ll remember. I’m still going to have all those thoughts you had, aren’t I? Those little quirks, those buried fantasies, those bits and pieces that have got caught up in your personality over the generations. I’ll be Fitz, and you’ll be gone, but you’ll be part of me, the same way I was part of you.

Just for a moment, there were other scenes in front of his eyes, the last of the memories being reshuffled and reordered inside his head. He saw his initiation into the Faction, back on Ordifica. He saw himself kneeling in Mathara’s shrine, with his hands behind his back and the living shadows clustering around him. He’d suppressed
this memory, hidden it away at the bottom of his skull, but now it was all coming back to him. Would he forget it again soon, or would it stay with him now? Hard to say. He got the feeling he’d be happier if he forgot.

Yes. Because now he could see the man with one arm, the messenger who’d been sent by Grandfather Paradox while he’d been in the shrine. A figure dressed in what looked like armour, even blacker and heavier than the armour the Remote wore, with his whole head covered by a great black mask. It was almost like a pharaoh’s death mask, but smoother, and darker, with no features except for the slits of the eyes. The remains of the man’s right arm dangled by his side, shrivelled and sad-looking.

‘This is the future,’ the messenger said, and his voice had all the cracks and wrinkles of old skin. The man sounded exhausted, Fitz noted. Tired of living. But then the messenger started to fold time into pretty origami shapes, showing Fitz his own destiny, where an old Fitz lay screaming in the dirt of a faraway planet as something huge and ancient started to eat him alive, except that –

‘Are you all right?’ asked the Doctor.

The memory vanished as soon as the Doctor opened his mouth. Fitz found himself back in the twentieth century, back in the remembrance tank. He looked up, and saw the Doctor’s face hovering over him, peering at him through the glass panel of the tank. The Doctor was smiling. Fitz thought about smiling back, but it was too much of a strain, really. After everything he’d been through. After coming all this way.

‘Well, I’m back,’ he said.
Coda 1:
Coming Down to Earth

coda n. (1) the final part of a structure, esp. a musical or mathematical one. (2) the concluding part of a literary work, esp. a summary at the end of a novel describing further developments in the lives of the characters.


The attic of Sam’s house, Shoreditch, London (19/8/96).

Sam concentrated on her hand, because her hand seemed a fairly safe thing to concentrate on. It wasn’t likely to start talking to her, for example, or to turn into a small dinosaur. But the more she looked at the skin the more she could see the veins underneath, and the more she looked at the veins the more she could see the patterns in the blood cells. Tiny capsules full of genetic information, branches of pure red data stretching all over her body, signals being pumped in and out of her heart…

So she closed her eyes.

She was getting the hang of things now. When the tablet had started to kick in, she’d tried to fight the signals, to keep the hallucinations in check. But when she’d done that the angles of the attic ceiling had started closing in on her like something out of that Hitchcock film about the man who was scared of heights, and the whole world had turned into one big film script. Just to show her who was in charge. You had to go with it, she decided. Go with it, and see where the signals took you.

The others had left the attic now. They’d gone scurrying for cover when things had started to get rough, and Sam wasn’t sure whether they’d seen the same things she’d seen. There’d been a banging, crashing sound from downstairs, which she was positive had been one of the hallucinations, but the girls had heard it, too, so her head was probably leaking.

There was a creaking sound. Quite possibly real.

Footsteps. Quite possibly real.

Sam opened her eyes.

There was somebody else in the attic. A single figure, tall and long-limbed, standing by the hatch. The hatch was open, so at least she knew he hadn’t walked through the walls or anything. Sam had a funny feeling she was supposed to be scared, or startled at the very least, but those sinister old angles in the architecture seemed to be unsettled by the man, and they shrank back into the shadows as she watched, which was sort of comforting. Apparently, the man wasn’t bothered by the fact that there were bright-red radio transmissions coming out of her ears.

Sam tried to get a grip on the way he looked. His clothes were filthy, his shirt covered in sticky black dirt, his cravat stained with what may well have been blood. He’d tried to cover it all up with an overcoat, big and grey and leathery. In Sam’s current state, she could easily imagine the coat having wings, the enormous flaps billowing up around the man to lift him off the ground.

Oh, and he looked like James Stewart. Exactly like James Stewart. That was the other important thing.

James Stewart crouched down in front of her, folding his long legs underneath him, so his eyes were on a level with Sam’s. He was inspecting her pupils, she realised. Just like the police did on TV.

‘Oh dear,’ he said, quietly. ‘This really wasn’t a good idea, was it?’

He didn’t sound like James Stewart. He sounded English. Sam didn’t risk shaking her head, in case it fell off.

‘Careless use of psychotropics,’ James Stewart went on. It didn’t sound like he was lecturing her, though. It sounded like he was just stating the facts. ‘Not advisable under any circumstances. I’d leave that kind of thing to the shamen, if I were you.’ Then his face fell a little. ‘Or is it “shamans”? I can never remember.’

‘Why are you here?’ asked Sam.

He looked surprised by the question. ‘You know who I am?’

‘Ah.’ The actor nodded. ‘All right. Just between you and me, I’m here because you’re vulnerable. You’ve made a serious pharmaceutical error, and now you’re open to… well, all sorts of signals. All sorts of transmissions.

Sam wasn’t sure what to say to that. She’d read in some magazine or other that you could have your entire personality changed while you were on hallucinogens, if you were exposed to a strong enough stimulus. There was this case of a gay man turning straight… or was it the other way round? Either way, that was why Sam had come up to the attic in the first place, just she and her friends. No bad influences. No television. No radio.

Then again, did it make a difference? Our whole culture, thought Sam, is just one long mass delusion. A great
big nonstop babble of pictures and sounds, of TV shows and bad pop records. And we’re all stuck in the middle of it, trying to make sense of it by pretending that Hollywood actors and minor celebrities are there to be our spirit guides. A world full of people guzzling chocolate and caffeine and alcohol and phenylalanine, all of them mind-altering substances, all of them making the population hyperactive, opening them up to the signals around them.

‘We don’t live in the world we think we live in,’ Sam said, out loud. ‘We live in the signals of the world we think we live in. I’m right, aren’t I?’

‘Why did you do it?’ James Stewart asked.

Sam gawped at him for a moment or two. ‘The tablet? Because… I wanted to see what’d happen. That’s all.’

‘No. That’s not what you told me.’

That confused her. She didn’t remember ever sharing her private thoughts with James Stewart before.

‘You did it because of your parents,’ the man prompted. ‘Because you wanted to find out just how liberal-minded they were, when it came to the crunch. Isn’t that true?’

Sam nodded, slowly and carefully. ‘That’s not all,’ she said. ‘They want me to be like they are. You know? I mean, they’re not forcing me to go on demos with them or anything, but you can tell, the way Dad talks to me…’

‘Isn’t that what you want?’

‘No. Well, yeah. But not like that.’ James Stewart was nodding politely, so Sam kept talking. ‘They’re so out of it, you know? They support all these protest groups, all these causes, but they’ve never been inside a thousand miles of a real torture camp. Or a real ghetto. Dad got arrested for going on a march back in the sixties, and that’s about it.’

‘I think I understand,’ said James Stewart. ‘You wanted to get your hands dirty.’

‘Yeah. Mark Lessing… he’s the one I bought the stuff off… he’s one of the people my parents want me to stay away from. But he’s part of the world they’re trying to save, isn’t he? He’s closer to it than they are. Closer to ground level. I can’t explain it better than that. It’s just…’

‘Sam.’ James Stewart reached out and put his hands on her shoulders, his touch throwing off tiny imaginary sparks of red light. It felt quite nice, actually. ‘Listen to me. I’m going to ask you something. Now, you’re very open to suggestion at the moment, and I shouldn’t really be doing this. I’m changing things just by being here. But it’s important to me. I made a promise to someone, and I have to keep it. Do you understand?’

Sam stared back at him. His ears were leaking, too, she noticed. But there were numbers popping out of his head, not signals. The numbers danced in circles around his shoulders, accidentally-on-purpose locking together to form equations, and Sam thought she could see patterns in those equations, like the patterns in tea leaves or tarot cards. There were whole futures in the maths, and the more the actor spoke, the more solid they seemed to get.

‘What do you want to do?’ James Stewart asked.

‘I want to save the world,’ said Sam. It just slipped out, really, and it’d probably sound downright embarrassing once all of this was over.

‘The world?’

Sam nodded. ‘I want to stop everything hurting so much. I want to help all the people. And all the animals. I want to stop everyone killing each other, and I want to stop them killing the dolphins, and I want to let all the beagles out of all the research labs. I want to change everything.’ She stopped for breath. ‘Is that enough?’

James Stewart seemed tense for some reason. ‘You can save some of the people some of the time,’ he said cautiously. ‘But you can’t change everything. Let me tell you a secret. Let me tell you about the future.’

He took a deep, deep breath. Sam saw the numbers freeze in midair, as if they were listening to him.

‘Early in the next century, human civilisation will be on the brink of collapse,’ he explained. ‘There’ll be disasters. Major wars. The first nuclear terrorist incidents. Whole cities will turn into no-go areas. By the mid-2050s, the government – the world government – will be desperate. Religions will be outlawed. The police, even the police here in Britain, will shoot to kill without a second thought. And then, inevitably, it’ll all come apart at the seams. There’ll be a few years when there’s no effective government at all. Total chaos.’

Sam wondered how James Stewart knew all this. Perhaps he’d read the script. ‘And that’s it?’ she asked. ‘The end of the world?’

‘No. By the 2060s, there’ll be new governments forming. New power blocs. But the same old patterns are going to repeat themselves. By the 2080s, things are going to be the same as they were in the 1980s. Two great empires, on the brink of war. Presidents and politicians with their fingers on the buttons.’

‘But that’s stupid,’ said Sam. ‘It means the whole thing’s worthless. Everything we’re going to go through. If no one ever learns anything, what’s the point?’

The numbers were actually trembling. Watching. Waiting. Ready to make equations that couldn’t be unmade.

‘Then what are you going to do?’ James Stewart asked.

‘Change it,’ said Sam.
‘You’re going to go into politics?’
‘No. You said that wouldn’t work, didn’t you?’
‘Did I?’
‘The same old patterns, that’s what you said. If I go into politics, so what? All politics is the same. It doesn’t matter what they say they stand for. They’re all playing with the same rules, aren’t they? It’s like… it’s like back when we lived in the jungle, and the biggest monkey got to make all the laws, so he made sure he was on top and everyone else was underneath. We haven’t changed. We haven’t changed the rules since then. All the leaders, all the prime ministers, they’re just big monkeys in suits. We need new rules. That’s the only way we can break out of this, isn’t it? By making new rules.’
‘I can’t make that decision,’ James Stewart told her.
‘I can. I want a better world. I want a different world. I mean, really different.’
‘Then what are you going to do?’ James Stewart repeated. A little more urgently this time.
‘Something else,’ Sam replied. ‘I don’t know what. I’ll think of something.’
And the numbers locked.
Then James Stewart got to his feet. The equations were popping like bubbles around his head.
‘Good,’ he said. ‘Good. It’s your decision. In your current state of mind, I could have just told you what to do. But I did that kind of thing quite a lot in my last lifetime, and I’m not sure it was ever worth it.’
‘Who were you before you were James Stewart, then?’ Sam asked.
The actor beamed. ‘Many people,’ he said. ‘Some of them very talented. But you’ve made your decision. It had to be yours. All I did was give you the facts. You interpreted them in your own way. A little bit of interference in the signals around you, but that’s all. If anybody ever asks, you’ll be sure to tell them that, won’t you?’
Sam nodded. She could keep that promise, even if she couldn’t actually understand it.
‘I always said I was beyond politics,’ James Stewart told her. ‘Now I think I was right. But not in the way I meant. Well… goodbye, Sam. I really have to be going now. Sarah should be coming back into the console room any minute, and… no, never mind.’
Without another word, he turned, and lowered himself through the trapdoor. Sam heard the soft thump of his feet on the carpet below, then the even softer sound of his footsteps, padding away down the hall.

A few minutes later, Sam’s father climbed up into the attic.
He didn’t say a word. But he seemed to know what had been happening, somehow. His face was pale, his eyes wide, as if he’d seen something he didn’t want to have to remember. He seemed confused as he stood over her, maybe embarrassed. He kept staring into the corners, searching for some way of starting a conversation.
In the end, he just got down on his knees, and put his arm around Sam’s body. Only one arm, Sam noted; the other one looked as though it had been broken, and now she thought about it, hadn’t James Stewart had the same problem? Well, that made a kind of sense. Her father and James Stewart were both part of the same process, so why shouldn’t they both have broken arms?
He stayed like that for some time, holding her to his chest, and Sam didn’t struggle. While he was there, she didn’t have to think about anything else. She didn’t have to worry about the hallucinations, or about the state of the world in 2080, or about the signals bursting out of her ears.
Eventually, he said, ‘Something’s happened.’
He didn’t explain what he meant by that. Sam remembered the banging, crashing sound from downstairs, and wondered if he’d seen something there, something even stranger than James Stewart in an overcoat.
But if he had, he didn’t tell her about it.
FOREMAN’S WORLD:
AFTERNOON ON THE SECOND DAY

‘I see,’ said the Doctor. ‘It’s an allegory.’
I.M. Foreman tutted at him. ‘It’s a riddle. You used to know it. You must have done, if you studied with the order. Don’t tell me you’ve forgotten.’

They were walking the length of the valley, heading away from the woodland where the TARDIS had been parked. The fields ahead of them had been laid out in neat squares, so from here they could see an enormous chessboard of green and gold, sloping upward and into the mist. I.M. Foreman had often thought about playing an actual game of chess here, controlling the bodies of the local animals to use as pieces, but it seemed like an awful lot of effort to go to for an afternoon’s entertainment. There were sheep grazing in the squares now, completely unaware that some of them were in exactly the right positions for a Rùy Lopez opening.

‘It’s been five regenerations since the last time I saw you. A lot of things get filed away with every change. Pushed to the back of my mind.’ The Doctor shook his head, and I.M. Foreman watched the curls bobbing around his head in all directions. A few of them seemed to be trying to break through the time barrier. ‘Let me make sure I’ve got this right. You take a baby goose, and put it inside a bottle. Then the goose grows up, so it can’t get out on its own. And you want me to tell you how to get the goose out, is that it?’

I.M. Foreman sighed. The Doctor was going into lovable-idiot’ mode, apparently. ‘That’s the general idea.’
The Doctor sucked his lip for a few moments. ‘Well, you could always break the bottle.’
‘Without breaking the bottle,’ I.M. Foreman told him. ‘That’s the whole point. You can’t break it. Or cut a hole in it. Or even touch it.’

‘Oh,’ said the Doctor. ‘In that case –’
‘And this version of the riddle comes from pre-industrial Earth,’ I.M. Foreman cut in. ‘So it doesn’t have anything to do with teleportation. Or transmigration of object. All right?’

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor.

They kept walking, cutting across one of the cornfields, and doing their best not to leave too many messy footprints behind.

‘Ah,’ the Doctor repeated.
‘You don’t know, do you?’ said I.M. Foreman.
‘I’ll get there,’ the Doctor insisted. ‘So. What do you think about Sam?’
‘You mean, about the fact that you’ve left someone on Earth whose sole purpose in life is to destroy human history?’

‘I wouldn’t have put it quite like that,’ the Doctor mumbled.
‘I think it’s quite typical of you, actually.’ The Doctor’s face wrinkled up when she said that, much to I.M. Foreman’s amusement. ‘There’s one thing I still don’t get, though.’
‘There would be. Is it about my shadow?’

‘No, but we’ll come to that. You said the TARDIS had seen something bad happen on Earth in 1996. You said it had tried to warn you about it. Is that the idea?’

‘More or less,’ said the Doctor. ‘It might not have been something that happened on Earth, as such. But something connected with the Remote. With the time I spent in that prison cell.’

‘What, though? Was it just what you did to Sam, or am I barking up the wrong tree again?’
The Doctor stopped walking. Which is what he always did, I.M. Foreman noted, when he wanted to make a point.

‘Something changed,’ he said. Annoyingly, he seemed to want to leave it at that. I.M. Foreman decided not to let him, and folded her arms in the most aggressive way possible.

‘What happened to Sam only relates to Earth’s history,’ the Doctor went on. ‘The TARDIS wouldn’t want to get involved. She’d only be worried about something that happened to me. Or to the TARDIS herself.’

‘So what did happen to you?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor. ‘That’s why I came here. To talk to you about Dust. About the last time we met the Remote. I’m sure there’s something I’m missing.’

‘All right,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘Then let’s get back to Dust. Where were we?’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘No, wait. There’s still something you’ve got to tell me.’

‘Oh yes?’

‘The goose,’ said the Doctor. ‘How do you set the goose free without breaking the bottle?’
‘Later,’ said I.M. Foreman.
WHAT HAPPENED ON DUST
(PART TWO)

Different game, different rules, but a lot of the pieces are the same. (Can you imagine that? Knights and pawns and bishops turning up in the middle of a Cluedo board. Still, it’s no stranger than seeing the Third Doctor trying to cope with life on Dust.) This is the Dead Frontier, we’ve already established that. The place where human culture finally rolled over and died, and had its carcass picked apart by the vultures. The dead end at the edge of the galaxy.

The Remote are here on Dust, although they seem to have degenerated a little since we saw them in the twentieth century. We get the impression that the oldest of the Remote is barely human at all, but we haven’t met him face to face yet, so it’s hard to be sure. When we left this story in stasis, the soldiers of the Remote were just about to descend on the town where Magdelana lives, planting their boarding tubes in the middle of I.M. Foreman’s travelling show. Remember?

Oh yes. I.M. Foreman. We still don’t know who he is – and he is a he, at least here on Dust – or why he’s running a show like this one. But it’s probably safe to assume that the Doctor and Sarah are about to find out, seeing that they’ve just taken refuge inside one of the thirteen covered wagons outside the town wall. One of the Remote shot I.M. Foreman in the head a few moments ago, although he doesn’t seem to be suffering any ill effects so far. And let’s not forget: Faction Paradox itself has noticed what’s happening on Dust, so a Faction warship is already on its way from the Eleven-Day Empire.

There are all sorts of questions we could ask ourselves, if we wanted to build up the suspense. How are the Remote connected to the Remote we saw on Earth? Why is I.M. Foreman a different gender from the individual the Eighth Doctor met on Foreman’s World? And who (or what) lives in the thirteenth wagon of the travelling show?

But suspense is cheap. The fact is, things are about to come together, at last.

Let’s start with that Faction warship…
6

How I Was Made
(prototypes and consequences)

The warship arrived in ‘real time’ about four and a half light years from Dust, in orbit around a planet that had been claimed by the Earth Empire nearly a thousand years earlier, but which had never been fully colonised for economic reasons too dull for history to remember. The human outpost there had soon been infiltrated by agents of the Faction – it was a perfect away base, being as obscure and as far from Gallifrey as it was – but it had been abandoned when Earth had fallen, leaving nothing but the ruins of the marble cloisters and ivory towers that the Faction had carved out for itself there. The crew of the Faction’s warship had been instructed to stop at the planet en route to Dust, to tie up some loose ends while the vessel was in the vicinity.

The Mothers and Fathers of the Eleven-Day Empire felt that the abandoned colony was now something of a liability. The Time Lords were bound to investigate events on Dust, and there was a very real risk of Gallifrey’s agents noticing what the Faction had been up to in the systems nearby, even if those systems had already been evacuated.

Typical of the Faction, the skeleton of the warship was quite literally a skeleton. A great horned skull at the prow, with the central corridor running through the spine, kilometres of electrical wiring threaded through the spaces where the nerve clusters had been. Once upon a time, before the lesser humanoid cultures had started spreading their empires across space-time, giants had walked this galaxy; and the Daemons had been princes among those giants, masters of arcane genetic science, beings capable of shrinking themselves down to the size of an atom or blowing themselves up to the size of a small moon with a single thought (given enough raw matter to work with, naturally). The Daemons of the military had grown vast wings from their shoulder blades, then given themselves spatiodynamic bodies with swept-back horns and necks like the necks of swans, allowing them to glide through hyperspace with the minimum of effort. When the Daemons had faced their own private Götterdämmerung, many of their number had died in full ‘battle mode’, and their remains were still highly prized by Faction Paradox. The skeletons made perfect infrastructures for the Faction’s warships, partly because of the way they looked, but mostly because of the aeons of power that had been absorbed and stored by the giants’ bones. The vessel that had been sent to Dust was the smallest of the six surviving Faction Paradox warships, and it had been built around a skeleton from the Daemons’ own homeworld, unearthed long after the planet had been infested by the lesser races.

Inside the skull of the vessel, certain orders were given to the ship’s technicians. The warship promptly opened its mouth, and thirty seconds later every single settlement on the colony planet had simply ceased to exist. The evidence had been removed from the face of history, once and for all.

That done, the warship headed for Dust. The crew’s main mission still had to be completed.

Sarah listened, but all she could hear was the ticking of a clock, although she wasn’t sure exactly where the sound was coming from. She suspected it was part of the furnishings of the wagon, a constant tick-tock-tick-tock noise to give the place a more homely kind of atmosphere. Outside, the dust storm was still tearing up the planet (probably). Outside, the big black thing in the sky was still descending on the town (probably). But, as soon as I.M. Foreman had closed the door of the wagon behind them, there’d been silence. Apart from that clock, obviously.

It was like walking into another world, or at the very least like walking into a TARDIS. Which was especially odd when you considered that the only thing between them and the world outside was a layer of grubby tarpaulin.

‘We’ll be safe inside,’ I.M. Foreman had insisted, when he’d ushered them through the door. ‘Protocols of property.’

The room inside the wagon was ten feet long, four feet wide, and just high enough to give the Doctor standing room. Even so, he looked distinctly uncomfortable here, as if he needed more space to be lanky in. The room reminded Sarah of the TARDIS at its worst. There were small furnishings stuffed into the corners, so many bits and pieces that you got the impression the room had grown new corners just to accommodate them all. The floor was covered with something that looked like a hand-made Persian rug, but piles of what could only be called ‘stuff’ had been heaped on top of it, leaving Sarah and the Doctor knee-deep in card tables, marble figurines and untidy stacks of videotapes. There was a seventies-style lava lamp near the door, and it was the most alien-looking thing here.

Everything smelled old. That was what struck Sarah most of all. This far in the future – her future – she couldn’t think of any reason why the videotapes shouldn’t be antiques, but in her mind VCR technology was something smooth, shiny, and Japanese, not the kind of thing that should smell like your great-aunt’s wardrobe. Even the Doctor looked fazed by it, and he was meant to be a Time Lord, for heaven’s sake. There were chairs free,
but the Doctor insisted on standing, with one hand on his hip and the other scratching his chin. I.M. Foreman himself sat in a fat old armchair at the far end of the wagon, with his elbows on his knees and his hands folded in front of his face. His expression was neutral, but then again it was hard reading someone when you couldn’t see their eyes.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, went the invisible clock.
‘Well,’ the Doctor muttered, obviously addressing the blind man. ‘I think you’ve got some explaining to do. Don’t you?’
‘After you,’ I.M. Foreman told him. He sounded as though he had something in his mouth.
If it hadn’t been for the blindfold, Sarah would have assumed that the two of them were trying to stare each other out. Perhaps they were, in dimensions that dopey little human beings like her couldn’t see properly.
‘Look,’ she said, deciding to end this face-off before it got silly. ‘I don’t understand any of this. I saw you get shot.’
I.M. Foreman looked dubious. ‘Doesn’t ring a bell. When?’
Sarah would have rolled her eyes, if she’d thought anybody would have noticed. ‘Outside. One of those men in armour. He shot you. I saw your head jerk back.’
‘Oh, that,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘Yes. Thanks for reminding me.’
With that, he spat out the object in his mouth. There was a tiny plink noise as the bullet hit the floor.
‘Caught it in my teeth,’ I.M. Foreman explained, with a miniature shrug.
‘That’s not possible,’ said Sarah.
‘Isn’t it? Showmen do it all the time, back where you come from. It’s the oldest show-stopper in the book.’
‘But that’s just a trick,’ Sarah insisted. ‘Nobody really catches bullets in their teeth. It’s a circus act. It’s an illusion. You need a fake gun to do it.’

There was a long silence. The Doctor raised a quiet eyebrow. I.M. Foreman frowned to himself.
‘A trick?’ he repeated.
Sarah nodded.
‘Are you sure?’
‘I’m sure,’ said Sarah.
‘Mmm. That explains why it took me so long to get the hang of it, then. I did wonder how your people made it look so easy.’
OK. Right. Fine. Sarah glanced around, looking for a reason to change the subject, and it wasn’t hard to find one. ‘Look… this wagon of yours,’ she tried. ‘It’s a TARDIS, isn’t it?’
‘God, no,’ said I.M. Foreman.
‘It’s a complex event,’ the Doctor added, obviously suffering from the delusion that he was being helpful. Still, at least he was talking again, rather than just brooding about being upstaged by the showman. He still had his eyes fixed on the competition, though.
‘Sorry?’ said Sarah.
The Doctor took that as his cue to spout technogubbins at her. ‘The TARDIS is a complex event in space-time, modelled according to strict mathematical principles. Numbers to program the continuum, so to speak. And this place… He waved his hand around the interior of the wagon, trying to make it clear how inferior it was to his trusty old police box. ‘This place is the same sort of thing, but not contained. Not what you could call a ship. Not attached to a TARDIS’s extradimensional framework, and not connected to any sort of direct power source.’
‘You mean, it’s like a TARDIS, only not in a box,’ Sarah suggested.
The Doctor ignored that particular piece of wisdom. He turned back to I.M. Foreman, and gave the man an extra-special glare.
‘I assume you stole it from Gallifrey?’ he asked.
‘I didn’t “steal” anything,’ I.M. Foreman countered. ‘It’s not technology. It’s not a machine.’
‘Oh no? Then what is it?’
‘It’s a process.’ The Doctor scoffed at that, but I.M. Foreman kept talking. ‘You don’t need solid hardware. There are other ways of getting from A to B. Not that the Time Lords ever use them these days.’
‘Gobbledegook,’ said the Doctor.
‘Wait a moment,’ said Sarah. ‘I sort of thought… you were a Time Lord, as well.’
‘No,’ I.M. Foreman told her. ‘I’m a Gallifreyan.’
Sarah looked at the Doctor. He’d raised his eyebrows again, and his hand had frozen on his chin.
‘Not all Gallifreyans are Time Lords, Sarah,’ he murmured. ‘The Time Lords are just the elite of the planet’s society. The creme de la creme. Or so they say.’
‘They like to think they’re the only ones who can make an impression,’ I.M. Foreman added.
‘Which begs the question, what are you?’ the Doctor asked. ‘Only Time Lords have access to time technology. That’s the law, anyway.’

‘It’s the law now,’ I.M. Foreman corrected him.

‘Meaning?’

The showman smiled very slightly.

‘I’m a priest,’ he said.

Sarah laughed. She couldn’t help it. She imagined a whole monastery full of people like him, bumbling around in their horrible waistcoats and bleeding on to the carpets. The Doctor didn’t look amused, though. Amazed, maybe.

I.M. Foreman sighed, apparently gearing up to go into one of his theatrical routines. He leaned forward, and started to rummage through the effects on one of the little tables in front of him, pushing aside the wind-up toys and bubble gum cards until he found what he was looking for.

It was a bottle, about the right size and shape to have had a Coca-Cola label stuck to it, and it looked as though it had been dug up out of the dust somewhere in the neighbourhood. I.M. Foreman began to twist off the cap, despite the fact that the bottle seemed to be empty.

‘The If breathed into this bottle,’ he announced. ‘The If does that a lot. It likes to collect stories, I think. It must have thought ours would make a good one. I was saving it for a special occasion, but I suppose this’ll have to do.’

There was a tiny hissing noise as the bottle popped open. Air poured out of the neck, hormone-scented air, and Sarah remembered being in the grey tent with the If, being taken twenty years into her own future when it had breathed on her. And if its breath really had been stored in the bottle…

She saw the Doctor lunge forward, trying to grab the bottle before I.M. Foreman could finish taking the cap off, not understanding exactly what was happening but trying to stop it anyway. It didn’t work. Sarah gasped for breath, and found herself sucking in the air of a completely different planet, in a time zone that had been deliberately set apart from the rest of history. Gallifrey; it had to be Gallifrey. She’d actually made it to the Time Lord homeworld, except that…

She was standing on the side of a mountain, watching the fires spread along the valley down below. The monasteries were burning. The agents of the High Council swept through the cloisters, with flames bursting from their robes, bringing fire to anything they touched. The priests and the monks ran howling from their chapels, skins and sackcloths smouldering in the heat, rolling in the dirt and begging the Time Lords for mercy. Huge silver butterfly things were whirling in the sky overhead, attracted by the smoke, sucking the burned flesh out of the clouds and feeding on the carrion of –

‘Stop it,’ said the Doctor.

Sarah blinked.

‘Is there a problem?’ asked I.M. Foreman, putting the empty bottle down on the floor by the side of his armchair.

‘That’s a lie,’ snapped the Doctor. ‘The Time Lords never burned down the monasteries. Or the churches.’

‘It was a story,’ said I.M. Foreman, defensively. ‘The Ifs like that. He exaggerates a bit.’

I hope so, thought Sarah. After what I saw in that tent, I certainly hope so. ‘But there were monks…’ she began.

‘Until the High Council dissolved the monasteries,’ agreed I.M. Foreman. ‘Monks, and priests, and wardens of the church. The religious classes used to have the same rights as the Time Lords. The same access to time travel. The same genetic privileges. A right to observe Council procedure.’

The Doctor wanted to argue, Sarah could tell, but he obviously wasn’t sure how to. ‘Look, old chap, I really do sympathise,’ he tried. ‘I’ve had some training in the old ways myself, you know. There was this old hermit… well, never mind that now. The High Council shouldn’t have got rid of the old orders, I know. But they never used violence. There weren’t any burnings.’

‘There might as well have been,’ I.M. Foreman mumbled.

The Doctor opened his mouth to take up the challenge, but then something more important seemed to strike him. Six squillion wrinkles suddenly appeared in his forehead.

‘You say you’re a priest?’ he queried. ‘From before the dissolution?’

‘That’s the general idea,’ said I.M. Foreman, dryly.

‘But your age,’ the Doctor said. ‘You must be…’

‘Let me put it this way,’ the showman/priest cut in. ‘We’ve been travelling from Gallifrey in a prearranged pattern. The techniques can’t take us too far in one leap. We’ve been going from planet to planet, a few light years each journey. Moving backward and forward in time when we have to, so there’s always some kind of civilisation wherever we go. Picking up skills on the way. Learning. Developing.’ He gave the Doctor a quick smile. ‘Getting
older. You know. The usual.’

‘What about all the others?’ asked Sarah. ‘They’re all priests as well?’

‘Mmm,’ said I.M. Foreman, in a noncommittal kind of way.

‘So where are you heading?’

‘Outward. Following the spiral of this galaxy. Taking in as much as we can on the way. We started on Gallifrey, which is about as close to galactic centre as you can get. This is as far as we’ve come.’

If the Doctor had looked surprised before, now he seemed entirely lost for words. ‘But this planet’s on the edge of the galaxy,’ he pointed out.

‘I know,’ I.M. Foreman agreed. ‘Long trip.’

There was silence then, apart from the tick-tock of the invisible clock. The Doctor started pacing the floor, somehow not treading on any of the assembled bric-a-brac as he went. Meanwhile, Sarah found herself wondering what might be happening outside. How many of the locals might be getting themselves killed out there.

Didn’t the Doctor care? Or was she failing to see the bigger picture here?

In the end, the Doctor stopped in his tracks, and faced I.M. Foreman again. All the indignation, all the snootiness, had been sucked out of his face by now. He looked earnest. Serious.

‘Why?’ he asked. ‘Why do it? Why come all this way?’

‘You’re a renegade, too,’ the blind man said. ‘Why do you do it?’

Sarah found herself turning her head to and fro to follow the conversation. It was like watching a special eccentric scientists’ day at Wimbledon. ‘There are times when a little intervention is necessary,’ the Doctor declared.

I.M. Foreman nodded. ‘Well, then. We’re agreed on something. We’re essentially doing the same job.’

‘You’re running a travelling show,’ the Doctor protested.

‘So I am. What’s the matter? You don’t think that’s a worthwhile occupation?’

The Doctor didn’t reply. His face was saying no in big fat wrinkly letters, though.

I.M. Foreman stood, and for a moment Sarah thought he was going to reach for another bottle of time, but it turned out that he just wanted a good stretch. Standing there in his own home, with his funny clothes and his funny props, he seemed almost human. ‘You know the way the order works,’ he said. ‘You know what we believe in. No direct action. Remember the story about the goose in the bottle.’

Sarah had no idea what that was supposed to mean, but the Doctor clearly got the point. He lowered his eyes.

‘We demonstrate,’ I.M. Foreman continued. ‘We show our audiences how far they can go. What one species is capable of. We let them see things they always thought were impossible, or unlikely, or just plain ridiculous, and we let them work out the rest for themselves. They never forget what they see in the travelling show. And that makes them stronger. Stronger human beings, or stronger Kalekani, or stronger Martians.’ Sarah saw the corners of his mouth twitch. ‘Mars was always my favourite planet. Never been sure why.’

‘There’s a time for direct action,’ said the Doctor, keeping his voice as low as Sarah had ever heard it.

But I.M. Foreman just shrugged. ‘Possibly. It’s not my place to say. It’s not my job to fight people’s wars for them. All the show does is remind people of their potential. The rest is up to them. It’s the way of the order.’

‘Yes,’ muttered the Doctor. ‘Yes, it was. I remember.’

‘Besides, it’s the kind of interference the High Council never notices,’ I.M. Foreman concluded. He stretched again as he said it, very nearly knocking over two bookshelves and a stuffed beaver in the process. ‘The Time Lords only look for the big things. Explosions. Invasions. Signs of large-scale intervention. Meanwhile, we specialise in changing the little things. Saving souls one at a time. Well, one audience at a time.’

‘But there’s a problem, isn’t there?’ said the Doctor.

I.M. Foreman cocked his head to one side. Sarah got the feeling he was playing innocent. ‘Is there?’

‘This show of yours. It attracts things, did you know that?’

The blind man shrugged. ‘Frankly, I don’t care who I’ve got for an audience. Natives or aliens.’

‘Attracts things?’ Sarah queried.

‘It makes dents in the space-time continuum wherever it goes,’ the Doctor told her. He said the words in a hurry, so he could carry on his conversation with the showman without losing his drift. ‘Anyone with any sort of time-sensitivity can find themselves being drawn to it. Like the TARDIS was. Or like these Remote people, for example.’

‘Everything comes to Dust,’ Sarah heard I.M. Foreman murmur. ‘Tell us something we don’t know.’

The Doctor fixed his eyes on the man, doing his best to look accusing. ‘How does this show get from planet to planet?’ he asked.

‘Oh, it’s not hard. We just use the techniques to tell it where we want to go next. And the show goes there.’

I.M. Foreman made a ‘whoosh’ noise with the spare air in his cheeks, although Sarah found it hard to believe things
were quite that simple. She wondered what these ‘techniques’ might be, exactly. The way I.M. Foreman talked about them, you’d think the show ran on raw prayer. She imagined I.M. Foreman and his friends sitting in a circle and chanting, programming the travelling show with their hymns, just like the Doctor programmed the TARDIS with his magic mathematics.

‘The show builds itself a new patch of space-time on the target planet,’ the showman went on. ‘The new patch pushes the fabric of the world to one side, and squeezes itself into the gap. It tries to disguise itself, usually. Like that travel capsule of yours does. By the way, did you know it’s broken? There aren’t any police boxes on Dust.’

‘I had noticed,’ said the Doctor, grimly.

Sarah cleared her throat, to remind them both that she was still there. ‘You mean the show doesn’t really look like a bunch of caravans?’

‘Only on Dust. Wherever the show goes, it finds a new shape for itself. It always leaves the old shape behind when it leaves, though. Like a snake shedding its skin, I suppose. Mind you, the show picks the furnishings itself. The decor around here gets a bit erratic sometimes. You’d be amazed at some of the shapes it’s had over the years. A wagon train. A derailed steam engine. An urban junkyard. An extra floor on a twenty-third-century space station.’

He probably listed some more examples after that, but Sarah didn’t hear him. Halfway through the sentence, she’d felt – actually felt – the temperature in the room drop by several degrees. When she looked at the Doctor again, his face had turned the colour of fresh linen. His eyes were wide open, staring in horror, and disbelief, and shock, and a million other things. He looked, in every possible respect, like a man who’d finally worked out what was going on in the universe.

‘A junkyard?’ he said.

I.M. Foreman just nodded. Had he really not noticed the change in the Doctor, or was this part of his act? ‘That was on Earth. London, 1964, I think. Same kind of period as that police box you… oww.’

The Doctor had moved too quickly for Sarah to follow. One moment he was near the door, the next he was standing right in front of the pseudo-priest. Grabbing the man by his waistcoat, quite possibly just to stop himself toppling over.

‘Your “techniques”,’ the Doctor said. His face was pressed right up against I.M. Foreman’s now, and there was a desperation in his voice that Sarah hadn’t heard there before. This planet really was getting to him, wasn’t it? ‘Good grief, man. How long? How long does it take the show to finish building itself a new site?’

I.M. Foreman seemed quite calm. He looked puzzled, rather than worried. ‘Months. Maybe years. Depends how the show feels.’

‘Years?’

“We haven’t got the same modelling technology as your TARDIS, remember. Look, I’ll explain. When the show locks on to a new planet, it starts building retroactively, so most of the work’s done before the time zone we’re aiming for.” I.M. Foreman tried to nod at the walls of the wagon, but it couldn’t have been easy with the Doctor clinging on to him like that. ‘The show started building this site a couple of years ago. That’s when the Remote got drawn here. When the building work started. We only moved in this morning, mind you. The show shielded itself in the meantime, so nobody noticed it until we were ready to open. It doesn’t always bother doing that. Depends how hostile it thinks the environment is.’

‘Nineteen sixty-four,’ the Doctor said, and he was practically spitting in the poor man’s face by now. ‘You said you were on Earth in 1964. The show was a junkyard.’

‘Well, that’s true –’

‘Then the junkyard would have been unoccupied,’ the Doctor went on, getting the words out faster than his tongue seemed to want to move. ‘While it was still half finished. It would have been empty for most of 1963. Waiting for you to arrive.’

‘Is that a problem?’ said I.M. Foreman.

The Doctor let go of the man. Suddenly he was standing by the door again, with his back turned to the rest of the room, slowly scratching the back of his neck.

‘The show attracts things,’ Sarah heard him mutter. ‘Jehoshaphat. I should have realised. And I thought I was the one who’d made the decision.’

Slowly, he turned back to face the blind man. Suddenly he was the Doctor she knew again, although there was a kind of energy in his body she didn’t recognise. A kind of… anger?

‘Don’t you see?’ he said. ‘You’re one of my ancestors.’

‘Um…’ Sarah began.

‘Um…’ added I.M. Foreman.

‘Not literally,’ the Doctor went on. ‘Not by blood. But you were the first. You, and some of the others from the order. You were the first ones who took your beliefs to the outside universe. The first true renegades. You
introduced that idea to the culture of Gallifrey, and it never went away. Every Time Lord who ever borrowed a TARDIS from the Academy was following the patterns you laid down. Don’t you see, man? You’re a first-generation renegade. We were following in your footsteps all the time, without even realising it. All of us. My granddaughter even named herself after you. Not that she ever knew the truth. To her, you were just a name on a sign.’

‘Honoured,’ said I.M. Foreman.

The Doctor was angry, Sarah realised. Because he wasn’t the pioneer he’d thought he was. Because he’d travelled from one side of creation to the other, and found someone else already waiting for him at the end of the journey. Because I.M. Foreman had interfered with his whole life, just like he’d interfered with the lives of all his human companions.

‘Doctor –’ she began, although she had no idea what she ought to say to him. Luckily, he hadn’t finished talking yet.

‘None of this matters now,’ he announced. ‘The important thing is, thanks to you this town’s being attacked by the Remote. That’s the first thing we’ve got to think about. How we’re going to save the people whose lives you’ve endangered.’

I.M. Foreman just shrugged. ‘It’s not generally the way we do things,’ he said. ‘Direct action.’

‘It’s the way I do things,’ snapped the Doctor. Before anyone could say another word, he turned to the door, grabbed the handle, and shoved it open.

There was the smell of dust and gunpowder. All of a sudden, the outside world was flooding back into the room.
Face-Off
(in which the villain tears off his mask, to reveal the features of...)

The Remote ship was hovering with its belly directly above the travelling show, so the front end of the vehicle/settlement was just poking over the edge of the town wall. The ship had reached out with half a dozen of its boarding tubes, six pipelines of black plastic membrane that had sprouted from the vessel’s bulk and planted themselves in the dust, one in the centre of the show, one outside the town gate, and the rest inside the walls of the town proper. The Remote troops were already taking control of the streets, battered plastic firearms at the ready, threatening anybody who got in their way. Not that many of the locals were bothering to get in their way, obviously.

So when the oldest of the Remote stepped out of the boarding tube and on to the surface of the planet, the first thing he heard was the sound of gunfire, of Faction-issue weaponry blowing miniature craters in the ground, accompanied by the thump-thump-thump of armour-plated boots in the sand. The oldest had taken the tube that led into the middle of the travelling show, but you could hear what was happening in the town even this far from the wall. The Remote were shouting warnings to the townspeople, although their masks were turning their words into horrible electronic screeches that probably didn’t make a lot of sense to the victims.

The masks were based on the old Remote shadow masks, and they’d changed very little over the years, apart from the fact that they now covered the whole head instead of just the face. The Faction had programmed the Remote to adapt, but not to innovate. In the yellow-grey light of the sunset, the masks made the Remote troops look like little black pharaohs, with their faces hidden under death masks. The only features you could make out were the tiny points of light from the eyeslits, where the systems inside the eyepieces blinked in time to the soldiers’ biorhythms. The armour the men wore was hard, sharp and bulky, plates of pure shadow that had been frozen in place around their bodies, but the dust clung to it just like it clung to everything else around here.

They were still more or less human, once you stripped the armour away. Not like me, thought the oldest. So old, so frayed at the edges, that the armour was just about the only thing keeping him together. His flesh had started growing into the cracks of the plating, and so many implants had been slotted into his joints that his cells had long since given up trying to reject them. His body accepted anything you put into it these days. Even his receiver, which a thousand years ago had just been a tiny little radio component at his neck, had worked its way down into his body and wrapped its wiring all the way around his spinal column. You could probably suck my whole skeleton out through one of the oxygen valves, he mused, and I’d stay upright anyway. The mask’s sensory systems had been linked to his神经系统 for so long that he had started to think of ‘temporal displacement’ as just another colour.

It didn’t bother him, most of the time. The horror stayed in the darkness down at the bottom of his spine, sleeping through most of his life, but every now and then there’d be a signal from the ship’s media systems that’d wake it up and get it agitated. Then the fake muscles in his armour would go into overdrive, thrashing and punching at anything that got in his way until he’d worked the adrenaline out of his body. There were certain specific signals that could trigger the horror, certain ideas the oldest of the Remote couldn’t tolerate, and most of them involved the Time Lords.

He could sense the Time Lords here now, somewhere on the surface of Dust. The taste of loose tachyons on the air, the scent of sweat laced with Artron energy. The four-dimensional fallout of an impending Gallifreyan death, or possibly just a regeneration, working its way backward in time and finding its way into the senses of the mask. The oldest could already feel his muscles tensing up, and the plastic-lined veins pulsing away in his neck.

He was remembering again. Memories that were almost two thousand years old, that had been moved from one part of his mind to another over and over again, finding a new place in his head whenever some of his brain cells died and were replaced by implants. The memories were flat and full of static, but he could still see himself in the days when he was young and sarcastic and covered in stubble, before his life back on Earth had been taken away from him. He still remembered his first meeting with the Doctor. His first trip on board the TARDIS. His first meeting with Faction Paradox, on the streets of San Francisco in the early twenty-first century.

But more than anything else, he remembered Anathema. The first city that had been called Anathema, the one that had apparently gone missing in the twentieth century, two hundred years after he’d left it. He remembered, in perfect detail, standing on the edge of the transmitter tower in the old city. Telling himself to jump, that jumping was the only way to preserve his personality and stop himself becoming one of the Remote for good.

Ah, youth.

He hadn’t jumped, in the end. He hadn’t had the guts. He’d slummed around Anathema for another couple of months after that, wallowing in his own misery and wishing he was dead as he screwed his way through the Remote
population. Then Faction Paradox had turned up in Anathema again, two years after they’d left the Remote to their
own devices. Mother Mathara had dropped in to check on the city’s progress, one last look before the Faction left
the Remote alone for good. But he’d made his decision by then, and he’d insisted on seeing the Mother personally.
The Faction would want someone like him, he’d known that. Someone who’d been close to a complex space-time
event like the Doctor.
He’d told Mother Mathara that he wanted to leave Anathema. He’d told her that he’d do anything, anything at
all, to get away from the place before its media swallowed him up for ever.
Which was how he’d joined Faction Paradox full-time. Which was how the Faction had inserted his biodata
into Anathema’s ‘remembrance tanks’ – just so the city wouldn’t lose anything when he went, and the Remote of
future generations would have carbon copies of him to use at their convenience – then taken the original away with
them to the Eleven-Day Empire. Which was how he’d eventually risen to the rank of Father, and been put in charge
of one of the last surviving Remote communities, and been cut off from the rest of the Faction after the Time Lords
had started their great war, and…
And, finally, how he’d ended up here on Dust.
The tents of the travelling show had all been torn down by now, leaving a ring of flat ground between the
wagons. The oldest of the Remote knew the wagons were the important things to watch. TARDIS technology,
probably. He could have ordered his men to storm them, of course, but it was never a good idea to try fighting your
way on to a Gallifreyan’s ship. The ship usually didn’t like it. For now, the Remote could wait.
He realised that one of his troops had stomped up to him while he’d been thinking all this through. The soldier
was keeping his eyes on his boots, and trying his best to look respectful.
‘Father?’ the man said. ‘We’ve got the town under control. We’re waiting for your, um… ideas.’
‘What’s the matter – you wanna live forever?’ Kovacs had asked him, back in 1944.
‘I dunno yet,’ he’d said. ‘Ask me again in five hundred years.’
“We’re getting away from this planet tonight,” he said. It was only when he heard the sound of his own voice
that he remembered just how old he really was.
There was no chance of getting back into the town. There were Remote men all over the place by now, and
Magdelana didn’t see any point in trying to use the shotgun against them. She kept her finger on the trigger anyway,
just in case.
The dust storm had ended, now that the Remote ship had stopped moving. Magdelana was taking shelter in the
space between two of the covered wagons, pressing herself against one of the doors, slipping out of the circle and
ducking behind the vehicle whenever one of the soldiers came too close. Just watching. Just waiting. She wasn’t
sure what she was waiting for, or even what she was meant to be watching, but she knew she had to keep herself
alert.
She’d kept an eye on the soldiers as they’d gathered inside the arena, and it hadn’t been hard to work out which
of them was supposed to be the leader. The rest of the Remote were men in armour, but the one they took their
orders from was armour, a great big mass of spiky plates and black rubber tubing. He limped when he walked, just
like Magdelana did, which made her wonder whether the implants in his leg were anything like as painful as hers.
And he had his back turned to her now. He had no idea she even existed.
Yes, a well-aimed shot from here could probably blow open the armour at the back of his neck. Yes, she could
probably kill him off with one pull of the trigger. Yes, the Remote would probably cut her to pieces a couple of
seconds later. Yes, that was her job. Yes, but…
Magdelana raised the gun. She wasn’t thinking of firing it, not yet, but she wanted to know how it felt to have
the leader in her sights. Whatever happened, she knew the gun was going to be fired only once today; it was one of
those things you were just sure of, like it had been scratched in stone instead of written in sand. One shot, and that
was all she’d get. She wanted to know if this felt like the one.
The back of the leader’s head appeared in the sights of the shotgun. A fat black rubbery target, easy to hit from
this distance. No problem at all.
Would it really change anything?
Would it really matter if it didn’t?
Then there was movement. The leader was turning, and quickly. Magdelana felt herself lose her grip on the
gun. Someone had seen her, and warned the Remote leader about the sniper risk, and suddenly she had no idea
which way she was supposed to be aiming or whether she was supposed to be running. She tried to concentrate,
squinting past the crack in her dust visor, searching for a decent target.
She found one. Suddenly, there was a new face in the middle of the sights. An old, craggy, carved-in-rock kind
of face, surrounded by white hair that looped and curled all over the place but never really went anywhere.

The gun was aimed right at the Doctor’s head. Because the Doctor had simply stepped out of one of the wagons, and now he was strolling across the square, towards the little group of Remote men who were clustering around their leader. It was the Doctor who’d made the leader turn, Magdelana realised, not her. The soldiers still didn’t know she was watching them. The Remote raised their weapons as the Doctor sauntered up to them, but they stepped back at the same time, not quite sure how to react to the man. Only their leader stayed firm, probably because his legs were too heavy to let him go anywhere in a hurry.

The Doctor’s face was right in her sights. For some reason, Magdelana felt the overwhelming urge to pull the trigger.

‘Rrr,’ said a voice. Right in her ear.

Magdelana stumbled, and fell into the dust, banging her head against the side of one of the wagons. The Remote would almost certainly have noticed her then, if their attention hadn’t been focused on the Doctor. Luckily, the shotgun didn’t go off when she hit the ground.

She’d been standing next to one of the wagon doors, and the door had opened while she’d been fixing her sights on the offworlders. She hadn’t seen the man until he’d grunted in her ear, but standing there in the doorway was one of the most repulsive human beings Magdelana had ever seen. He seemed to fill up the entire frame, like a heap of badly moulded flesh rather than a living thing, towering over her while she squirmed in the dirt.

The man wore trousers and an old threadbare shirt, but the shirt was hanging open at the front, letting Magdelana see every inch of muscle on his torso. His head was huge and bloated, his eyes so far apart that she couldn’t think of him as being anything other than dumb, while his thinning hair was pulled behind his head in a dirty ponytail. He looked a lot like one of the offworlders the Remote had crucified out in the desert, but his skin was a blotchy pink instead of corpse-grey. One of the freaks, thought Magdelana. Every inch the carnival worker, and as for the smell…

The smell he gave off wasn’t human. Simple as that. A whole wave of animal hormones rushed over her as she looked up at him, triggering chemical reactions in her body that she wasn’t sure she recognised. She remembered being trapped in an old mine tunnel when she was fifteen, forcing herself to eat a pitrat just to stay alive, snapping its little neck with a rock and peeling the hair away from its body. She remembered shooting at birds in the sky over the old hometown, watching their bodies drop down into the desert. She remembered all five of the lovers she’d had since she’d come to this town, the sweaty things that had happened in the heat of her bedroom. Somehow, the chemical signals from the man in the wagon were making her think of all these things, sending messages to every animal instinct in her body, good and bad and itchy and violent.

Mohandas. Mohandas the Geek. It had to be. A geek was someone who ate live animals, according to the Doctor. Was that it, then? Had the freak eaten so many things in his life that he was starting to become something less than human?

She lifted the gun, and aimed it at the geek’s chest, just in case he tried anything. But all he did was turn his head, on his fat cowlike neck, to watch the people in the middle of the show ring. The Doctor was talking to the leader of the Remote now, although Magdelana couldn’t hear what the two of them were saying.

Then the geek turned to face her again. He cocked his big ugly head to one side.

‘Rr,’ he told her. With that, he stepped back into his wagon and closed the door behind him.

The second the Doctor had stepped out of I.M. Foreman’s wagon, there’d been at least a dozen guns trained on him. That hadn’t worried him, though. From what Magdelana had told him, he guessed that the armoured men wanted – needed – the travelling show, and in one piece. It was their only way off this planet. They couldn’t breach the wagons themselves, not while I.M. Foreman’s defences were in effect, so logically they had to try bargaining first. Unless they were completely mad, of course.

The Doctor stepped out into the middle of the circle with his hands in his pockets, and strolled casually up to the individual whom he took to be the Remote’s leader. The Remote looked like walking nightmares, like the kind of things young children always expected to find hiding under the bed, as if their armour had been designed to remind human beings of all the dark and slippery things in the universe. But the leader’s armour was bulkier than the rest, the headpiece merging with the plating on his shoulders, giving the Doctor the impression that the man had welded himself into the suit instead of simply putting it on.

The Doctor stepped right up to the Remote leader, and cleared his throat. He decided that ‘good evening’ was probably a good opening gambit.

He didn’t even get the chance to say it. All of a sudden there were signals buzzing through the air, transmissions from some sort of device that had been wired into the leader’s outfit, so loud that even the Doctor could hear them. Every nerve in the man’s body was ringing out a warning, you could feel it from here.
The Doctor froze. The other soldiers took a few more steps back.

‘Oh dear,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’ve upset you, haven’t I?’

The leader answered him by punching him full in the face, with a gauntlet that felt like it had been made out of the kind of substance you usually found only in the middle of very old and very dense dwarf stars.

Sarah pressed her ear up against the door of the wagon, trying to hear what the Doctor was saying to the men outside. The door seemed quite happy to let her do this, even though it was still filtering out the sounds of gunfire and Armageddon from the town. The Doctor had insisted on going out alone, saying that (1) it was incredibly dangerous out there, and (2) he was going to be perfectly safe. Sarah had heard him say ‘oh dear’ to somebody, but she hadn’t been able to interpret the heavy thumping sound that she’d heard shortly afterwards.

There was a pause. Then the Doctor’s voice again.

‘Sheer brutality,’ he said, obviously trying to make the Remote people feel ashamed of themselves. ‘Sheer senseless violence. You’re not going to get anything out of me that way, you know.’

The next thing she heard was a crunching, creaking noise. Someone with tin legs was shuffling his feet.

‘I’m sorry,’ said a voice Sarah hadn’t heard before. The voice felt old, the way antique manuscripts felt old, but with a ring of something electronic about it. Sarah couldn’t think of a decent simile for that, so she didn’t bother. ‘I wasn’t expecting you,’ the voice went on. ‘It is you, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor. ‘Who were you expecting?’

‘Stop it. No games, Doctor. Not here.’

Aha. So the Remote knew him. Sarah turned to look at I.M. Foreman, sitting in his armchair at the other end of the wagon, but his face was blank and his dead old eyes were fixed on the floor. Sarah didn’t even know whether he could hear all this.

‘Have we met?’ the Doctor asked.

When the alien voice spoke again, there was an edge in it Sarah hadn’t noticed before. Hate? Maybe. Computerised hate. Hate that had come straight out of a databank. ‘This incarnation,’ the Remote man said. ‘It’s one of the early ones, isn’t it?’

‘Third, actually,’ the Doctor told him.

‘So we haven’t met. Not yet.’

‘Ah. I see.’

‘I’m still going to try to kill you, though. It’s not going to stop me or anything.’

The Doctor was probably dying of curiosity by now, although Sarah got the feeling he was scared to ask too many questions. ‘Look, old chap… I don’t really know what’s going on here, but I’m fairly sure it shouldn’t be happening. Isn’t that obvious?’

‘Does it matter?’

The Doctor sighed. ‘This travelling show belongs to someone I’ve never met before. Someone who was – is – a predecessor of mine, in a sense. I’ve been chasing his tail all these years, without even knowing it. And it’s not a good idea for you to meet someone if you’ve been following in their footsteps like that. It’s against all the usual protocols of time travel. I expect you know that, if your people are as advanced as they seem to be.’

‘Am I supposed to care?’ asked the Remote man.

‘I shouldn’t be here at all,’ the Doctor insisted. ‘The truth about the travelling show is one of those secrets I was never meant to find out about. I shouldn’t ever have met I.M. Foreman, or you, or any of your people. Everything here is wrong. Can’t you see that?’

‘Wrong,’ repeated the Remote man. His voice was getting harsher now, although it was hard to say how much of it was genuine spite and how much of it was just the sound of his circuits fizzling. ‘Doctor… I could tell you what’s really “wrong”. I could tell you what you did to my life. What happened to me after you left me. I could tell you all the damage that’s been done to me over the last two thousand years. All the waiting I’ve gone through. I’m older than you are, do you know that? And I don’t even think I qualify as human any more. Your fault. Believe me, I could tell you everything.’

There was a pause. The Doctor presumably didn’t know what to say.

‘But I won’t,’ the Remote man concluded. He suddenly sounded incredibly tired, as if he’d worked himself into a frenzy but couldn’t keep it up. ‘I can’t be bothered. Living like this just wears you down. I don’t want to hurt you any more. I want to see you dead, that’s all. I want to get this over with for good. I want to see your head up on my wall, so I can relax for once in my life. You understand?’

The Doctor cleared his throat, in an embarrassed sort of way. ‘Yes, well,’ he said. ‘Perhaps we’d better stick to the point. You want the travelling show, is that it?’

‘Can’t argue with that,’ said the Remote man. He sounded quite relieved to get back to the matter in hand.
‘And what’s to stop us just taking the travelling show away from this planet right now?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Two things,’ the Remote man told him. He didn’t even have the energy to gloat properly, Sarah noted. ‘First, we’ve taken over the town. You won’t leave this place without trying to save everyone. It’s not the way you work.’

‘I see. And secondly?’

‘Secondly, you can’t go anywhere anyway. We’ve figured out how the show works. It plants itself inside the planet’s biosphere, doesn’t it? Makes a new stretch of land for itself on the surface of the host world. Neat, that.’

‘I’ll give my compliments to the owner,’ said the Doctor, flatly. ‘And?’

‘We can play around with biospheres as well. Probably better than you can. It’s part of standard Remote technology. We’ve got machines on the ship that can tap into the biosphere of whatever planet we’re on, and plant our media systems in the environment. It’s the first thing we do when we land anywhere. We use the local ley lines to transmit our signals. More reliable than using radio waves.’

Ley lines. Used to transmit TV pictures. Sarah started to wonder what kind of insane race had spawned these people.

‘The point is this,’ the Remote man went on. ‘We’ve tapped into the biosphere of Dust – what there is of it, anyway – and we’ve told the planet not to let go of anything that’s part of the scenery. So the travelling show’s stuck here. Dust won’t let you get away. Not as long as our systems are on line.’

‘Are you saying you can manipulate whole planets?’ asked the Doctor. Sarah could imagine his sceptical frown when he said it.

‘No. We can just give them a few basic instructions, that’s all. Believe me, if we knew enough about how biospheres work to control everything, we’d have turned this bastard planet into another Earth by now. Run by us. Obviously.’

‘Obviously,’ said the Doctor.

There was more conversation after that, but Sarah didn’t hear it. She turned to I.M. Foreman, and saw that he’d drawn his legs up on to his battered old armchair, crossing them under his body. Getting ready to meditate, by the look of him.

‘Can they really do that?’ Sarah asked, putting just enough anxiety into her voice to let him know that ‘no’ was the optimum answer. ‘I mean, can they stop us going anywhere?’

‘Shh,’ said I.M. Foreman, as he put his hands on his knees. Yup, thought Sarah. Definitely meditation time.

‘No,’ she told him. ‘I won’t shh. Did you hear what he said? Those people are going to –’

‘I know,’ said the blind man. ‘Please be quiet. I think I’ve just figured out what’s really going on here. Everything’s starting to come together.’

‘So what are we going to do?’ Sarah demanded.

I.M. Foreman lowered his head. If he’d been anybody else, Sarah would have assumed that he’d been closing his eyes.

‘I’m going to talk to the others,’ he said. ‘Then we’re going to start making plans.’

The message spread through the travelling show in less than a minute, moving from wagon to wagon, skimming across the minds it found there. Mohandas the Geek heard I.M. Foreman’s thoughts first, and responded to them in his usual way, with a noncommittal grunt and a wave of animal sweat. He was actually quite lucid, if you could understand the language of his hormones properly. From Mohandas, the message spread to Melmoth, the Map of Scars, whose entire body was engraved with information that nobody outside the show had ever been able to read. From Melmoth it reached Mr Zarathustra, the Walking Brain, whose cranium was so vast and bloated that he had to constantly sit with his head in his hands to make sure his neck didn’t snap. Then the message touched O’Salamander, and John Salt, and Mould the Worm-Boy, and the Goofus, and…

And soon, every member of the travelling show had heard the news, straight from the telepathic centres of I.M. Foreman’s own brain. They all knew about the Remote, they all knew about the biosphere machines on board the Remote’s ship, and they all knew exactly what I.M. Foreman had in mind. Most of them had already worked it out for themselves, but it was always good to synchronise your thoughts.

Well… actually, not every member of the travelling show was told the news. Nobody bothered transmitting I.M. Foreman’s message to the occupant of wagon number thirteen, because they all knew how unstable Number Thirteen was, and they all knew there was no point trying to tell it anything. But the rest of them were in perfect harmony. They knew exactly what they had to do, and what was going to happen to them because of it.
a distance of several thousand kilometres.

The warship could have eradicated the entire town in a second, if it had wanted to. But that wasn’t the crew’s mission here. So instead of opening its mouth and breathing light over the world, the ship simply jettisoned a single metal capsule from its underbelly, and tracked the object as it ripped its way through the upper atmosphere.

In the command section, the crew members settled back in their seats to watch what happened next.
8

Army of Me
(the Magnificent Thirteen, or the Dirty Baker’s Dozen)

Unbelievably, things were getting worse.

The Doctor strode back towards I.M. Foreman’s wagon, feeling the eyes and gun sights of the Remote troops digging little holes in his back. Their leader, who for some reason insisted on being called ‘Father’, had given him a message to pass on to I.M. Foreman himself. An ultimatum. The Doctor had pleaded with the man to call off this ridiculous siege, but the Father hadn’t listened.

Well, of course he hadn’t. The Doctor remembered the vision of his future self he’d seen on board the TARDIS, just before the ship had started bleeding. Yes, that was where things had started to go wrong. Where the timelines had begun to cross. Since then, he’d been forced to suffer not only the usual threats and rhetoric from his opponents, but a kind of brutality he simply wasn’t used to. He felt as if he’d been dropped in the middle of this situation several regenerations before he was ready to deal with it. As if this old dog of a body was far too worn out to learn any new tricks.

He felt as tired as everything else on Dust.

When the Father had ignored his pleas for sanity, the Doctor had tried explaining how dangerous the travelling show could be, and how it had attracted so many things to Dust. Like the Remote themselves, or like the aliens Magdelana had told him about, the two big grey humanoids who’d been crucified out in the desert. The Father had found that funny, though.

‘Ogron Lords,’ he’d explained. ‘Nothing we couldn’t cope with.’

‘I beg your pardon?’ the Doctor had said.

‘Ogron Lords. Can’t you work it out for yourself? Ogrons who’ve had time-travel codes wired into their bodies.’

The Doctor couldn’t possibly imagine why anybody would want to do such a thing, and he’d said so.

‘Ogrons are like a blank slate,’ the Father had said, wearily. ‘That’s what makes them the last word in security hardware. That’s why everyone uses them. You can customise them any way you like. The Remote used to give them media receivers, but we’ve moved on since then. A lot of the Time Lord factions have been fitting Ogrons with time-travel biodata. “Ogron Lords”. The name’s supposed to be a joke.’

‘Ogrons,’ the Doctor had repeated, speaking slowly just in case the words exploded in his mouth. ‘Working for Time Lords.’

‘Far as we can tell. We still don’t know who sent the ones we killed. Probably the High Council. We think they just got drawn here by accident. We would’ve taken their ship, if it hadn’t had a recall system built into it. We didn’t feel like ending up on Gallifrey.’

And that was the thing that had shaken the Doctor most of all. The idea of the High Council, or any other Time Lord body, using… no, it couldn’t be true… using Ogrons as slaves. A ludicrous, insane strategy. But, unless the Father had been lying just to upset him, then the Doctor had obviously wandered into a part of the universe he’d never even dreamed of before, where the Time Lords were as militant and political as any other power bloc in this galaxy. A corner of reality where the great and the good of Gallifrey were ready to inject their secrets into…

Well, it didn’t bear thinking about.

Sarah jumped when he climbed back into the wagon, although I.M. Foreman seemed as calm as ever. The man hadn’t left the armchair, but now he was sitting in the cross-legged pose that humans often used when meditating, and that Gallifreyans used when entering telepathic rapport with their nearest of kin. The Doctor closed the door behind him, shutting out the noise and the dust of the outside world.

‘You’re hurt,’ Sarah pointed out, and her voice melted at the edges when she said it. The Doctor suddenly realised that she could have been talking about any number of things, from Magdelana’s coffee burn to the bruise he’d been given by the Remote. He gave her a quick smile, and hoped it’d be enough to keep her happy.

‘We were right,’ he announced. ‘They want the show. As a matter of fact, I rather think they want my head, as well. Otherwise they’re going to burn down the town. We’re supposed to meet with their leader in the town square. We’ve got ten minutes to think about it.’

‘Why there?’ asked Sarah.

‘So they can kill some of the locals if we try anything clever,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘He does know you well, doesn’t he?’

The Doctor started scratching his chin. ‘You know, I’m not sure I can see a way out of this. I feel as if the rules
have been changed while I wasn’t looking.’
‘Maybe this’d be a good time to mention that we’ve got a plan,’ said I.M. Foreman.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows at the man. ‘Oh really? Isn’t that rather unusual, for someone who doesn’t
believe in direct action?’

‘This time it’s personal,’ the showman told him. ‘I think I’ve just worked something out. Something that’s been
bothering us for… a long time, anyway.’

‘The meaning of life?’ Sarah tried.

‘The meaning of my life, maybe,’ said I.M. Foreman, in a tone so earnest that even the Doctor nearly found
himself believing it. ‘We’ve been getting a bit restless the last couple of decades. Us in the show, I mean. We’ve
been wondering what we’re going to do, now we’ve reached the edge of this galaxy. Now we’ve come to the end of
the spiral. And I think I’ve just figured out our next career move.’

‘Go on,’ said the Doctor.

‘First things first,’ said the blind man. ‘There’s one thing I still haven’t told you about this show.’

There was another of his patented dramatic pauses after that. The Doctor folded his arms, but resisted the
temptation to tap his foot. I.M. Foreman smiled, shrugged, and twiddled his fingers, in a way that suggested he’d be
much happier if he had something to juggle with.

‘I think you’d better sit down and listen,’ he said. ‘It’s about wagon number thirteen.’

Ten minutes after the Doctor had vanished into the wagon, things started happening again. From her vantage
point between two of the other vehicles, Magdelana had already seen the leader of the Remote limp out of the circle.
He’d headed straight for the town, with a bunch of his men in tow. Magdelana didn’t know what the Doctor had told
him, but somebody had to be planning something, and that in itself was enough to get her itchy.

But now the door of the wagon was opening again. The Doctor was stepping back out on to the desert floor. His
girlfriend was behind him, and after her came the blind man. The few Remote soldiers who were still inside the ring
tracked the three offworlders with their weapons, but it was obvious that there wasn’t going to be any shooting.

Then the other doors started opening. All around the circle, the freaks were leaving their mobile homes.
Magdelana tried to count them as they came into view, ticking them off against the names she remembered from the
posters: the half-human, half-lizard thing, the man covered in albino monkey fur, and the boy who crawled on his
belly like a maggot. One of the freaks had wings, although you could tell they weren’t powerful enough to lift his
body off the ground, at least not without help. He looked like he’d been built for gliding, not flying. And there was a
woman who moved like a snake, who –

The door next to Magdelana opened up again. She took a step back, and saw Mohandas the Geek stumble out
of his wagon, not giving her a second glance as he headed into the middle of the arena, taking big, slow, heavy steps
all the way. His scent triggered off more memories as he passed by, and Magdelana very nearly pulled the trigger of
the shotgun right there and then. None of the freaks were making a sound, she noted. They didn’t seem to think there
was any point making noise.

Then the Doctor moved off, towards the gap in the ring that formed the entrance and exit of the travelling
show. He had his arm around his girlfriend’s shoulders, and Magdelana saw the look of shock on her face when the
freaks started to follow them. One great twisted carnival procession, still not making a sound. I.M. Foreman brought
up the rear, falling behind the little grey lump that had to drag itself through the dust with its stumpy tentacles. One
of the doors hadn’t opened up, Magdelana realised, so there was probably still one freak locked up in his wagon, but
it was hardly the first thing on her mind right now.

She let the shotgun dangle by her side. Obviously, the time to use it still hadn’t arrived.

The Doctor was the first one to step into the town square. Father Kreiner was already waiting for him there, and
his troops had drawn their weapons as soon as they’d seen the Time Lord heading towards to the gate, with the army
of freaks at his back and his girl companion by his side. The Father found himself thinking of the Doctor’s other
companion, the one he’d had back in the days before Kreiner had joined the Faction. He couldn’t quite remember
what the girl’s name had been, although he was pretty sure there’d been an ‘s’ in it somewhere.

Night had fallen over Dust, but at this time of year there was light even at midnight, so the sky was a dirty
greyish brown instead of pitch black. Which meant that Father Kreiner could make out the square in detail, even
without using the infrared components in his mask. There were a dozen or so Remote troops in the area, arranged in
a wide semicircle opposite the gate. None of the townspeople were anywhere to be seen, although Kreiner could
smell burning wood nearby, which suggested that one or two of them had actually bothered putting up a fight.

The Doctor came to a stop in the centre of the square, with every single Remote weapon trained on his skull.
The showman in the blindfold – I.M. Foreman himself, Kreiner guessed – was the last one through the gate, but he
moved forward as soon as the freaks had gathered behind the Doctor, to stand at the Time Lord’s side. The Doctor’s companion stayed as close to her mentor as she could, somehow managing to look anxious and dopey at the same time. Father Kreiner tried to remember what it felt like to be in her position, but found he couldn’t. His implants had jettisoned that memory a long, long time ago.

He suddenly realised that the freaks were lining themselves up in front of the gate, almost forming a mirror image of the Remote’s semicircle. They looked as if they were getting ready for the firing squad, and the Father briefly wondered how many of them might be bulletproof. I.M. Foreman glanced back over his shoulder, blindfold or no blindfold, making sure that all his comrades were standing in line. Or squatting in line, in the case of the man with the enormous cranium. Or just being in line, in the case of the little grey lumpy monstrosity that didn’t seem to have any proper legs.

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, turning his attention to Father Kreiner at last. ‘What happens now?’

He still sounded defiant, the old sod. The girl companion was positively clinging to the Time Lord by now, and Fi-… and Kreiner wondered if he’d ever looked that ridiculous.

He could do it. He could really do it. He could actually kill the Doctor, even if it did set up some kind of historical paradox. The Doctor was going to die here, the Father could smell it in the air.

The responsibility of it was almost crippling.

‘The show’s ours now,’ he said, motioning towards his troops with one big black hand. ‘Also, we can take the TARDIS once we’ve killed you. I’m not sure which one we’ll use to get us out of here. Probably the TARDIS. It’ll be easier to steer.’

‘Oh, I don’t think the TARDIS will like that,’ said the Doctor, smiling annoyingly ‘She’s quite choosy about her crew, you know.’

‘We know how to use the technology,’ growled Kreiner. Especially me, he thought, but he kept it to himself.

The Doctor probably would have kept jabbering, if I.M. Foreman hadn’t stepped forward and cleared his throat. ‘So you’re going to have us killed,’ the showman said.

‘Looks that way,’ Kreiner agreed.

I.M. Foreman nodded. ‘Fair enough. But there is one thing I think you should know before you do anything… irreparable.’

Kreiner clenched his teeth. This sounded like exactly the kind of distraction the Doctor might have used.

Still. Best not to take any chances.

‘Well?’ he said.

I.M. Foreman thought for a moment. Then he turned, stretched out one long, spindly arm, and waved it towards the line of freaks behind him. ‘Did I introduce all my colleagues?’ he said. ‘That’s Mohandas, standing on the end there. He’s a geek, in the old-fashioned sense of the word. Isn’t it wonderful, by the way? Living in a culture that’s got a special word for a person who bites the heads off animals. Anyway. The one next to Mohandas is Melmoth, but –’

‘That’s enough,’ Kreiner snapped. If he’d been carrying a gun of his own, he probably would have shot the man himself.

I.M. Foreman ignored him, and kept talking. ‘Actually, there are thirteen of us in the show, not twelve. We don’t generally let Number Thirteen out. Bit on the unstable side, Number Thirteen. Not mad, strictly speaking, but… he’s not like you and me. Well, he’s not like you, anyway.’

Suddenly, I.M. Foreman was facing the Remote troops again, whirling round on his heel and fixing his dead eyes on his firing squad. Most of the men took a step back, which was irritating.

‘What you’re forgetting is this,’ the blind man said. ‘I’m a priest. From one of the old orders. And back in my day the priesthood had the same privileges as the Time Lords. Including the right to regeneration.’

The companion girl glanced at the Doctor, and mouthed something Kreiner couldn’t see. He didn’t let it bother him.

‘Not very impressive,’ he said, putting as much contempt into his voice as he could manage. ‘We’ve got weapons built to take out Time Lords. We can scramble your nervous systems. You can’t regenerate your way out of that.’

But I.M. Foreman just shook his head. ‘You’re missing the point, Father. The important thing is, I’ve got the same regenerative cycle as the Time Lords.’

‘And?’ said Kreiner.

‘I can regenerate twelve times over.’

‘And?’ said Kreiner.

‘Which means, I can have a total of thirteen different bodies.’

Kreiner was just on the verge of saying ‘and?’ again, when something about the man’s words struck a chord.
Thirteen. Thirteen different bodies. Thirteen lives. The number thirteen that had been painted on the one sealed door of the travelling show. Thirteen freaks in all. Number Thirteen...

Father Kreiner suddenly found his eyes drifting along the row of freaks behind the Doctor, all of them as still and as silent as ever. There was a kind of order in the way they’d been lined up, he could see that now. The ones on the left were very nearly human, but they got less and less recognisable as you moved along the line, until in the end...

‘No,’ said Kreiner. Not possible.

‘I’m afraid it’s true,’ said the Doctor, and he almost sounded sympathetic. ‘I didn’t believe it either, at first.’

‘Erm,’ said his companion. ‘Is this what you were talking about in the wagon? Sorry, you weren’t making much sense.’

The Doctor looked down at her, and smiled. ‘These fine people here,’ he said, nodding towards the freaks. They’re all Gallifreyan. But, more specifically, they’re all the same Gallifreyan.’

The companion paused for a moment, clearly not getting the idea. Then she whirled around to stare at I.M. Foreman.

‘I’m afraid so,’ the blind man told her. This is a one-man show. All my compatriots here – Mohandas, Melmoth, Mr Zarathustra – they’re all me. All my future selves. All my future regenerations.’

‘Doesn’t this break that Blinovitch Limitation wotsit?’ the companion asked.

‘Gallifreyans used to be shielded against that kind of thing,’ I.M. Foreman replied. ‘The Time Lords took out the biological defences after a while. They didn’t want to encourage people to cross their own time streams. Or at least that’s the story.’

As one, the eleven freaks in the line-up lowered their eyes, as if ashamed en masse that their secret had been spoken out loud. Kreiner felt himself sweating under his armour, and the salt water made tiny sparks in the electrical systems of his joints. Somewhere in the back of his head, something was telling him that he had absolutely no reason to stand here listening to all of this, but the rest of his brain was telling him to shut up and pay attention. Meanwhile, his men were looking at each other and shrugging, obviously not understanding a word of it.

Slowly and casually, I.M. Foreman strolled over to the first of the freaks, and put his hand on the man’s shoulder. This is my next incarnation,’ he explained. ‘This is who I’ll be, after I regenerate for the first time. I’m in my first body now, in case you were wondering. As you can see, Mohandas here is quite humanoid. Gallifreyan-normal, very nearly.’

‘But the others...’ the companion prompted. Kreiner saw that her eyes were fixed on the little grey creature.

‘Did you know that we absorb DNA from the things we eat?’ the showman said. ‘Not just Gallifreyans. All of us. All living things. It doesn’t matter whether it’s meat or plants. Live flesh or fresh fruit. Our bodies break down the things in our stomachs, and some of the food’s DNA always gets stuck in our systems. Our own genes suck up the alien genes. We start to turn into whatever we swallow.’

He turned his face up to the heavens, just so the gods could see him shrugging. ‘A universe of cannibals,’ he exclaimed. ‘Every one of us a geek. Forcing our own evolution by what we eat. I mean, the amounts of DNA we pick up are so tiny, they never really make a difference. Not usually.’

Then he smiled, and the smile seemed to be directed at everyone in the square, Remote and ally alike. He was going into some kind of routine, Kreiner realised. His last great performance.

‘Regeneration throws a Gallifreyan’s DNA into a state of chaos,’ the man went on. ‘While his body’s rebuilding itself, all kinds of foreign DNA can find its way into the process. If a Time Lord eats a bacon sandwich before he dies, there’s a good chance of his new body having an awful lot of pig genes in it.’

Even the Doctor was frowning now, Kreiner saw. ‘That’s not supposed to happen,’ the old bastard mumbled. ‘It was a problem in the early days of regenerative technology, I grant you. But the problem was ironed out thousands of years ago.’

I.M. Foreman didn’t say a word. He just tapped his foot. ‘Oh,’ said the Doctor.

‘Oh yes. Of course. Carry on.’

‘My regenerative cycle’s a lot less stable than yours,’ the showman told the Doctor. ‘I’m one of the old school. Not likely to turn into a pig, but a lot more open to mutation.’ With that, he began to move along the line of freaks, indicating each one in turn. ‘Like I said, Mohandas is my second incarnation. And he’s a consummate geek. He’s spent his lifetime eating anything that moves. He sees it as his mission in life to keep expanding his genetic horizons. To push his biological envelope as far as it’ll go. There’s all sorts of alien DNA stored inside that body of his. Animal and plant species from thousands of different times and places. He’s a walking zoo, basically. So, when he regenerates, all that biological data is going to end up getting woven into the cells of his new body. Of my new body.’

The next in line seemed human, although every inch of his skin was covered in scar tissue. He was stripped to
the waist, so Father Kreiner could see the patterns on the man’s body from the top of his grubby bald head all the way down to his belt. There were so many lines etched into his flesh, so many swirls and patterns and vortices, that Kreiner couldn’t make out any of the man’s other features. Perhaps that was the whole point.

‘My third incarnation,’ I.M. Foreman told his audience. ‘Melmoth, the Map of Scars. The animal DNA from Mohandas is still sleeping inside me by this point, but I’ve started to mutate a little. Those scars weren’t made with a knife, by the way. My third body was born with them. They’re genetic codes, written across his skin for everyone to see. A whole lifetime’s worth of biological information, if you know how to read it. A zoological map of this galaxy.’

‘Good grief,’ the Doctor muttered. His companion hugged him a little tighter, but he didn’t seem to notice.

The next freak was the old man with the huge head, squatting in the dust with his cranium in his hands. ‘Mr Zarathustra,’ explained I.M. Foreman. ‘I’m still more or less humanoid in this incarnation, but my biodata’s starting to stretch a bit.’ The blind man moved on, and next in line was the half-man, half-lizard creature, his body split down the middle, his skin charred and blackened on both sides. I.M. Foreman coughed, politely. ‘O’Salamander. My fifth self. This is the point when the stored DNA starts to take over. Part man, part… something else. Whichever part’s supposed to be which.’

‘This is ridiculous,’ said Kreiner.

I.M. Foreman ignored him, and kept moving along the line. ‘I get less and less humanoid over the next few regenerations. Experimenting with animal shapes. It’s true, I’m doing it consciously by now. Seeing how many kinds of biological data I can mix and match. John Salt, the Missing Link. Mould, the Worm-Boy… hello, Mould. Please don’t leave that goo on my boots again. Thank you. Then there’s the Goofus, our living armoury. My eighth body, when I start absorbing machine parts into myself as well as DNA. Next there’s Ezekiel, the only version of myself who came fitted with wings. Not a very successful experiment, I’m afraid. No offence, Ezekiel. And there’s Queen Nitocris, who’s frankly a lot more snakey than I think any of us intended.’

Then the showman stopped, in front of the small grey thing. Kreiner thought he caught a smile cross the man’s lips. ‘Oh yes. The If. We Gallifreyans have always been bio-linked to our time-travel machines, so I suppose the If’s no big surprise. We’ve got Rassilon’s protocols wired into our biodata, remember. The If here didn’t turn out looking like anything else in the universe, but his – its – time-travel biodata is a lot more well developed than anybody else’s. The If sweats raw time. Isn’t that something?’

Finally, I.M. Foreman moved over to the figure at the very end of the line. Father Kreiner hadn’t concentrated on the last of the freaks before, and now he realised why. It was hard to focus on the thing’s shape, because it kept shifting and squirming, somehow wriggling away from your eyes whenever you tried to stare at it. It was changing all the time, Kreiner saw. It wasn’t a true shapechanger, and it probably couldn’t even decide what form it wanted to take on next, but its body looked horribly unstable anyway. It was a great big blur of living matter, which couldn’t quite settle on one species.

‘My twelfth incarnation,’ I.M. Foreman announced, more than a little proudly. ‘We call him AKA. The metamorph. All the DNA I’ve absorbed over my lifetimes, wrapped up in one ever-changing body. One moment he wants to be a fish, then he wants to be a cat, then… just use your imagination. And that’s the travelling show for you. All comers welcome, no refunds given.’

‘You don’t charge admission,’ the companion pointed out.

‘Exactly,’ said I.M. Foreman.

‘How?’ hissed Father Kreiner.

I.M. Foreman turned back to face the Remote troops, and raised his eyebrows at them. ‘I’m sorry, what?’

‘It’s not possible. How? How can all twelve of you be in the same place at once? How did you call them all together?’

Predictably, the showman just shrugged.

‘To be honest with you, I haven’t a clue,’ he said.

Even the Doctor looked surprised by that. I.M. Foreman obviously hadn’t had time to tell him all the details.

‘You don’t know how it happened?’ the Doctor asked.

The showman took this as his cue to go into ‘storyteller’ mode again. ‘It was in the days when I was still on Gallifrey,’ he said. ‘Just after they abolished the priesthood. I’d been turned out of my home, I didn’t have anywhere else to go, and I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. I had only two choices, really. I could go to the Capitol and ask the Time Lords to turn me into a menial worker, or I could walk out into the wastelands and trust to luck.’ He shrugged, but it was a rehearsed kind of shrug, and he didn’t put too much effort into it. ‘So I took the things I had, and started the journey. I was only about a day into the wastelands when it happened.’

‘When what happened?’ asked Kreiner. Then he bit his tongue, realising slightly too late that this was exactly the question I.M. Foreman had wanted him to ask. As it turned out, his tongue tasted like iron filings.
‘I found them lying at the bottom of a valley,’ the showman-priest explained. ‘Twelve of them. Twelve complete strangers. Some of them were like me, and some of them… weren’t. But they were all just lying there, looking half dead. All of them injured. All of them struggling. I had to help, didn’t I?’

‘Wait,’ said the Doctor’s companion. ‘You’re saying that you found all twelve of yourself just lying around the place? In the middle of this wasteland thing?’

‘That’s exactly what I’m saying. Like I said, they’d all been injured. They’d all gone through some kind of trauma. They couldn’t remember how they’d got there, or what had happened to them. They couldn’t remember anything about their previous lives. Still, it didn’t take us long to work out the truth. To work out that we were all basically the same person.’

Kreiner’s eyes flickered back to the Doctor. The old man was shaking his head, clearly having a hard time believing this.

‘And you never thought to ask how they got there,’ he muttered.

‘It did cross my mind,’ I.M. Foreman told him, with more than a hint of irony. ‘But after the first couple of hundred years we still hadn’t figured it out, so there wasn’t a lot we could do except get on with our lives. In the end, we just put it down to fate. One of those questions you know nobody’s ever going to answer for you.’

‘I see,’ said the Doctor. He didn’t sound entirely satisfied by that answer.

‘Whatever the truth was, we thought it was probably a sign of something,’ I.M. Foreman went on. ‘That was why we started the travelling show. It felt like the right thing to do, once we were in that position. It’s the real philosophy of the show, remember. To let the audience see how far one person can push himself. To let everyone know how much a single individual’s worth. How much potential there is in your own lifeblood. We felt like we had a duty to explain that to the universe.’

Once again, the showman shrugged. With great aplomb.

‘Seemed to make sense to us,’ he concluded. ‘Sounds a lot less impressive when you say it out loud, though.’
9

Building the Perfect Monster
(one of those solutions that may well be worse than the problem)

The capsule from the Faction’s warship hit the ground about half a kilometre from the town wall, just outside the range of the Remote’s receivers. The pod’s casing cracked open on impact, and the material began to disintegrate, exactly as it had been programmed to. These days, the Faction tried not to leave any evidence behind.

The contents of the capsule were duly released on to the surface of Dust. Faction Paradox had become directly involved in the planet’s affairs.

As if things weren’t complicated enough already.

‘This doesn’t change anything,’ snapped Father Kreiner.

Suddenly, all eyes were on him. Freaks, Remote, and all. He thought he felt something at that point, a twinge that ran through his receiver and into his nerve centre, as if the systems on board the Remote ship were trying to tell him something. He doubted it was as important as what was happening in the square, though, so he put it out of his mind for the time being.

‘I rather think it does,’ mused the Doctor, obviously glad to have something to say again. ‘Have you thought about the ramifications of this at all? If all of I.M. Foreman’s future selves are on this planet, then –’

‘I know,’ Kreiner told him. ‘You’re going to say I can’t kill him. If I kill him now, then his future selves won’t ever have existed. But I don’t care. I was with the Faction. I’m not going to let a paradox get in my way.’

‘Faction?’ queried the Doctor. At last, he looked worried.

‘That’s not what we were going to say,’ I.M. Foreman cut in. ‘Isn’t there something you’re forgetting, Father?’

‘Is there?’

‘Oh yes. There are only twelve of us here. My first twelve incarnations.’

Thirteen, thought Kreiner. Thirteen wagons. Again, he was sure the Remote ship was trying to communicate with him through the receiver, although he couldn’t tell exactly what it was saying. There was the sound of screaming being pumped into the back of his skull, and it was giving him a headache.

‘One of the people I found out in the wastelands wasn’t like the others,’ I.M. Foreman explained. ‘My last self was different. My final form wasn’t really a form at all. It was more like a force of nature than a person. Raw life energy, I suppose. It didn’t have a body, as such. It was the essence of all the biological data my regenerations had been collecting over the years. The ultimate Gallifreyan life form. My destiny. The final state of I.M. Foreman.’

‘But you locked it up,’ the Doctor’s companion said.

‘We had to,’ said the showman. ‘It didn’t see things the way we saw them. It just wanted to eat. To consume as much life as possible. To learn from as many other beings as it could swallow. The perfect geek, really. It was quite a job, capturing it like that. And, believe me, it wasn’t easy, knowing it was really me we were locking up. Knowing I’d end up trapped like that one day.’

God almighty, thought Father Kreiner. This creature, this Number Thirteen; it’s still alive, inside one of the wagons of the travelling show. It’s been trapped there for centuries, for millennia. For longer than I’ve been trapped in this useless, rotting, heavy-metal body. And it’s still there.

And I.M. Foreman must have guessed what he was thinking – or maybe Kreiner’s thoughts were leaking out of his receiver, who could say? – because suddenly the blind man was smiling again, a kind of I-told-you-so smile that he must have been practising for years. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘That’s right. Number Thirteen’s been growing. It’s been locked up ever since we left Gallifrey, but it can still sense things living on the planets we’ve visited. It’s been learning from them. Picking up new tricks from their biodata. We’ve worried about it getting out, sometimes. But it hasn’t ever managed to slip through the safety protocols of the show. Until today, anyway.’

The Remote troops started muttering. There were voices shrieking in Kreiner’s receiver, the media systems of the ship, finally telling him exactly what was happening on board.

The crew members were screaming. Being eaten alive. Father Kreiner’s nerves were ringing in sympathy with them.

‘We gave the travelling show a few instructions before we left,’ said the Doctor. ‘You can program it, you know. Just like you can program a TARDIS, although I believe my friend here uses meditation techniques instead of control panels.’

‘What-did-you-do?’ Kreiner shouted. It was hard getting the words out through the pain in his skull, and he could sense the Remote troops looking at him as if he were going mad, but right now he couldn’t have cared less.
what they thought.

‘Simple,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘We told the show to give us time to get clear. Then to open up the seals on wagon thirteen. To set Number Thirteen free. For the first time since Old Gallifrey.’

‘You could have explained this to me better,’ the Doctor’s companion mumbled, but everyone ignored her.

‘Why?’ Kreiner shrieked. ‘Why-do-this?’

‘Don’t worry,’ I.M. Foreman told him. ‘We’ve got a plan.’

‘It’s coming,’ said the Doctor.

And, indeed, it was.

The Remote ship had been the first thing Number Thirteen had noticed, once it had been let out of its wagon. It had sensed life there, complex human life, and for the first time in thousands of years it had actually been able to reach its prey. So its first decision as a free life form – even before it had stopped to wonder where it was, or why it had been released in the first place – had been to get on to the ship, to force itself along the boarding tube that had been planted in the middle of the travelling show.

Number Thirteen moved through the vessel like liquid, like a flood that had been building up for millennia. It crashed in waves across the decks, across the computer systems, and across the crew. Not technically fluid, nothing that could accurately be called ‘matter’ in any form. Just a deluge of potential life, a force that had been given thousands of years to decide what form it wanted to take, but still hadn’t made up its mind. On some decks, it stampeded through the corridors like a herd of cattle. On some decks, it moved like a worm, burrowing its way through the walls whenever it reached a dead end. On some decks, it even seemed to have a face. AKA the Metamorph had been able to take on any number of shapes, but only Number Thirteen could be all of those shapes at once.

It didn’t think like a Gallifreyan now, of course. It thought like everything it had eaten and absorbed over the years, ten thousand different ideas tearing through its mind at once, so the only thing it could be sure of was that it was still hungry. It ate the Remote as it crashed over them, and added their life patterns to its own bulk. The crewmen didn’t die, naturally, because death was unthinkable to Number Thirteen. They were still alive, there in the guts of the energy mass, and as things turned out most of them were happier that way. Their flesh and bones were dissolved into raw biomass, but their potential became part of the greater whole of Number Thirteen, and for beings who’d spent their lives hooked into the media systems of Faction Paradox this wasn’t an entirely new experience.

Once Number Thirteen had filled up every corridor, and squeezed its way into the every last niche of the ship, it realised that it’d have to break out of this place if it wanted to learn anything else. So it simply breathed in, sucking the black metal walls of the vessel towards the centre of its body. The ship shook for a few moments, trying to resist the pressure, then crumpled like a plastic cup.

Magdelana was standing at the town gate when the Remote ship vanished. She’d been there for a good ten minutes, pressing her back against one of the big wooden gateposts, listening to the conversation in the square without getting involved. She hadn’t understood much of what she’d heard, about the showman and his ‘regenerations’, but she understood the basic problem.

The offworlders were linked to other times, not just other planets. The Doctor, the freaks, the Remote… none of them belonged to Dust, not like the townspeople did. Not like Magdelana did. The desert had swallowed up this planet’s history, but these people lived outside of history altogether.

She looked up as soon as she heard the crunching sound, and covered her face when she saw the walls of the ship buckling, to fend off any debris that might have rained down on her. There wasn’t any, though. The ship was being sucked inward, and every single rivet, every single piece of scarred black plating, was being carefully drawn up into…

Into whatever it was that now hovered over the town wall. Magdelana couldn’t be sure exactly what she was looking at, but it reminded her of the geek she’d met, buzzing with so many different animal hormones that you couldn’t tell what species it was supposed to be. You’d be able to see it even if you were blind, she realised. You’d be able to feel it inside your head, scratching against your senses. It was alive, and it was hungry, and the very last fragments of the ship were sucked into it as Magdelana watched, until the thing filled up the sky with a kind of light that was just as all-consuming as the darkness the Remote had brought with them.

She remembered the roaches that had clustered around her father’s body, the way they’d sucked at the blood on the floorboards of the old house. She remembered the rush of animal adrenaline when she’d shot him through the head. She remembered the smell of her horse afterwards, when she’d pulled on her father’s Clan mask and ridden out of the town where she’d been born.

The light made her remember all these things, and many, many, many more.
Number Thirteen consumed the last of the ship, breaking down the metal and distributing the mass around its… well, around its body. Now it had swallowed all that raw matter, it was becoming solid. Not solid enough to stick to one shape, but at least it had all the materials it would need to build whatever body it finally chose for itself. It ate the power systems, carefully putting out the fusion fire that started in its stomach. It ate the environment core, the machines that put the Remote in touch with the biosphere of Dust, storing the blueprints in the spaces of its DNA in case the knowledge came in handy later on.

Finally Number Thirteen examined the world around it. There was a sky at last, room for it to move, air for it to breathe, should it wish to. The planet wasn’t exactly teeming with life, but down below it could see walls made of dead wood, and inside those walls there were animals. Complex animals. Number Thirteen crawled forward, making the oxygen burn and ripple in its wake, then peeked down at the square below it through eyes that were as yet only potential eyes.

There were plenty of living things down in the square. Even apart from the viral life in the town, Number Thirteen could see more shiny black human figures, just like the ones it had eaten on the ship. They were all staring up at it, waving their weapons but not knowing what to do with them. One of the black animals – dearly the pack leader – was starting to back away, heading for the deeper parts of the town. He was saying something like ‘no, no, no’ as he went.

Then there were the others. The twelve showpeople, for a start. Number Thirteen was vaguely aware that they were just earlier versions of itself, and knew it couldn’t absorb them without creating some kind of paradox, but frankly it couldn’t help wondering what a paradox might taste like, so that wasn’t a problem. And there were two other complex animals in the square. One was a Time Lord, Number Thirteen noted, while the other was a basic human being. The Time Lord told the human to run as Number Thirteen looked down on them, and they began to move across the square as fast as their tiny legs could carry them. The Remote people hardly noticed them leaving.

Number Thirteen let them go. After all, it had more than enough biomass here to be getting on with.

It suddenly noticed that it was floating, in defiance of the local gravity. It was using up quite a lot of energy doing that, so it decided to stop. It felt itself dropping towards the square, and turned itself into a kind of vortex as it fell, a swirling helter-skelter of life and energy and matter.

Father Kreiner had made a decision, and the decision had been based on several centuries of experience. He’d decided not to look back.

The armour had never felt heavier on his limbs. He could feel the warmth of the lubricant on his skin, squishing and squashing between the parts of his body that were still recognisably human and the parts that had been replaced by the implants. It had been a long, long time since he’d had to run anywhere.

So he was only a few metres away from the square when he heard the crashing sound, and knew that the monstrosity had swept over the people in the square. He could hear it swirling against the walls, snatching up his troops as it went. Without the media systems on the ship, they were utterly helpless, not even having the sense to run when they saw something huge and nasty rearing up over them. Kreiner could hear them gurgling as they were consumed, their masks turning the sound into something flat, electronic and meaningless. He didn’t hear anything from the I.M. Foremans, not a single scream, and that was what annoyed him most of all.

He wondered how long it’d be before the monster started to flood the streets around the square. He wondered if that was what the Doctor had wanted, if the evil old sod had planned things this way out of spite. More than anything, he wondered how long he had left before Number Thirteen, or the Doctor, or something even worse, finally cornered him.

These thoughts were so distracting that he found himself glancing over his shoulder, without even realising he was doing it. Looking back. Well, so much for his big decision.

He had only a second to register what was happening before the wave hit him. The monstrosity was still in the square, whirling in circles, but parts of its body were starting to leak into the rest of the town. One tendril had lashed out, and now it was following him down the side street. Rolling along the ground, picking up dust and matter as it went.

Accident, thought Father Kreiner. It hadn’t even seen him. It had reached out blindly, and he was right in its path.

And suddenly he was falling backward, knocked off his feet by the force of the wave. There was pain in his arm, although the repair systems in the armour were trying to distract him from it, pumping sedatives into his body before the shock could shut down his brain. But nothing else was happening. He hadn’t been carried away, or swallowed up by the wave. He could still feel his legs, and the sweat between the layers of his skin. He could still hear the echoes of a scream inside his mask.
He was on his back. Lying in the dust, with his head turned towards the square. He could still see the monstrosity from here, framed between the walls of the side street, but the tendril had been pulled back into the thing’s body. It had winged him, that was all.

It had touched his arm.
His arm… wasn’t there.

Something was there. Something that might have been a limb, but it was tiny and weak, and it made him think of the images of *Tyrannosaurus rex* he’d seen in picture books two thousand years earlier. A stunted little forepaw, stuck to a big powerful body. The limb was still surrounded by Remote armour, but the armour had shrivelled up around the flesh, so the arm looked as though it’d been shrink-wrapped. He couldn’t feel anything at all down his right side. The monster had sucked all the life from that section of his body, drawn the biodata out of one of his limbs, and left the remains just dangling.

Even if he got out of this alive, he’d be crippled for the rest of his life. For a hundred years, or a thousand years, or… or until he was crippled again, and again, and again, and eternity was made slightly less bearable for him. He remembered how the Remote had offered to make him more than human, back in the days of old Anathema. But he’d chosen the Faction, hadn’t he? Becoming less than human instead, just because he’d wanted to keep his own name and his own memories.

He was a one-armed man now. Which would have been a mark of distinction, if he’d still been with Faction Paradox.

Adding irony to injury. Hah.

He felt his head sink back into the dirt. Maybe it was the drugs, but he felt a lot more relaxed than he had done in a long, long time. Perhaps it was just the comfort of knowing that he didn’t really stand a chance of killing the Doctor after all, and that he didn’t have to go through all the stress of trying.

Not that his collection of Time Lord heads existed any more. He felt a bit sad about that. Still, at least he was feeling something.

Sarah had never seen the Doctor move so fast in her life. He’d hurtled along the streets like an Olympic sprinter, with his long legs suddenly changing gear from ‘gangly’ to ‘athletic’, and Sarah had poddled along behind him with tiny little atom bombs going off all around her diaphragm. He’d been in such a rush that he’d fumbled with the key twice before he’d finally managed to open the TARDIS.

Sarah had expected to feel safe once she was inside. It hadn’t worked out that way, though. The floor and the console had started to suck up the blood they’d leaked, but there were big pink stains wherever you looked, and Sarah still couldn’t quite come to terms with that. Now the Doctor was standing at the console, punching buttons so quickly that Sarah had to assume he was just guessing. With one good thwack of the main switch, the column at the centre of the console began to rise and fall, as the TARDIS tore itself away from the surface of Dust.

‘We’re going?’ Sarah asked.

‘Just a short hop,’ the Doctor murmured. The column stopped almost as soon as he said it, and he reached out for the scanner controls. The shutters opened over the TV screen on the far wall, with their usual quiet moan.

She found herself staring at a whirlpool. There were lines of force on the scanner, currents of energy, spinning in a Catherine wheel that threw off new limbs and new patterns from second to second. Sarah could make out clumps of matter in the maelstrom, small patches of sanity that almost-but-not-quite looked like living beings. Things the whirlpool had only half digested, maybe, or things it was trying to grow out of itself.

It was a picture of the town square. Number Thirteen, seen from above. The scanner didn't provide any sound, but she could imagine the noise the thing was making anyway, the animal scratching sounds you could hear inside your head when you got too close to it.

‘We’re hovering,’ the Doctor explained, while he darted from one side of the console to another. He ended up in front of one of the less obvious control panels, pressing switches Sarah had never seen him play with before, and which quite possibly hadn’t been there this morning. She concentrated on the scanner again, squinting at the thing that she absolutely refused to believe had once been I.M. Foreman, trying to work out how many of the shapes inside its body were Remote soldiers.

That was when she saw the other shapes. About a dozen of them – no, exactly a dozen of them – standing at the dead centre of the whirlpool. People. Not moving. Not panicking. The life-energy thing was swirling around the walls of the square, Sarah saw, and the people at the centre hadn’t been touched by it yet.

‘Doctor,’ she tried to say. But she ended up shouting it. ‘It’s the people from the show. Look.’

The Doctor didn’t bother looking up from the controls. ‘Yes, I should think so.’

‘I thought they ran for it. I thought they left when we did.’

The Doctor shook his head while he tapped at his switches. ‘I don’t think Number Thirteen would have let
them get away quite that easily. You are what you eat, you know. And you eat what you are.’
Sarah gave him her best gawp.
‘We’ve got to help them,’ she said.
‘My dear girl, that’s precisely what I’m doing,’ said the Doctor.

They’d formed a circle in the centre of the maelstrom, all twelve of them staring out at the carnival of life force
that had swallowed up the Remote troops. I.M. Foreman couldn’t see anything of the square now, just wild flashes
of life and energy, moving too quickly for him to follow without feeling distinctly ill. If I were seeing this through
my eyes, he thought, it wouldn’t be so bad. It’s being able to see the biodata patterns that bothers me.
Number Thirteen had decided to leave them until last. Well, that made sense. It must have known that its
twelve former selves would be hard to digest, so presumably it had just been lining its stomach by swallowing the
Remote forces first. It was ready for them now, by the looks of things. Number Thirteen reared up as it tightened the
circle around them, turning itself into a great chimney of biomass and hormones, showering tiny droplets of itself
down on to their heads.
I.M. Foreman tried to look the thing in the eye, but as neither of them had eyes, the gesture was purely
symbolic. He didn’t see anything in Number Thirteen he recognised. Nothing that reminded him of himself at all.
God, what a destiny.
‘I’m sorry,’ I.M. Foreman told his final form. ‘I’m afraid we can’t let you do this.’
He wasn’t sure whether Number Thirteen could hear him. He was sure, however, that it didn’t really care about
anything he might have to say.

The Doctor’s fingers were getting faster. Sarah could have sworn she felt the console shaking. On the scanner,
the twelve people shapes pulled themselves into tighter and tighter circles as the monster thing closed in on them.
‘Now,’ said the Doctor.
Sarah jumped, just for a moment wondering whether that was her cue to do something important and
dangerous. But the Doctor punched one big button on the console when he said it, and suddenly the air was full of a
wheezing, groaning noise, the sound of the TARDIS’s engines pulling open the universe like a zip. Except that the
ship wasn’t going anywhere. The floor wasn’t humming, not like it usually did when they took off.
‘It’s broken down,’ Sarah heard herself say. But the Doctor’s eyes were fixed on the scanner, where something
was taking shape in the centre of the square, holding back the maelstrom and folding itself around the twelve show
people.
‘Well, well, well,’ Sarah heard the Doctor mumble. ‘He was right. It works.’

Number Thirteen had been slightly distracted by the arrival of the TARDIS, and paused for a few moments to
grow sensory organs through which it could examine the ship’s structure properly. It knew what a TARDIS was, and
it knew there was no point trying to eat one. As with a coconut, what was inside wasn’t worth the fuss and bother of
breaking through the shell.
It was therefore both surprised and annoyed when it looked back down again, and saw that there was a second
TARDIS standing in the centre of the square. Furthermore, this new TARDIS had taken on exactly the same shape
as the first: a little blue box, with a long and distinguished history that Number Thirteen frankly wasn’t interested in.
The second TARDIS had not only appeared out of nowhere, it had materialised around the twelve showpeople,
robbing Number Thirteen of its intended prey.
It wasn’t happy about that. It ignored the hovering TARDIS completely, and started lashing out at the one in
the square, battering the vehicle with every limb at its disposal. This was one coconut Number Thirteen was
determined to crack.

‘What?’ said Sarah.
The Doctor had already turned his attention back to the console. He was standing halfway between the new
control panel and the usual navigational systems, with his legs spread wide to cover the distance, moving his head
from side to side as he tapped away at one panel or the other. He really did look much too old for this sort of thing.
‘It’s the travelling show,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’ve linked it up with the TARDIS. The two systems are busy
talking to each other now.’
‘It looks like the TARDIS,’ Sarah pointed out.
‘The show’s travelling techniques are different from ours,’ the Doctor said, with his head still bobbing
backward and forward. ‘Some of the processes are compatible, though. I.M. Foreman said they would be. I wasn’t
sure until a moment ago.’
‘It looks like the TARDIS,’ Sarah still pointed out.

The Doctor looked up, but he kept his fingers hovering over the controls. ‘Yes. It does, doesn’t it? That’s because I’ve used the TARDIS systems to pull the show together. To put it all into a little box, so to speak. The show’s usual method of transportation was a bit slow for what we had in mind. The show must be copying the TARDIS’s shape as well as her protocols.’

‘It looks like the TARDIS,’ Sarah persisted in pointing out. There wasn’t really anything she could add to that.

‘Theoretically, I should be able to steer the travelling show from this console,’ the Doctor concluded. ‘Let’s see if it works, shall we?’

‘It looks like the TARDIS,’ agreed Sarah.
10

Control
(everything falls into place, more or less)

Father Kreiner couldn’t hear the sound of the TARDIS over the thrashing of Number Thirteen, but it didn’t matter. Faction Paradox had pretty much turned him into a Time Lord alarm system when it had taken him under its wing, so the moment the ship arrived in the square he could feel it, like an itch that was spreading all over his body, even through his crippled arm. He found himself on his feet again, although he wasn’t sure how he’d managed to get up. He stumbled forward, back towards the square, where the Foreman creature had pulled itself into a column of light, sweat and fire.

There it was. The TARDIS. Hovering in the air, just a tendril’s length away from the monstrosity. Even now, even after all these centuries, Kreiner could feel the pull of the thing. He could feel the early 1960s scratching at the back of his skull, the corrupted memories of his first steps into the TARDIS console room. He didn’t remember the last time he’d actually seen the TARDIS, but he remembered it coming and going in his nightmares, as if the Doctor had wanted to look in on the insides of his head over the years. He remembered all those months spent on Ordifica, and then Anathema, waiting and praying for the ship to come and take him home. He even remembered the exact moment, the precise second, when he’d realised that he didn’t care about home any more.

It was only then that he saw it. The monstrosity in front of him was spreading itself thin now, stretching so far into the sky that Kreiner could see right through its skin, all the way to the space at its heart.

There, at the dead centre of the square, was a second TARDIS. A second blue box. And the light on the roof was flashing, telling the world it was getting ready for lift-off.

Kreiner felt himself stumbling towards it, the machine parts in his legs struggling to go on despite the dirt and the leaking fluid inside his armour. His body felt numb from the drugs in his system, and he had the terrible sensation that he was going to trip up at any moment. That he wouldn’t make it in time, that the TARDIS was going to leave without him.

Because that had to be his TARDIS, didn’t it? The Eighth Doctor’s TARDIS, the one he’d first stepped into, all those years ago. It was the only thing that made sense. Somehow the Eighth Doctor had worked out what was happening, and come to tie up the loose ends, to meddle in his third self’s affairs. Kreiner didn’t know why he was running to it like this, or what he thought he was going to do or say once he got through the doors. He wasn’t sure whether he’d feel compelled to kill the Eighth Doctor, or whether he’d be able to ask the Time Lord to take him away from here and leave it at that. All he knew was that he could feel the armour crunching and squeaking against his skin, getting ready to be shed.

This was it. His one chance at a way out. The thing he’d been waiting for all these years, even when he’d told himself he’d given up. He suspected that this state of mind was something to do with the drugs, although it hardly seemed to matter. Kreiner knew he was walking right into the body of the monstrosity, but even Number Thirteen couldn’t touch him now. He cut his way through its flesh, felt the energy slide off his shiny black skin, let the armour use up the last of its power holding off the thing’s advances. For these last few seconds, he was indestructible.

The TARDIS in the square was vanishing. The ship was leaving. Father Kreiner was still a metre away, maybe a metre and a half. He felt one final burst of power in the machine systems of his legs, pushing his muscles to snapping point, launching his body towards the shape of the police box. He reached out with gauntlets that had been built for handling raw time, trying to sink his fingers into the side of the ship, to grasp the solid blue of the surface and cling to the machine as it took itself out of space-time.

Seeing that the gauntlets had been designed by Faction Paradox, it was entirely possible that this might have worked. Unfortunately, the individual who had once been called Fitz Kreiner was roughly half a second too late.

The show, wrapped up in the blue box shape it had copied from the TARDIS, pulled itself away from normal space and let the currents of time drag it off to its destination. The destination in question had been programmed into the TARDIS by the Doctor, who’d been given the coordinates by I.M. Foreman himself. The showman hadn’t been able to give the Doctor the exact details of the landing site, but he’d doubted it was important, as long as the time and the world were right.

‘Wherever you send us, it’ll be the place,’ he’d said.

The show eventually materialised on a planet close to the centre of the galaxy, several thousand years in I.M. Foreman’s own past. Most TARDIS units had been programmed to avoid the past history of Gallifrey, but the show
hadn’t been brought up as a TARDIS, so it didn’t have any of these little hang-ups. It arrived in the middle of the Gallifreyan wasteland, hovering several metres above ground level, and hung there in midair for a nanosecond or two before it exploded.

The explosion was only to be expected. Now it had completed its journey, the show was no longer linked to the guidance systems of the TARDIS, so there was nothing to hold it all together. And there was no other form in the area that it could safely inhabit, either: It hadn’t prepared for this trip, and therefore hadn’t built itself a new ‘body’ on Gallifrey. There were no covered wagons to be found here, and definitely no junkyards. The travelling show simply ceased to exist, and, without anything to keep it in place, the matter that had made up the police-box exterior exploded in all directions.

The twelve passengers survived the explosion, but only just. Their bodies were scattered across the sands of the wasteland, with their bones broken and their blood vessels ruptured. Even AKA the Metamorph had difficulty remoulding its body to soften the blast, while the If found itself breathing a particularly sick and twisted kind of time.

I.M. Foreman himself was the first to come to his senses. He’d landed face down in the sand, and for a moment he’d thought that the plan hadn’t worked, that they’d all ended up back on Dust. Then he rolled over on to his back, nerves tearing with every move he made, and saw the orange sky overhead. That was when he knew he’d come home.

‘Colder than I remembered,’ he said, just before his vocal cords finally snapped.

He tried holding his hand in front of his face, and noticed that he was bleeding. Well, no surprises there. Bleeding was what he did best. He’d always known that the blood was the most important thing about him, the thing that made him what he was: blood, and the genetic destiny it carried with it. Now all his pores seemed to be leaking, and he briefly wished that he could see it in the normal way, through a working pair of eyes. It must have looked spectacularly grotesque. A real show-shopper.

He could feel the presence of Mohandas the Geek nearby, but Mohandas wasn’t making a sound, not even his usual grunting. I.M. Foreman could tell that Mohandas was in exactly the same state he was, standing at death’s door and waiting to be asked in for coffee and crackers. And beyond Mohandas there was Melmoth, and Mr Zarathustra, and O’Salamander, and…

Oh. And here it came, that feeling down in his bones, as his body got ready to turn itself inside out and start again from scratch. He’d never regenerated before, of course, but somehow he’d known it’d feel like this. He was bleeding light now, light everywhere, so bright that he could almost see. Or was that just the sensation of new eyes growing?

It was going to be a traumatic regeneration, though. And traumatic regenerations had a way of blanking the mind, of making people forget who they’d been, of forcing them to leave behind their past histories. Already, he could feel his memories slipping away. The Doctor, gone. Dust, gone. New Mars, gone. The junkyard on Earth, gone. Everything gone, except for the here and now, the light and the blood and the orange sky.

There in the wastelands of Old Gallifrey, I.M. Foreman regenerated into Mohandas the Geek. Meanwhile, Mohandas regenerated into Melmoth the Map of Scars, Melmoth regenerated into Mr Zarathustra, Mr Zarathustra regenerated into O’Salamander the Dragon-King, O’Salamander regenerated into John Salt the Missing Link, John Salt regenerated into Mould the Worm-Boy, Mould the Worm-Boy regenerated into the Goofus, the Goofus regenerated into Ezekiel the Master Aerialist, Ezekiel regenerated into Queen Nitocris the Mistress of Serpents, Queen Nitocris regenerated into the If, the If regenerated into AKA the metamorph, and AKA regenerated into Number Thirteen. Albeit a much younger and much smaller version of Number Thirteen than the one who’d been let out of its prison on Dust.

Just a few minutes after the travelling show had exploded, twelve entirely new people were lying there in the wasteland. Each member of the travelling show had become the next in line.

Minutes passed. Hours passed. Nobody moved, and in that period of silence it was doubtful that any of the twelve knew they were alive at all. Then – finally – a lone Gallifreyan priest appeared from over a nearby crag, saw the twelve travellers in the sand, and went to help them.

The priest would one day call himself I.M. Foreman, but at that point in his life he still hadn’t made up his mind about leaving his homeworld, and he definitely hadn’t yet decided to sharpen up his telepathic centres by removing his own eyes. But, when the twelve strangers eventually recovered, it didn’t take the priest long to realise that they were all his future incarnations. One day they’d acquire the techniques of time travel from the other wasteland refugees, and the travelling show would begin, working outward from Gallifrey in its grand spiral of life. For now, though, all the priest and his twelve new friends could do was wonder how they’d ended up in the same
place at the same time. Perhaps, they speculated, it was one of those things that had simply been destined to happen.

The rest would be history.

Sarah looked at the scanner. Then at the Doctor. Then at the scanner. Then at the Doctor. Then at the scanner. She was sure she was going to get bored of this sooner or later, but she wasn’t sure when.

‘Well?’ she said. ‘Where did they go?’

‘Back to Gallifrey,’ said the Doctor. ‘Several thousand years ago. To meet their destiny.’

‘And what’s their destiny?’

The Doctor nodded at the whirling flesh thing on the scanner. ‘That is, I’m afraid. The final form of I.M. Foreman. The last regeneration.’

‘Huh,’ said Sarah. ‘I’d ask for my money back if I were him.54’

But the Doctor was already back at the controls, and a second later the column in the middle of the console was bobbing up and down again. When they landed, the scanner told them that they were back in the alley where they’d first arrived. The Doctor had opened the doors before Sarah could even ask him what he was doing.

‘Stay here,’ he said, as he took his usual hundred-mile strides across the room.

‘All right,’ said Sarah.

‘No, Sarah. I mean, really stay here.’

‘Oh,’ said Sarah.

Even the first TARDIS had vanished now. That made Number Thirteen very, very irate indeed. There were still people in the town, but it could feel them huddling inside their homes, and they didn’t seem to be particularly varied or interesting bioforms. Many of them had been inbreeding for generations, judging by the state of their genes.

Number Thirteen had planned on swallowing all life on the planet, then (and only then) deciding on the form it actually wanted. No point building yourself a great big body before you’d weighed up all the options, was there? But now it was starting to wonder whether it shouldn’t just –

Aha!

The Time Lord was back. Number Thirteen turned its attention towards one of the side streets, and saw the little animal standing there with his hands on his hips, staring up defiantly. It could smell the panic on his body, though. Still, you had to admire the creature for trying. Number Thirteen reared up, becoming one great wave again, and prepared to crash down on its victim.

‘I’d listen to what I’ve got to say first,’ said the Time Lord.

Number Thirteen paused. The wave lost momentum, and it found itself crashing back to the ground in a big messy puddle of energy. The Time Lord stepped back, to avoid getting splashed.

‘Are you listening?’ the Time Lord asked.

Number Thirteen felt the absurd urge to nod.

‘Good,’ said the Time Lord. ‘Now pay attention. You used to be Gallifreyan, like me. I don’t know if you can remember it, but you used to be someone called I.M. Foreman. I didn’t know him very well, although I saw enough of him to know he was a good man. A lot like myself, I’d like to think. We just had different ways of doing things.’

Number Thirteen thought about this for a moment. Yes, it decided, the Time Lord was right. It did use to be a little blind man called I.M. Foreman. Not that it mattered now.

‘I.M. Foreman dedicated himself to becoming something more than he was,’ the Time Lord went on. ‘And he did it, too. He became you. A million different species in one. The collected biodata of a thousand planets. You’re quite unique, you know.’

One of the minds Number Thirteen had swallowed wanted to point out that something couldn’t be ‘quite’ unique: it was either unique or it wasn’t. But Number Thirteen told that particular part of itself to shut up.

The Time Lord cleared his throat, although he kept his eyes fixed on the towering mass of Number Thirteen.

‘The point is, I know what you are, and I know what you want. You want to be all things to all people. That’s why you haven’t picked a solid body for yourself yet. You’ve got so much genetic experience inside you, you don’t know whether to be fish or fowl. One body isn’t enough for you. You want to be more than you are, which was what I.M. Foreman thought everyone should aspire to.’

Again, Number Thirteen had to agree, although it was starting to get bored with this whole conversation.

‘When you ate the Remote ship, you ate all the ship’s systems, too,’ the Time Lord continued. He seemed to be coming to the punchline at last. ‘One of the things you swallowed was the machine the Remote used for tapping into a planet’s biosphere. Isn’t that right?’

Number Thirteen considered this. It had already broken the ship down into raw matter, but the blueprints were still stored in its memory. As the Doctor spoke, it started rebuilding some of the ship’s machines inside its body,
carefully putting the biosphere-manipulation system back together in the depths of its fluid stomach.

‘Have you thought about what that machine can do?’ asked the Time Lord.

Number Thirteen hadn’t thought about that at all. It hadn’t had any reason to.

‘Turn it on,’ said the Doctor. ‘You’ll see.’

That made Number Thirteen suspicious. The Time Lord wanted it to activate a piece of alien machinery inside its own body. For all it knew, the device would explode, or even...

No. The machine wasn’t a bomb. It didn’t look harmful at all, in fact. The thing was part of its body now, so it could always take the device apart again if there seemed to be any negative effects. True?

‘I suggest you try it,’ said the Time Lord. ‘I promise you, you won’t regret it.’ And there wasn’t a single drop of sweat on his body when he said it, not one ounce of deceit.

All right, thought Number Thirteen. All right, let’s see.

It let its mind flow into the workings of the Remote’s biosphere machine, and switched it on.

There was a door.

The door opened, and Number Thirteen saw the world behind it. The planet Dust, seen from the inside. An entire biosphere, a complete ecosystem made up of ecosystems, a whole environment made up of environments. It saw the DNA of every species that had ever existed on the planet, from the snakes that crawled in the deserts to the insects that fed off the skins of the humans. It saw the seeds of plants that had lain dormant under the sand for millions of years, waiting for the next great rain. It saw nutrients, layers of dead things buried under the soil, waiting to be reprocessed and turned into raw life again. It saw never-ending networks of ley lines, patterns of energy no single life form had ever seen before. Not like this.

The surface of Dust was peeled back for Number Thirteen’s benefit, revealing the cities under the sand, the leftovers of the old Earth empire. It was in touch with the planet’s evolution, with the fossil records and the strata of the rocks. It watched generations of carrion birds flutter past in a second, as the lizards of prehistoric Dust grew wings and feathers and took to the air. It saw the rules that governed growth and change here, and knew, in a second, exactly where things had started to go wrong.

Yes. All you had to do was go through that door, and you’d be inside the planet, inside the laws that held the planet together. The Remote had used their machines to tap into the local ley lines, but you could do so much more than that, if you knew what you were doing. If you were adaptable enough, you could go through that door and become the planet.

Number Thirteen was probably the most adaptable life form that had ever lived.

It passed through the door. Well, it couldn’t resist the challenge.

Suddenly, it was stretching, flowing and expanding, reaching into the roots of every cactus on Dust, working its way into the biodata of every animal that had been born here. It was a pregnant sand snake, sheltering from the sun in the shade of a rock. It was a tree that had been reared by humans on the other side of the planet, now being torn out of the ground for its wood. It was an old woman in the town where Number Thirteen had arrived, shutting herself away inside her home, waiting for the storm to pass. It was a leech that had attached itself to a small child’s leg, and wouldn’t let go.

It was everything, everywhere, and everyone. It was the world. It was Dust.

Except that Dust, in Number Thirteen’s view, was a terrible name for a planet. It was a name for a place where life was dull, dry and hopeless. Where nothing changed, and nothing varied.

Number Thirteen objected to that. So it reached deep into the bowels of the planet, and tried something else.

The Doctor stood in the square for some time after Number Thirteen vanished, just to make sure it didn’t come back again. It didn’t. The lure of the biosphere had been too much for it, just as I.M. Foreman had predicted. More than once, the Doctor spotted signs of movement from around the square, as the locals noticed that things had returned to normal and started peering out from behind their boarded-up windows.

No. Things hadn’t returned to normal at all, had they?

The Doctor knelt down, and ran his fingers through the dust. It could have been his imagination, but even the dust felt different now. As if it no longer wanted to cling to everything it touched, as if it no longer felt the need to suck the life out of anything that moved. And then there were the shoots, of course. They hadn’t broken the surface yet, but their life patterns were so strong that the Doctor could already feel them growing. The plants were taking root in the dirt, getting ready to burst out into the square.

This time tomorrow, thought the Doctor, this town’s going to be covered in grass. Grass, or something very much like it. One of the many plant species that I.M. Foreman had ingested into his body over the years, and that had been stored inside the biology of Number Thirteen.
‘It wasn’t such a bad sort, really,’ the Doctor told the dust. ‘It didn’t want to hurt anybody. It just wanted to be everybody. And it got what it wanted. How many people can say that, eh?’

Then he stood, and clapped the dust off his hands.

There was someone standing in the square when he turned round, and at first he thought it was Sarah, disobeying instructions as usual. But Sarah didn’t carry a gun, and he’d never known her to wear a hat, either.

Magdelana stepped out into the square, and stopped a few yards in front of the Doctor. She still had both hands clamped around that shotgun of hers. Her face was as taut as ever, with the ever-present grey dust ground into the wrinkles around her mouth. Even if her hair hadn’t been tied back behind her neck, the dirt would have kept it in place anyway.

The Doctor smiled at her. Magdelana didn’t smile back.

‘It’s over,’ he said.

Magdelana’s expression didn’t change. ‘Over,’ she repeated.

The Doctor nodded. ‘The Remote won’t be bothering you again, Magdelana. And I think you’ll find that this planet’s a much more hopeful place to live, after today.’

He glanced around the square, seeing blank, empty eyes staring out from the boarded-up buildings. Could they feel it? he wondered. Could they feel the change in the dust yet?

‘You might want to think about changing the name of the place,’ the Doctor added. ‘I don’t think “Dust” is going to be very appropriate, from now on. This is Number Thirteen’s world now. Foreman’s world.’

He turned back to Magdelana, but Magdelana was still just standing there, staring at him. Her eyes were sharp and bright, even though the planet had drained all the colour out of them. She looked alert, he had to give her that.

‘You’re a time traveller,’ she said. ‘Aren’t you?’

The Doctor found himself scratching the back of his neck. ‘Yes. Well. That’s going to be rather hard to explain, I’m afraid.’

‘That’s why you came here. The show people were all time travellers. More time travellers there are in a place, the more turn up. Like you. Like the Remote. Like those two grey things that got nailed up in the desert.’

‘Something of a simplification,’ the Doctor told her. ‘But essentially true, yes.’

Magdelana stopped staring at him then, and swept her eyes across the sky. It didn’t seem quite as yellow as it had done, the Doctor noted, which made him wonder what Number Thirteen was doing to the atmosphere. It was a quick worker, no doubt about it.

‘Remote are gone,’ Magdelana said. ‘The show’s gone.’

‘Yes.’

‘They all dead?’

‘No, no. Not dead. I suppose you could say… they’ve all gone underground.’

Magdelana nodded. ‘Been buried. That’s what you’re saying.’

It wasn’t hard to work out what she meant by that. On Dust, ‘buried’ must have been the word they used to mean ‘gone for good’. ‘Buried’ meant ‘taken away by the dust’. ‘Well, I suppose so, yes,’ the Doctor agreed.

‘I told you, didn’t I?’ said Magdelana. There was a tone in her voice the Doctor couldn’t quite place, something that didn’t sound as tired as everything else on this planet. ‘Anything tries to hurt this town, I have to take it out. Anything like that trying to hurt this town, I have to take it out. That’s what I said. Remember?’

The Doctor furrowed his brow. ‘I’m sorry, I don’t understand.’

‘You people,’ she said. ‘You time travellers. You bring things here. Bad things. Just you being in this town, that’s putting us in danger.’

The Doctor started shaking his head, then realised he was lying.

All those species that want me dead, he thought. All those enemies who want to bring me down at any cost. The Master would never have thought about going to Earth if I hadn’t been there, and how many people did he murder once he got there? How many people died, just because I happened to be in the vicinity?

The Doctor attracted things. Just like the travelling show had attracted him, back in 1963.

‘Yes,’ he admitted. ‘Yes, I’m afraid you’re right. But I’m leaving now. I’ve just got to make sure the biosphere’s stable, and then we can –’

‘No,’ said Magdelana. ‘Sorry.’

The Doctor felt somewhat taken aback by that. ‘No?’

‘Buried,’ said Magdelana. ‘Got to see you buried. Can’t leave any trace of you here. Or there’ll be more. More like you, or more like the Remote. Can’t take the chance. Like I said. Sorry.’

The Doctor sighed.

‘I really don’t want to cause you people any trouble,’ he said.

‘I know,’ said Magdelana. Then she raised the shotgun, aimed it at the Doctor’s chest, and fired.
As it happened, the shot wasn’t immediately fatal. The Doctor was fast enough to turn to one side as Magdelana pulled the trigger, so the lead entered his body at an angle rather than going right into his heart, cracking open the front of his ribcage and stopping about an inch under the skin. He didn’t fall straightaway, but stared at Magdelana for a moment or two, not understanding how she’d managed to do this to him.

Even though the shot didn’t connect with any major organs, the wound was obviously a terminal one. This was why Magdelana turned away as soon as she saw the Doctor fall face down into the dust, and headed back towards her home.

She hadn’t enjoyed executing her duty like that. But she felt satisfied that she’d done everything she had to do.
Coda 2: Interference Patterns

Sarah found him, eventually. It had taken her a lot longer than usual to ignore his instructions, to leave the TARDIS and come looking for him. Which was ironic, under the circumstances.

To be honest, he had no idea how long he’d been lying there, with the sky getting darker over his head and the blood making bigger and bigger smudges across his shirt. Every now and then he’d sensed the townspeople moving close to him, crawling from the rotting woodwork of their homes and watching him die from their doorsteps, but none of them had tried to help him. Whenever any of them had passed by the part of the square where he’d fallen, they’d seemed to move very, very slowly. Which was only to be expected, the Doctor supposed, seeing as he’d slowed down every part of his body that he still had some degree of control over. On the plus side, he’d brought his pulse down to a crawl, so he hadn’t suffered as much blood loss as he might have done. On the minus side, this had stretched out his final moments until he couldn’t exactly remember what it felt like to be alive.

The real irony was that he could feel the life in the dirt underneath him, as Number Thirteen went about its work and rebuilt the planet from the inside. If he didn’t get back to the TARDIS in time, his body would probably be feeding the grass in a week or so. It seemed odd, somehow, that he was going to be the very last casualty of the planet Dust.

He felt himself being pulled upright. Sarah was kneeling by his side now, trying to rest his head in her lap, gasping into his ear while she stroked his hair. He wasn’t sure what she was saying, but he doubted she knew either. Random words of consolation, probably. She sounded like a six-year-old, doing her best not to burst out crying.

Poor girl.

He felt every cell in his body go into spasm, then relax again, giving up the last of his energy. The cells didn’t have the strength to keep him together any more. He remembered feeling the same thing just before his first regeneration, that moment of weakness when your body tried to tell you that being solid was overrated anyway, that it’d be much easier to let yourself melt back into primordial soup. Back at the Academy, the students liked to say that a Time Lord who died his final death would degenerate into a sticky puddle, leaving nothing behind but an ugly stain and the memories in the Matrix.

It suddenly occurred to him that he had no idea whether this was actually true.

‘It’s all right,’ Sarah was saying, finally managing to put proper sentences together. She didn’t sound as though she believed a word of it. ‘You’re going to be all right. I’m going to get you back to the TARDIS.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Too late,’ he said, and his voice was as dry as the dust, as quiet as the desert. This is… the end, I’m afraid. Not… quite how I imagined it, but…’

He felt the cracks in his throat, and heard the sand sticking to the words. Sarah held him tighter, so he could feel his biofield rubbing against hers.

‘You can’t die,’ she told him. He could imagine her saying the same thing to her first pet hamster, moments before it passed out of her life for good. ‘You can’t. Not now. Not like this. Please.’

But the Doctor couldn’t see her at all now, not through the cocoon of pure life force his body was building around itself, keeping him safe and warm during the time of crisis. This was what the TARDIS had been trying to warn him about, then. The old girl had known it’d end this way. Still, how could he have understood? The rules were different here. Dust wasn’t the kind of place he ever would have chosen to go.

He had the funny feeling all that was going to change soon.

The Doctor felt his hand brush against something. Sarah was squeezing it, he realised, pressing his fingers against her face. He thought he felt a spot of liquid there, warm and sticky against her cheek. One of those little details that made the pain of existence worthwhile, really.

‘A tear, Sarah Jane?’ he said.

It’d be nice to record that those were the last words he said to her, before the change began in earnest and the Third Doctor effectively ceased to exist. However, there was one more thing he managed to say, one more message he felt he had to pass on to the world before he slipped away.

‘This is wrong,’ he said.

Then he died in the dust.

There were plenty of witnesses. The townspeople, for example, watched from their broken homes as the offworlder took his last breath and a brand new life form began to grow out of his biomass. And then there were the
agents of Faction Paradox, the crew of the great skeletal warship, who observed every detail of the square from their position in orbit of the planet.

Mother Mathara stood before the monitor wall in the command section of the ship, dressed in the same Faction-issue spacesuit that had been keeping her in one piece ever since the twenty-sixth century. She tried not to show any feeling as the Third Doctor passed away in front of her eyes, but it was hard not to get emotional at times like this. She wasn’t entirely sure which emotions she should be feeling, but a regeneration was such a primal, archetypal thing that it appealed to senses she hadn’t used properly in years.

The warship had spotted crucifixes in the desert, Mathara reminded herself. People nailed to wooden crosses, hanging there like Odin at the World Tree or Christ at Golgotha. Symbols of rebirth, according to primitive human culture. Almost as though the universe had seen the death of the Doctor coming, and decorated the planet with the appropriate props.

‘We’ve messed it up, haven’t we?’ said Cousin Llewis.

The Cousin was standing beside Mathara on the gallery of the command section, slouching against the railing with his suit hanging from his shoulders and his mask tucked under his arm. The Mother tried not to let his lack of enthusiasm bother her.

‘No,’ she told him. ‘We’ll report this to the Eleven-Day Empire, just as it happened. I don’t think they’ll be disappointed.’

‘We messed it up,’ Cousin Llewis repeated. ‘They gave us a mission, and we blew it. They’ll bloody skin us.’

At least the man was honest. Llewis had been recruited from twentieth-century Earth, but he’d been put in Mathara’s care after only five or six years under the Faction’s wing, so he was probably the youngest of the crew on the ship. He was in his early fifties, and he looked his age, which made him more or less unique among those on board. Mother Mathara was frankly amazed how well he’d adapted to life inside the family.

He’d been a failure back in his own place and time. His native culture had been perfectly in tune with the Faction’s own principles, a culture of rogue symbols and technological fetishism, but Llewis’s society had been so riddled with guilt and anxiety that the man had effectively been crippled. Once he’d been taken away from all of that, and given the Faction’s perspectives on life in a blame-free universe, he’d positively bloomed.

He’d been touched by the family’s work on his own world, and it had almost destroyed him. He’d lost his way, he’d lost his job, and he’d very nearly lost his mind. But he’d cried out for help, and when Faction Paradox had agreed to adopt him as one of their own he’d become the human being he’d always wanted to be. In fact, his ideas about human psychology had been quite inspirational. It had been his idea to take the Faction’s agents back to Earth in the early 1980s, for example, and to vandalise a small patch of land that was known locally as the ‘Blue Peter garden’. According to the research the Faction had done afterwards, this one act of petty destruction had introduced a whole new kind of guilt and terror to a generation of young people on the planet, a psychological trend that would turn thousands of them into potential Faction agents once they grew up and the neurosis blossomed.

Besides, nobody would have even remembered the garden if it had been left intact. It had become valuable to human culture only once it had been ruined. Which was perfectly in line with Faction doctrine, of course.

However, Llewis’s one problem was that he often failed to see the bigger picture. Like now, for instance. The Mothers and Fathers had sent the warship to Dust in order to plant a virus on the surface of the planet, a virus that had been specially engineered in the workshops of the Eleven-Day Empire, and which had finally been delivered to its destination in a single poisoned capsule, like a pill being given to the whole of the world. The virus had been designed to work its way into the biological make-up of its victim, to reprogram the victim’s biodata, and the Faction had chosen its target quite carefully.

The gift of the Faction was in the blood, as Mother Mathara knew full well: the first thing the Faction did when you joined the family was rewire your body. In theory, the virus would turn anyone it infected into an agent of Paradox. In theory. However, the engineers had managed to give the virus only a tiny life span, and the infection was nowhere near powerful enough to break through the defences of a Time Lord’s immune system. Otherwise, the Faction could have just let the virus loose on the High Council of Gallifrey and sat back to watch. As things stood, the virus could worm its way into a Gallifreyan’s biodata only under certain extreme circumstances, if the victim’s body was in a state of great vulnerability.

During a regeneration, for example.

The Faction had first come across I.M. Foreman’s travelling show centuries earlier, when the show had stopped off on New Mars and some of the family’s agents among the Ice Lords had realised that time technology had to be involved somewhere. It hadn’t taken the rulers of the Eleven-Day Empire long to work out exactly what I.M. Foreman was, or where he’d come from. They’d analysed his biodata, as well as they could without revealing themselves to him, and they’d been perceptive enough to see the slow mutation he was going through. They’d worked out I.M. Foreman’s destiny long before I.M. Foreman himself had. It hadn’t been hard, figuring out that one
day a single body wouldn’t be enough for him. The Faction hadn’t been able to guess the exact circumstances, but
they’d known that one day he’d evolve into an entire ecosystem. He wouldn’t have settled for anything less.

The Faction had abandoned the Remote a long time ago, in the early years of the Time Lord war, when it had
become clear to the Mothers and Fathers that the Remote were far too conspicuous to use as agents in the modern
universe. But the Faction’s programs remained on board the Remote ships they’d sent out into space, recording
everything, sending any important data back to the Eleven-Day Empire. The programs had been instructed to keep
watch for I.M. Foreman, to let the Mothers and Fathers know if the Remote ever stumbled across the place where
the travelling show was bound to meet its final fate. Where Number Thirteen would eventually become Foreman’s
World.

That was why the virus had been unleashed on Dust. The way the Eleven-Day Empire saw it, if the virus could
integrate with I.M. Foreman just as his thirteenth self joined with the biosphere of the planet…

Well, then the whole world would be infected. It’d be a planet of Paradox. A complete ecosystem, with the
principles and biodata codes of the Faction wired into the very heart of its biosphere. Faction Paradox had tried to
set up homeworlds for itself before, but so far every one of them had been destroyed, either by the High Council or
by the other groups that liked to involve themselves in Time Lord politics. These days, the Eleven-Day Empire was
the only hiding place the Mothers and Fathers had left. But a planet that was Paradox itself? That could grow and
learn and protect itself, the way any life form would? That was too good an opportunity to miss.

That had been the plan, anyway. It had started to go wrong, though, as soon as the virus capsule had been sent
down to the surface of Dust. Like all of the Faction’s greatest creations, the virus was semi-intelligent, programmed
to seek out Gallifreyan matter and detonate inside the body of its victim. What the Faction hadn’t realised, at least
not until it was too late, was that there’d been two Gallifreyans on Dust. There’d been I.M. Foreman, in all his
forms. And there’d been the Doctor.

Typically, it was the Doctor that the virus had found first.

Mother Mathara watched the pathetic spectacle on the monitor wall, as the Doctor’s companion dragged his
body through the streets of the Dust town, with her eyes all soggy and her clothes covered in dirt. The Doctor was
still in midtransformation, wrapped up in a cocoon of hormones, glowing with the force of his biofield. The girl had
no idea what was happening, Mathara told herself. As far as the Doctor’s companion was concerned, this was all an
adventure that had gone terribly wrong. Like Cousin Llewis, she hadn’t seen the bigger picture. The plans. The
politics. The possibilities.

In the long run, thought Mathara, the Faction’s interference is the only interference that matters.

‘The Doctor wasn’t scheduled to die here,’ she announced, loudly enough for all the crew in the command
section to hear her. ‘We’ve got this part of his existence on record. Evidently, we’ve altered his timeline. For the
better, naturally.’

Llewis made a little grunting noise. ‘So? We’ve still messed up the job.’

‘Only to an extent. The Doctor’s infected with our virus. Our biodata’s going to take root inside him. We
haven’t secured the planet, but the Doctor’s always been a major player in our plans. The Eleven-Day Empire won’t
be entirely displeased.’

Llewis took a step towards the monitor wall, to squint at the image of the dying/born-again Time Lord. You
couldn’t make out any of the Doctor’s new features, not yet. Away from the influence of the TARDIS, the
regeneration was slow and clumsy. ‘So the Doctor’s going to turn into one of us, is that it?’

‘Not yet. It’ll take time for the virus to get all the way into his biodata. Time Lord bodies are designed to hold
off this kind of attack. But every time he regenerates, the Paradox biodata will tighten its grip on him a little.
Eventually, he’ll come round to our way of seeing things.’

‘Eventually?’ Llewis queried.

‘Give him four or five more regenerations. The more contact he has with the Faction, the quicker the process
will be. One day, the virus will tip him over the edge and rebuild him according to our principles. There’ll be a few
side effects before then, I should think. He’ll probably lose his shadow first. That’s usually the way it happens.’

‘Be a bit obvious,’ Llewis mumbled.

‘We can give him a new shadow. A false one. He shouldn’t notice the difference. Not until it’s too late.’

Llewis blew out his cheeks. ‘He’s not looking good. No chance of him snuffing it, is there?’

‘No. He’ll regenerate into the same form he was scheduled to regenerate into. I expect his companion will get
him back to his home base on Earth. History will carry on much as before, apart from this one alteration. The fourth
Doctor will be exactly as the records describe him. And the fifth. And the sixth. And probably the seventh. But the
eighth…’

She didn’t bother finishing the sentence. It was pure melodrama, she knew, but melodrama had always been the
most powerful weapon in the Faction’s arsenal.
Llewis didn’t take his eyes off the figures on the screen. The Doctor’s features were starting to stabilise at last, now he was just a street or two from the comfort of the TARDIS. The girl kept dragging him through the dust, and the townspeople kept staring at him from the shadows.

‘Poor bugger,’ grumbled Llewis. ‘He must have felt like he’d walked into someone else’s adventure.’

‘He had,’ said Mother Mathara. ‘Ours.’

A week after the blue box left the planet that had been called Dust, Magdelana Bishop stepped out into the town square, where the creepers were reaching into the cracks of the buildings and the townspeople were starting to lose themselves in the wild grass. The plants were stretching up out of the ground, and taking the walls of the town apart piece by piece, sweeping away the old settlements just like they’d swept away the deserts. The locals were starting to leak out through the holes in the wall, taking long walks out into the fields and never coming home again. Nobody liked to talk about the change that had come to the world, and nobody liked to say anything about their reasons for leaving, but Magdelana knew there wasn’t any point in trying to stop them.

Dust had been built out of the signals of the past, out of all the corruption the human race had pumped into the planet over the years, out of all the dreams of falling empires and final frontiers that had been written and recorded and videotaped down through the generations. The colony had been a kind of warning to the universe, a demonstration of what happened if you sat back and let your culture rot, if you let your society recycle the same old messages over and over again until they stopped meaning anything. There were new signals in the ground now, though. With every step Magdelana took, she could feel them moving under the earth. Pushing up the grass. Rewriting the world.

She still didn’t understand how it had happened. All she knew was that it was done, and that the reasons for it had been safely buried, never to come to the surface again. In that much, she was sure she’d done her job.

Seven days after the death of Dust, Magdelana slung her coat over her shoulder, dropped her hat on to her head, and walked out of the town for the very last time. She didn’t know exactly where she was going, but she knew when she wasn’t needed. She took the shotgun with her, just in case, although she didn’t bother packing the dust visor.

Ten metres outside the town gate, she took off the old plastic ID badge that marked her out as the ‘first assigned defender’, and fed it to the grass.
‘Too many loose ends,’ said the Doctor, as they trudged back up the hill.

‘Usually,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘For a start, I still want to know what you did to Compassion. Don’t tell me you’ve still got her locked up in that TARDIS?’

The Doctor made a little v-shape with his eyebrows. ‘That’s not important now. If I told you what happened next, we’d be here all week.’

‘Well, I’m not going anywhere. I’m sure I can take a few days out of my busy schedule.’

The Doctor looked down at his shoes. Then frowned. Then looked up again, and pretended to watch the sheep trundling across the fields.

‘No,’ he said. ‘I don’t think I should stay here. Too many things to do. Places to be. Time frames to exist in.’

‘Typical,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘No sense of commitment at all. All right, let’s forget about Compassion. You still haven’t told me how you got your shadow back, though. Or even why you lost it in the first place.’

‘I don’t know,’ said the Doctor. ‘That’s just it. I think something happened on Earth – or on Dust – that neither of us noticed. Something that took my shadow away. There were so many things going on, we couldn’t keep track of them all. We’ve got no way of knowing what the Remote were doing behind the scenes. Or the Faction. And then there was the leader of the Remote on Dust. You remember him?’

‘Mm-hmm,’ said I.M. Foreman.

‘He recognised me,’ the Doctor went on. ‘Not in my third incarnation, though. That means he could be somebody I’ve met since Dust. Anybody. I’ve been thinking about that a lot, recently.’

‘And?’

He looked as though he didn’t know how much to say. ‘There’s something familiar about him,’ he declared, after a dramatic pause that the first I.M. Foreman would have been incredibly proud of. ‘Whenever I think about the Father, it always strikes a chord. Just for a moment, I think I know who he was. Or what he was. But I can’t ever put a finger on it. I can’t put a name to him. I get the feeling that some part of my mind doesn’t want me to work out the truth, even though the truth’s incredibly obvious.’

‘Does your mind often do that kind of thing?’ I.M. Foreman asked.

‘Only when it thinks it’s in trouble,’ the Doctor admitted. ‘The point is, part of me thinks I’d go mad if I knew the answer. So my memory’s blotting the answer out.’

I.M. Foreman sighed at him. ‘You really are a complete mess, aren’t you?’ she said.

‘Increasingly,’ said the Doctor. ‘Here it comes, thought I.M. Foreman. Here comes the big one. The real reason why he came to see me.

‘The leader of the Remote,’ the Doctor said. ‘The one who called himself “Father”. You swallowed him up, didn’t you? Just before you joined with the planet. While you were still Number Thirteen.’

‘Is that what you think?’

The Doctor nodded. ‘I think you’ve still got his memories, somewhere inside you.’

‘So that’s it, thought I.M. Foreman. That’s the bottom line. He wants access to the Father’s mind.’

‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘I didn’t swallow him up at all.’

It was hard to read the Doctor’s expression then. He blinked a lot, but the rest of his face didn’t seem to know what to do.

‘Then…’ he began.

‘The Father tried to grab on to the travelling show just before you sent it back to Gallifrey,’ I.M. Foreman told him. ‘He nearly managed it as well. He sank his claws right into the side of the box before it left the planet.’

‘If he’d been human, the Doctor’s jaw probably would have dropped at this stage.

‘He got sucked into the space-time vortex,’ I.M. Foreman explained. ‘Dragged into the middle of nowhere. Sorry.’

‘He’s still there?’ said the Doctor. He was starting to panic now, the way Time Lords were programmed to if they thought there was something wrong with the continuum.

I.M. Foreman shook her head. ‘I thought it was a bit of a loose end, leaving him hanging around in the vortex. So I got rid of him.’

She reached out with one oh-so-casual arm, and motioned towards the top of the hill. The Doctor fixed his eyes on the peak up ahead, but still looked blank.
‘I had to draw some energy out of the vortex to build the universe-in-a-bottle,’ I.M. Foreman said, deliberately making it sound as though you’d have to be a three-year-old not to understand this. ‘While I was doing it, I thought I’d draw the Father out as well. It wasn’t hard getting a grip on him. There weren’t many other rock-solid things floating around in the vortex like that. His armour was keeping him in one piece.’

‘You trapped him inside the bottle?’ the Doctor queried, apparently still not believing any of this.

‘You don’t need to sound so surprised. He’s still trapped in the vortex. But in the bottle vortex, not in the real one. Less of a risk that way, I thought.’

They trudged the rest of the way in silence. The Doctor was evidently lost for words. He seemed to be finding whole new universes of interesting dirt on the edges of his shoes.

They finally reached the peak of the hill, where the most valuable object in the galaxy (ostensibly) rested in the long grass under the tree. Night was falling over the valley again, turning the chessboard-fields into black and white, blurring the trees together until the woodland became one huge dark cloud between the two hills. But you could still hear the sounds of life from down below, the insects in the grass and the deer hooves pattering against the earth.

The wind blew the scent of old leaves up the side of the hill, and I.M. Foreman saw the Doctor taking deep, deep breaths, sucking the atmosphere all the way into his body. He’d turned to face the woodland, to face the TARDIS. He probably did that without even thinking about it.

‘Is this where the town used to be?’ he asked. His voice melted into the wind, making the words sound almost musical by the time they reached I.M. Foreman’s ears.

‘Not quite,’ she said. ‘This is where the Remote crucified those two Ogron Lords. One on each hill. I mean, they weren’t hills back then. Just bumps in the desert.’

She sat down under the tree, right in front of the universe-in-a-bottle. The Doctor glanced over his shoulder at her. ‘You can change the geology?’

‘Oh, yes. I can turn molehills into mountains if I want. It’s not just the biosphere any more. I’ve learned a lot these past few years. There isn’t one corner of this planet left that’s still Dust. It’s all me now.’

The Doctor turned back to face the valley, and nodded down at the woodland. ‘Those deer we saw yesterday. Deer aren’t… weren’t native to Dust. I assume you put them there.’

‘Mohandas ate a couple of deer back in 1964. The DNA’s been part of me ever since. I added the data to this ecosystem, that’s all. Same way I added most of the trees. Over three hundred different varieties, since you’re asking.’

‘You used to eat trees?’

‘I was a geek,’ said I.M. Foreman, defensively.

‘But the deer are part of you,’ the Doctor pointed out. ‘Part of the planet.’

I.M. Foreman made a ‘tsch’ noise. ‘I’m not a planet. Calling me a planet is like calling a person a body.’

‘You can control the deer, though. Can’t you?’

I.M. Foreman thought back to the previous day, when they’d been sitting in the clearing with the deer gathering in the shadows. It was true: she’d felt the urge to slip out of her body while she’d been there. She’d felt the call of the wild, the desire to inhabit the bodies of the animals for a while, to see through their eyes and feel the soil under their hooves. But, when she’d taken on this human form, she’d made a conscious decision not to let go of it until it died of old age, and she wasn’t going to change her mind now.

‘I could control them if I wanted to,’ she admitted. ‘But they’ve got their own lives. Around here, it’s hard knowing where one life form ends and the next one starts.’

‘The people,’ the Doctor reminded her. ‘The humans on Dust. Did you swallow them? Like you swallowed the Remote?’

I.M. Foreman felt a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. ‘Not a chance. They all went their own ways, once the towns fell apart. They’re all over the place now. Living in little family groups around the planet. I think they’re happier that way.’

‘Except for Magdelana.’

I.M. Foreman looked down at herself, at the skinny old legs that were stretched out on the grass in front of her, at the wrinkled skin on her hands and the old leathers she’d wrapped herself up in. She could still feel the twinges in her thigh, where Magdelana had almost lost her leg and the surgeons had fitted bio-implants under the skin to keep the cells in check.

‘It was the way she wanted it,’ I.M. Foreman said.

‘You gave her a choice?’

‘Of course I gave her a choice. God, what kind of person do you think I am? Magdelana was lost, that’s all. It was harder for her to adapt than it was for the others. Well, you know what she was like.’
She thought she saw the Doctor scratch at his chest when she said that. ‘Yes,’ he mumbled. ‘I know.’

‘I was looking for a new body at the time,’ I.M. Foreman went on. ‘I thought I should see this planet the way everybody else saw it. From ground level, not just from the inside of the biosphere. I was going to build myself a body specially, but this seemed like a better way of doing things. Magdelana just wanted to keep her identity in one piece. She thought she’d lose herself for ever if she went out into the wilderness like everyone else.’

‘What happened to her mind?’ the Doctor asked. It sounded more like an accusation than a question.

I.M. Foreman tapped the side of her head. The Doctor’s back was turned to her, but she knew he’d get the point anyway. ‘Still here. Every little bit of her identity, kept safe for as long as this body stays alive. Magdelana comes to the surface sometimes, to tell me what she thinks. I think she’s happy here. I haven’t had any complaints, anyway.’

The Doctor didn’t reply to that. He kept staring out over the valley, letting his coat flap around his legs as the wind rolled up the hillside.

I.M. Foreman suddenly realised what he wanted her to say.

‘You can talk to her if you like,’ she said. ‘I could slip out of this body for a few minutes. Let Magdelana take over for a while. I was trying not to let go of her until she died on me, but I suppose this counts as a special occasion.’

The Doctor paused. Turned. And very nearly smiled.

‘I’d appreciate that,’ he said.

I.M. Foreman shrugged. ‘If you’re sure you want to do this. After what she did to you the last time.’

‘I’d like to speak to her again,’ the Doctor said. ‘I think she’ll understand me better now.’

He probably said a lot more than that, but I.M. Foreman didn’t hear it. She was too busy pulling herself out of Magdelana Bishop’s body, letting the mind of the old woman flood through the synapses and nerve endings again.

She’d forgotten exactly how much effort it was, having to cling to one nervous system all the time.

– back again,’ said the Doctor.

I.M. Foreman blinked. They were standing down in the valley, between the bottom of the hill and the edge of the woodland. She got the feeling they were heading back towards the TARDIS, although she didn’t remember leaving the hilltop.

The Doctor peered into her eyes. ‘Ah,’ he said. ‘You’re back, then?’

I.M. Foreman kept blinking, until she was used to the way the world looked through Magdelana’s eyes. A few moments earlier she’d been lodged inside the mind of one of the sheep, but she was already starting to forget how it felt to walk on four legs, and to have no concept of ‘guilt’ whatsoever.

‘How was Magdelana?’ she asked.

The Doctor smiled. ‘I think we’ve settled our differences.’

Somewhere in the back of her mind, I.M. Foreman could feel Magdelana’s memories of the last few minutes. The impressions that the Doctor’s words had made, the tension she’d felt when she’d had to talk with the Time Lord in his new body. I.M. Foreman tried not to focus on those memories, though. They weren’t any of her business.

However, there was one thing she was sure of.

‘You’re leaving,’ she said.

‘I’m afraid so,’ the Doctor told her. Then he started walking again, crossing the darkened valley in the direction of the woodland. I.M. Foreman tutted, and hobbled after him.

She stood and watched him as he reached the TARDIS, almost feeling the need to applaud when he started searching his pockets for the key. He looked more like a showman than I.M. Foreman had ever done, juggling the bric-a-brac from his coat with such precision that you could almost believe he was keeping his eyes on every single air molecule. He finally found what he was looking for, and held it up for all the world to see, with a big shiny smile on his face.

‘Must go,’ he said. ‘It’d be rude if I stayed any longer.’

‘I don’t mind,’ said I.M. Foreman, hoping she didn’t sound desperate for the company.

‘Not rude to you. Rude to causality. The laws of time say I should be somewhere else. I’m actually halfway through an adventure at the moment, and taking two days’ time out might be considered to be…’

‘Pushing your luck.’

‘Quite.’

The next thing she knew, he was grasping both her hands in both of his. The Doctor’s skin felt depressingly soft and smooth next to hers, just as it had the night before. He still had that big babyish smile fixed to his face.

‘I’ll come back,’ he said. ‘I promise.’

‘Mmm,’ said I.M. Foreman.
He’d obviously been expecting her to say more, and there was another one of those awkward human silences. They were both putting on a show, she knew that. They were both much bigger, much more complex, than the bodies they wore. If anyone had been there to see it, it would have been like watching two glove puppets in a Punch and Judy show.

‘Oh yes,’ said the Doctor, when the silence got too much for him. ‘I nearly forgot. One more thing.’

‘Go on.’

‘How do you get that goose out of the bottle? Without breaking the glass?’

I.M. Foreman sighed at him. Theatrically. ‘By feeding it. How else?’

The Doctor looked shocked. He’d probably been expecting an answer that involved large amounts of technology and a great big screwdriver. He let go of her hands. ‘I’m sorry?’ he said.

‘You feed the goose, until it gets strong enough to break the bottle itself. Isn’t it obvious?’

The Doctor looked as though he didn’t know whether to nod his head or shake it. ‘I don’t understand. What’s the point of the riddle?’

‘It was always your problem,’ I.M. Foreman told him. ‘Always trying to save the universe the direct way. Bringing down governments. Getting involved. Breaking the bottle, basically. Me, on the other hand…’

‘You feed the goose,’ the Doctor concluded. ‘Teaching the universe to save itself. Reminding your audience what it’s capable of, and leading the way by example. Is that what you’re saying?’

‘I never wanted to save the universe,’ I.M. Foreman insisted. ‘I’m not for the universe. I’m for Gallifreyans. I’m for Bandrils. I’m for Martians. I’m for man. But the universe can look after itself, I should think. Always has done so far.’

‘You’re just playing with words,’ the Doctor protested. ‘By feeding the goose, you are breaking the bottle. You’re applying a force that’ll cause the bottle to be broken, but you’re doing it from the inside. That’s cheating.’

‘That’s philosophy,’ I.M. Foreman said, somehow resisting the temptation to go ‘nyah nyah nyah’ at him. ‘All philosophy’s “just playing with words”. It’s all a question of the message you want to send. The signals you want to give out.’

‘Hmm,’ snorted the Doctor. ‘Then what about all the trouble on Dust? You didn’t want to get directly involved, but it was your fault the Remote attacked. Just by being there, you caused interference.’

‘I think that’s the idea,’ said I.M. Foreman. ‘Don’t you?’

The Doctor obviously didn’t have an answer to that. So he just stood there and sulked. I.M. Foreman took his hands again, in the hope that it’d make him feel better about himself.

‘Now you can answer a question,’ she said. The Doctor cocked his head at her, so she kept talking. ‘Your travelling companions. Like Sarah Jane. Like Sam.’

‘Yes?’

She felt that smile tugging at the edges of her mouth again. ‘Do you ever get… urges?’

It was hard to describe exactly what happened to the Doctor’s face at that point.

‘I’m only asking because of the state your body’s in,’ I.M. Foreman told him. ‘There’s a lot of material in your biodata I don’t think I recognise. And I think some of it looks a lot more human than it’s supposed to.’

‘Sometimes,’ said the Doctor.

Suddenly, all the character had gone out of his face. He’d stopped acting, the way he usually did only when he was asleep. For once, he was telling the absolute truth.

‘Only since I regenerated into this body,’ he added, a little too quickly. ‘It started after the change. It wasn’t an urge, as such. It was just a feeling that… there was something missing. That there was an element to my life I’d been ignoring.’

‘Love?’ suggested I.M. Foreman. The word sounded flat and stupid in Magdelana’s mouth.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Romance, I think. The excitement of being close to someone. The need to exchange ideas on a more personal level. To be able to tell someone what you really believe. To express things in ways that make sense only if you’re attached to another… well, if you’re attached.’

‘But not Sam? I mean –’

‘No. It wouldn’t be fair on her. It wouldn’t be fair on any of them. I come with a lot of baggage, you know that. Time Lords come fitted with all sorts of inbuilt features. All sorts of protocols, all sorts of defences. And I’m more complex than most. I can’t afford to let anybody get too close, not even another Gallifreyan. Certainly not a human being.’

‘But the rules are different with me, is that what you’re saying?’

‘You’re Foreman’s World,’ said the Doctor, with a gesture that came perilously close to being a shrug.

So it’s true, thought I.M. Foreman. He thinks of me as his equal. Not because of my mind, though. Let’s be honest, I’m probably smarter than he is by now. No, it’s because of what I represent. I’m as complex as he is, and he
knows it.

‘And this body didn’t bother you?’ she asked.

He didn’t look as though he wanted to talk about it. ‘I knew you weren’t Magdelana as soon as I saw you. I knew Magdelana didn’t live in that body any more. Not full-time.’

‘I didn’t mean that. I meant the way it looks.’

The Doctor seemed thrown by that. ‘I don’t understand,’ he said.

‘It looks so old.’

‘“Old”?’ he repeated, looking her up and down but obviously not getting the point.

‘Never mind.’

The Doctor nodded, clearly still not understanding, and slipped his key into the lock of the TARDIS. I.M. Foreman heard the hum as soon as the door opened, the low murmur of the ship’s heartbeat. It sounded content here, as if it’d be quite happy to stick around and become part of the planet. Most people felt that way when they ended up on Foreman’s World.

For a moment, the Doctor looked embarrassed. I.M. Foreman wondered why. Perhaps he thought he should formally introduce her to the ship.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘This is goodbye, then.’

‘It’s starting to look that way,’ I.M. Foreman told him.

Unlike Sam, she did kiss him.

She turned away before the TARDIS dematerialised, and began the long walk back up the hill. She was getting bored with this part of the world now. In the morning, she could move on, maybe heading out into the wilderness where the Remote had once built their ship-town. There was a great big crater there now, full of flowers and thistles from every corner of Mutters’ Spiral, where cross-pollination was so common that entire empires of plants could rise and fall in a single day. She’d seen it only from inside the biosphere, and it’d be nice to look at it all through human eyes for a change.

She’d reached the tree before she noticed that anything was wrong. It was the dent in the ground that gave the game away, the spot in front of the tree where the grass had been pressed flat by something smooth and heavy.

The bottle was gone. Her pet micro-universe had disappeared.

I.M. Foreman turned, just as the TARDIS finally vanished from the edge of the woodland. Why it had taken the Doctor so long to leave, she didn’t know. Perhaps he’d been watching her, who could say?

As the last traces of the ship left the surface of Foreman’s World, she tried to work out exactly where the bottle had gone. The Doctor had to be the prime suspect, seeing that he could have had any number of reasons for wanting to get his hands on the thing. He needed to get in touch with that Father from the Remote for a start. But it had been a big bottle, a good two feet from end to end, so he hadn’t just slipped it into one of his pockets. Not unless his pockets had been specially tailored by the Time Lords.

Then again, she didn’t know what the Doctor had been doing while Magdelana had been in charge of her body. I.M. Foreman could have searched Magdelana’s memories for the truth, of course, but that would have been unseemly. Ugly. For all she knew, the Doctor could have smuggled the bottle on to the TARDIS while I.M. Foreman had been snuffling through the fields with all the other sheep.

For all she knew, the High Council could have taken the bottle while they’d both been distracted.

Still, the bottle was gone, that was the important thing. And, in all honesty, that didn’t bother her half as much as she might have expected. She’d only built the bottle to test her limits, to see whether she could control the ecosystems of an entire universe rather than just this one world. And she could. And she had. The micro-universe had been a bit of a disappointment after that, as if it had outlived its purpose once she’d finished playing God with it. Besides, it had started leaking anyway.

Now it belonged to someone else. Someone who not only possessed the most valuable object in the galaxy (allegedly), but in doing so held the entire future of the Time Lords in his or her hands.

However, I.M. Foreman didn’t have a great deal of interest in the future of the Time Lords. Which was probably why she didn’t feel as though she’d lost much.

‘Ask any of the politicians, whatever party they come from, and they’ll tell you the same thing. Mankind needs laws, needs discipline, needs politics. Without them, civilisation will collapse, because if they’re left to their own devices then people will do whatever they like, and order will fall apart in a second. Which ignores one obvious point: if that were true, then civilisation would never have been created in the first place […] because the truth is, we don’t need laws, and we don’t need discipline, and we certainly don’t need politics. We don’t need government to keep civilisation alive: we just need culture, a culture that can hold all of us together. Here in this century of the
mass media, we've finally got a shot at building a utopia, a society without any of the tyrants or generals or businessmen who have, for these last few unhappy centuries, been killing and torturing the rest of us at will, just to prove who's the top gorilla [...] we want an end to authority, and, for the first time in recorded history, we've actually got a chance of getting it.'

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From the third manifesto of the Black Seed Movement, 2043.
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