

BBC

DOCTOR WHO

KURSAAL



PETER ANGHELIDES

Kursaal is a pleasure world, a huge theme park for the Cronus system – or rather it will be if it isn't destroyed during construction.

Eco-terrorists want the project halted to preserve vital archaeological sites – areas containing the last remains of the long-dead Jax, an ancient wolf-like race, whose remains are being buried beneath the big-business tourist attractions.

Sam falls in with the environmentalists and finds her loyalties divided. Meanwhile, the Doctor's own investigations lead him to believe the Jax are not extinct after all.

Cut off from the TARDIS, separated from his companion and pursued for murder, the Doctor realises Kursaal hides a terrible secret – and that Sam is being affected by events more than anyone would guess...

This book is another in the series of adventures featuring the Eighth Doctor and Sam.

DOCTOR WHO

KURSAAL

PETER ANGHELIDES

BBC

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*For Anne Summerfield
Kursaal always love her*

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'There are no protected species on this planet'

Amy Saraband casually dropped the final few marble bricks behind her on the tunnel floor, where they lay like pulled teeth. Then she holstered her small handpick, and squeezed through the freshly made hole into the faint phosphorescence beyond. And gaped at what she saw.

Breathe, she told herself. Steady, regular breaths. Remember your emergency training. Don't hyperventilate. The slamming sound that her heart made beneath her excavation clothing mocked her attempt to stay calm. Breathe. *Breathe!*

It was a huge domed cathedral, hundreds of metres across, and another hundred metres tall. She was astonished to think it was completely buried. But then she thought of how far they had travelled into the angled escarpment. She thought of how Gray Corp's terraforming bulldozers had blindly gouged thousands of tonnes of earth from the mountainside, unexpectedly uncovering the entrance to the tunnel network. And how she had set up the expedition in a crazy rush within just thirty-six hours afterwards.

All she could do was stare at the cathedral. How could they possibly complete the work in the remaining twenty-four hours? Surely the dozers had to stop now.

After the gloom of the excavation tunnels, lit only by the piercing white shafts of light from her torch, the soft glow of the illumination here should have been relaxing. But she could still feel her heart hammering.

A distinctive, animal smell caught her throat. Her cough echoed sharply from the walls all around her. Amy raised her head to take a

cleansing breath. High above, a broad, dark line stood out against the bright, white, marble walls. It could be a high walkway, she thought, perhaps some kind of ambulatory. Below it, huge geometrical outlines and glyphs were interspersed with bas-reliefs of fierce animal shapes and dancing humanoid figures. Amy twisted a complete circle as she examined them, and then returned her gaze to the smooth white floor, which was covered in a patina of long-undisturbed dust. Beneath this even covering she could make out an arc of round, shallow indentations, a curving line which ran across the entire floor area. And at its centre, lit by a thin shaft of bright light, was the chamber's focal point.

The sculpture sat half a metre from the floor on a narrow black plinth. It looked like a huge crystal crown, or perhaps the crenellations of a model castle. The crystal diffused the narrow column of light, scattering it. Amy could see a circular recess to either side, looking like two flawless crystal bowls scooped out of the sculpture. Fitted in the bottom of the right-hand bowl was a large medallion or talisman. The left-hand bowl contained a circular indentation of the same size, suggesting a missing pair.

Amy picked up the talisman. It was the size of her palm, and in a curve across one side a row of thirteen sparkling stones was embedded, a glittering arc catching the light. She grinned with delight, and peered up into the column of light. High, high up through the ceiling, at the top of a long, smooth rock shaft, she could see the waxing moon.

Amy was still grinning as she thumbed the comms link on her wrist. She could imagine Olivier's reaction when he arrived. Usually the most emotion he'd ever betray was to cock his head dog-quizzically on one side, staring intently as he silently took something in. This was going to make his jaw hit the tunnel floor.

'Gray speaking.'

Amy's grin sank into her thick boots again as the gruff nasal voice crackled out of the comms link and echoed around the room. 'I was hoping for Olivier,' she said.

The speaker snorted at her. 'Nice to talk to you too, Professor Saraband.'

Damn the man. One sentence, and she was already ill at ease. In the past fifteen years, Amy had co-ordinated twelve digs; she had led nine, and picked her team personally for eight of those. Maximilian Gray was the unwelcome member of this latest expedition. Amy mouthed a silent obscenity at the speaker. ‘I’m sorry, Mr Gray,’ she said calmly. ‘I wanted to discuss our next move with Olivier.’

‘You already seem to have made the next move.’ Gray’s pedantic tones echoed loudly around the cathedral, startling her. Amy turned to see him squeezing through the hole in the wall. He was sniffing the air with faint distaste, obviously detecting the rank animal smell. Wispy tufts of hair on his otherwise bald head stuck out at an angle, and his old, pale face was flushed with the exertion of his journey from the team campsite, where she thought she had left him. It made him look, incongruously, like a pink, wrinkled, newborn baby.

Gray emerged wheezing from the gap. ‘Olivier was heading back towards the surface,’ he panted. ‘I think he has been worrying about a big storm brewing. As climate control is not yet online, he was concerned that a flash flood in this area could pour down these tunnels and drown us while we sleep.’

Amy sucked air through her teeth. ‘Well, I guess he’s the expert. That’s why I pay him so much.’

‘I pay him, Professor Saraband. And in his enforced absence, perhaps you could discuss your question with me. Then I may feel I am getting my money’s worth out of your expedition.’

Amy ignored the gibe. ‘How did you find me?’

Gray held out his arm as though he wanted her to kiss his limp hand. Then he tapped his wrist. ‘The comms link, of course.’ Now he was gesturing to the one she was wearing, and she saw that its display screen showed two red spots separated from five others. ‘I am sure you are most pleased that I prised these devices out of Gray Corporation Labs for this expedition.’

‘Your technology is wonderful, Mr Gray. And our own archaeological tools. . .’

‘Yes yes yes,’ said Gray impatiently as he brushed mud off the shoulders and front of his jumpsuit with one thin, gloved hand. ‘They are a

bit pointless if you all get lost, are they not? Now down here, so deep underground, the planetary sat-link is useless. These little charmers use a submedia carrier, whatever that is, which ensures we are never out of contact over a direct line of three to five kilometres.’ He seemed to be struggling with the dust, because at this point he pulled out a handkerchief and cleared his throat noisily. The chamber echoed the sound, growling back at them. ‘Well, that is what the lab team put on the funding request.’

‘You have an accountant’s mind, Mr Gray,’ said Amy lightly.

‘You are very kind, Professor Saraband,’ snuffled Gray, carefully wiping his long, pointed nose. Amy noticed that, even in the light from the sculpture, his eyes were blank and grey. Then he plucked the talisman from her fingers, and hefted it in his palm.

‘There would have been two,’ said Amy. ‘The glyphs on the plinth below suggest some kind of pairing. . . perhaps male and female. Certainly the long skylight above us which reaches to the surface suggests that important opposites for this culture are light and dark.’

‘Life and death, perhaps? This place does look like a catacomb.’ Gray turned the talisman over in his fingers thoughtfully. ‘I wonder what happened to the other one of these.’ He moved off with a scuffing gait, swirling dust around him in the low light. When he reached the nearest wall, he started to examine the glyphs there.

‘Are you going to catalogue that talisman, or just pocket it?’ Amy said.

Gray half turned his head, and she could see him smiling in the reflected torchlight, unabashed. ‘Well, I am funding this expedition, am I not?’ He turned away from her again. ‘I do wonder, Professor Saraband, if you have forgotten that we have only one more day to complete this excavation before the Kursaal excavators move in and demolish it. Now that you have uncovered this remarkable find, let us be bold. If you insist on photorecording our every step before scraping away the dust with a teaspoon, we will only scratch the surface.’

Amy felt her face flush with anger. ‘I’m an archaeologist, Mr Gray,’ she said tartly. ‘We try not to scratch surfaces. Unlike your company’s excavators, which will destroy this location.’

‘My company’s bulldozers uncovered this location. They pull a tonne of earth up with every scoop. You would never have found these tunnels by digging with your teaspoons.’

‘And now we need more time.’

‘Your colleagues seem much less enthusiastic about staying, especially with that storm brewing. Or perhaps they are just worried about those dreadful InterPlanetary Media murders.’ Gray clucked his tongue, and the echo made it sound like water dripping from the roof. ‘Who knows what HALF are capable of these days.’

Amy fumed, staring at the back of Gray’s bald head and wondering if her pick would crack it like an egg. ‘That’s ridiculous, and you know it. This is precisely the sort of thing the HALF people are trying to preserve. They wouldn’t try to stop us – they’d want to encourage us.’

She could see Gray’s thin shoulders jiggle up and down, and was annoyed when she heard in his tone that he was laughing quietly, ‘I wish you were correct, Professor Saraband. But I rather think that HALF is more interested in commercial disruption than archaeological preservation. They don’t want my company to redevelop this planet, and it is clearly in their paymasters’ interests to prevent Kursaal from ever opening.’ He spoke quietly and quickly, as though these were words he had rehearsed many times. Amy remembered hearing him say the same thing on InterPlanetary Media news three nights before.

Amy sighed. ‘My team aren’t worried about HALF or about the weather, Me Gray. We are self-sufficient.’ She reached her right arm around in front of him to make a point with her comms link. ‘We don’t rely on clear skies and satellite access and not being deep underground, because of your wonderful technobabble devices.’ She looked more closely at the comms link on her wrist. The other group showed only as four lights now. Oh. So much for new technology, she thought bitterly.

When she looked up at Gray again, he was favouring her with his ingratiating smile. ‘I am glad you have earned the respect of your team, Professor. I am trying to display control and confidence with them, but I feel it is coming across as just bossy. What do you think?’

‘You’d earn their respect if you allowed them to do their job. Which is protecting these ancient artefacts from your bulldozers. Doesn’t this cavern move you? Listen to your heart, if you can hear it over the sound of jingling coins. Don’t you want to preserve this area of Saturnia Regna, instead of destroying it with a theme park?’

Her words bounced around the room, a repeated challenge. Gray’s tone was unchanged. ‘Kursaal’s backers agreed the project plan years ago, and that was after several previous years of haggling.’ He noticed he had got mud on his sleeve, and brushed it away along with her objections. ‘You can hardly expect me to renegotiate the specifications at this stage.’

‘What kind of thinking is that?’ she raged. The words tumbled out of her, and collided with the echoes in the chamber as she ploughed into him with her accusations. ‘This is obviously an even bigger discovery than sulphur mines on Jagrat. It’s huge. Literally. Can’t you see that?’

‘It is a matter of priorities.’

‘Don’t you wonder what this place is? Who built it? What happened to them? They were obviously an advanced life form. . .’

‘Who are no longer here.’

Amy snorted. ‘Maybe HALF have got some things right. Mr Gray, there could be anywhere between five and fifty million species of creatures on Saturnia Regna, this planet that you want to treat like a kid’s sandpit. Most of them will be wiped out even before they’re found. And now here are artefacts from an ancient race that’s already extinct, and you think I can tidy it up into a press release for you in four days so that your hired hoodlums can bury it under a five-star hotel. I mean, what does it take to get protected-species status round here?’

‘There are no protected species on this planet,’ said Gray, smiling his infuriating, calm smile again, saying those unreasonable things in his quiet, reasonable voice. ‘Like this talisman, Professor Saraband, the planet belongs to my company. I have free and unrestricted right to grant the use of any feature on Saturnia Regna, including natural, structural, or animal, to any third-party franchise for any purpose.’

‘You don’t understand,’ Amy persisted. ‘These creatures –’

'I will treat them as I wish,' said Gray firmly, turning the looted talisman over in his hand. 'They are only animals. You may as well ask me to put my poodle before my profit margin.' He sniffed, and pulled out his handkerchief again.

'Are you allergic to animal fur?' Amy said.

Gray was slipping the talisman into a transparent pouch on the breast of his suit. 'Yes, how would you know that?'

Amy picked at a piece of dirt from the back of Gray's jumpsuit where his earlier cleanup had missed. Trapped in the dirt between her finger and thumb were a number of fine brown hairs. 'Animal fur? I wonder if it was an animal that started that hole that we climbed through.' She trotted over to the ragged hole in the far wall.

Gray's angular features folded into a frown. 'What sort of animal?'

Amy ran her fingers over scratches in the marble brickwork to one side of the hole. 'A protected species, I hope.'

A howl of terror, abject, uncontrolled, came from beyond the jagged hole. They both jumped back instinctively. Amy saw Gray stare at his wrist, and for a mad moment she wondered if he was checking the time. Then she remembered, and looked at her own comms link. Two red lights indicated Gray and herself, but she could see only three others beyond them, close by. She clucked with annoyance. 'Your technology has given up,' she said to Gray.

'I don't think so,' he said in a whisper, and angled his arm towards her. His comms link showed the same. Then one of the other three red lights went out.

Another anguished scream, starting high-pitched, became a man's hoarse, bellowed plea. 'No. No.' There was a further gurgling cry, and silence.

Amy looked around herself, panicked. She saw with a jolt that Gray had pulled a squat gun from the hip pocket of his jumpsuit. 'They're close,' he said, and slid head first into the hole.

Amy slipped through after him. After the soft illumination in the cathedral, she struggled to adjust to the gloom of the tunnel. She wanted only to concentrate on her torchlight, so she pointed it down and stared across at the dark wall, willing her eyes to focus. She

switched on one of the floodlights she had placed earlier, and the rough rocks and earth of the tunnel walls seemed to press in on them both. She was about to speak, but Gray silenced her by taking her arm in the grip of one bony hand. 'Listen.'

She could hear a scrabbling sound from the direction of the team campsite. She glanced at her comms link. The lights pricked the darkness like two pairs of red eyes. At the first corner, ten metres ahead of them, a jumbled figure lurched into view. Amy flashed up her torch beam, and Gray raised his gun sharply.

The figure gave a short cry of despair as it was caught in the harsh light, and then its shoulders slumped in a sort of relief. Gray flicked his gun to the tunnel roof with a grunt.

Amy stared in disbelief at the dishevelled figure in the torchlight. It was Osram, his eyes staring and wide, his face caked with sweat and dirt and blood. He was half slumped against the tunnel wall, grabbing down ragged lumps of air with every breath. 'Run... coming...' he managed to gasp.

But then his feet seemed to flick backward beneath him, while at the same time he lunged forward, grasping desperately for purchase on the stony tunnel floor and giving a despairing little cry before his head connected with the ground. His right hand had managed to grasp one of Amy's floodlights, which, as it toppled over, briefly illuminated the bend in the tunnel. Amy dropped her torch with shock. The unconscious Osram was being dragged back around the corner. Then she could only hear his body scraping along the tunnel floor in the darkness.

They snatched up the fallen torch, and followed. Fifty metres further on, they found Leet. They knew who it was only by the name label on his shredded jumpsuit. The torchlight threw bizarre shadows across the body, but in the centre of the beam they could see fresh, bright blood, still drizzling out from the huge gash which ran from his sternum up across his neck and face. Leer's long brown curls were matted with blood where they tumbled on to the tunnel floor. Amy felt the whole weight of her own body as she slumped down beside the corpse. She realised then that she had been biting her tongue hard

enough to draw blood.

‘Hurry up,’ said Gray. He wasn’t looking at Leet’s body any more, and started to make his way further down the tunnel, tapping his wrist. ‘Osram is not dead – his comms link is still broadcasting his life signs. They seem to want to take his body, at any rate.’

‘They?’ mumbled Amy. Her numb tongue lay like a slab in her mouth.

‘Our HALF friends.’

‘No,’ she said. ‘It can’t be.’

Gray checked his gun again, and moved forward carefully towards the next bend in the tunnel.

They rounded the gradual curve to the expedition base site, and the powerful camp illumination grew stronger as they drew close. Amy’s stomach tightened. The rank smell of animal was stronger here.

They entered slowly, cautiously. Amy remembered when the team had first discovered this wide, high cavern at the junction of three tunnels. It was about three metres high and twenty metres across in a rough circle, with a gentle slope towards the back. Sharstone had declared it to be a natural place to establish base site, and had swiftly co-ordinated them into teams to set up their many pieces of equipment. After their unsuccessful first-day forays into the darkest and dampest of the tunnels, the cavern had felt like a welcome haven.

She looked about warily. The equipment was scattered over the whole area. To one side, Olivier’s photorecording equipment had been dashed into useless fragments against the rocky wall. Two of the three powerful lamps had been toppled over and smashed on the groundsheet, so all the light in the area was from one direction, casting huge and frightening shadows over the opposite walls. Amy found their communications unit overturned, though it appeared otherwise undamaged. Her relief was short-lived: she could see the bodies beyond it.

Olivier lay face down on the groundsheet in a sticky puddle of his own blood. There was so much of it that at first she hadn’t realised it was not just the shadow thrown along the slope of the floor by his body. Clutched in his outstretched fist was a tube of protein substi-

tute, the contents squirted onto the groundsheet in a convulsive last gesture.

Sharstone's body lay on its back, the eyes and mouth wide with disbelief. It seemed that she too had been attacked while she was eating. The smooth dark skin of her young face was unmarked, but there were three deep, savage slashes through her jumpsuit and across her chest and abdomen. Amy looked away, not wanting to see the glistening entrails spilling over Sharstone's legs. She could taste her own blood, and she wiped a dribble from the corner of her mouth. Her tongue still hurt like hell.

'They have taken this tunnel,' Gray called to her from the other wide of the cavern. He was gesturing with his gun to a trail on the ground. 'Why would they kill the others, yet keep Osram alive?'

Amy looked around. 'Where's Aykers?'

Gray jutted his thin head towards the third tunnel. 'Back there,' he said. 'His head has been almost severed from his body. It is not pleasant.'

Amy made the communications panel upright again, plugging the speaker jack into the base unit with her shaking fingers. On the third attempt, the jack slid home, and the hissing sound of low static filled the cavern. For a moment she panicked, then she twisted the control until the unit was retuned. The hiss vanished, but she could now hear a low growling. The new sound was coming from the first tunnel, the one that led back to the surface.

Just as she looked up, a low dark shape sprang from the tunnel. Gray was stooped over Sharstone's body, and the attack took him by surprise, knocking him into the freestanding floodlight. It rocked, then tumbled, a wash of sharp illumination spilling crazily across the room for a moment until the light stand jammed against the lowest part of the ceiling. Gray snarled, but was thrown down by the creature, his gun clattering to the floor.

Amy froze where she was for a long moment. In the angled light from the flood, she could make out a metre-long creature standing over Gray's supine form. Amy could see that Gray's gun had spun just out of his reach. He was staring up with an unaccustomed wild light

in his grey eyes, his thin mouth quivering with fear. Amy could see that the creature looked like a huge dog, and its patchy grey-brown pelt seemed to be bristling as the animal stared down at its prey. It looked emaciated, old, but still obviously powerful. For some reason, it had paused, staring at Gray's breast pocket, and then at his long, gaunt face. Amy screamed.

The animal's head snapped in her direction. Its pointed ears flicked back on its head, and the top lip' peeled back from its whiskery snout to reveal sharp white teeth covered in flecks of fresh blood. Amy screamed again, and the animal leapt towards her with a frightening speed over the scattered boxes of provisions.

She struggled up, but had only half risen before the creature's scrawny front legs powered against her midriff. In the half-light she glimpsed sharp teeth snapping at her face, a mass of stringy fur, and green, green eyes full of savage hatred. As she fell, she dropped to her right, trying to cover her face with her arms. She had a glimpse of something hung around the creature's neck – a motif, circular, maybe the size of her palm, glittering in the half-light. Then she heard the sharp report of two gunshots, and the animal dropped heavily on top of her, then rolled. She twisted awkwardly, and felt a jarring, agonising pain in her right arm.

Gray had struggled up onto one elbow, and had loosed off the two shots at the creature. One had caught it in the leg, causing it to fall on Amy, but now the creature was rounding Gray again, stalking him cautiously behind the discarded boxes. Gray fired another shot wide, and as he handled the recoil the creature leapt at him again, scrabbling against his legs and chest with its front claws and reaching for the soft flesh of his neck.

Amy had managed to grasp the communicator microphone. Pain from her arm washed over her in a crashing wave of nausea. She watched in horror as Gray struggled with the animal. Then the creature's body jerked three times as Gray's gun fired again. The animal let out a siren howl which reverberated around the chamber. Then it lowered its head, licked Gray's face from chin to forehead with its long dark tongue, and rolled heavily off him and onto the ground-

sheet. Gray lay unconscious, his eyes closed, his breathing irregular.

Amy whimpered quietly, hardly daring to hope that the animal was dead. The pain was reaching a crescendo in her head, like a mad orchestra's overture. She closed her eyes, and the light through her lids slowly faded from white to red. She thought that she managed to whisper a mayday into the microphone before they went black.

'Kursaal security forces remain baffled'

Kadijk didn't look at the waiter when he handed back the menu. 'Whack off its horns, wipe its butt, and stick it on a plate.'

'Rare, sir?'

'Like a Sin City virgin,' said Kadijk, waving him away with the back of his hand.

Captain Paul Kadijk knew the impression that his short, thick form gave. He wore his shirts and his eyebrows knitted. He stared conversationalists down with his steady dark eyes. He hated wearing his official uniform, but he was head of planetary security and could make the rules for himself. So he wore a loose jumble of faded old clothes – today, a crumpled suit of pale linen. He frightened people, and that was just fine. He had frightened his two children, so his wife had said. Well, pre-teens need to respect their elders. Maybe the pubescent jerk serving today had missed that lesson when he was a youngster. Otherwise, he wouldn't have insisted that Kadijk wear a tie in the restaurant. Hell, until Kursaal Phase One was complete in six months, this eatery wasn't even officially open.

Kadijk shoved his place setting aside with a noisy clatter, and spread out the pile of case notes on the small round table. He'd intimidated the staff into allowing him a seat with a view, even though he planned to spend the whole meal reading. So he sat with his back to the panoramic window, twenty floors up, which showed a real-time view of the cityplex. He wanted to study the staff and the other clientele while annoying the snotty maitre d'hotel, who had grudgingly allowed him the privileged table. Behind him, the tower blocks and service areas of the city spiked up into the black atmosphere in which pendulous storm clouds were gathering on the far right. The Gray Corp

HQ squatted to the left, taller and broader than the other needle-thin buildings it had spawned in the first phase of development. After that, the first of the tourist accommodation lay half finished and heavily guarded. And farthest out, the massive fires of distant work crews flared on the horizon as the day-round development teams chased the sun.

The first notes Kadijk read were about a recent murder subject, possible victim of a drugs ring in the cityplex. Dull, one for the grunts. The next was the report he'd commissioned about allegations that drug runners had infiltrated his newest police division. He skipped through the details, marking review comments with an old-fashioned stylus; his idiot junior could scan them in later – he was damned if he would rely on the notesheet technology not to throw up all his annotations when the power fluctuated again. And on the subject of throwing up, here was his meal. The sauce looked as heavy as his caseload.

'Bring me the news,' he snapped at the waiter. The youngster wordlessly brought him a datacube, and set it on the far side of the small table. Kadijk flicked it to the InterPlanetary Media newsfeed, then dabbed at his new tie with a napkin.

The picture in the cube buzzed into life. The reception here was terrible, but maybe the satellite was on the way out again so the offworld channel databases weren't easily accessible. And he was looking at the wrong view of the scene, since the news reporter seemed to have decided that she would look away from him. Nice bum, he thought, and then swivelled the cube so that she was facing him.

'...direct-action campaign against Gray Corporation,' Nice Bum was saying. 'The pressure group Helping All Life Forms, or HALF, has successfully disrupted work on the Gray-owned planet Saturnia Regna for nearly three years. Gray Corp heads a consortium of major Cronus financial houses which wants to convert Saturnia Regna into Kursaal, a Class Two leisure world. Gray owned the planet for more than a decade before HALF first appeared. This latest action is the sixth attack in two months. Kursaal security forces remain baffled about how to combat, or even find...'

Kadijk spat a large wodge of steak back onto his plate, and shouted an oath at the datacube. Restaurant staff murmured at a distance. Kadijk lowered the volume on the newsfeed, and rewound it.

Nice Bum continued: ‘...in two months. Kursaal security forces remain baffled’ (Kadijk snorted again) ‘about how to combat, or even find, the environmental group. HALF are believed LO be led by the hardline activist Bernard Cockaigne.’ (A photomontage of a hard-faced bruiser with deep-set eyes and a broken nose.) ‘Gray Corp insist that HALF are a cover for a rival business consortium who want to see Kursaal fail, and that a shadowy billionaire is funding their on-planet activities.’

An image of Maximilian Gray appeared next to Nice Bum, who explained that Gray had reiterated the accusations only a week before this incident, but declined to name the other companies involved. ‘I rather think,’ he was saying, ‘that HALF is more interested in commercial disruption than archaeological preservation. They do not want my company to redevelop this planet, and it is clearly in their paymasters’ interests to prevent Kursaal from ever opening. In addition to Captain Kadijk, I have recently hired many more security staff. We will stamp out these terrorists, and Kursaal will open on schedule in three years’ time.’

‘Yeah, right,’ said Kadijk, mopping gravy from his new tie. ‘All your new crack troops, boss.’

‘I’m Martina Lennox for InterPlanetary Media Crime Report. Next time, an exclusive report from our news team who are on site at the Kursaal complex.’

Kadijk chewed on an overlarge slice of steak. ‘That’s what you thought, darling.’ He rewound the report again, and paused it in the middle, and zoomed in for a close-up of Martina. ‘What a waste,’ he said, swallowing. Then he started thinking about the report some more, and that’s when he choked on his drink.

Shortly after, as he dabbed at the spirit stain on his lapel, he tried to wave away the thin youngster in the waiter’s uniform who had appeared discreetly at his shoulder. ‘I don’t need help. I was just a bit surprised by something, that’s all. Push off, there’s a good lad.’

'You have a guest, Captain,' said the youngster, his polite inflection unchanged.

Kadijk was about to roast the waiter rather more than his steak had been when he spotted a familiar, dreary figure standing next to the maitre d'hotel. He had the yellow hair and blue skin typical of all Fodorans. 'Send Sergeant Zaterdag over straight away,' Kadijk snapped.

The tall blond newcomer scurried across at the waiter's curt nod. 'This had better be important, Zaterdag,' Kadijk said between chomping. He gave the young policeman one of his dark stares. But Zaterdag was two metres tall, and stood picking nervously at a spot on his triangular jawline, so he didn't seem to notice.

'Sir, there's been another attack,' said Zaterdag in his irritating high nasal whine. 'This time it was at Mr Gray's archaeological event.'

'When?'

'Call came in half an hour ago.'

'What the hell kept you?' Kadijk was on his feet. 'Jeez, I warned Gray that a scout trip to go digging bones was inviting trouble. If he has to play the PR game, why can't he sponsor the ZooPark instead of arsing around with that crazy xenophobe?'

'Xenobiologist, Captain,' said Zaterdag.

Kadijk hated it when they did that. But it was typical of the over-precise grammar of a Fodoran who wasn't speaking his first language – or his third, come to that.

'Whatever,' snapped Kadijk as he bundled his notes into his case, and forked up one further mouthful. He turned back as though he had forgotten something, seized his drink, and loped across the restaurant like a grumpy gorilla. 'You give me indigestion, Zaterdag.'

'You can eat here later, Captain,' said Zaterdag as he strolled after his superior towards the exit. 'They have 24-hour service.'

'Who's gonna wait that long for their food to arrive?' Kadijk said, stepping onto the exit escalator. He seized a sheet of paper from the sheaf that protruded from his briefcase, and pushed it against Zaterdag's chest. 'When you're back in the office, you can tell Garrick that we've received the path lab report on the blood found at his scene of

crime. Tell him we've got good news and bad news for him. And the bad news is that the results show it's his blood on the victim and all round the murder scene.'

'And the good news?'

'Tell him that his cholesterol count is low.'

The vehicle park was halfway up the FoodBlock building, and had not been completed. Kadijk half wondered whether he should hold Zaterdag's thin blue hand, in case the young Fodoran wandered off the unmarked edge and fell to the unfinished pavement thirty storeys below.

Zaterdag continued his cheerfully inane explanation of the services available in the FoodBlock that housed the restaurant.

'You talk too much, Zaterdag,' interrupted Kadijk. 'You can learn a lot just by listening, especially when you're interviewing a suspect. You get them to fill those uncomfortable silences with their own voice. And you'll find they will volunteer information despite themselves.'

Except, he reflected ruefully, that was what Zaterdag was doing – filling the awkward gaps in their non-conversation to avoid embarrassment. He had all the earnest enthusiasm of any newcomer to Kursaal, each of whom had eaten up the Gray Corp introduction to the planet and politely regurgitated it verbatim to newcomers.

But Kadijk was no newcomer. When Gray Corp had decided to beef up its on-site security team, it had interviewed forty candidates from all over the Cronus system. Paul Kadijk was freshly available, and was the only person who turned up to the interview on the Gray SpaceStation in casual clothes. Gray had interviewed them all personally, and the appointment of a ten-year company security man with mixed recent success was considered eccentric by some shareholders.

Yet since his arrival, Kadijk had achieved some success in reducing HALF activity on Kursaal. The newsfeeds said he was a lateral thinker. His staff said he was a tyrant who demanded the impossible and achieved it through fear. His wife thought she was better off without him. 'Go and marry bloody Gray, why don't you?' she'd said with cold deliberation on the day she left him. 'You see more of him than

you do of me.’ That was two years ago.

Kadijk finished his glass of spirit, put the empty container on the low roof of a nearby cargo transport, and followed Zaterdag across the unlit vehicle park. He wondered if they were ever going to find their security flitter.

Kadijk had demanded a huge new intake of staff, and Gray had offered him twice as many as he requested so long as they were all newcomers from the training academy. Kadijk had weighed up the advantages of more staff against the disadvantages of bringing in so many enthusiastic, highly trained, and utterly inexperienced twenty-year-olds. Zaterdag was one of Gray’s more eccentric personal appointments – half Kadijk’s age, an IQ of 189, and the common sense of a toddler. ‘Mr Gray, you have to be crazy,’ Kadijk had told his most senior executive when he saw Zaterdag’s psych tests. ‘This guy is no detective. He couldn’t locate his own rear first in a butt-finding race if you tied his hands behind his back and gave him an hour’s head start.’

Usually during their meetings Gray seemed more interested in the wall of monitor screens to one side of the room. On this occasion, Gray had been staring out of his office window, hardly acknowledging that Kadijk was in the room. Then Gray had said, with what sounded like bitterness: ‘They told me the same about you, Kadijk. And they were wrong, were they not? Zaterdag is a sound appointment. He will be your direct report. He starts next week.’

Now, a month later in the FoodBlock vehicle park, Zaterdag suddenly turned on his heel. ‘Ah,’ he said, pointing behind Kadijk. ‘It was in this row all the time. ‘The battered security flitter stood alone in a weak pool of light. ‘Now, where did I put my I-card?’

‘Get in, you idiot,’ said Kadijk, activating the door with his own Identification card. ‘That’s my vehicle. You’ll have to drive.’

He tossed his I-card at Zaterdag across the low flitter roof. Zaterdag caught it awkwardly against his chest. ‘Doesn’t it have an Isomorphic response built in, so that only you can use it, Captain?’

‘You can’t believe everything you read in the sales literature.’

Zaterdag squeezed his tall frame into the driver’s side. ‘I try to be open-minded.’

‘Yeah,’ said Kadijk, ‘but not so much that your brain falls out.’

Zaterdag initiated the flitter’s prelaunch sequence. ‘At least we won’t be hounded by the press today, sir.’

Kadijk tutted in a parody of disapproval. ‘That’s a very distasteful thing to say.’ He opened up his case, and flicked again through the short report on the murder of the InterPlanetary Media team. ‘Ironic, I suppose. They came to make Crime Report, and now they’ll all end up appearing as its lead story.’

‘As soon as we lift the reporting restrictions?’ asked Zaterdag.

‘As soon as we announce the murders,’ said Kadijk. ‘They were the only media team on Kursaal, and you know how long it took them to get their material cleared by Gray Corp. This will take a while longer to get across the Cronus system.’ He felt the passenger seat adjust itself belatedly to accommodate his weight, and then the flitter lurched forward, shot across the vehicle park, and spat into the air above the cityplex.

Below them, a few other flitters made their way through the skeleton cityplex. Building contractors returning to their crude accommodation; service personnel making their way into town for the evening events; visiting executives on authorised visits to ensure their financial investment was sound while taking the opportunity for a trip away from their home planet and, later, to fiddle their expense claims.

Through the front window, the construction fires on the horizon were being covered by anvil-shaped storm clouds moving towards the cityplex. The limited climate-control systems that remained undamaged after recent terrorist attacks were concentrated around the cityplex’s main buildings, but the outlying construction areas would continue to suffer the brunt of the planet’s unpredictable and violent weather systems. The stars were slowly going out ahead of them, and, as the flitter travelled towards the fat, waxing moon, the sky was turning purple and then black.

Kadijk looked at the rear-view monitor, and watched the squat black shape of Gray Corp HQ growing very gradually smaller as though they were travelling away from a cliff face. A protruding band of steel and glass around the fiftieth floor stood out in what remained of the moon-

light. Kadijk could judge where Gray liked to sit on his office balcony, surveying his planet Kursaal as it grew like an organism from the thick wet earth of Saturnia Regna. When Zaterdag replayed the garbled, whispered mayday message on the flutter sound system, Kadijk wondered whether Gray would ever stand on his balcony again.

‘Other units are already responding, sir,’ said Zaterdag in his nasal whine. ‘Deaths were reported, so I’ve advised the pathologist. When we arrive, you can take over from Jedeski as scene-of-crime officer.’

The flutter bobbed briefly in the air as it crossed the border of city climate control. Kadijk heard the engine note change as the thrusters adjusted automatically. ‘Did you see the latest *Crime Report* news-feed?’

Zaterdag leaned forward, as though this would give him a better view through the flutter’s front screen. ‘I don’t think I’ve seen *Crime Report*, sir.’

Kadijk gave a little groan. ‘What a surprise. Well, they reported on the HALF attack on the AquaWorld complex.’ He smiled to himself. ‘They used that photomontage of Cockaigne that we knocked up last month.’

‘The one you invented from the mugshot tapes, Captain? Ah, so it’s good news about the report?’

‘Like hell it’s good news!’ bellowed Kadijk, his bass voice ringing in the small vehicle. He had a spiteful moment of pleasure that his outburst had caused Zaterdag to swerve the flutter slightly. ‘The AquaWorld bomb went off the day after the media crew were killed. And Tasty Tina, their reporter, was one of those who died. “Kursaal security forces remain baffled”? Too bloody right we do. They must have recorded the story before it happened.’ He scowled into the oncoming storm. ‘It’s almost worth releasing the media murder story now to blow their cover. Except that we’d have every other network in the Cronus system across here before you could say “scoop”.’

Kadijk peered sideways at Zaterdag to study his reaction. The lights on the flutter control console made the Fodoran’s face look green. Zaterdag blinked his yellow eyes slowly, and surreptitiously picked at his nose. ‘So all these bombs at Gray Corp installations have been planted

by the reporters to create news stories?’

‘No,’ said Kadijk in a long-suffering tone. ‘Pay attention, I’ll use short words. The HALFWits have claimed responsibility for seven small bombs in the last two months, which have destroyed key Gray locations on the planet. They brought down the comms net for a week, they closed the spaceport, and they’ve trashed three of our biggest earth movers. If the InterPlanetary Media people are warned in advance about the HALFWits’ plans, who on this planet would kill them? Because I he pathology report says that their deaths were no accident.’

The first wave of rain battered into the flitter like a wall of water as the storm hit.

After thirty minutes, Kadijk looked up from sheaves of paper, which spilled over his knees like a paper tablecloth. Outside the flitter it was pitch-black, apart from undulating waves of rain washing towards them in the vehicle’s external lights. He half turned to Zaterdag, who was still staring intently into the storm as it swirled shapes in the wash against the front screen and moaned against the seals in the doors beside them. He was relieved when Zaterdag returned his attention to the tracking controls on the console.

The flitter was buffeted by another gust, and Zaterdag regained control. The rain rattled in steady waves of sound on the roof just over their heads. At last, Zaterdag said, ‘Why didn’t Mr Gray take your advice about this expedition, Captain?’

‘He’s playing with his new toy in public,’ muttered Kadijk. ‘It was his smart response to the HALFWits, who were doing so well in the publicity polls. Hire a . . . xenobiologist to research the planet. Incorporate the research into Kursaal, supposedly. And be visibly part of the work.’ He laughed briefly. ‘And I think it appealed to the Venture Scout in him.’

‘Do you think he’ll be OK?’

‘If he’s not, then you and I will be out of work for quite some time. Unless the HALFWits have been stupid enough to set up this attack, in which case we’ll crucify them. I’ll slice off their heads and watch the

blood spurt out the top of their necks.’ He realised he was scrunching up his paperwork between his fists.

There was another long silence, during which Kadijk allowed the hiss of the storm spray and the undulations of the flitter to calm him. He was just dozing off when a familiar pedantic nasal whine disturbed him again. ‘*Crime Report*,’ Zaterdag was saying while scratching his chin fiercely. ‘Isn’t that the show fronted by the pretty girl with the pert bottom?’

Kadijk closed his eyes again. ‘Can’t say I really noticed,’ he said. Zaterdag might have said something in reply, but if he did it was lost in the howling wail of the storm.

3

'Sorry about the language'

'I wish I'd brought my umbrella,' said the Doctor. 'I remember I used to have one.'

Sam stopped walking. The Doctor must have heard her feet scuffing behind him, because he turned back to see what she was doing. She was dripping. Big fat blobs of water ran through her short blonde hair, over her shoulder, down the sodden arms of her shirt and onto the dry earth of the tunnel. Sam studied the growing pool of water by her favourite pair of Caterpillar boots in the sharp light from her thick black torch. 'I hope you're kidding,' she said slowly. Then she leaned against the wall so that she could pull off one boot, which she emptied theatrically in front of him. A dribble of dark water poured from the heel and on to the ground. 'When we were leaving the TARDIS, you said we wouldn't need an umbrella. And when I saw the clouds, you said they were alto sopranos, which...'

'Alto cumulus,' stressed the Doctor, 'and the nimbostratus was blowing high in quite the opposite direction.' He grinned at her like a dog expecting a bone.

Sam dropped her boot to the ground, and wiggled her wet sock back into it. She examined the hand she had propped on the wall with studied distaste, and rubbed off the dirt on her trousers. Where it stuck. 'Doctor, you have an excuse for everything. And that's the worst excuse for forgetting your umbrella since excuses were invented. Well, you can go on making excuses until you're blue in the face... Oh great, you're making me sound like my mum.'

The Doctor had come back down the tunnel towards her. 'Well,' he said solemnly, his face level with hers, 'for that, I apologise most sincerely.'

Sam looked at his eager expression, lit from below by his torch. His light-brown curls were plastered down over his forehead, his ears were sticking out, and his jutting chin and angular nose threw huge shadows up over his long face. She thought of Hallowe'en lanterns, and had to laugh.

The Doctor smiled at once, and blew a drop of water from the end of his nose. Then he straightened up and spun on his heel. 'It was very strange the way those clouds seemed to change direction so suddenly,' he said, his voice filtering back to her as he strode off again. 'I wonder if they have rudimentary climate control here. Cloud control, eh?'

'The only clouds,' muttered Sam as she squelched after him, 'are in your memory. You promised me a leisure break, not a hike, in a force-ten gale through a ploughed field.' The tunnel was narrowing, and she was watching her footing on the uneven ground and so bumped straight into the back of his green velvet coat. His wet, green velvet coat, which seemed to be steaming slightly in the torchlight.

'Where's your spirit of adventure?' he demanded brightly.

'In its box alongside your umbrella.'

'Well, at least let's explore this archaeological excavation-until the weather turns, eh?'

Sam fixed him with her special glare, the one she practised in front of the bathroom mirror. 'You promised me leisure, luxury. All the Lindt chocolate I could eat. You showed me the brochure. "Kursaal, the Pleasure Planet of a Thousand Worlds". "You deserve a break," you said. "I know just the place," you said. "Imagine Disneyland meets *Babylon 5*.'" She looked around with ill-concealed contempt. 'You're going to tell me this is the Alice in Wonderland ride, I suppose.'

Uh-oh. He was giving her the half-smile that he reserved for when he was trying to cajole her into something. His estate-agent look. Yes, his lips were pursed as he tried to find the right sales pitch. 'Well... we have definitely arrived at Kursaal.'

'What is this, the off-season?' she snapped. 'I hope you booked a return flight.'

'We're just a bit early.'

She stared. 'How early?'

‘Couple of years. Er, maybe five?’ He looked forlorn.

Sam brushed past him, muttering back at him as she moved further down the tunnel. ‘I am wet through and fed up. We’re at least thirty minutes from the TARDIS. I refuse to walk another step in that down-pour, and I don’t intend to stand here in the damp and dark until my boobs freeze.’

‘Sam,’ he called after her in a hurt tone.

‘Let’s find your archaeologists and get some dry clothes from them. Maybe air our pants over their open fire while singing “Kumbaya”.’

‘I think you may have taken a chill already,’ said the Doctor as he hurried to catch up.

Sam followed the passageways that led down. At a couple of junctions she chose the route that seemed to have the sharpest descent. The tunnel walls narrowed to less than a metre at times, and she could feel sharper rocks in the floor pushing into the soles of her boots. Her feet were killing her.

She couldn’t remember when she’d last had a good sulk. Probably the time her mum had thrown away the Greenpeace magazine clippings at the bottom of her knickers drawer and replaced them with wallpaper offcuts – ‘...so much nicer as a drawer lining, dear, don’t you think?’ Now she knew she was once again enjoying being miserable. Well, she owed it to herself once in a while.

The Doctor seemed content to trail after her contritely. On the few occasions she looked back, he gave her brief smiles, which were probably supposed to encourage her. Then she’d feel the damp material of her shirt against her skin, and stamp ahead faster, shivering.

After ten more minutes, the Doctor had caught up with her and placed his jacket around her. She had tried to shrug it off irritably, but he had held it gently and firmly on her shoulders, and she had relented with ill grace. ‘I’m still seriously fed up with you, you know that?’ she said. The Doctor nodded. ‘So where are we really? And what’s that dreadful smell?’ She sniffed at his coat on her shoulders, and he threw her a pretend insulted look.

‘I thought we might have landed in one of the Discovery Theme

areas,' he confessed. 'But the state of the entrance, the lack of nearby transport facilities, and the complete lack of, erm, predictable climate control suggests that this is a real archaeological dig. Started at the same time they were building Kursaal. Did you notice the striations in the mud and rock outside the tunnel entrances?'

Sam shone her torch straight at him, but relented when he squinted sideways. 'Those huge grooves, the ones running parallel to the line where the fir trees started further up the mountain?'

'Yes, they look to me like the markings of an excavator.'

Sam whistled. 'Big digger. Each of those was the width of my house.'

'Put three of them together, and you have some idea of the size of the excavator scoop,' said the Doctor. 'They're not building sand castles here.'

'I learn something new every day with you, Doctor,' she replied sweetly, trying not to sound too impressed.

The Doctor made a grand gesture, which looked odd in the narrow space. His torch flared wildly over the tunnel roof. He was obviously doing his schoolteacher thing again: see the universe, discover alien cultures, learn other languages. 'You couldn't pay for this kind of education,' he said.

'In your case,' she retorted, 'you'd need to guarantee full refunds if not satisfied. And travel insurance.'

'I was once told that you can't teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself.'

Sam started back down the tunnel again. 'Now you sound like my mum. After she gets back from one of her evening classes. My dad just rolls his eyes, and says it's all prewar Freudian mumbo-jumbo.'

'Well, early-seventeenth-century mumbo-jumbo, at any rate,' said the Doctor, sniffing. 'Galileo.'

'You met the guy who discovered America?' said Sam, wide-eyed.

The Doctor looked up with a reproofing look, and saw her grinning wickedly in the light of her own torch. 'Now you're just teasing me.' He sniffed the air again. 'I'm rather afraid that smell could be some

sort of wild animal. Perhaps we should take our chances in the rain after all.'

They turned and started to make their way back upward, Sam grumbling that she used to think the Doctor was indecisive, but now she wasn't so sure. Then they came to the fork in the tunnel. Sam couldn't remember seeing it – it must have been a branch which doubled back and up beside the tunnel they had originally taken. 'Suggestions?' There was a rustling sound, which she realised was the Doctor shaking his head. 'I thought you never forgot a route that you committed to memory,' she grumbled.

'That assumes that I remember to commit it to memory in the first place,' he said glumly from behind her.

She mentally tossed a coin, and indicated the left-hand route with a confidence she did not feel.

The tunnel had a sharp rise, but soon narrowed considerably, and she began to remember that their route down had not been so claustrophobic. The roof dipped lower a couple of times and scraped her wet head painfully, so she focused her torch upward, and slid her feet along the ground to avoid tripping on protruding rocks, feeling for them with the toes of her boots. The Doctor said something about Wilson, Kepple, and Betty, who, she assumed, had once been his travelling companions.

Ahead, Sam could see that they were coming to a narrow gap in the tunnel, no more than a few inches wide. There was no way they would get through there. She half turned to tell the Doctor.

Just before she fell over the body.

She twisted, landing heavily on her bum, her legs still stretched behind her over the soft form. Her jeans pressed against her calves, and she could feel they were still wet through. Behind her, the Doctor hunkered down and lowered his torchlight to see her. 'Oh dear,' he said softly. Too softly.

She looked, the light from her torch wavering.

It had been a man, late teens, maybe early twenties – the shadows made it difficult to judge. His light-brown eyes were staring at her in mute accusation, startling her. She thought at first he was wearing a

red turtleneck. Then she saw the shreds of flesh below the chin, the sticky pool of red that had seeped into the dirt of the tunnel floor. It was on her trousers now, too.

‘Gordon Christ,’ she shouted, and pulled her legs away. For a dreadful moment, she thought the dead man was moving his hand to grab her, pull her back, and she gave it sharp cry. But it was just her foot dragging his arm across his body. It was almost severed at the shoulder. It had a watch on it, with a wristband made of interleaved gold and silver links.

Still seated, she pushed herself away, hugging her knees to her chest. The musky animal smell was stronger here on the ground, she realised – and then she could smell the blood on her trousers. With a little noise of disgust, she straightened her legs, pushing herself further back from the body, pressing herself against the wall, pressing hard. ‘Gordon Christ!’

The Doctor took off his coat. ‘Are you hurt?’ When she shook her head tentatively, he placed the coat over her legs.

‘The blood...’ she said. He waved her objection away, and tucked the sleeves in under her knees. Then he turned back putting himself between her and the body. ‘Sorry about the language, Doctor...’ She didn’t know what else to say. She wanted words to tumble out, to fill the terrible silence in which she could think only about blood on the ground, on her legs, on the young man’s tunic, on his throat... on his neck. She put her hand up to her own neck. She was taking short gasps of air, as though she was shivering, so she tried to breathe deeper, more steadily.

She stared at the Doctor’s back. She could see his shoulders moving, and studied his long hair, still sodden and plastered to the stained silk on the back of his waistcoat. The sleeves of his shirt were scraped with mud from the tunnel walls. When he spoke, his words died in the air. ‘Sit still, Sam, you’ve had a bot of a shick. I mean, a bit of a shock.’ He laughed. ‘Words are tricky, aren’t they?’

‘The worst thing I ever heard my dad say was “oh cripes”,’ she said eventually. ‘I never even heard him say “bastard”. Except in Latin, y’know: *illegitimi nil carborundum*, when people were getting at me.

I don't suppose he had the same provocation. But I doubt he's ever seen that much blood spilled all in one go. Even when he was with the Blood Transfusion Service. One of the few things I did that I remember him approving of was when I went down the community centre and gave blood, without being asked nicely first.' She could hear a quavering note in her own voice, so she tried a half-hearted laugh. 'Melissa Donoghue fainted when she first gave blood. Fell off the couch, and dragged the bag onto the floor. It squirted all over the lino. And Dad said "oh cripes".'

The Doctor's shoulders moved again as his hands worked beyond her line of sight. 'What's the word you find most difficult to spell?' he said in a light tone.

She closed her eyes, and smiled, leaning her head back against the cold tunnel wall. She recognised his technique. 'Haemoglobin,' she said provokingly.

'Hah!' snorted the Doctor as he realised she wasn't going to play his game. Now he turned back to her, smiling a tight smile and blinking in the light of her torch. Just as she lowered it out of his eyes, she noticed that they weren't smiling too. He reached out and grasped her shoulders gently, looking her full in the face. His tone was calm, conversational, with that lilting intonation he used when patiently explaining things to people. 'Sam, it looks like this poor fellow was killed by an animal. He had a name tag. He was called Osram.' He paused, thinking briefly. 'Rigor mortis has not yet set in, and so we must assume that the animal that did this could still be nearby. Can you stand?' She nodded mutely, colder than ever. 'We should get out of these tunnels.'

He helped her to her feet, and settled the coat back on her shoulders. Then he reached into one deep pocket, and brought out a conker on a piece of frayed brown bootlace, a pair of Marigold gloves, and a browning apple core. He tossed the core aside, and stared at the rubber gloves.

'Doesn't the TARDIS have a dishwasher?' asked Sam. 'Or are you worried about stubborn stains?'

'Not what I wanted,' he said, stuffing them back in the pockets and

rummaging some more. 'Aha!' He brandished a round tin of travel sweets.

'Do you have a tartan blanket in there too?' asked Sam. The lid was attached firmly to the tin, but eventually came off with a sharp popping sound. Inside, she could see half a dozen stubby sticks, like pencils.

With a flourish, the Doctor plucked one out and flicked his thumbnail against the top of the pencil. The head flared with a magnesium brightness before settling down into a steady flame. 'How long is that going to last?' asked Sam.

The flickering light played over his long face, which was studying her carefully. The bright yellow flame made his cool blue eyes look darker. 'Everlasting matches,' he said casually.

'You could put Swan Vestas out of business,' said Sam, 'except...'
She blew at his raised hand, and the match fizzed out.

The Doctor looked unimpressed, tucked his torch in his armpit, and waved his free hand in front of the dead match. She heard a fizz, and when his hand came away the match was lit again.

'If we are unfortunate enough to encounter this animal,' the Doctor said, 'we may be able to distract or frighten it with these matches. That,' he admitted lamely as he saw her reaction, 'may be a rather optimistic notion.' At this point he produced a second lit match and presented it to her with a flourish. 'On the other hand, the direction of the flame will give us some idea of the movement of air in the tunnels, and suggest the swiftest route back to the surface.'

She accepted the match from him, and was surprised to feel it was cylindrical and smooth between her thumb and forefinger. Then the Doctor took her other hand, steering her carefully over the corpse. He was pointing his torch back down the tunnel so that it did not illuminate the remains.

He held her hand all the way, juggling both torches and his match in the other. His hand felt damp and cool in hers. She wasn't sure what it most reminded her of. She'd held hands with John Govan on the way home from the Coal Hill disco, thinking all the time about who in Year

9 had seen them leave after the last dance, whether the strangers who passed them on the high street thought they were a couple. As they walked, she had snuggled up to the fake-fur collar of John's heavy overcoat, which smelled faintly of patchouli and, irritatingly, cheap cigarettes. She hadn't minded the drizzling rain that night, floating silently against the sodium yellow of the streetlights. They'd perched on the dry part of the bench beneath the tree outside Woolies, and John had failed to take her hints about having a snog. She wondered if it was deliberate. The rain had got heavier, and they'd moved on.

Her dad had been furious when they'd arrived home; he was supposed to collect her from the school gymnasium, but he was running late and was just getting into his Astra when she and John appeared in the drive. He said he was angry that she hadn't waited at the school for him. She said he was just upset because he'd forgotten about her, and someone else had seen her home. John had slunk off during the row. She told herself later that she hated boys who smoked. She told Melissa and Shobu in Year 9 that John was a rotten kisser.

She also thought about how her mum held her hand in Regent Street when they went shopping for party clothes when she was thirteen – thirteen, for heaven's sake – her grip firm and possessive as she steered her daughter through the traffic.

Sam snuggled up to the velvet of the Doctor's coat on her own shoulders. It smelled faintly of damp soil.

After fifteen minutes, Sam thought she could see a light ahead. 'That can't be the surface, it must be pitch-dark out there now.'

They stepped around the corner, and into a low-ceilinged cavern. After the narrow tunnel, Sam felt like she should be stretching her cramped limbs. The Doctor took the two everlasting matches in one hand and extinguished them like a fire eater. Then he patted Sam's hand and released it, before stepping away from her.

The cavern was lit by the reflection of a single floodlight, which was propped precariously against the rocky wall. How it had fallen there was immediately apparent: the place had been trashed, maybe in a fight. Unless they threw wild parties down here.

She followed the Doctor in, moving up the slope of the rough cavern floor. To the left, by one of the other two tunnel exits, a pile of large metal boxes lay dented, spilling their contents into the dirt. She could see what looked like a video camera, surrounded by a scattered collection of coloured Compact Discs each about five centimetres across.

The Doctor was stooped over something, and she went to join him. He said, 'Er . . .' but then shut up as she saw what he was examining. It was another ravaged corpse, this time with its face ground into the dirt floor, one arm thrown forward as though the man had been trying to scabble to safety with his fingernails. In his left hand was a silver tube, like a paint container, from which brown paste had been squirted in a worm-cast pile beside it. The back of the body's neck and shoulders were raw flesh. She could see the Doctor hesitating, as if wondering how or whether to take a pulse.

There was another body, its eyes staring sightlessly straight up. Sam knelt down, staring for a long moment at the face, thinking how the smooth dark skin reminded her of her friend Jamila. The name badge attached to the left-hand breast said 'Sharstone'. She could be her age. Could have been. The girl's jumpsuit had deep slashes from the chest down. Sam looked lower, and immediately looked away again, sickened.

Shadows moved all around the room. Sam gave a little squeal, but then cursed her own reaction: it was only the Doctor, who had righted a second fallen floodlight and switched it on. He hurried over to her. 'Come away, Sam. We can't help them.' He was lifting her by the shoulders.

She stood up, and stared around. By the floodlight that the Doctor had just switched on was a third body, a man. A shaft of light was shining under a box which had fallen over the man's arm, and she could see he was clutching a handgun. The body's torso and face were covered in fur and blood. For a moment, she thought she saw its chest rise and fall, but then the body dropped into shadow as the Doctor straightened the fallen floodlight. Get a grip, Sam Jones.

She followed a trail of blood from the third corpse. It suggested something had been dragged away from the body and towards the

third tunnel exit past an untidy pile of communications equipment. And there she noticed a further body, this one with a dried trail of blood from the mouth and down the long white neck. She snapped her gaze away, trying to find something to say. The Doctor pushed two fingers against her lips and shushed her. ‘Listen!’

There was a scuffling noise from one of the tunnel entrances. Sam shivered in her wet clothes. The Doctor stood in front of her, moving his head slowly from side to side as though tracking something. The shuffling sound got nearer.

‘When I say run. . .’ began the Doctor in a low tone.

Then they heard the voices, one high and fluting, the other a low mumble full of anger.

‘Oh,’ said the Doctor in his normal voice, ‘civilisation.’ He rubbed his hands together briskly.

Sam tugged the back of his waistcoat. ‘Oi,’ she hissed, ‘we should get out of here.’ The Doctor turned, looking puzzled. ‘Well look at me,’ she continued, flapping the Doctor’s drenched coat arms to indicate the blood all down her trousers. ‘What does it look like?’

The Doctor threw his head back in an exasperated gesture. ‘Sam Sam Sam Sam Sam,’ he chided. ‘This is obviously a horrific animal attack, and neither of us has fangs or claws. We’re not even wearing fur. These people will see that, surely.’

‘Who are these people?’ she hissed again, dragging him by his shirt-sleeve towards the nearby tunnel exit.

The Doctor followed along like a truculent toddler being led out of a shop. ‘Well, maybe you have a point,’ he said quietly.

Within a few metres, the tunnel twisted in a bend and they flattened themselves against the dirt wall. Sam craned her neck forward, and tried to listen above the sound of her heart thudding. The two voices took on a slightly different tone. The owners must have come into the cavern, where the acoustics were different. And they were speaking more loudly in the less confined space.

‘Jeez,’ the gruff voice was saying, ‘what a crazy mess. Is this the whole party? Some party.’ Sam could hear the shuffling walk again. ‘Two dead here. Jeez, what a shambles. She wasn’t kidding.’ The

other voice was high, nasal, somehow apologetic. ‘Professor Sara-band’s over here, Captain. She’s still alive. Her arm looks a bit awkward, but it looks like she hasn’t been attacked like the others.’

‘Don’t tell me, Zaterdag, tell the backup team. Tell them to get their butts down here. They can use the trace on our comm signal, like we used hers.’ More shuffling of feet. Sam leaned back again as a torch beam flashed across the tunnel entrance. ‘We need more light down here, too, so we can... Whoah, I think I’ve found Gray. He’s breathing!’

In the gloom of the tunnel, the Doctor leaned back to look at Sam. ‘There are people still alive!’ he said incredulously. ‘We should go and help.’

‘Not so fast,’ Sam whispered. ‘You heard them – they’ve got assistance on the way. They’ve come to find these people.’ She gripped his shirtsleeve.

The gruff voice sounded furious now. ‘How long are those morons going to be? Didn’t they get the call before us?’

‘The storm perhaps, sir,’ said the nasal whine she’d identified as Zaterdag.

The gruff captain was not impressed. ‘I can’t tell how bad Gray is. There’s a lot of blood, and that looks like... hairs? I don’t think we should risk moving him.’ A pause. ‘His pupils are fixed and dilated. Where the hell is that police surgeon?’

‘There’s a call out,’ said Zaterdag.

The captain snorted. ‘Webber told me he was taking some leave. He didn’t tell me he was going to vanish without naming a deputy. Damn him. I hope his return flight crashes and burns and there’s no one to identify the body? There was a cough. ‘I know the HealthBlock hospital has skeleton staff...’

Zaterdag was laughing, a high-pitched giggle. ‘Skeleton staff – very droll, Captain.’

‘Shut up, Zaterdag – weren’t you supposed to have contacted the HealthBlock and arranged all this? Jeez, I’m staffed by idiots. No wonder this planet’s never going to be finished in time! Am I the only person on Kursaal with any sense of urgency? I left a perfectly good

steak in loganberry sauce back at the FoodBlock, you know. It was more than compensating for the piss-poor pea soup they gave me for the first course. . . .’

Sam dragged at the Doctor’s sleeve again. ‘We should go,’ she urged. ‘You heard them, there are others coming. We have no identification. Or at least, none that’s worth anything here,’ she said, thinking of the rubbish she might find in the Doctor’s coat pockets. ‘And we can hardly claim to have lost our Kursaal season tickets.’

The Doctor seemed to hesitate, then she saw him opening the sweet tin. She hadn’t noticed him take it out of her – his – pocket. He flicked a match into life with his nail, and studied the flame when it steadied. ‘Looks like we can continue down this tunnel,’ he said. ‘Follow me.’

He pushed past her, and trotted off up the incline, his torch washing over the rough floor. After only half a minute, he stopped, abruptly. ‘Oh dear.’

Sam looked around him. It was another corpse. ‘Don’t stop,’ she said, squeezing past and refusing to look down.

‘His name was Aykers,’ said the Doctor.

Sam didn’t stop, she just kept on going. Follow the tunnel, stay focused, they would get out of here. Keep walking, put one boot in front of the other and then the next and then the next, don’t think about what’s down here with them, don’t think about the strangers’ voices. Don’t think about the bodies, don’t think about staring eyes in a young man’s face. Don’t think about blood on his throat. Step, step. Come on come on come on, focus!

She had got ten metres ahead when the Doctor caught up with her. ‘Sam, wait.’ She tried to shrug him off, but he strengthened his grip. Now she could hear it too. It was a jingling sound, a scraping sound. It was ahead of them.

Sam threw up her hands as the tungsten-bright light spilled down the tunnel and washed over and under and around them, wiping out their torch beams. She squinted through half-closed eyes, her arm thrown over her forehead in a futile attempt to shade them. There were two tall humanoid silhouettes moving swiftly towards them.

‘Don’t move,’ said a woman’s voice, strong and clear in the confined

tunnel. 'Kursaal Security. Identify yourselves.'

Sam glanced back over her shoulder. 'Doctor?'

His long, sad face looked flat and deathly white in the powerful light, his pale blue eyes wide despite the brilliance, and his lips slightly parted as though he was unsure what words to use.

'Oh cripes,' he said.

4

'I'd value your opinion'

Kadijk released the eyelid carefully. 'His pupils are fixed and dilated,' he said, staring at Gray's pallid features. There were bloodstains on the old man's face, smeared up the cheeks as though crudely wiped away. He thought of how he had used a wet cloth to mop food off his boys' faces when they were toddlers. There was more blood, thick and dark, on Gray's designer overalls, and clumps of soft brown fur. He wasn't sure he could see any wounds. Gray's chest rose and fell slowly. 'Where the hell is that police surgeon?'

'There's a call out,' said Zaterdag, who was squatting down beside Saraband, up the slope and on the other side of the cavern by the scattered communications rig. Kadijk wondered how that had survived when so much of the other equipment had been destroyed. The whole area smelled like an animal house in the ZooPark, he thought.

Kadijk stood up and looked around again. Seven in the party, two known dead, two survivors. They needed the backup now. And his senior police pathologist had chosen now to go on holiday. A holiday away from a holiday world. Kadijk snorted with disgust. He could feel the rage boiling up in him again. 'Webber told me he was taking some leave. He didn't tell me he was going to vanish without naming a deputy. Damn him. I hope his return flight crashes and burns and there's no one to identify the body.' He coughed emphatically. Webber was bound to have some fancy excuse. 'I know the HealthBlock hospital has skeleton staff. . .'

He was interrupted by Zaterdag's girlish giggle. 'Skeleton staff – very droll, Captain.'

'Shut up, Zaterdag.' Kadijk stomped over to the Fodoran, who was still checking Saraband for injuries. There was a dried trickle of blood

which had trailed down onto the collar of her jumpsuit. Kadijk stared at Zaterdag. ‘Weren’t you supposed to have contacted the HealthBlock and arranged all this? Jeez, I’m staffed by idiots. No wonder this planet’s never going to be finished in time! Am I the only person on Kursaal with any sense of urgency?’

At least Gray is still alive, he thought, along with my career. He shuffled back towards Gray’s supine form, stopping briefly at the two ravaged corpses.

Whatever had done this was still loose, possibly nearby. His support staff were probably still fighting their way through the worst storm he could remember, and he was beginning to wish he’d delegated this job to someone else and joined Webber on his off-world holiday. What was worse, he was still ravenously hungry. ‘I left a perfectly good steak in loganberry sauce back at the FoodBlock, you know,’ he called over to Zaterdag. ‘It was more than compensating for the piss-poor pea soup they gave me for the first course.’

As he spoke, his eyes never left the corpses. He had seen worse when he was a junior officer back on Kandax. At his first murder, the SOC officer Bhairom had brought him over – ‘to get your opinion’ – pushed him into the tent protecting the scene of crime, and shown him the two kids’ bodies without any warning. Junior Officer Kadijk just had time to dodge back out again before he had brought up his whole lunch, to the cheery accompaniment of his senior’s laughter. It was the first and only time he’d ever thrown up when viewing a body.

Bhairom had seen it as a cheap gag on the new boy. She attributed no motives to the two runaways’ flight from home, it just gave the murderer opportunity. She just saw two small corpses, the latest in a long line of dozens of dead bodies in her career. Kadijk had forced himself to follow things through, and to her irritation had also followed the kids’ bodies through the post-mortem stages and to the funeral. When he’d nailed the father for the deaths, Bhairom had been sidelined and Kadijk promoted.

What Kadijk never said was that, all through the case, he couldn’t look at the kids’ bodies, or the scene-of-crime photorecordings, or statements of evidence, without thinking of his own sons. He would

never have let them down that way, he had decided. He would never let them escape like that.

Now, as he looked at this young woman's corpse with its guts spilling into the dirt, he just saw one more corpse, and he could understand Bhairom at last. He thought about bringing Zaterdag across for a closer look, but reconsidered when he thought about where his blue junior might throw up.

He snapped a quick image on his pocket photorecorder, and then pulled away a box which was covering Gray's arm. Behind it, he was surprised to see Gray's hand loosely gripping a small but powerful projectile handgun. Another quick image, then he picked up the weapon with callipers. He popped the projectile chamber with a flick of his wrist, and peered in. Eight shots maximum, two left. He sniffed it carefully. Recently fired? Bag it, think about it later.

To the right of Gray's body was a large patch of blood and fur. Closer examination revealed that there was a faint trail uphill, past where Zaterdag was still squatting, and out through the third tunnel exit. 'Hot damn,' he murmured. 'I think he may have fought this thing off.' He shuffled over to Zaterdag and Saraband, surprised at the effort it took. He scratched his day-old growth of beard, as though that would help him think more clearly. He scrutinised the marks on the ground. 'The killer could have a major wound. So why struggle all the way uphill, instead of away downhill to one of the two exits which lead to the surface?'

Zaterdag was about to answer when there was a flood of brilliant light from the centre tunnel exit, and a crowd of newcomers clattered in. The six at the rear were in black security fatigues, some carrying compact, powerful searchlights, the others laden with heavy equipment boxes.

Kadijk leapt to his feet, and went over to them. 'Watch where you put all that crap,' he bellowed. 'This is a scene of crime, you cretins, not left luggage.'

The woman at the head of the team saluted sloppily. 'Sergeant Mallaby,' she said. 'Team six reporting. Eesh, its freezing down here.' She blew steam through her fingers. 'Are you acting SOC, sir?'

'Yeah, get your act together, Mallaby,' rumbled Kadijk. 'For a start, I want those lights placed –'

'Set those lights down at two-metre intervals along that wall,' said another voice in a sharp tone. 'Hurry hurry hurry hurry, no time to spare, there are injured people here.'

Kadijk stared at the stranger, then at Mallaby. 'Who the hell is that?'

'Pathologist, sir,' said Mallaby, though perhaps she didn't sound completely convinced. 'Got here just ahead of us.'

The tall figure stood, half turned away from Kadijk, arms akimbo, occasionally gesturing impatiently at the police staff as they made their way carefully down the slope of the cavern. He was tall, his long, dishevelled, wet hair starting to curl above the shoulders of his grubby waistcoat. A filthy scarf, maybe a cravat, was draped untied around his neck, and looked as though it had been used to wipe his grimy face. His long-sleeved shirt was splattered with dirt, and his baggy brown slacks were caked with wet grey mud up to the knees.

When the lights were positioned to his satisfaction, he knelt swiftly at Gray's side, checking for vital signs. Kadijk could see he was wearing a pair of bright yellow rubber gloves.

'Sam, where's the woman patient?' said the strange man.

'Over here, Doctor,' she said, and Kadijk spun on his heel to look over where Zaterdag was crouched with another stranger. This one was smaller, with short, dirty, blonde hair, and in this light looked as though she might be in her late teens. She was wearing a heavy green coat, with the cuffs turned up like a buccaneer's because its arms were too long for her, and the tail dropped down below her knees, revealing only a small amount of muddy trouser leg. If anything, she looked more dirty and soaked than the man. He had reached her in half a dozen loping strides, and crouched next to her. 'Ah yes,' he said. 'What a very beautiful young woman, isn't she?' Kadijk thought he saw the blonde girl elbow him in the leg, but perhaps he was just kneeling down anyway.

Kadijk was stood next to the little group a few seconds later, studying the tops of their heads. They were soaking wet, and even over the animal stink in the cavern he could detect the foul smell of clay

on their clothes. ‘What’s going on, here?’ There was no reply. ‘I said what’s going on here?’

The man looked up, and Kadijk saw serious blue eyes. ‘No need to shout,’ he replied pleasantly. ‘This woman has had an awkward fall, and may have broken her arm. There are no tears or breaks in her clothes, and the only minor bleeding visible – there on her chin, see – is probably where she’s bitten her inner lip, or maybe her tongue. She’s breathing regularly, but there’s unexpectedly rapid conjugate movement of the eyes, which may mean significant neuronal activity of the mid- and forebrain.’ He looked up at Kadijk with a wide grin. One canine tooth was, incongruously, shorter than its neighbours, as though it had never fully grown. ‘Nightmare, I shouldn’t wonder. Under the circumstances, you’d better get her to the hospital immediately.’

Kadijk let him stand up, and then growled at him. ‘That is not what I meant, smartarse.’

The stranger nodded in the direction of Gray. ‘I’m much more worried about the man over there. . .’

Kadijk stood on tiptoe, and pushed his face close to the stranger’s. ‘Shut up,’ he said fiercely. ‘Who are you?’

‘Webber’s deputy,’ said the man calmly. ‘Police pathologist. I am the doctor.’ The tall man gestured at the teenage girl. ‘My assistant, erm, intern is Nurse Samantha Jones. Nice girl, going places, wants to save the poor and unfortunate, father’s a medic in, er, plasma transfusion. Is your team well armed, Captain? These poor people are obviously victims of a savage attack by wild animals. And a recent one, at that.’ He took Kadijk by both elbows, turned him gently but firmly to one side, and brushed past towards Gray, threading his way between the police. Kadijk watched him wait patiently for a moment to avoid obstructing the sharp-faced police corporal who was photorecording everything.

Kadijk decided then that if Webber survived re-entry, he would kill him anyway. This doctor seemed almost plausible enough to be the deputy pathologist. But almost wasn’t good enough. He spent a few moments assigning police staff – two to finish the scene of crime, four

to search for the remaining archaeologists. Then he stumped downhill, Zaterdag trailing behind him like an usher, to where the doctor was re-examining Gray.

‘You seem to have suffered in the downpour, Doctor... Doctor what?’ said Kadijk. He faked a little laugh. ‘You have me at a disadvantage.’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘You know Captain Kadijk’s rank,’ prompted Zaterdag, ‘even though he is not wearing insignia.’

‘And now you know my name,’ said Kadijk, looking sidelong at Zaterdag.

The doctor stared straight at him with those transparent blue eyes. ‘Briefing,’ he said swiftly, as though Kadijk was an imbecile. ‘Just call me “Doctor”, I’ll just call you “Captain”. This man needs urgent medical attention, he appears to be in a coma. His temperature is dropping. Perhaps we can cover him with something.’

Kadijk gestured to one of the police staff who was marking the position of the corpses, then turned his attention back. ‘Where is your medical equipment, Doctor?’

‘Ah,’ he replied. ‘I’m afraid our transport came down in the storm, about half a kilometre from the tunnel entrance. We had quite a struggle through the mud and clay.’

Kadijk snapped his fingers to bring Mallaby over. ‘Contact construction rescue, Sergeant. There’s a –’

‘Sank without trace in the mud,’ said the Doctor quickly, looking up from where he was taking Gray’s pulse. He smiled apologetically at Mallaby. ‘Glug, glug, glug. We’re lucky to be alive.’

‘All your equipment, oh dear. And your medical clothing...?’ The question trailed off as Kadijk indicated his soaked and muddy clothes.

The Doctor took off one yellow glove, reached up and tapped a long forefinger on the captain’s crumpled lapel. ‘Do you insist on uniform?’ he asked thoughtfully. Then he knelt up and sniffed at Kadijk’s tie. ‘Beef gravy,’ he said suddenly. ‘With maybe evidence of loganberry sauce?’

Kadijk glared down at his tie, rubbing the spots furiously with a handkerchief.

Meanwhile, Zaterdag was clearing his throat with what he recognised as a cue for a pointed question. ‘Will you be requesting assistance from the hospital where Webber works?’

The strange doctor stared up again, and sighed as though these constant interruptions were becoming an irritant. ‘I trust, Zaterdag, that you have already contacted the HealthBlock and advised them to expect incoming wounded and several additions to their path lab, mm?’ He favoured them with a short sigh, and stood up in one swift movement. ‘If you haven’t, get right on it, man. And perhaps you could arrange some fresh clothing for me and Nurse Jones?’

‘Actually,’ said Zaterdag, slightly abashed at the affronted tone in his voice, ‘I’ve just seen the paramedics arrive.’ He pointed towards the far tunnel exit.

‘Good news at last,’ said the Doctor, beckoning the four newcomers over. He swiftly apprised them of Gray’s condition in a low, urgent voice. Then he took them over to Saraband and explained her situation too. Without waking her, the medics were able to fit a plastic brace around her broken arm, before unfolding a portable canvas stretcher and loading her onto it.

Kadijk watched them attach lanterns to the stretcher, and then carry it and its load carefully over the debris in the room and out into the darkness of the centre tunnel. He thought about her frightened, whispered emergency call all those hours ago, replaying it repeatedly in his mind just as he had replayed the recording of it on the journey here.

He led the Doctor to where the two corpses were still splayed in the centre of the cavern. Now they were surrounded by a crude outline in white tape, the harsh white light of the floodlights revealing the awful mess of their remains. ‘I’d value your opinion. Give me your first thoughts on approximate time of death. And perhaps your intern would like to help?’ He nodded to where Nurse Jones was leaning against the far wall, shivering and pale in the stark light. Her eyes widened a little when she heard what he’d suggested.

‘I think I can manage,’ said the Doctor, shaking his head fractionally at the girl. ‘And it’s a little early to be precise.’ He lifted the more complete corpse up slightly with his yellow gloves. Kadijk could see that he was eyeing him cautiously. ‘But... fairly recent, I’d say. Less than an hour.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Kadijk, trying not to sound too triumphant, but raising his voice as he moved away towards the far cavern wall. He looked to Zaterdag for support as he reached Jones. ‘The call from Professor Saraband came in three hours ago. These men must have been dead for at least that long. And you would know that, wouldn’t you, Doctor? From the time you received your own callout?’ He smiled ingratiatingly at Jones. ‘I’m sure you remember too. When was that, Nurse?’

‘Alas,’ called the Doctor, striding swiftly across to them, ‘our chronometer went down with our transport. Glug, glug,’ he added helpfully, putting his arm around Jones to adjust the coat on her shoulders; Kadijk realised that it would actually fit him. But before he could comment further, he saw the Doctor chaperoning Jones back towards the centre of the cavern. ‘If these deaths were not recent,’ said the Doctor, ‘one might expect evidence of rigor mortis, or the blood pooling at the lowest points in the body. I find neither.’

Kadijk gave a shout of disbelief. ‘Are you saying these men survived this attack? This savage attack? And died shortly before we arrived? With wounds as extensive as those?’ He pointed brutally at the corpses. ‘That’s plainly absurd, and you must know that. I thought you were supposed to be a doctor.’

‘I thought,’ snapped the Doctor, ‘you were supposed to be a detective. Why couldn’t the call have been made before these poor men died?’

Kadijk stared. The Doctor was frowning right back at him. Jones had lost that bewildered, frightened look that Kadijk had thought he could exploit. Now she, too, was scowling at him.

The Doctor’s voice was insistent: ‘Your team could be in very grave danger if that animal is still near here.’

Mallaby coughed discreetly, and everyone looked at her as though

she'd leapt out of a cake. 'Actually sir,' she said to Kadijk, 'I now have positives on all but one of the other members of the Saraband team. The pathologist and his intern showed us one on the way in, and my men have found another close by, also dead. Do you want us to hunt down this animal, sir? Communication systems are pretty terrible once we get more than a few dozen metres from here. I think the sat-link has gone AWOL again.'

'Forget it,' snapped Kadijk. 'Who's still unaccounted?'

'Osram.'

'Find him, and we'll declare the dig unsafe. Unsafe!' The word gave him grim amusement. The medical team had returned, and he watched them as they considered the best way to get the human remains into mortuary bags. 'Once we're clear, we'll bury this place.'

Jones bristled angrily, pulling herself away from the Doctor's protective arm. This might be interesting after all. 'That seems typical of your approach,' she was saying. 'Bash it, bully it, bury it. You've been hostile and threatening to us since we arrived, when we're just trying to do our jobs. And now you're suggesting that an animal, which for all you know could be a rare indigenous species, will be rewarded for defending itself by you ploughing up its habitat. . .'

Kadijk noticed that she fell silent as the Doctor reached forward and touched her shoulder. But the bright accusation was still clear in her shining eyes. He nodded towards the medics who were sealing up the mortuary bags on the stretchers. 'Is that how those people would feel?'

'Don't make excuses for it, don't avoid it,' she spat. 'Deal with it. You can make excuses until you're blue in –'

She broke off, flustered, staring at Zaterdag. She was muttering something more, but then Kadijk saw the Doctor's hand tighten slightly on the shoulder of her long green coat. 'It's been a difficult day,' the Doctor was saying, stepping forward slightly. 'We're cold and wet, but remember your father's medical motto, Ms Jones: *illegitimi nil carborundum*.'

She seemed to relax at this. Kadijk wondered what the hell it meant. Fancy medical terms, probably.

‘We should go,’ said the Doctor, pushing Jones forward.

‘Where?’

‘To the HealthBlock hospital, Captain. I’m afraid we will have customers waiting for their post-mortems.’

Zaterdag moved forward. ‘You’ll need transport. Sergeant Mallaby, see that they join the medics in the ambulance.’

‘Sir?’

Kadijk nodded his approval. He waited until the Doctor was about to step out into the exit tunnel before calling him back by wagging a crooked finger. He waited while the tall stranger walked slowly, glowering all the way, to stand next to him. ‘I’ll see you later, Doctor. We’ll be following as soon as we have found Ostram.’

The Doctor’s mouth was a thin line. ‘Maybe you should try a narrow fork off that third corridor, about fifty metres on. Looks like a dead end, so perhaps it is.’

Kadijk raised his eyebrows. ‘What makes you think that?’

The Doctor lowered his eyes. ‘Um, I’m a lucky guesser.’ He had taken his yellow gloves off, and now pressed at a green spot on Kadijk’s shirt. Kadijk looked at the food spot irritably. Then the Doctor put his finger into his mouth, and smacked his lips together several times. ‘Is that pea soup?’

Kadijk’s stomach rumbled. By the time Kadijk looked up from his soiled shirt again, the Doctor had already loped across the cavern and was following the medics into the exit tunnel.

Zaterdag was humming in an irritating fashion, and then said: ‘Impressive, eh?’

‘You’re an idiot,’ said Kadijk wearily. He carefully straightened one of the archaeologists’ storage boxes, and dropped down on it with a heavy thud. He sat thinking for a few minutes, his stomach churning again. Then he called Mallaby over from where she was talking to two police officers.

‘Where did you meet our pathologist friend?’

Mallaby stood at ease in front of him. ‘We almost ran them down on the way in. Though we were fairly barrelling through the tunnels at the time. We challenged them for identification, and she called him

“doctor”.’ Kadijk sensed Mallaby was flicking back mentally through the events. ‘They took us immediately to the Aykers corpse, and brought us on through to this area. Which was the point we made contact with you. Sir.’

‘Yeah.’

‘The boys have found Osram. Apparently, the corpse looks worse than the two we found in here, sir. It was in the dead end.’

‘Where else?’ he said. ‘OK, all the photorecords complete?’

‘Sir.’

‘Then let’s pack up and ship out. We’re sealing this place tonight.’

Once she had saluted and moved off, he pulled out his personal communicator. The indicator showed NO CONNECTION, so he recorded a message which would be sent as soon as he moved into satellite range at any later time.

James, it’s Paul Kadijk. I want you to get me a complete list of names for relief staff at the HealthBlock. And anyone you have recorded for an intern programme. Check out the time on this message – I’m recording it in a dungeon with no landline, and I don’t know when I’ll get within satellite range. Or whether the damn satellite will be flying when I do. ASAP, please, James. I’ll owe you, again. Stop. Send.’

He flicked the communicator off again. He was brushing idly at the stains on his shirt and tie when Zaterdag sidled up again, scraping his chin with a dirty fingernail, ‘Captain, how could he tell that was roast beef and pea soup?’

Kadijk narrowed his eyes, but didn’t look at Zaterdag. ‘Surely you know the difference between the two?’ he said. ‘I mean, any fool can roast beef. . .’

He thought of Bhairom again, whether he’d ever seemed like this to her. Then, as the junior officers started to dismantle their searchlights and move out of the cavern, he switched on his own torch again. ‘Zaterdag,’ he said. ‘Come and have a look in this dead-end tunnel up here. There’s something I’d like to get your opinion on.’

* * *

The wind was like a slap in her face as she left the shelter of the tunnel. God, it was colder up here, like stepping into winter. She thought she could feel the moisture freezing on her face, and tears forced out of her squeezed eyes. The wind bit into her and she shuddered at the intensity. Maybe it was an effect of the lighting here, too. Impossibly tall construction lights, like football-stadium pylons, drenched the whole area with brilliant white. The rain had stopped, and she could see the lights reflected in the areas of filthy water where it had pooled in the heavy grey clay, stretching off into the distance.

All the way back through the tunnels, she had thought of their original journey from the TARDIS, the slow misery of their damp struggle through the downpour, the cautious relief at finding the shelter of the tunnels in the mountainside, the way they had picked an uncertain route deeper and deeper. The same feeling of doubt picked at her confidence now. She knew they were going to get out, that they could leave behind the dead bodies, their scattered, bloody remains, their baffled, unseeing eyes, and go – where?

Sam stared blindly into the chaos of light and wind. All around the periphery of her vision she could see the dark shapes of police staff, patrolling the area, setting up equipment or lifting other, dark shapes. She wanted to slip away, drop out of sight, and make her way back to the TARDIS. She tried to think of the mundane pleasures of her calm, warm room, what clothes she would choose from the deep shelves in the tall oak wardrobe, what shoes she'd consider now that she had discarded her ruined Caterpillars, maybe rummaging through the boot cupboard while sipping at one of the Doctor's lukewarm cups of tea from a real china cup and saucer.

Strong, gentle hands eased her down from the tunnel exit. She didn't even know where to start looking for the TARDIS in this stinging, whistling wind. For a frightened moment, she stared wildly around for the Doctor. He was standing beside her, smiling wanly in the stark illumination, his long brown hair whirling about his head. He had his eyes half closed against the wind, and his head was flicking from side to side, searching. The Doctor had kept his hand on her shoulder all the way, removing it only briefly when the medic had put

thermal blankets around them. The edging of the thin metallic material chafed gently against her skin, the tails flapping wildly behind her while the material blew tight across her front, showing the crumpled contours of her shirt and trousers.

Two medics supervised her carefully over the hundred metres towards a squat white and red transport, square-ended and about twenty metres long. She guessed it was an air ambulance. The medics seemed to be shouting to each other, but their words were snatched away by the howling wind. They put their heads down, and pushed themselves forward.

They approached the rear of the transport, where a sliding door panel had been lifted up into the casing. The construction lights spilled from high up, and they didn't shine into the back of the transport. Sam started up the short ramp into the vehicle, leaning gratefully against its side and pausing to allow her eyes to adjust to the lower-intensity strip lamps inside – they seemed to be blue, maybe ultraviolet. She reached one arm outside her blanket, raising her hand up to smear over her eyelids and clear away the grit and moisture. Her eyes adjusted, and she felt sick again: strapped to the fittings in the room were four black mortuary bags.

She stumbled backward onto the ramp. Two policemen lifted another long black plastic shroud past her on a stretcher. She shied back.

One of the medics was shouting in her ear, now. 'Don't be so keen! You'll see them later.' She stared at him. He squinted back through his gingery beard at her, leaning in again to make himself heard. 'Go into the casualty bay,' he yelled, and pulled her gently by the arm back down the ramp and around the ambulance.

In the lee of the ambulance, she could see the Doctor scanning pensively. She thought at first he was looking for her, but when he acknowledged her with a quick, tight smile, she knew he had been looking for a way out too.

She followed his gaze. In the distance, police officers were bustling around the edges of the floodlights, almost invisible in their black jumpsuits. They were spiking poles into the hard earth and rock out there, setting up equipment and aligning it with what looked like

theodolites. After a moment, a thick red line flicked between two points, a broad slash of laser light forming a warning barrier which shimmered at the dark edge of the excavation site, just before the tree line further up the mountain. At the end of the red line, a second sprang up at an angle, and then a third at the end of that. The area was being cordoned off. Then she and the Doctor were ushered inside with two medics, and the door on the side of the ambulance slid down, clunking and hissing into place as the seals activated.

Sam's ears hummed in the unexpected silence of the room. The light here was strong and bright, but ambient, and the shadows were softer. It was suddenly, blissfully warm in here, too, like finally climbing onto a bus after waiting half an hour for it in the rain.

One of the medics was already in the room. She could see he was only a couple of years older than she was. He apologised that this was one of the older hospital transports, and so he needed to explain the layout. When he offered her a reassuring smile, Sam liked the way the skin round his eyes crinkled. He spoke softly, and sounded hoarse from shouting. 'Two staff up front in navigation. Me and one other here with warm bodies. Cold storage at the back – nobody in with our guests there, since they're not going anywhere, are they?'

Now he was talking to the Doctor. 'If you need anything before we get to the hospital, sir, just ask. ETA forty-five minutes. Bit rough until we get above the weather system, so you'll want to strap in.'

He showed them where they could find fresh clothes, and then went to join his colleague in the other medical bay, where the two casualties had been placed. He shut the partition door behind him, leaving the Doctor and Sam alone.

Sam looked around the bay. There were half a dozen collapsible beds, folded into the walls. Below, drawers marked with medical insignia lined the sides. There were four seats bolted to the wall and facing rearward, presumably where the medical crew could secure themselves during flights. She could make out three exits: one to the other part of the sickbay; another to the front with a transparent panel through which she could see the gloomy navigation deck; the last was the sliding bulkhead through which they had entered, now

sealed from the elements. 'We're trapped,' she said morosely.

'We're delayed,' corrected the Doctor. 'I think I know where the TARDIS lies from here, but we won't get far in this weather and in these wet clothes. So let's change out of them, before they have to make space for us in the cold-storage section.'

Sam thought about the shiny black mortuary bags, and felt herself shivering again under the thermal blanket.

The medic had hung two sets of medical clothes on the wall. The larger one was a dark-blue jumpsuit with reflective patches, the smaller one the same in green. There were two white, one-size T-shirts, possibly surgical smocks, with pairs of thick cotton socks and some knickers that looked like something her great aunt might wear. The Doctor passed her one set of clothes, and turned away politely while she struggled under her blanket to remove her shirt, jeans, and underwear.

She had awkwardly managed to pull up the voluminous bloomers, crinkling noisily beneath her cover, when she snagged a look across towards the Doctor. He had removed his shirt and waistcoat and stood, his back still turned to her, stripped to the waist. She could see him drying his hair vigorously on a small towel, and watched the muscles in his upper arm flexing, his shoulder blades moving. He started to turn to pick something up, and she looked away quickly, feeling her face flush.

'That thing with the pea soup,' she said, realising she was speaking just a bit too loudly. 'What is that?'

'What is what?' said the Doctor. It sounded as though he was pulling hard on his trouser legs.

Sam mimicked him, smacking her lips together as if she was tempting a cat with a morsel. 'It's embarrassing. I'd rather watch my Uncle Norman do his Christmas party piece.' She chanced another look up, and almost turned away again when she saw he was staring at her. He was wearing a surgical smock and a faintly hurt expression. The smock was a little too big for him, so that it hung in loose folds over his chest and reached halfway down his thighs.

She thought he said 'strapping', and gave him an odd look. Then he

pointed to the seats behind her. 'We're about to take off. Strap in.'

Now she too could hear the rising note in the engines beneath the floor. She dropped into one of the bucket seats, clipping the buckle in place over the sharp creases in her fresh green tunic just as the ambulance shuddered, and lurched slightly. Then she got that sensation in her guts which told her when a lift was going up. The equipment lockers rattled as their contents shifted around. The lights dimmed faintly, then faded slowly back up again.

There was a long silence, not companionable. When Sam glanced sideways at the Doctor, he seemed distant, distracted. His hands gripped the safety belt on his lap so that she could see his knuckles whitening slightly. 'Doctor,' she said warily. 'Are you afraid of flying?'

He seemed to come out of a reverie. 'Mmn? No no,' he said, picking at his white smock. His long bare legs stuck out into the room, and he was studying his toes as though it was the first time he'd seen them. 'I'm just not very keen on hospitals, that's all.'

She laughed to break the tension. 'Midwife dropped you on your head as a baby?' she said. 'That would explain a lot.'

'Not exactly,' said the Doctor. 'But I suppose you could call it a birth trauma.'

The rising sensation in her stomach had gone now, so she flicked at the harness catch and then went to peer into the navigation area. And give him time to put his blue jumpsuit on.

She was surprised when the door slid sideways with a buzzing sound. 'Come on in, Nurse,' said a breezy voice.

The room wasn't gloomy after all, she thought, just darker than the rear of the transport. A large shuttered viewscreen, maybe four metres across and two high, filled the front wall. The shutters were open now, offering a real-time view of their destination. She could see no stars, just the filtered glow of a full moon behind thinning cloud high above them. Below, even in this poor light, she could see part-completed facilities, huge swathes of black and grey earth stretching for kilometres all around as if some giant had ploughed his fields. She thought she could see buildings, but then she worked out they were excavators. If she hadn't known how high they must be flying,

she'd have thought they were only ten metres up. Her mind juggled to readjust the scale. Those diggers were the size of office buildings. Further across she saw a crane the size of a Saturn V rocket gantry.

'Hell of a mess, huh?' said the pilot. His pockmarked face was lit green and red by the instrumentation array in front of him, the lights winking in his wide yellow eyes. Or maybe his face was green and red – she wouldn't hazard a guess after seeing Zaterdag, The pilot was wearing what must have been a nonstandard, close-fitting cap over his stubble-short hair. It had a motif stencilled on to it: KURSAAL FLYERS. Maybe some sort of club for ugly ambulance drivers, she thought.

'I remember this whole area before the construction crews moved in,' the pilot was saying. 'You look at it now, you see it all flat. But before the terraforming, this was valleys and streams and fields and trees.'

The co-pilot smirked, and picked at his teeth with his little finger; then sucked on the results. 'You wanna show us your HALF membership card now, or what, mate?'

'Fun-nee,' drawled the pilot. 'I pick 'em up and patch 'em, buddy. I don't blow them to pieces. Jeez.'

The exchange intrigued Sam. 'What's "half"?''

The co-pilot was biting his nails now. 'You must be new round here, kid.'

'I could show her around,' said the pilot with heavy emphasis.

'HALF are terrorists. "Helping All Life Forms". Except, of course, for the people they kill in their bomb attacks.' The co-pilot gave an exasperated breath. 'I think they'd surrender if they blew up an animal by mistake.'

Sam took the spare seat between the two men. 'What do they want?'

'They want to "protect biodiversity". That's their snappy soundbite. It sounds real convincing, until you mop up after them. Me and my mate here were at the last one this week. Where they blew up the media crew. There wasn't enough left of them to scrape into a bowl.'

'Look around, bud,' said the pilot, in an expansive gesture at the viewscreen, which encompassed everything below them. 'Can you see Gray Corp stopping this now? This place will be open in three

years. Five years, tops. It's progress. It's jobs.'

Sam glared at him silently in the dark. 'It's awful,' she said. 'Don't the people who live here object to the way they're trespassing on the planet?'

'Girl, Saturnia Regna was an uninhabited planet. It belongs to a multiplanetary corporation, and they can do what they want with it. Those HALF offworlders are the trespassers.' He looked at her sidelong, appraising her. 'No one lived here when it was bought.'

'No people, you mean,' Sam said. 'What about indigenous flora and fauna?'

'I don't remember reading a petition from the flora and fauna.' The pilot pointed out of the viewscreen again. 'Everything you see belongs to Gray Corp. So we'd better be careful with our passenger, because he's the Chair and Chief Executive Officer. Maybe there'll be a bonus in this trip for us, eh, bud?' This obviously prompted another thought, and he scratched an itch under his hat. 'Been up in one of these before, girl?'

'This is my first time.'

She could see his reflection in the viewscreen, secretly leering. 'I'll be gentle with you,' he said, placing a hand on her arm.

'Watch out,' said the co-pilot in a spooky voice. 'The guy's an animal.'

'I'm sure he's as smart as he is handsome,' said Sam calmly.

'Oo-ee, she got you there,' guffawed the co-pilot, the sound bouncing around the navigation room.

'Whatever slashed our passengers, buddy. Now *that's* an animal.'

'I think that may be a little early to say, wouldn't you?' The Doctor's voice came from behind them. Sam turned to see his silhouette in the doorway; he was standing with his hands folded under his armpits, which made his shoulders look broader in the medical jumpsuit. She craned back to look at him properly, managing in the same movement to disengage herself from the pilot's clammy hand.

'Well, you're the expert,' drawled the co-pilot, who didn't sound at all like he believed what he was saying. 'Looked like it coulda been an animal attack to me.'

‘Or maybe HALF faked it to look that way, bud,’ said his colleague. ‘I can’t understand how we got the call so long ago, yet the stiff’s weren’t stiff. When we bagged ’em, they were like jello. They were folding like paper even when we dropped ’em in the chiller.’

The Doctor stepped into the navigation room. ‘Yes,’ he frowned, stroking his top lip as though worried he might suddenly have grown a moustache. ‘Yes, there’s something not quite right there. I’m sure the post-mortem will reveal something.’

Sam almost leapt up from her flight seat. She did her best to stare him in the eye. ‘Are you serious, Doctor?’ He was gazing in an unfocused way at the darkness outside the ambulance; he was definitely starting to get that interested look in his eyes again. ‘Doctor,’ she persisted, ‘don’t we have an urgent appointment somewhere else? Aren’t we off duty? Isn’t it time to put our police equipment back in its police box?’

‘Yes yes yes yes,’ he said, meaning no. ‘When are we due to arrive?’ The pilot pointed to the flight plan on the console, and the Doctor slipped into the spare seat to look. ‘Well, then perhaps we’ll know whether it was an animal or not.’

The pilot held his hand out, palm facing his colleague. ‘My money’s on HALF. Usual stakes, bud. I say they faked it.’

The co-pilot reached up and slapped the palm. ‘You loser. I’ll take you.’

‘Probably that bloodthirsty monster Bernard Cockaigne himself. He may be the head honcho at HALF, but he loves to get involved. They say he’s murdered dozens with his bare hands.’

‘B-E-A-R hands, more like, mate. He’s huge, like a gorilla. Didn’t you see that image of him on *Crime Report*?’

‘Ugly sonova, that’s for sure, buddy.’

‘An expert speaks.’

‘Now Martina Lennox,’ said the pilot, licking his lips extravagantly. ‘Ooh, buddy. . .’

‘There wasn’t much left of her to scrape up after the bomb,’ said his colleague. ‘I’ll tell ya, that was not how I dreamed of getting my hands on her. I literally could not get enough of her.’

Sam didn't want to hear about this, so she slipped back into the sickbay, gravitating to the viewport in its exit door. The thin cloud cover had gone now, and strange stars glimmered in an unfamiliar sky. Far below, the giant's playpen had different toys in it now. She tried to imagine the landscape in sunlight, undulating and green, a meandering river vanishing around a hill covered in fields of shocking-yellow rapeseed, like the countryside near her gran's before Baskerville Builders had built on the green belt. Peering out into the dark now, she tried to imagine transport, accommodation, residential, infrastructure, entertainment, and the usual paraphernalia of a theme park, but the scale defeated her again. This wasn't a housing estate building site, and she wasn't flying in the Baskerville helicopter.

'Are you OK, Sam?' The Doctor had appeared silently behind her. She could see his face reflected, folded in concern.

'They treat death so casually, here,' she said. 'The animals, the environment, even the people.'

The Doctor studied his socks. 'Don't judge those two so harshly, Sam. It's just the way that they deal with death on a regular basis.'

She turned around, leaning against the viewport and feeling its cool surface on her neck and through the bristling hair on the back of her head. When the Doctor looked up again, she peered for a long moment into his sad blue eyes. 'How do you deal with death on a regular basis?' she said.

A short breath through his nose. 'I don't expect it in the way that they do in their line of work. They deal with the aftereffects. I want to make sure there are none.'

Sam thought of the Tractite she had killed in self-defence. How she had felt. How she still had not been able to tell the Doctor. 'But I've seen death now,' she said cautiously. 'I shouldn't be so afraid of it. It shouldn't haunt me like this, should it? There shouldn't be ghosts. I don't want there to be ghosts.' She swallowed down the lump in her throat before it choked her off.

'Don't be so hard,' he persisted softly. 'Don't think it's brave or clever or necessary to take death in your stride. Because you have something that I wish I had: you have youth, you have so few preconceptions,

you have the inexpressible joy of discovering things for the very, very first time. Don't let yourself become hard. I know you want to be grown up, but don't forget to enjoy being the child as well.' She realised that he'd grasped her by her arms now, and she let herself lean against him. 'You stumbled across death today when you didn't expect it. You're not a real nurse, or a soldier, or an ambulance medic, or –'

'Or a Doctor?'

He leaned back at an exaggerated angle to look at her, smiling his pleased-to-be-here smile. 'Or a Doctor,' he said. 'We'll do as little as we have to at the hospital, and then find a way back to the TARDIS.' He stepped around her, and peered through the viewport for himself.

Over his shoulder, she watched his smile fade in the reflection. She'd heard him say that he was old, perhaps a thousand years older than her. She could rarely imagine that this handsome young man was so impossibly aged, so distant from her experience. But seeing his worried face staring out into the dark sky, she could believe he was every year of it. She peered around him, and could see the red laser lights disappearing rapidly into the far distance, the tops of tall firs rushing past below as they accelerated away.

'We've passed well beyond the security cordon now,' said the Doctor, his voice sombre again. 'The TARDIS is on the other side of it.'

5

'Something here doesn't smell right'

Sam listened to the bass note of the air-conditioning system, and shivered again. Could it be even colder in here than it had been in the tunnels? As she exhaled, her breath hovered in front of her in a small cloud. She decided she didn't even want to think about rain.

When she and the Doctor had first been shown into the room by the nurse, Sam was about to joke that they could expect a chilly reception in the morgue. But the sight of the four cadavers laid out on stark white plastic tables made her reconsider.

As soon as the shuttle had arrived at the hospital, Sam and the Doctor had been steered into the main concourse while the body bags had been manoeuvred into a separate reception area. Rather than argue as they parted, she'd accepted the pilot's home address, which he'd scrawled on the back of a grubby prescription card. 'Call me Randy,' he'd said, showing her a row of yellow teeth in a crooked grin. Call me when you've been to the dentist, you tosser, she thought.

They had been escorted into the building by two police officers, and handed over to the hospital staff, who, with humourless efficiency, had then marched them down grubby green corridors and several flights of stairs into an untidy lounge area. Here they were asked to wait until the bodies were prepared for them in pathology. They sat for thirty minutes, scrutinised at all times by a grim staff nurse, feeling that they had to talk in whispers, until their unsmiling staff guides collected them and whisked them off on another long trek. As they had travelled, Sam had experimented with looking for opportunities to break away so that they could try to find their way back to the shuttle, back to the TARDIS and away. But their hospital chaperons steered them like trained dogs towards the morgue, and the prospect

of outpacing them seemed unlikely. Besides, she reflected morosely, she hated running up and down corridors.

And now she tried to look anywhere other than at the bloodied bodies in the centre of the cold, antiseptic room. The torn flesh she had seen in the caves was too real here, too present, too visible in the artificial light. If she stared up past the dazzling spotlights above her, she could also make out an open window high on the wall, and through that the large, round circle of moon just visible against the black night sky. It must be the middle of the night, she thought.

She moved around the room, her back to the dead bodies. To the left, racks of doors hid coffin-sized holes for other corpses. Opposite was a range of display screens, cameras and microphones. One dusty computer keyboard was covered in flexible plastic – from the staining, it was obvious that its purpose was to keep out fluids. Beside that, a tray of bright metal surgical instruments on the counter reflected the stark brilliance of the overhead strip of lights. Trying not to think about how hungry she was, Sam turned away to her right and saw hospital signs indicating other pathology labs: DNA ANALYSIS, FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES, MATERIALS ANALYSIS, BIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.

The Doctor had breezed into the room ahead of her, rubbing his hands. Sam had unsentimentally consigned her clothes to the rubbish, but the Doctor had retained his bedraggled green velvet jacket, which he draped untidily over a fifth, empty table and rolled up the sleeves of his blue suit. Now he was fingering the surgical instruments with a professional air.

Sam fastened the collar of her green jumpsuit, and hugged herself. And then, aware that this made her look defensive, she awkwardly stuffed her hands into the baggy pockets instead and tried thinking of other things. ‘They got here faster than we did,’ she said at last, nodding towards the bodies. ‘Not bad considering the state they’re in.’

The Doctor was examining a small scanner device hanging on the far wall, and made an ‘mm’ sound of pretend interest. When he picked up the device, it left a lighter scanner-shaped mark on the wall, and

Sam realised that, like so much of the rest of the hospital, the morgue was slightly shabby, only nearly clean. ‘This place is revolting,’ she said, and then almost leapt at a clattering sound behind her.

The Doctor dropped another instrument into a metal surgical dish. ‘Yes, it looks rather makeshift, doesn’t it? As we came in, you could see from the air that this whole hospital block was designed as a temporary facility.’ Another nerve-jangling clatter of instruments. ‘I’m sure we can manage without an invasive procedure.’

Sam turned to face him. ‘What’s with “we”? I warn you, I failed Year 7 Biology.’

The Doctor was giving her that half-grin of his, the one he saved for those times when he needed her to do something she knew she’d hate. ‘You don’t have to, Sam. But you could think of it as on-the-job training,’ he said. ‘Hold this scanner for me. Other way up.’

Sam moved reluctantly towards the centre of the room. The Doctor was wheeling one of the mortuary tables under the main light. With the clothes cut away, the body lay pale and fragile in the harsh light, gashes and weals visible in the vulnerable flesh. Three long claw marks striped the dead man’s torso from neck to stomach, and one savage blow seemed to have torn away half his face, the shreds hanging down, bloodless, on the white table. Having earlier decided she wouldn’t look at the corpses, Sam found now she could not look away. She was still staring when the Doctor flicked the long fingers of one hand at her irritably and, after a beat, she passed him the scanner. He slid the activation switch, and ran the device steadily above the corpse’s torn flesh, starting at the feet. A dirty medical tag on one toe identified the remains as ‘Olivier, Carl (m)’.

‘I was relieved that you knew all that medical jargon when they found us in the tunnels,’ she said. ‘I thought I’d better stay shtum. I didn’t think I’d get too far with my first-aid training.’ She watched him dextrously manipulating the scanner, and wondered if he knew what he was doing, or was still improvising. ‘What are you a doctor of, anyway?’

‘Oh, lots of useful things.’ He clicked off the device, and a display screen buzzed into life behind them. ‘I have an eclectic range of inter-

ests.’

‘I bet they don’t include GCSE Home Economics. Or Latin.’

‘What’s wrong with Latin?’

‘It’s a dead language,’ she said, looking sidelong at Olivier. ‘For dead people.’

The Doctor handed her the scanner, and went over to the display screen. ‘We can learn a lot from dead races.’

Sam laughed a cloud of foggy air. ‘You sound like my dad. He’s got an answer for everything too. And he can translate it into Latin, of course. What a guy.’ She could see that the Doctor was affecting his hurt look. ‘I suppose time travelling must make “dead races” a relative thing, anyway,’ she added.

The Doctor smiled without looking up. ‘Did you know that “alien” comes from Latin? *Alius* means “other”,’ he said. ‘So, if we bump into any, you’ll be equipped to greet them.’ He paused thoughtfully, studying the scan results on the display, sorting through the data by touching the screen and manipulating images and figures.

‘That would please my dad,’ said Sam. ‘He told me Latin was useful for doctors. He even asked my head teacher why she didn’t teach it at my school. I could have died.’

‘Mm,’ said the Doctor, who had moved back to study the next body.

‘I used to think I was her blue-eyed girl, head-prefect material. Well, I suppose she was right about the blue-eyes bit.’ She fluttered them prettily at the Doctor as he looked up. ‘Can we go soon?’

The Doctor had pulled on a pair of examination gloves, and was studying the fingers of the second corpse. Around the wrist, she saw that the gold-and-silver wristwatch had not been removed. The toe tag confirmed this as Osram’s body. ‘There’s something quite wrong here. Look.’ The Doctor wiggled the corpse’s fingers.

Sam made a gagging sound.

‘There’s still no rigor mortis,’ the Doctor said. ‘How odd.’

‘Rigor mortis – the rigidity of death,’ said Sam. ‘One of the few bits of Latin I do remember.’

The Doctor gave her one of his ‘well done’ grins. ‘And rigor mortis is caused by...?’

‘Being dead?’ she ventured.

The Doctor scowled. ‘No no no no. The stiffness of the joints is caused by depletion of ATP in the tissues.’ She was looking blankly back at him. ‘Adenosine triphosphate. It’s a nucleotide found in the mitochondria of all plant and animal cells. It’s the major source of energy for cellular reactions, released during its conversion to adenosine diphosphate. And that happens during the performance of muscular work.’

‘Should I be taking notes?’

‘Perhaps you should have taken more interest in GCSE Biology.’

‘Only during sex education,’ said Sam, ‘and that was just to watch James Watford’s ears go pink with embarrassment. That seems like a lifetime ago now.’ Standing still was making her cold again, so she flapped her arms about. Then she picked up the Doctor’s velvet jacket, and pulled it on. It was crumpled, but unexpectedly dry. It was also surprisingly light and pleasantly warm. Her fingers peeked out of the sleeve. ‘Doctor, I thought you said in the ambulance that we were going to do the minimum possible, and then find a way back to the TARDIS before we got rumbled.’

‘But this is baffling. I need to know more,’ wheedled the Doctor.

Sam rolled her eyes theatrically. There were the familiar signs that the Doctor was becoming engrossed in an intellectual challenge. ‘Doctor, they’re going to turn up here and find that we’re not the pathology team. That we don’t even have medical qualifications. Unless you’ve got your GCSE Biology certificate hidden in this jacket.’ She patted the pockets, which rattled mysteriously.

‘Actually, I did take a medical degree,’ replied the Doctor smugly. ‘Even if it was several lifetimes ago.’ The results of the second scan were now flickering into view on the display screen. ‘This one’s the same – the ATP has built up to abnormally high levels.’ Frowning, he went back to the body. ‘And look at the fingernails – they’re distorted, they seem longer and the fingers are gnarled.’

‘Needs a shave, too,’ said Sam.

‘Hair and nails do continue to grow for a short period after death.’

Sam pointed. ‘Yeah, but this is a woman.’

They both looked at Sharstone's corpse, and then moved across to the third body, Leet's. The lips were peeled right back in what seemed to be a rictus grin. But when the Doctor pressed gently against the lips, he could move them back down over the large canine incisors. Leet's face was covered with downy black hair, even the forehead.

The Doctor ran the scanner over Leet's body. Sam studied the corpse's fingers – they seemed elongated, the thick nails twisted into a claw grip. 'I wonder how he ever got his shoes on,' she said. They both studied Leet's hairy feet, which also had long, thick, pointed nails.

The plastic identification tag seemed to be biting into the flesh of one toe. Sam peered to look closer, and startled suddenly at a hissing sound. The mortuary doors behind her had opened, and two people were striding in unannounced. Sam bit her tongue in annoyance at her instinctive reaction.

It was the woman archaeologist from the dig site, Saraband, still in her muddied overalls. She looked exasperated, and her eyes flicked impatiently around the room as though she was hunting for another route out. Behind her, uncomfortably close, was a policeman, a sharp-faced corporal whom Sam recognised from the cavern.

Sam watched Saraband, seeing her expression crumple as she realised where she was. 'Oh no,' she said softly. 'Not now.'

'We need you to identify the bodies, Professor Saraband,' said the corporal. 'Captain Kadijk's orders. Then we can take you back to your room, and the medics will see to your arm.'

Professor Saraband was shaking her head slowly. 'Not now,' she said again. The policeman was ushering her gently but firmly into the room. As the pair stepped closer to the examination lights, Sam could see that Saraband's left cheek and temple were scraped with mud where she must have fallen at the dig. Her right arm was in the plastic cast which she'd seen being fitted at the dig site, presumably a temporary medical sling. Under her other arm she had a small satchel on a shoulder strap, clutching it to her side as though it was her life-support.

The Doctor intercepted her before she reached the first gurney, taking her gently by her arm and steering her away from the corporal.

‘That will be all, Officer. . . Huan Qua, thank you,’ he said.

Huan Qua glanced down at his own ID badge as though it had only just appeared. ‘Captain Kadijk asked me to stay with Professor Saraband.’

‘She can hardly come to harm here, Corporal,’ said the Doctor, turning his and Saraband’s back on the policeman. ‘These poor people are beyond that, and Professor Saraband would obviously like some private time.’ Sam watched him turn his head and flick that cool blue gaze of his at Huan Qua. ‘But perhaps you could wait outside, just in case we need you.’ Sam could see the corporal hesitating. ‘Nurse Jones will accompany the professor at all times, of course. Hospital policy – you know how it is.’

Huan Qua turned on his heel and stalked out, the doors hissing shut behind him.

Sam was about to thank the Doctor for his thoughtfulness, but cut off her comment. He was guiding Saraband to the first gurney, on which the mutilated remains of Olivier lay like a specimen. ‘We don’t have a lot of time, Professor Saraband,’ said the Doctor. ‘We must talk about how this happened.’ He released her arm, but stood close by, studying her reaction.

The archaeologist straightened a little, adjusting the bag strap on her shoulder. ‘Must we?’ she said, testing her voice in the cold air. From behind her, Sam couldn’t judge her reaction, apart from her swift, shallow breathing. She must have been looking at Olivier’s slashed body in front of her under the brutally revealing examination lights. When she spoke again, her voice was tenser, angry.

‘I shouldn’t say it, but I can’t help feeling it. It’s almost a shame that they died and Gray survived.’ She paused, as though embarrassed by this admission. ‘They were the most alive. . . the most alive people I’ve ever known.’ She moved around the gurney, and Sam could see she did not take her eyes off the body for a moment. ‘Olivier here. . . we kinda argued all the time. He enjoyed it, it was part of the game. Just this morning something flared up – he’d found our food contained meat substitute, and said that we were insulting him as a vegetarian. I got more and more exasperated until, after ten minutes, I caught on.

He was just winding me up again. I could see it in his eyes, and the way he would lean his head to one side and study my reaction.'

She didn't seem to be focusing on the body, as though she was replacing the dead man in front of her with the live one in her memory. 'Gray never felt like a part of the team, but he never wanted to be. He's a cold fish,' she went on calmly. 'Everything had a price for him. He has an accountant's mind, and cold accountant's eyes. They match his suit – calculator grey.'

'I need your help, Professor,' said the Doctor, studying her reaction.

Saraband closed her eyes, and smiled oddly. 'I can still hear Leet and Osram arguing. It was the same on every expedition. It didn't seem to matter what about, they just enjoyed the wordplay, the one-upmanship. They could continue, off and on, for days on end, repeating the same points until it seemed they'd lost the thread of their argument. We just used to laugh. Gray never seemed to understand the joke.'

'Professor,' the Doctor interrupted gently. 'How did these four people die?'

Saraband's eyes snapped open. 'Four?' She looked around the room, baffled. She stepped quickly around the gurneys, checking each briefly. She ended up at an empty examination table, shoved at an angle against the far wall. Sam and the Doctor went over to join her. The table's white surface was stained with recent blood, and along the sides were ragged scratches as though something heavy had been dragged across the surface. Saraband stared at the Doctor with a hostile look of suspicion. 'They told me there were five brought in. Where's Sharstone?'

The Doctor sprang round the gurney, leaning towards her. 'I think something terrible is happening here, something more nightmarish than I first thought. These bodies have been dead for – how long? Yet they are not decomposing, there is no rigor mortis, there are signs of significant recent molecular alterations.' He seized her forearms. 'Please, let me examine your fingers.' Now he took her hands in his, turning them over, studying the nails. Sam watched his reaction, fearful of what she might see. But after a moment of bewildered compli-

ance, Saraband snatched her hands away from him irritably.

‘This place is a nightmare,’ she said, gesturing with a toss of her head. ‘You people have already lost one of the bodies. You’ve dragged me in here and forced me to relive the horror of that cave system.’ She waved her broken arm in its plastic cast at him. ‘And the primitive medical facilities in this cut-price clinic mean that this simple fracture won’t heal for at least two days.’

‘We can get a doctor to examine –’

‘You’re supposed to be a doctor. I refuse to spend a moment longer here, and you can’t detain me.’

She turned abruptly to go, and the strap on her satchel caught on the corner of the nearest gurney, which rolled slightly. Saraband must have glimpsed the movement, and with a little cry dropped the bag. It landed on its corner, and the contents spilled over the grey-white floor – plastic cards, a sheaf of notes, several small vials and cylinders.

Sam stooped to help her, but the Doctor pulled her back by the arm.

‘She’s right,’ he said in a low, urgent voice. ‘Of course we can’t detain her. But she knows more than she’s saying. Stay with her, Sam. I’ll try to find the other survivor, Gray. Stay with her – she’s the key to this, I sense it.’

‘I think,’ muttered Sam, ‘that you just have a thing about pretty women.’ She saw that Saraband had scooped the contents of her bag up again, and was rising. ‘Professor, let me show you to, er, reception,’ she called.

‘No need,’ snapped Saraband, her hand already on the door handle.

Sam put her hand over Saraband’s. ‘Corporal Huan Qua is waiting for you outside. But you can lose him if you come with me. The Doctor looks like he needs a hand.’

Saraband held her look for a few seconds, and Sam saw something change in her eyes. ‘After you, Nurse Jones,’ she said, pressing the handle.

Huan Qua was hovering in the corridor like an unspent storm cloud. ‘Ah, Corporal,’ yelled the Doctor from the other side of the mortuary. ‘Professor Saraband needs to use the toilet, and Nurse Jones will of course accompany her. Meanwhile, I’d appreciate a strong pair of

hands over here to move this scanning equipment, please.'

Sam threaded her way through the hospital corridors, trying to exude an authority she did not feel. She had assumed that the coloured lines on the floor were indicators to different areas of the building, and that they would all eventually come together in a rainbow of parallel stripes at the main entrance. She was completely thrown when they all ended suddenly at the foot of a wall, and she realised with a sinking feeling that they were just decorative.

She scanned the walls for a sign, sneaking a look at Saraband and expecting an explosion. But the professor was smiling. 'Are you very new here, Nurse?' There was a curious emphasis on the last word.

Sam thought their trip would never end. Saraband seemed happy to meander through the hospital behind her, and showed no indication of looking for a quick escape route from her escort. Sam wanted to look more confident than she was, but her constant glances back to check on the professor's progress weren't helping. She had missed two junctions already, and had to double back. So she tried to strike up a conversation with Saraband, asking her about the development of Kursaal.

Saraband explained in general terms about Phase One of the development, sounding reluctant to express an opinion. Sam thought about the housing development near her gran, and asked a question about government approvals for Kursaal. Unfortunately, this made Saraband stop walking for a few seconds. 'What government?' she asked eventually.

'Are you telling me,' asked Sam cagily, 'that the Gray Corporation doesn't need any approvals for the way they're levelling this planet?'

Saraband set her mouth in a straight line. Sam didn't know if this was annoyance with her or with the situation. 'Gray Corp, and other consortia like it, own half the planets in the Cronus system,' she said. 'In that respect, whether you approve or not, Gray is the government. The law.'

'L'etat, c'est lui,' said Sam. 'French. Ten out of ten.'

'What's French?' said Saraband. 'Never mind. Gray Corp is a

system-wide development conglomerate, so the notion of regional governments doesn't apply. In the unlikely event there are areas where governmental restrictions do apply, they just take their business, employment, and profits elsewhere. Who wants that?

'Blackmail,' said Sam. 'Oops, wrong turning.'

Saraband pointed to a sign behind them. 'Allow me,' she said wryly. 'This way.' Sam followed her, abashed.

'So because Saturnia Regna has no one living here, Gray Corp can do what they want and bury it beneath the Kursaal development?'

'Oh, there were people here,' said Saraband. 'Most were bought out for generous sums – generous by subsistence-farming standards, anyway. The ones who wouldn't move found that, by an unfortunate coincidence, the building work just had to start next to their land. They got the hint, they got the money, they got the hell out.'

Sam was horrified, and said so. By this stage, they were walking side by side into hospital reception.

'Do we have to check out?' asked Saraband.

Sam stared at the receptionist, whom they were fast approaching. 'I don't know. Er, I mean, no need, Professor.' Yeah, very cool, Samantha.

"'Professor' sounds so formal. I'd rather we weren't formal just at the moment.' Saraband was at the reception desk now. 'Call me Amy.'

'I'm sorry, ma'am?' said the receptionist.

'Not you,' said Saraband, slapping her palm on the reception desk, brisk and businesslike again. 'You can call me a cab.'

While they waited for their transport to arrive, Sam and Amy sat in the reception area, a soulless open area just off the main concourse. Outside, it was still dark, but Sam knew she couldn't sleep even if she wanted to. Before her journeys with the Doctor began, she had barely travelled to a different time zone. Now she knew why people complained about jet lag.

She passed the time by telling Amy about her Geography project on Greenpeace, and how her father teased her that she couldn't set up a group called 'Coal Hill Friends of the Earth' because coal was an

exhaustible natural resource. She wasn't sure how much Woodland Caribou or Beluga Whales would mean to Amy, but she listened well – Sam saw in her eyes that it wasn't just social chat.

Chained to the desk in front of them was a projection cube. Amy twisted it round and listened to the end of a *Crime Report* programme trailing a future item about financial irregularities in a building consortium. 'Key personnel were unavailable to bring you this report today as advertised,' said the presenter. 'We plan to transmit this programme tomorrow. . .' Sam went up to the reception desk to see what had happened to their cab.

A tall, imperious man with an extravagant hat had swept in through the main doors, and was talking to the receptionist as though she was an idiot. 'No no,' he demanded in a plummy, affected voice, 'my name is Webber. I came straight in from the PortBlock and I have not been able to retrieve my identification. Please will you just put in a call to Captain Kadijk. He's expecting me in the pathology lab.'

A tone sounded on the receptionist's desk, and she took this opportunity to studiously ignore Webber. 'Your transport, Professor Sara-band,' she called across to Amy.

Amy picked up her satchel and stepped towards the exit, stopping on the threshold when she saw that Sam was not following.

Sam looked at Amy, and then back at Webber, who looked set to perform an autopsy on the receptionist.

'Sam, I'm going now.' Amy had joined her by the desk and was listening to Webber explaining that he was expected at the path lab immediately on arrival. 'Sam, I don't think you want to stay, do you?' Then she was off again.

Sam dithered. How could she warn the Doctor if she couldn't find her way back to the pathology lab? And Amy was about to leave for – wherever. Stay with her, Sam. She's the key to this. Stay with her.

'I'll put in that call now, Webber,' said the receptionist. 'I'm sure Captain Kadijk will be right here.'

Sam jogged over to catch up with Amy outside the main hospital doors, and pointed. 'I believe that's our cab.'

* * *

Gray had not come round since the attack. He lay unmoving on the white hospital pillow, the outline of his thin body visible under the blanket. Kadijk watched the scrawny chest rise and fall rhythmically. An indicator on the body scan a metre above the bed blinked in sympathy.

Kadijk had no sympathy for Gray. He had ignored all his warnings about the danger of a HALF attack. Gray, supercilious to the last, had dismissed them all, presumably seeing only the propaganda value of the expedition with his new expert, Saraband. What he was seeing now, Kadijk could not guess. Perhaps he could see the HALF people slashing at the other expedition members. Perhaps he had seen Cockaigne himself.

The Doctor sat hunched over a screen on the far side of Gray's private room. He had come in twenty minutes before, accompanied by Huan Qua, oblivious of Kadijk's erratic dream about making a pass at Martina Lennox and getting chased off by her dachshund as it tried to jump up and bite him in the butt. The Doctor had explained that he needed to check Gray's medical details. Now Kadijk listened to the noises of the machinery around the room, and the gurgling sound in his guts. He considered asking Huan Qua to fetch some food, but then the Doctor provided a high-level summary of the autopsy, which left Kadijk none the wiser but with much less appetite.

'Mr Gray only seems to have sustained superficial wounds in the attack,' said the Doctor from the corner of the room. He was tapping a touchscreen with his finger so rapidly he could have been trying to pin a fly chasing across it. Now that the man was in medical clothing instead of the drenched carnival outfit at the scene of crime, Kadijk could see that he had the air of a professional. The fact that he didn't smell of clay and stale water made a difference, too. 'Actually, it seems Professor Saraband was more badly injured physically. I wonder what Mr Gray experienced to put him into this coma.'

'Something he ate,' said Kadijk sourly, rubbing his gut.

'Whatever it was, his life signs are down, and dropping.'

Down the drain hole with my career, thought Kadijk. 'Maybe HALF have finally done for both of us,' he muttered morosely. 'Lazy

scroungers, all outsiders from the system worlds with nothing better to do than prevent the creation of millions of new jobs.'

The Doctor kept talking without looking up from the touchscreen. 'I thought when I came in I heard you say you'd had a run of successes against them. Or was that your propaganda?'

Kadijk snorted in derision. 'Not enough success, Doctor. And not fast enough for Gray's investors, which is probably why he brought in this sexologist.'

'Xenobiologist,' said the Doctor.

'I know what I mean,' said Kadijk in a bitter voice.

'Though from the results of these whole-body scans,' continued the Doctor, 'what we need an enzymologist.'

Kadijk persisted: 'The pretty professor got results fast enough.'

'You shouldn't be so impatient,' said the Doctor. He was studying the screen so closely that he could probably touch it with his long thin nose. 'Oh come on, how long does this system take to complete a simple enzyme cross-match?' He rapped the frame of the touchscreen with his knuckles. 'Maybe you need to be more tolerant, Captain?'

'I'm not known for my tolerance, as my ex-wife will testify,' grumbled Kadijk morosely. 'In fact, as my ex-wife *did* testify. I'm not a patient man. You'd know that if you ever saw me interviewed by the InterPlanetary Media team. Not that I get asked anything by them any more.'

'Ah yes,' said the Doctor, 'the unfortunate victims of the last bombing.'

Kadijk surprised himself by laughing at this. Perhaps he was getting overtired. 'The irony of that is, you know, that they'd have reported "live" on their own deaths, except that the satellite system' was disrupted. HALF had bombed the comms network earlier that same day.'

This seemed to interest the Doctor. It was certainly the first thing that had drawn his attention from the touchscreen. He was leaning back in his chair, staring across Gray's bed at Kadijk. 'Now that doesn't make much sense, does it?'

Kadijk grunted, a noncommittal sound.

The Doctor swivelled his chair so that he faced Kadijk. ‘Imagine I run a terrorist group,’ he said. ‘I’m certainly not going to just hide underground in the middle of where you plan to build, chained to heavy objects. On a planet this size, you’ll just build somewhere else.’

‘Or bring in the excavators,’ rumbled Kadijk. ‘Dig the lot out. Eliminate or capture everyone at once.’

‘Yes, I believe you would,’ said the Doctor. ‘And I’m not going to stop Kursaal by wrecking a couple of earth movers here or an office block there, am I? Not even with the megaton bombs that you’re using for excavation purposes here on Saturnia Regna.’

‘But that’s what HALF have been doing.’

‘Those sorts of interruptions are just organisational and financial pinpricks for a transplanetary conglomerate like Gray Corp.’ The Doctor leaned forward conspiratorially. ‘So, if I’m smart, I’m going to wreck business confidence in Gray Corp. Show up the inefficiency of the security forces, the inaccuracy of the project management, and the ineptitude of the publicity. Suggest to everyone that Kursaal is out of control by exaggerating the few incidents and attacks that Gray Corp cannot deny. Upset the investors, hit the share price, and sink the project.’ He dusted his hands together.

Kadijk frowned back at him. ‘So?’

‘So why,’ stressed the Doctor, ‘would I destroy the communications network and the news team which broadcasts that message to the whole of the Cronus system?’ Something flashed up on his touchscreen, and he turned back to it. ‘Ah, the results of my enzyme analysis, I hope. Hmm. Something here doesn’t smell right.’

Kadijk thought about the animal stink back in the tunnels. Then he jumped involuntarily as his personal communicator went off in his pocket. He fumbled around in his crumpled jacket until he found it and snapped it on. ‘Yeah, Kadijk. What is it?’

The receptionist’s voice floated out into the room. ‘There’s a Dr Webber here in reception for you, Captain. He says you require him for an autopsy.’

‘Yeah, I feel like death. Send him straight down.’ The receptionist’s voice was frosty. ‘The gentleman has no identification, sir. You’ll need

to accompany him yourself.’

‘I’ll be right down.’ Kadijk groaned, and rolled his eyes. He flipped his communicator shut, and stood up. ‘Well, Doctor, looks like your boss is here at last.’

Kadijk stalked around the corridor towards reception, clutching his communicator in his hand. He may as well listen to any messages that had come in while he was asleep. He muttered the command sequence, and placed the speaker against his ear. He had two messages.

The first was from James Jensen. ‘You owe me bucketloads already, Paulie boy. Now all you want is a list of all current medical personnel, huh?’ Jensen went on to explain the format of the information, its accuracy, when it should arrive, and where Kadijk could stick it. Oh, and he didn’t understand what Kadijk meant about a Kursaal intern programme, since there wasn’t one.

The second message was from Mallaby, telling him that two of the five bodies had been stolen from the morgue.

He stopped so suddenly in the corridor that a porter had to swerve to avoid him, cursing. Kadijk snarled back at him, and rasped a few commands into his communicator. Mallaby’s face appeared in the little viewscreen. Before she could speak, however, the image broke up into static. Then a message: NO CONNECTION.

‘Jeez,’ said Kadijk, and ran to reception. Webber was standing there in the lounge area, tapping his foot – *tapping his foot!* – and looking seriously pissed off.

‘Look here, Captain Kadijk, it really is too much –’

Webber had twenty centimetres on Kadijk, but the captain silenced him with a heavy stare. He hurried over to the receptionist, and pointed to the datacube hissing white noise from the table on the waiting area. ‘What’s wrong?’

The receptionist looked up from her cheap novel with faint disinterest. ‘Satellite’s down again, sir.’

Kadijk could tell that Webber was standing behind him before he even spoke. It was the smell of disinfectant that seemed to permeate the man, incongruous for such a flamboyantly dressed figure. It was

the same with all the pathologists he'd ever worked with: none of them seemed able to completely escape the smell.

Webber was warbling on about being kept waiting, but Kadijk barely heard. 'Something here doesn't smell right,' he said. 'The Doctor doesn't smell right.' His communicator blinked at him: NO CONNECTION. So he snatched an internal phone from its cradle on the receptionist's desk, ignored her outraged squawk, and punched in the number for Gray's room. 'Come on, Doctor, answer, damn it. Answer!' There was no reply.

'Our internal phone system is satellite-routed to the voicemail system,' said the receptionist smugly, taking the phone from him as though it were a specimen delivery.

Kadijk hared off down the corridor. Webber ran half-heartedly after him. 'Doctor?' he was saying, panting slightly as he jogged. 'Who were you... trying to reach? I called Mr Gray's room... while I was waiting for you... and spoke to a man there... who said he was the doctor in charge...'

Kadijk threw open the door to Gray's room. It slammed into the wall restraint with a thudding crash.

Huan Qua was sitting on the other side of the room, and leapt to his feet with an oath. Gray lay beneath the blanket, just as unmoving as before.

'Where is he?' bellowed Kadijk.

Huan Qua blanched. 'The Doctor, sir? He said he was going back to the mortuary to run some more tests. I think, sir. He was in a hurry, and asked me to stay and watch Mr Gray.'

'Cretin!' Kadijk threw up his hands. 'And the intern? Nurse Jones?'
'Accompanying Professor Saraband, sir.'

Webber had got some of his breath back now. 'Oh... I rather think they left in a cab just as I was arriving.'

Kadijk gave a bestial shout of rage at the ceiling, and stormed over to the touchscreen where the Doctor had been working. It displayed a message.

NO CONNECTION.

‘Saraband, Jones, this fake doctor. . .’ snarled Kadijk, ‘they must all be in the conspiracy together. Damn them!’ He slammed his fist on the touchscreen, which flashed its short message repeatedly in protest. ‘“Imagine I run a terrorist group,” he said to me. Double damnation – he could even *be* Cockaigne!’

There was a rustle of movement from behind him, and then the blanket was pushed backward down the bed as Gray sat up abruptly and turned to one side. The small amount of grey-white hair was ruffled at the back where his head had pressed into the pillow. He fixed Kadijk with a stark, challenging stare, and his unblinking eyes were green and fiercely alive.

6

'Bad intelligence'

Sam twisted the small card in her hands, examining her own picture on the square of plastic. It was odd to be able to see, at one angle, the back of her own head. From the front, the card showed her pale-blue eyes peering out from dark patches in her face. She looked, she decided, like a panda. A panda with short yellow hair spotted with grey where she had not quite managed to remove all the grime from the tunnels. The hologram had been taken against a green background, and her borrowed medic's tunic seemed to vanish in the hologram, leaving her head floating in midair. It was worse than her passport photo, and that made her look like she was twelve.

The storm had cleared completely, vanishing as suddenly as it had appeared. Sam stared through the viewscreen of Amy's flitter at the cloudless sky, and the large circular moon pocked with strange, unfamiliar shapes.

Their first short journey had taken them swiftly across the cityplex. The cab was unmanned, and Sam had been unnerved when they had climbed in to find there were only passenger seats. Amy, of course, had taken it all for granted, spoken her destination into the computer, and slumped in a rear-facing seat. Within minutes, they were at Gray Corp HQ, because that was where, Amy had explained to Sam, she had parked her personal flitter for the briefing that had preceded her expedition's departure. She had ushered Sam through the security doors, used her own pass as authority to arrange the creation of a temporary pass for Sam, and escorted her to the vehicle park.

Now they were flying low, at speed, away from the cityplex. From the position of the moon and what she could remember of her previous journey, Sam judged they were travelling in the opposite direc-

tion, further away from the tunnels. Further away from the TARDIS. There was little evidence of construction work here, and Sam asked whether this was an unspoiled area of the planet.

‘Depends on what you mean by unspoiled,’ said Amy, and powered the flitter high for a while so that Sam could see a wider area.

Sam looked down again. It was like a chessboard.

She had seen pictures taken of the border between the USA and Canada, where the cultivated fields of one country ended and another’s began – a bizarre, clear-cut boundary, a horizontal separator that she knew was a real-life photo yet looked just like an artificial line drawn on a map. This was the same except that, in every direction as far as she could see in the bright moonlight, the world was partitioned into perfect squares.

‘Each one is themed on a different culture from the Cronus system,’ explained Amy. ‘We’ve got an ice world, a technological city block, a desert world full of nomadic dwellings. Hasn’t got any nomads in it, yet, of course. There’s a sea world. . . full of sea, but so far unstocked. You get the idea.’ She steered the flitter carefully, if a little awkwardly, with her good hand. They’ve stripped those plantations from Cenima. Nowadays there’s a patch, probably a square of the same size, in the Golden Desert on Apang. . .’ She was pointing out squares at random. ‘All the northern-hemisphere lakes on Trantor were drained to get just the correct chemical balance in the water for that section,’ she continued, adding with heavy irony, ‘They’re very keen on stressing that, because they’re so proud of their conservation record.’

Sam hissed through her teeth. ‘What’s wrong with the originals?’

‘So difficult to manage. So difficult to protect and maintain. So inconvenient to travel to. So much better to gather them in one place for your holiday pleasure and convenience.’

‘You sound like a brochure,’ said Sam.

Amy grimaced. ‘Well spotted. And remember, this is before they’ve denuded those worlds of the animals – including birds, once they get the antigrav technology sorted out for the aviary platforms. Oh, and in some cases, indigenous people. Can’t have the tourists getting here and finding the place empty.’

Sam sat in horrified silence for a long while. Eventually, she said, 'You haven't said where we're headed.'

'I'm going home,' said Amy. She sounded wistful. Sam thought of her own room in the TARDIS. 'How come you don't live in the... cityplex thing?'

Amy didn't answer, as though she was concentrating on bringing the flitter back down to its lower flight path. She winced as she brought her arm cast down against the seat. 'Can I help?' Sam asked.

Amy had levelled the flitter out again. 'Why not?' she said, sliding the control panel across to Sam's side of the vehicle.

'Oh,' she said quietly. 'I hadn't...'. She remembered the cab, and prayed that this vehicle was on autopilot at the moment.

'You flown one of these before?' said Amy, leaning back.

Sam thought about how long it had taken to persuade her father to give her driving lessons in his beat-up second-hand Astra. Her mum had refused point-blank. Even the Doctor had been reluctant to let her use the Volkswagen Beetle that, impossibly, he had got into the TARDIS. Now she stared at the controls in front of her, the way she might at a random pile of jigsaw pieces.

'They're supposed to be idiot-proof,' said Amy.

'Cheers,' said Sam, 'very flattering.'

'OK, crash-proof.'

'Like the *Titanic*?' Amy looked baffled. Sam said: 'I hope you're right about this.'

And she was. Once she realised which indicators she could ignore, Sam could concentrate on the simple directional controls. If she tried to move them too far or too fast, she felt them resisting. 'Cool,' she said after fifteen minutes. 'And really reassuring. My dad says that his flights on business trips are five hours of boredom followed by five minutes of terror.'

'Why?'

'Because landing's the most dangerous bit.'

Amy slid the control panel back across. 'Perhaps,' she said, 'I'll do that part, then.'

* * *

They scooped lower as they traversed what looked like a square of ocean sticking up into the air. It abruptly ended in a straight line, a sheer wall of water towering next to a further vast square of golden wheat field. There was a tiny red farmstead tucked in one corner. Then the wheat vanished suddenly, and they were dropping down into a concrete and metal city of tall buildings and low lighting, filled with greys and gloom. Sam thought of *Manhattan*.

Amy set the flitter down in a dark side street. It was eerie to see the streetlamps extinguished, and that a place that should be bustling with activity, even in the middle of the night, was so totally deserted. Amy used one of the controls that Sam had ignored earlier, and immediately there was a grumbling roar from across the alleyway. Sam did a double take. The front of a baker's shop was lifting up – door, window, shop sign, and a sizable stretch of pavement – like an automatic garage door. Amy eased the flitter on its land wheels into the concrete shell beyond this.

'F-A-B,' said Sam, bewildered. 'Thunderbirds are go.'

Amy switched off the flitter engine, and gave her an amused look 'I must be getting old,' she said, popping open the flitter doors. 'I don't recognise the jargon any more.'

Lights sprang on within the concrete shell. The frontage of the fake shop was arcing back down with a grinding sound, and beside it stood a short, thin man wearing dark clothes. He had one of those straggly beards that didn't quite make it all the way round, the sort Sam associated with earnest student members of her local FOE group. This man had to be forty, though.

He led them out to a lift, listening patiently while Amy finished her conversation with Sam. Amy was explaining how she had tried to persuade Gray to preserve the true archaeological sites, not just document them before they were redeveloped, and certainly not to redevelop them as the sort of fake environments they had seen on their journey here.

'Why are you working for Gray Corp then?' asked Sam. The lift seemed to be taking for ever.

'A girl's gotta eat.'

‘I don’t believe it. Besides, it’s obvious that you’re running away.’

‘On the contrary. I’ve come home.’ Amy smiled at the slight, bearded figure. He was standing quietly with them, not meeting their eyes but flicking a nervous look at the lift’s floor indicator.

Sam said, ‘I’d have thought after what happened in the tunnels, you’d at least be worried that the HALF terrorists would just treat you like the rest of Gray Corp. You were almost killed. And HALF killed that news crew too, didn’t they?’

She was a bit peeved to see that Amy was just smiling sadly at her, her head back.

‘Well,’ persisted Sam, ‘I’d hate to meet Bernard Cockaigne, if he’s half the monster they make him out to be. He’d rip your head off and spit down your neck.’ She thought about the bodies in the cavern again, and bit hard on her bottom lip. Idiot.

‘Oh, Sam,’ said Amy as the lift slowed. ‘And after all you were saying before about your environmental work at home. How you wouldn’t take your father’s facts at face value, even when you wanted to believe them. You should know that you can’t believe everything you hear.’

The lift doors sprang open, and she gestured into the well-lit corridor outside.

‘If you want to know what HALF are really doing,’ continued Amy, ‘come in and ask us.’ She put her hand on Sam’s shoulder, and spoke to the bearded man, giving him a broad wink. ‘Say hello to Sam Jones. She talks funny. But she also talks our language.’

Sam hovered in the lift doorway. She heard the bearded man’s reedy laughter, and realised he was reacting to her amazed expression. ‘Hello, Sam Jones,’ he said. ‘I’ll be happy to show you around.’ He reached out his thin hand to shake hers. ‘My name’s Bernard.’

He seemed to have relaxed as soon as the lift doors closed behind them, and led the way through the underground corridors, buzzing with excitement about the recent events he was explaining to her. They soon reached a large room filled with busy equipment operated by half a dozen people – ‘the night shift’ – clearly engrossed in what they were doing. They were surrounded by the remains of their pre-

vious meals. A couple of them looked up as Amy came in, and offered various cries of welcome, which she acknowledged with a little wave and a tight smile. The place smelled of vegetable soup.

Sam looked at Amy's sad expression. She didn't look very pleased to be home. No, it was something else, something she wasn't saying. Then she knew. Amy hadn't told them about the tunnels. About the deaths. How could she have?

Her new friend Bernard was still bubbling along with his story, explaining how they had knocked out the area satellite. 'They thought they'd secured it from the virus we uploaded last time,' he laughed, his mouth of baby-white teeth grinning through his beard. 'So we took out their ground station in the tropical-rainforest section. The datapulse will have chased back up to the satellite and blown every last system in it. It'll be weeks before they can sort that one out, and the whole quadrant will be in disarray. Let's see them talk their way out of this one. Especially when the Gray Corp salary payments are all delayed. I wish we'd thought of it sooner.' He slapped someone on the shoulder. The man turned round, and Sam could see he was a guy of about her age. 'That's the good news, isn't it, Denis?'

'Um, yeah,' said Denis. 'I guess. Bad news, too, though. The pulse took out our comms as well.'

'Oh, poo,' said Bernard, wrinkling his nose. 'So we're running blind down here at the moment.'

'Small oversight,' said Sam, studying Denis for a reaction. He was wrinkling his nose, too. No, his nose was wrinkled. In fact, now that she looked, his ears were wrinkled too, and that weak chin was actually no chin at all. He wasn't human. Hey, that didn't make him a bad person.

'Bad intelligence from our spies,' said Denis.

'So sue me,' said Bernard.

Denis showed an image on the grubby touchscreen in front of him. 'We're trying to reroute, here, via a landline to the station where they just launched their new weather satellite. Two days at least. Sorry, boss.'

'I should rip your head off and spit down your neck,' said Bernard

mildly, and glanced at Sam. Then he said to Amy, 'What time are the others due back?'

She smiled wanly. 'Can we go somewhere quiet?'

Kadijk stared out of the window at the moon, which sat fat and bright above Gray Corp HQ on the distant skyline. Behind him, the hospital doctor was packing up his equipment bag and getting ready to leave. 'I'll bring you the results as soon as I can. Sorry, when the comms went down, the medical database crashed.'

'Looks like you'll have to work for your salary,' said Kadijk without moving.

When Kadijk did eventually turn round, he and Gray were alone in the room once more. Despite the man's apparent age and infirmity, Gray's extraordinary recovery had continued, and the equipment around them showed his life signs now peaking at normal. But the thin old man had sat, almost completely silent, for two hours, just staring at his hands as though he'd never seen them before. Then he'd started to stroke the palms and the backs with his long, bony, arthritic fingers. He hadn't said a word since he had sat up, despite the doctor's earlier questioning. Kadijk had gently probed about the archaeological dig, but Gray had just looked at him with that piercing, unblinking gaze and said nothing.

Kadijk flicked idly through some of Gray's belongings in the bedside cabinet. The gun and clothing had been taken to forensic, but all the other possessions that Gray was carrying when they found him had been bagged up and brought to his room. Kadijk wondered why Gray had thought it necessary to take cufflinks and a tiepin with him. Sentimental possessions, he thought vindictively, or maybe he doesn't trust his cleaning staff. Another item appeared to be a wristwatch, which had a complicated face and too many buttons down one side. There was also a flat, round, metal coin with one smooth side. It fitted neatly in his palm, and when he turned it over he could see it had a curving smile of shiny stones set in the bottom half.

He hadn't expected Gray to move, but one thin bare arm lunged out at him, scattering items off the bedside table and onto the floor.

He felt the long nails scrape him as Gray snatched the coin from him. He looked at his hand – there were white scrapes on the palm where Gray’s fingers had raked him, but the skin was unbroken. ‘Jeez,’ he said to Gray, ‘you only had to ask.’

Gray had relaxed back into his pillow now. It was as though all the tension in his body from the past few hours had suddenly dissipated. He closed his mottled eyelids, shutting off the unnerving green gaze.

Kadijk bent down to the floor, hearing his knees crack in protest. He wheezed as he peered under the bed for the rest of the items that had fallen off the side table. He could see the wristwatch, but he couldn’t make out the time, just a red winking spot. He resolved to get his eyes checked, reached under the bed with a small groan, and pulled the watch out. It still showed a red spot, and he wondered. . .

There was a chime at the door, and a police sergeant stepped into the room, interrupting Kadijk’s train of thought. ‘Urgent message, sir.’ ‘Couldn’t you just call, Porlock?’

‘Sorry, sir. It’s just that we’ve traced the communications problem. The HALF terrorists destroyed a ground transmitter station with one of the stolen excavation bombs. The resulting datapulse outran the destructive force of the explosion by a millisecond.’

‘I hate technology,’ sighed Kadijk, ‘so spare me the technobabble, Sergeant. Where are we?’

‘The bomb’s knocked out the comms satellite for the whole of this area. And, um, the whole quadrant, sir.’

Kadijk held up the wristwatch. ‘So I see – this isn’t connecting to the central time system.’

‘No, sir, it wouldn’t,’ said Porlock. ‘Because that’s a wrist communicator.’

Kadijk scowled. ‘It’s a what?’

‘Medium-range quadrodaturm compression on a tightly focused premium-subspace frequency,’ said Porlock. He was studying Kadijk’s reaction. ‘I’d guess.’

Kadijk said, ‘It’s a *what*?’

Porlock shuffled his feet. ‘I imagine Mr Gray used it to keep in touch with his team members on the expedition, sir. May I?’ The sergeant

took the wrist comm from him. ‘When each team member’s life signs activate them, the red spot shows you where you are positioned, relative to. . .’ He pressed a couple of the buttons, tutted, and pressed a third one. ‘Ah. . . relative to where they are.’

Kadijk snatched it back off him, and stared at the little screen. ‘I love technology,’ he said.

Sam ran her fingers over the shelves of books. She hadn’t expected to find a library down here, or at least not one with real, tangible, printed books. Amy explained that they did use computer-based records, and hacked into the Kursaal systems when they needed more. But paper materials couldn’t be traced by other computer users, including the hackbusters employed by Gray Corp, so it made their key operating materials more secure. When the building of this city environment had been completed by Gray Corp, HALF had quickly moved into this underground system – the maintenance complex for the whole geographic square. ‘Better than our previous location,’ said Amy. ‘That was really damp. Some of our documents suffered a bit.’ She indicated a row of heavy volumes full of crinkled paper.

Sam meandered around the library, picking up volumes at random. It was a long, narrow room with pipes and access grilles high up above them in the ceiling. The shelves were neatly attached to the concrete walls with wooden battens. Sam wondered if they came from renewable sources.

Bernard came in behind them, and closed the door. He asked Sam to sit at this end of the library while he and Amy spoke at the other end.

Sam tried to earwig the conversation anyway without making it obvious. When picking books off high shelves was starting to look suspicious, she sat at a table behind a large volume and peered over the top.

She couldn’t hear their words, but she could judge the tone of the conversation, watching it ebb and flow like a tide.

At first, Amy did all the talking. Sam could tell she must be telling him about the deaths, because Bernard slumped down on to a bench

and hung his head, shaking it slowly. Amy spent a short while comforting him, but soon became more animated, making several wide gestures, which seemed to encompass the whole library, or beyond. She formed shapes with her hands that Sam couldn't see clearly, and then Bernard joined in, a questioning note in most of his words. The tone of the conversation became more urgent, the exchanges faster. Amy moved further down the room towards Sam – so Sam had to stop looking over the book, listening instead as Amy bustled around behind her muttering that something 'must be somewhere in all this paperwork'.

Bernard came down the room to join her then, and they walked back past Sam and stood in the doorway.

'Do you want to tell the others?' Amy asked.

'If you want,' Bernard had replied, and she nodded gently.

She watched Amy checking through several piles of paper for about twenty minutes, unable to judge her mood, before she decided to speak.

'What are you looking for? Can I help?'

When Amy looked up, Sam was astonished to see how angry she was. But after seeing Sam's reaction, her frown dissipated. 'Sorry, Sam. I was checking papers about how the Kursaal financial backers are pressuring Gray Corp to complete ahead of schedule, even though they know that we in HALF are holding up the completion.'

'Oh,' said Sam. She wondered how HALF would have obtained these papers, but Amy was evasive. When she asked again, Amy snapped at her, so she tried something else.

'Did Bernard know your friends on the expedition?'

Amy stared past Sam at the wall. 'Yes, they were all HALFers, and he'd recruited several of them himself. He knew Sharstone and Olivier very well. They had worked together for many years.' She tried to raise her hand to her face, must have realised it was still in a cast, and put it down beside her again. 'It's kind of a cliché, I know. But we are like family – an extended family. We have that history, you know. That special understanding... those relationships.' She broke off with a shy smile, and then focused on Sam again. 'Tell me about

your friend, this Doctor. Are you with him?’

‘Yes, I travel with him,’ said Sam, and then realised what Amy was asking. ‘Oh... no.’

‘Do you fancy him?’

‘No,’ said Sam quickly.

‘Oh, well,’ said Amy. ‘He seems to like you. But then you’re a pretty girl. Blue eyes, blonde hair, a bit... unconventional?’

‘No,’ said Sam in the firm tone she used with her mum. ‘We’re friends. I like him. I just don’t *like* like him.’ She saw Amy was smiling and frowning at the same time. Sam sighed, as though exasperated. ‘It’s like... There was this teacher,’ said Sam. ‘He was a trainee, or a supply teacher, or something. And he was Australian. He had that accent, it was almost like everyone else’s but just different enough, so that it was... exotic, strange. I’d never been further abroad than France, but I’d wanted all my life to go to Australia. Not Neighbours Australia, or Sydney Opera House Australia. I mean Willandra Lakes, and the Tasmanian Wilderness, and Uluru-Kata Tjuta. So he represented what I wanted, but I didn’t want him, you know what I mean? Not that he was a pug, or anything, but he wasn’t dishy either. Of course, Melissa said she wouldn’t push him out of bed, but Melissa fancies anyone from south of Dover.’

‘Is that right?’ said Amy.

‘And he’d left after three months. And I never got to Australia. You know, I couldn’t tell any of this to Melissa,’ said Sam, looking at Amy from the corner of her eye. ‘Hmm. Mr Bisham. I found out later that he was eight years older than me.’

‘My last partner was seven years younger than me,’ Amy said.

‘Age difference shouldn’t matter, should it? That’s not what my dad would say, of course.’

Amy leaned closer. ‘You’ve talked a lot about your dad. You talked about him in the hospital.’

‘I guess. He’s a doctor, too.’ She squirmed a bit on her bench to get comfy. ‘Is HALF really your family now? What about your parents?’

‘I haven’t seen them for many years. We didn’t talk much, my father especially. He didn’t ever say how he felt – he was just there. It sounds

like your mum and dad talk to you. Even if sometimes you think they talk at you.’ Amy put her good elbow on the table. ‘Hospitals remind me of my father.’

Sam watched her expression soften.

‘When I was your age, Sam, I had an accident at home. I was fooling around with my father’s things in his workshop, burned my face and hands quite badly at the time. In hospital, I couldn’t find the right words to explain to him or to apologise. And I knew that he wouldn’t go until I was settled in my hospital bed, so I pretended to go to sleep. I could feel Dad sitting next to me, above the bedclothes. Then I could hear him crying softly. He kissed me on an unmarked part of my face, and left. I can still remember feeling his breath on my cheek.’

She stood up stiffly. ‘I’m going to be looking through a lot of stuff tonight. Bernard said he’d be pleased to show you round, so ask him about the artefacts we discovered.’

‘I don’t mind staying,’ said Sam. She looked around at the piles of paper, thought about the passion in Amy’s conversation with Bernard. Remembered her view from the flitter: Saturnia Regna under the full moon, parcelled up into convenient tourist-sized squares. ‘I want to help.’

‘Not now,’ smiled Amy. ‘Go and meet some more of my friends. My family.’

‘It will be getting light by now,’ said Bernard Cockaigne. ‘Though it’s difficult to tell down here. Almost end of shift, team.’

Sam looked across the computer room to the tired figures at the touchscreen terminals. Denis was still busily establishing connections. She’d learned from Bernard that Denis Lambton was an Ermorgan. She’d also met two other HALF members, Claire Johnson and Tarbogev, one a willowy red-haired woman and the other a Brascan hermaphrodite who looked like an orang-utan in a boiler suit. Sam had studiously avoided referring to ‘him’ or ‘her’, but was also wary of saying ‘the Brascan’ because that sounded as though she was defining the creature by race alone. ‘It’ sounded like an object. So in the short conversation she’d had with them, she had used their names

repeatedly in the conversation, like some kind of incantation.

‘How many of you are there here?’ she asked Bernard.

‘About a dozen now,’ he said quietly. ‘Is that what you expected?’

Sam considered. ‘I’m not sure. I heard you were funded by some mystery billionaire, so perhaps I should have expected more people. Or plusher carpets.’

‘What were you told about me, then?’ said Bernard.

Sam thought about bears and gorillas, but thought Tarbogeve might be offended if she mentioned either within Tarbogeve’s earshot. ‘I thought you’d be. . . taller,’ she said eventually.

He reached out, and pulled her hand away from her mouth. She saw that he was looking at her nails, which were chewed short and ragged. ‘You shouldn’t bite your nails,’ he said. ‘You’ll ruin them. Cause a whitlow, or something.’

‘Sorry,’ she said. ‘Nervous habit.’ The same excuse she gave the Doctor.

She found it easy to talk to him. An hour passed, and she learned more about HALF’s direct-action campaign against Gray Corp. He spoke with passion and determination about Saturnia Regna, and she could easily believe that HALF would succeed in halting the Kursaal work. ‘They’re saturating this world with alien toxins,’ he said, ‘and devastating huge swathes on dozens of other worlds, too. They’re changing Saturnia Regna’s nature, and destroying an environment that they want to manage and control.’ He tapped up a series of plans and designs on his touchscreen. ‘And have you noticed that all Kursaal’s leisure facilities are humanoidist?’

Sam studied the screen politely. ‘I had noticed,’ she said, ‘that all the HALF people I’ve met are humanoid.’

Bernard laughed at this. ‘Very good. We have a Brascan, several Ermorgans, and of course lots of my own race. But Kursaal is designed for humanoids, and so to bring other races into this environment would be to risk their lives and our plans. We have considered how to involve our piscine and reptilian members, but apart from anything there’s the difficulty of feeding and accommodating them.’ He must have seen she was not entirely convinced. ‘We do have members

who are birds, and fish and monopodes...’

‘And quadrupeds?’ asked Sam.

He paused at that. And then he said, ‘Let me tell you about the Jax.’

He took her to a metal cabinet in the next room, and threw it open like a conjuror. Inside, Sam could see shelves full of old objects, many rusted over or coated with the grime of age. He lifted some out for her to see, handling them like sacred items. There was a belt buckle with shreds of leather still attached, and some cutting implements. She saw a knife, still shiny in one spot where a motif stared out at her – a circle with an arc across it suggesting, she thought, a crescent moon.

Bernard showed her a viewer in the shape of a cube. In this she could see other archaeological finds, each one cleaned up and well lit in the virtual world of the six-sided viewer. ‘The Jax artefacts in the cabinet were found by Amy and her team here on Saturnia Regna. Those you see in the datacube already exist in museums around the Cronus system.’

Sam just looked at him.

‘The point is,’ said Bernard, ‘those museum pieces were found before Gray Corp bought Saturnia Regna. They knew this planet had a sentient history, and they still set about destroying it. Amy thought she had identified the location of a major Jax site, and had the good fortune to secure a job working for Maximilian Gray to fund further work. And now she says she’s found it. We have to get photorecorded evidence of what she found. Then, when we get the comms link back, we’ll go public. It’ll cause a major upset for the Kursaal Consortium when we get this place declared a Heritage Site.’

Sam put the knife back into the cabinet. ‘What were these sentient beings? These Jax?’

‘Come and see,’ said Bernard, and led her to a desk and another datacube.

She sat looking at it dumbly. ‘I’m no good with computers,’ she confessed. ‘When I bought my dad a mouse mat, I asked the salesman to check whether it was for Windows or Mac.’

He gave her a confused look, and showed her how to activate the

datacube. ‘Shift’s ending,’ he told her. ‘I’d better turn in. See you later. Enjoy the story.’

She sat staring at it for half an hour. It showed the HALF story about Saturnia Regna, believed to be the last of fourteen planets inhabited by the Jax. Legends existed in the Cronus system about this unknown race which died out more than a thousand years ago. It made a plausible case for a historical trail leading across the Cronus system to this one world. She recognised Bernard Cockaigne’s reedy tones in the voiceover. *Panorama* as presented by Sir David Attenborough.

There was a dull thud nearby, and a fine line of dust filtered down on top of the datacube. She brushed it aside, thinking how displeased Bernard, Denis and Claire would be if someone was clumping around as they tried to get to sleep after their all-nighter. Maybe it was Tarbojev going for a pee. Standing up or sitting down?

The line of dust had become a stream now, and she stared up. There was a crack in the concrete ceiling, through which sand was pouring. As she watched, the crack widened. She didn’t stay to watch the rest, and threw herself through the nearby doorway. Behind her, a chunk of concrete had peeled away. When she looked back through, she could see it had splintered the desk where she had been sitting. And it had crushed the metal cabinet full of Jax artefacts. There was more stuff coming down, and the walls of the computer room were starting to buckle.

She fled into the corridor, colliding with Claire Johnson, who was pulling on clothes and screaming for the others to do the same. ‘Earthquake!’ bellowed Sam.

‘This is no earthquake,’ said Bernard, dragging her away from the deforming wall. ‘Out, all of you. Get up the stairs before it’s too late.’

At the end of the corridor, outside the long library room, more ceiling came crashing in. ‘What about Amy?’ yelled Sam.

‘Stairs!’ Bernard shouted back, and shoved her towards them. All around as they fled, the reverberating groan of shifting rock and concrete echoed and re-echoed. They were five flights up when Sam chanced a look down. The plaster and concrete on the walls was rippling and popping off into the stairwell. And then above them, there

was an explosion of dust and flying metal particles. Bernard, Claire and Denis threw themselves onto the stair landing next to Sam, and they covered their heads as particles rained down on them. When they were able to look up again, they could see that a huge metal spike had lanced across the stairwell high above them.

‘The murderous barbarians,’ snarled Bernard, his eyes alight. His faced was covered with dust, and his straggly beard looked grey. ‘They’re digging us out.’

Claire threw open the buckled door next to them. ‘Along the corridor, next stairwell,’ she gasped, and hurled herself through into the half-light. Lights fizzed and sparked above their heads as they fled. Behind them, they could hear the creaking protest of the building structure as the previous stairwell gave up the unequal struggle and crashed into jagged pieces.

Kadijk squinted into the orange light, which was angling low across the grey buildings as the sun rose. He adjusted the light-filter control on the viewscreen, and gradually he didn’t have to squint any more. That was what he liked about his police security flitter – he always felt like he was in complete control.

Ordinarily, the tall buildings of the Metropolitan Theme area would have prevented the sunrise from throwing its light into the police vehicle, and it would have been in heavy shadow until at least the middle of the morning. But several of the tall buildings were now lying in tangled heaps several hundred metres in front of Kadijk. Another of them seemed to be moving sideways all of its own accord. Kadijk looked more closely, and saw that it was actually one of the excavation machines, gouging another chunk of concrete and tarmac and earth up in its huge metal scoop.

Beside him, Porlock yawned extravagantly. ‘Do you enjoy an early start, sir? Or do you just not sleep?’

Kadijk allowed himself a fat chuckle. ‘People are more vulnerable to a surprise attack at this time, didn’t you know that Porlock? Besides, I thought you’d want to see a bit of action, instead of burying yourself in all those technical reports.’ He looked at the control panel in front

of them, and smiled at the sight of the wrist comm flashing, its two red eyes almost touching now.

‘You’re a bright fellow, Porlock – you’ll do well. You’re more help than Zaterdag, wherever he’s got to. He wrote the book on being stupid. And needless to say, it’s a picture book.’

There was another satisfyingly loud grinding noise from the two excavation machines outside. ‘Are our backup units here yet?’

Porlock checked. ‘Yes, sir.’

‘Let’s move in on these HALFWits then,’ said Kadijk. ‘And remember not to kill them unless we have to.’

The air was filled with dust and sharp orange light and the noise of screaming machinery, but Sam gave a whoop of relief as she fell into it from the doorway. Behind her, Denis and Claire helped Bernard to his feet as he stumbled onto the pavement.

‘Which way?’ screamed Sam at them. They looked lost and bewildered, moles blinking in the unaccustomed brightness of Above Ground. ‘We have to move it. Which way to your vehicles?’

‘They’re gone,’ moaned Denis. ‘The bakery is in the next block. And the next block isn’t there any more.’

They all looked back, as though they didn’t believe him. They ran away from the sound of destruction, throwing themselves into a side street which still stood in gloomy shadow. Silhouetted at the end of the street were four others, scrambling out of a doorway. One of them looked like Tarbogev. Sam called to them, but a police transport vehicle had appeared at the far end of the street. Its roof hatch popped open, and three police staff scrambled out, brandishing hand weapons.

Sam watched one of the HALFers running away from the police, towards her. There was a sizzling sound from behind the figure as the police opened fire, and the escapee pitched into the gutter. Tarbogev slowly raised his long arms, and the police surrounded him and his two colleagues. Just before Sam turned away to flee, she saw the first policeman club Tarbogev across the face with his handgun. Claire, Denis and Bernard followed Sam.

They didn't get any further than the corner, because another police transport squealed to a sharp halt in front of them.

'Oh, poo,' said Bernard gazing at it in despair.

Sam looked too. The transport was completely blocking the street. With an explosive clang, the hatch on its top flipped open.

Sam tensed, waiting for armed police to pour out of the armoured vehicle.

7

'I thought I'd lost her'

Sam looked about her for a weapon. To her right lay a short piece of metal pipe protruding from the ripped pavement. She tugged at it, but it held fast, embedded by its fall into the tarmac. She kicked it with her boots, cursing as she felt the pipe through the soft toe.

'Well,' said a familiar voice from above her, 'am I going to have to wait for you all day?'

She stared up in disbelief. The Doctor was grinning down at them from the hatch at the top of the police transport, his hair curling wildly about his head. Sam noticed he was wearing his familiar green coat over the blue medic's uniform.

She pushed Claire and Bernard ahead of her, and dragged Denis by the arm. 'It's my lift,' she yelled. 'Get in.'

They scrambled up the ladder on the side of the transport. Sam took a glance back down the street as she was dropping in, but could see no one in pursuit. Then she slammed the hatch over her head.

The three HALF personnel watched the strange newcomer with wary eyes. 'Doctor,' beamed Sam, and grasped him in a big hug. Then she stepped back as far as the cramped security vehicle would allow. 'So what kept you?'

He pouted. 'I followed Kadijk's team when they left the hospital in a hurry. Lucky I didn't end up at their office party, I suppose.' He flung himself into the driving seat, and his hands wavered over the control panel. 'Now let's see, this one I think.' The vehicle lurched sideways, and there was a faint booming sound from somewhere nearby. 'Oops. Let's try this one.' There was silence. 'It seemed so simple on the way here.'

Sam dropped into the left-hand seat. 'Doctor, these controls are

idiot-proof, you know. Look, you've moved the control panel sideways over here by mistake. You're using the weaponry on that panel. I think you managed just then to fire a rocket into that drugstore ahead of us.'

'Oh yes,' said the Doctor, surveying the smoking remains of a storefront. 'I suppose I was expecting right-hand drive.' He stared at the panel that Sam had pushed back across to him. But she could see that his eyes were far away, his mind working fast in an apparent attempt to keep up with the words cascading out of him. 'Sam, there's something very strange happening with those corpses in the hospital. I think it's a kind of enzyme which has been dormant in the bodies for some time, which could make them extremely dangerous. We must get back to that excavation site and find out what it was that could have introduced the enzyme into those poor people. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to complete my analysis of the test results from Gray before I had to leave, so I can't work out what's triggering the bodily mutations. . . Of course!'

Sam leaned her face closer to his. 'What is it, Doctor?'

'It's this one,' he said, and activated a control on the panel before him. The transport vehicle juddered briefly, and started to rise gently off the side street and into the dusty orange air. 'Now,' he said, turning his back to the viewscreen and putting his hands on his hips, 'aren't you going to introduce me to your friends?'

Sam grinned broadly. 'Doctor, this is Denis Lambton and Claire Johnson.'

'How do you do?' said the Doctor, shaking them by the hand. Denis and Claire stood close together, looking with worry at the main viewscreen. The transport continued to rise while the Doctor and Sam both sat with their backs to the controls. 'Shouldn't you be driving this transport, or something?' asked Denis. His brow seemed, impossibly, even more furrowed than usual.

'I think I learned enough about the autopilot. . . ' began the Doctor.

Bernard appeared from the back section of the transport. 'There's a police officer bound and gagged out here,' he announced.

' . . . from the previous pilot,' concluded the Doctor. 'Poor Huan Qua. It really hasn't been his day.'

‘And this,’ Sam said grandly, ‘is Bernard Cockaigne.’

‘How disappointing,’ smiled the Doctor. ‘Only one head. Hello, I am the Doctor.’

‘Careful,’ said Cockaigne, returning the handshake. ‘Some of my members have two heads.’

‘They’re better than one, apparently,’ said the Doctor.

Sam tugged at his sleeve. She had seen something on one of the undercarriage monitors. ‘Doctor, put us down again.’

The Doctor nodded, and started to manipulate the flight controls. ‘Are you crazy?’ shouted Denis, starting forward and seizing his arm. Then he, too, saw what was on the monitor. Sam saw his expression change – and he looked ashamed.

Sam tried to read the expression on the Doctor’s face. ‘You told me to stay with her,’ she said. ‘And I thought I’d lost her.’

On the monitor screen, Amy scrambled over the debris below them.

Sam stared around the road in despair. ‘Surely she can’t have missed us, Denis,’ she said in exasperation. Concrete dust blew in a blinding cloud towards them as the transport lifted off again.

The Doctor had dropped the vehicle on the main highway, but only with great reluctance. The alleyway where they’d seen Amy was too narrow to land in, but Sam had threatened to jump out of the open hatch from twenty metres up if the Doctor didn’t set down nearby to let her go after Amy. She had shouted a warning to the professor over the police transport’s loudhailer, suggesting a rendezvous in one minute at the nearest major junction. She thought that Amy had given her a signal of agreement over the monitor.

Sam sneezed as the cloud cleared, and looked at Denis. His wrinkled face was covered in fine grey dust, and he looked as if he was already regretting his rash insistence on helping her with the rescue. ‘Maybe she’s still down the alleyway,’ he coughed. They ran to look, stumbling over fallen pieces of masonry.

It was difficult to see, because they were staring back into the rising sun from this angle. Then Sam spotted a stooped silhouette on the

far left, and jogged towards it, cautious of potholes opening up in the buckling tarmac. 'Amy!' she called.

The professor turned her head, but did not stand up. She was scrambling on the ground for a sheaf of papers, which had scattered from her satchel and were swirling in and out of the gutter as the wind gusted down the alleyway. The bag was tangled round the sling on her broken arm, and she was struggling to stuff the papers into it with her good hand.

'Come on, Amy,' panted Sam. 'I've called the cab, and it won't wait for us this time.'

Amy shook her head fiercely, and grabbed at a little datacube which had fallen on the pavement. Sam was amazed to hear her muttering loudly, cursing Maximilian Gray, as though she was delirious. Papers slithered out of the open bag and whirled away in a fresh gust of cloudy grey air. Sam squeezed her eyes shut against the dust. When she opened them again, the pavement was cracking along its whole length. Amy gave a little cry, and dropped into the gap up to her knees.

The alleyway was dark suddenly, and cold. Sam thought at first it was another gusting cloud of debris. She could hear Denis screaming at her from the junction. When she looked back at him, she thought he was gesticulating at her. Then she saw that he was pointing past her.

At the opposite end of the street, one of the building-sized excavators had driven across the junction, blocking out the orange sunlight. She watched in cold fascination as its claw-scoop swatted the corner of the rightmost building like a toddler playing with a toy. The building crumbled and melted into a shower of tiny particles. Bricks and glass and beams dropped into the street in a fierce, continuous down-pour. The excavator started to push into the alleyway, brushing the right-hand buildings aside like Duplo blocks.

The ground undulated under her feet, throwing Sam down. Denis was beside them both now, helping Sam up. Then he froze with horror as he saw the excavator rumbling inexorably forward. 'Help me,' snapped Sam. 'Get her under the arms.'

Amy shrugged him off irritably. 'Take the bag,' she shouted, pushing it at Denis. He snatched it and threw it back down the alleyway. Sam watched the bag bounce in the gutter. She looked back towards Amy, who was reaching down into the split tarmac, waving away Sam's attempts to take her arm. At last Amy straightened up, brandishing the little datacube that she had recovered from the gap.

'Come on!' yelled Sam.

The excavator rumbled on, and a further block of buildings collapsed with a dull crunch. The tarmac shrugged again, and she heard Amy scream. The cracked pavement had squeezed back tightly against the other woman's legs, trapping her up to her thighs. Amy's face was white, her eyes like discs and her mouth a wide 'O' of pain.

Sam reached for her hands to try to pull her. Amy couldn't bend her arm in the cast. The excavator was almost on them, throwing up stones and bricks and dust with its traction wheels. Sam could feel the whole surface of the road bouncing beneath her. She lunged forward towards the professor, but felt something dragging her back by the waist. She tried to struggle, but Denis was too strong for her, his hoarse scream telling her she was too late, too late, too late.

He was dragging her back and away.

The traction wheels of the excavator rolled onward.

Covered Amy.

Sam screamed and screamed and screamed and wept and struck out blindly at Denis.

Denis held her tightly, and they stumbled away back down the street. At the end, visible beyond the narrow gap, their police transport vehicle sat with its engine firing.

In front of it, a police flitter was swooping into the gap between the buildings. They heard the sound of the excavator change, and glanced back. It was slowing to a juddering halt, the alleyway still reverberating to the note of its engine, rivers of concrete still tumbling down beside and beyond it.

They stood numbly while two police officers leapt from the flitter in front of them. Sam watched a third man step out, smoothing his hands over the creases in his linen suit that would never go away.

The first policeman seized her, and started pushing her forward. The second pulled his hand back, and released it in a savage blow that struck full across Denis's face. Denis went down, sobbing. The second policeman moved towards her.

'Enough, Porlock,' shouted Kadijk. He ambled up to her, his eyes narrowed against the settling dust. 'Nurse Jones,' he said with false bonhomie. 'Still on duty? What dedication, eh, Porlock? For a while, I thought I'd lost her.'

He ignored her long string of obscenities. His face hardened. 'Where is the Doctor? Or should I call him Bernard Cockaigne?'

Sam took a long, ragged breath. 'He's dead. You buried him.' She looked down as Porlock jerked Denis into a standing position. The Ermorgan's wrinkled face was lined with blood. Then she looked past Kadijk, past the flitter to the police transport vehicle which was rising out of the shadows and into the brightening morning sunlight. 'You can't reach the Doctor now.'

Kadijk watched her eyes, and then turned to watch the transport curving off into the sky. 'Porlock, bring that transport back for any remaining HALF stragglers. These two will come with me.'

He was looking at his wristwatch, as though late for an appointment. As Sam was hustled roughly forward to the small police vehicle, Kadijk turned to walk beside her, and she could see a single red light winking on the watch. Perhaps it was no longer working, because he unbuckled it and let it drop onto the cracked pavement, before smoothing one hand down his dusty jacket lapel and climbing into the flitter.

The sunlight was streaming into the transport and straight into Bernard Cockaigne's eyes. He fumbled for the controls, searching for the visor control. By the time he had found it, the Doctor had banked the transport up sharply, and the light was no longer ahead of them.

Cockaigne struggled into the co-pilot's seat. Claire Johnson sat between him and the Doctor, gripping her bucket chair and trying not to fall against either of them. The vehicle suddenly sprang upward, and Cockaigne was jolted back into his seat. Then it levelled out with

a groan of protest as the Doctor forced the manoeuvring rockets past their limits. The transport was now high above the wreckage of the fake city.

‘I’ve got to stop that excavator,’ muttered the Doctor.

Cockaigne was adjusting the image on one of the fore-view screens. ‘That small police flitter that got between us,’ he said, pointing. ‘They’ve grabbed Sam and Denis.’ He zoomed the image. ‘I can’t see Amy.’

‘She must be in the flitter already,’ said Johnson, trying to zoom further into another image. ‘They’re putting Denis in now. The excavator’s pulling back.’

Cockaigne watched the Doctor’s eyes flicking between different viewscreens. ‘This transport is too wide to enter that end of the alleyway,’ he was saying. ‘Could it squeeze in beyond the excavator?’ He tapped a screen to show where the collapsed buildings had opened a gap.

Cockaigne shook his head. ‘There’s a short subway run under there, and the ground is collapsing into it. The excavator’s stopped because its weight would drop it straight through.’ He stared into the Doctor’s face. ‘They’re out of our reach, Doctor. The police have them.’

The Doctor’s hands hovered over the control panel. ‘We must follow them.’

‘And do what?’ barked Cockaigne. The Doctor stared back at him furiously. Cockaigne lowered his voice. ‘We’re outnumbered, and the police will be taking them back into the heart of the cityplex. By the time we reach them, the satellite may have been rerouted. They’ll just take us out too. There’s nothing we can do to help them just now.’

‘No,’ said the Doctor quietly.

Cockaigne leaned across Johnson to put his hand on the Doctor’s, as though to prevent him from using the controls. ‘Believe me, I don’t want to leave Amy or Denis down there.’ His mind was racing through the options. They might have such a short time before the quadrant-wide communications net came back on line. ‘Doctor, you said that you wanted to go to the excavation site. You wanted to learn more about what happened to Amy’s team. Most of the people on that expe-

dition were HALFers.’ He transferred his hand tentatively to Johnson’s shoulder, and tried to put some feeling into his voice. ‘They were my friends. I want to know what happened to them too.’ And I want to see what they found, he didn’t add. Before the comm-net came back up.

‘Amy told me they’d started burying the site,’ said Johnson. ‘That it was security-sealed as soon as they flew the... victims out.’

Cockaigne nodded. ‘But the security systems are also routed through the communications satellite. That’s why Denis was so pleased with the last bomb. They put all their eggs in one basket. He cut a hole in the bottom of their basket.’

He was interrupted by a voice echoing around the navigation room. One of the local communication screens had lit up, and a police sergeant with cropped black hair was speaking directly to camera. ‘I repeat,’ he said briskly, ‘this is Porlock. Police transport seventeen, return to these co-ordinates to collect personnel.’

‘That’s us,’ said Johnson.

Cockaigne watched the Doctor’s reaction. ‘The excavation site, Doctor.’

‘Police transport seventeen, is there a problem? With your ears, maybe?’

The Doctor put his hand over the camera lens in front of him, and toggled on the communicator. ‘Having prob- commu-... -tion... -peat, please,’ he stuttered. His other hand tapped at the flight controls, and the transport began to turn.

‘Your signal’s breaking up,’ said Porlock. ‘Return to ground at once. What’s the matter with you?’

‘We’ll put dow- bsht bssst! zzzt!... next block... fffrrt!’ growled the Doctor, and flicked the communicator off. He looked at Cockaigne and Johnson. ‘The excavation site,’ he said firmly.

The Doctor banked the transport up and over the next block of buildings, taking it swiftly along the broad expanse of a main highway. When he’d built up speed at the far end of the road, he pushed the vehicle up into the air and forced it sharply and swiftly away from the city. The viewscreen filled with the last glimmers of early-morning

stars.

Cockaigne grinned. 'All right,' he said, as the floor levelled out. He popped the buckle on his seat and moved to the door that led to the transport's rear section. 'Let's see if our police friend Huan Qua can tell me where they keep the photorecording equipment on this craft.'

Johnson pointed to a trace on the viewscreen in front of her. 'The tactical system's coming online,' she said, and switched it through. The physical viewscreen in front of them was overlaid with a grid of lines showing the city below them. 'And another thing. We're being tailed. Another transport like this.'

'I think I'm getting the hang of it,' said the Doctor, and banked so steeply that Cockaigne fell to the floor. He dusted himself down, and struggled back into the co-pilot's seat.

The Doctor's fingers flickered over the controls with a light touch, as though he was casting a magic spell over the craft. Then the transport powered up into the lower atmosphere. Cockaigne could feel his body being squeezed back into the hard seat. The transport groaned and creaked all around them, and the temperature started to climb.

'They're tracking us,' grunted Johnson, as though talking was an effort. 'They're staying in the lower atmosphere. We appear,' she added, 'to be burning up.'

The Doctor conjured another manoeuvre. Cockaigne had a sickening sensation as the transport looped over, and started a powered dive. 'What are you doing?' he yelled.

The Doctor sounded tense. 'I'm going to skim us over the surface of the planet, try to shake them off down there. Goodness, what an odd sight.'

Cockaigne fought his nausea and stared at the viewscreen. The many completed biosquares of Kursaal lay below like a neatly stitched quilt. They dropped towards it at sickening speed. On the viewscreen overlay, the ship flashed past their pursuers, who were still rising.

The Doctor leaned back into his pilot's seat. It looked like he was trying to pull the transport up again physically. Cockaigne watched the man's head coming forward again, his nose levelling. The transport did the same. There was a smell of burning now all round the

room.

Johnson gave a little squeal, and Cockaigne snapped his eyes back to the viewscreen. A field loomed below them, so close he thought he could see the ears of wheat bending. Then there was a thrumming vibration below them as the undercarriage dipped into the crop for a moment.

‘Whoops,’ said the Doctor, pulling the ship up a little. A glance at the rear scanner revealed a stripe of charred wheat, over which their pursuers were now racing. ‘I remember when I was training for my Mars-Venus shuttle certificate,’ said the Doctor, his eyes never leaving the control panel. ‘I’d paid upfront for ten monthly lessons. My instructor was Frajnar Kumbolo, an old soldier from the original Dalek wars, and he’d seen everything, so you can imagine how expensive he was. Halfway through my first all-day lesson, I forgot that Uranus spins on its side. I was very embarrassed, because I misjudged my route between the delta and gamma rings.’

The transport lurched to the left, and Cockaigne disentangled himself from Johnson. The Doctor seemed unaffected, still chattering away in his calm, singsong narrative. ‘I tried to adjust at the last minute, but I pulled out into the path of a fleet of solar yachts. Then across the bow of a Mars freighter.’ The transport heaved down and to the right. Cockaigne’s stomach went in the other direction. ‘Finally,’ concluded the Doctor, ‘we ended up in a soft crash-land into a caldera on Umbriel. I’ll never forget what old Frajnar said to me. Ah... OK, you two, nice and quiet for this bit please, I need to concentrate.’

The Doctor was staring intently at the viewscreen. Cockaigne glanced up. Then he looked again more closely. The scale on the viewscreen told him that they were powering towards a sheer wall of water dead ahead. Their pursuers were still close behind, slightly higher. Several sizzling bolts of lightning were skimming above and beyond them.

‘They’re laying down covering fire,’ said Johnson coldly. ‘To prevent us from rising.’ She was trying to sound calm, thought Cockaigne, but her voice betrayed a faint tremble. ‘What can we do?’

‘Do you know any hymns?’ Cockaigne asked.

‘Shush shush shush,’ said the Doctor, who seemed to have pulled several fibre optics out of the control panel beside him, and was adjusting their connections with a long thin silver tube that he had produced from his inside coat pocket. ‘Here,’ he said, nudging a control panel towards Johnson, ‘keep us level, start to decelerate as much as you can without breaking us up. I need both hands free to use my sonic screwdriver.’

‘What are you doing?’ she squealed.

‘Remote deactivation of the force field holding up that wall of water,’ gasped the Doctor, his voice high, fluttering now with exasperation. ‘You have to slow us down so that we don’t just hit it like a block of concrete. But I have to cut out the crash control in this transport so that it doesn’t try to steer us up and away and into the covering fire.’

‘What can I do?’ asked Cockaigne.

‘Keep drawing a circle in the air with one hand,’ said the Doctor. ‘Go on!’

Cockaigne did so, feeling stupid.

‘Now at the same time, draw a triangle in the air with your other hand.’

Cockaigne tried. His circle started to get jagged.

‘And now,’ said the Doctor, ‘tell me the first names of all your grandparents.’

Cockaigne put his hands down. ‘It’s impossible to concentrate on everything at once,’ he said irritably.

‘Well now you know how I feel,’ the Doctor snapped, ‘so shut up.’ He was bundling the wires back under the control panel. ‘Right, crash control off. Let’s just check our speed... no, much too fast, slow us down more.’

‘We’ll tear apart,’ muttered Johnson.

The heat in the room was almost unbearable. The wall of water loomed up ahead. The Doctor pushed a control in front of him. ‘Right, the force field will cut out for sixty seconds.’

The wall of water shimmered, and then a skin seemed to peel away from it. What had been a wall had become a waterfall, a torrent. The Doctor adjusted the controls one last time, and the transport dipped

briefly down and then back up. Just before it would have crossed back into their pursuers' laser fire, the ship hit the water.

The transport walls seemed to buckle around them. Cockaigne thought he could hear the hull hissing, screaming, protesting. There was steam and water gushing in tiny pinholes from the roof above, and he didn't know if it was internal or external. They clung to their seat belts as the vehicle rolled over and over in the water, which cascaded all around the transport.

After a long and frightening wait, the transport righted itself. The engines had cut out now, and there was an eerie silence in which Cockaigne could hear all their breaths gasping, and the hiss of something leaking in the back of the vehicle.

Cockaigne sat in the silence for several minutes. When he opened his eyes again, he saw that Johnson and the Doctor were checking over the systems.

'So,' he asked, his eyes wide in the underwater gloom. 'What did old Frajnar say to you?'

The Doctor laughed. 'He said, "Same time next week, Doctor?"'

8

'Manipulation skills are jolly useful'

They had reached the tunnel entrances, dropping the battered police transport close by. The acres of clay surrounding the slope of the mountainside had started to dry out in the hot morning sun, grey peaks showing above the darker wet earth and water gathered in pools.

The Doctor was looking around like an explorer in a new land, shielding his eyes from the early-morning sun. He had done the same at their last stop-off, the ZooBlock. They had hopped between several other blocks on the journey here, to ensure that the other vessel pursuing them had long lost their trail. After slowly traversing a long section of the block of sea, the Doctor had brought the transport out of the water and then, on a cautious route, to the new excavations on the edge of Kursaal development.

Cockaigne studied the outside of the transport, noting with alarm where the outer shell had buckled and twisted, and that several of the external plates seemed to be hanging on only by one edge. When they had stopped earlier, it had still been too dark to see the damage clearly. But he had been too busy bundling the unfortunate policeman, Huan Qua, out of the ship and through the deserted safari section of the ZooBlock. They had left him, locked in the empty wolf cages, with a pile of emergency provisions and a distress bleeper which would activate when the comm-net came back up.

'I'm not completely sure,' the Doctor was saying. 'But I think those are the tunnel entrances over there. I thought that the laser barriers would give some indication of where we needed to go, but they all seem to have failed. The whole point of leaving this place unguarded was that the laser barriers were adequate.'

Cockaigne stood next to him. ‘The barriers would probably rely on satellite telemetry,’ he said. ‘Our little disruption was more successful than we could have dreamed.’ He thought about Denis Lambton’s enthusiastic grin, remembered where Denis was and didn’t feel like celebrating any more.

The Doctor was tut-tutting to himself as they made their way into the tunnels. ‘Doesn’t look like the painstaking archaeological excavation of the professor’s original team, does it?’ he said, indicating in the mountainside where the huge development diggers had left crude earth-moving scars.

Cockaigne gaped. ‘This site is being destroyed for ever,’ he mumbled.

The Doctor nodded. ‘You can see landslips further across, over where that scree has gathered. All this recent excavation has affected the water table, too. It’s made the ground very unstable.’ He waited until Johnson had climbed up the slight incline to join them, hefting a couple of police lanterns. ‘This site is very dangerous.’

‘You’re telling us not to bang our heads?’ said Cockaigne. ‘And after we survived an earthquake in the CityBlock.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘It will take more than hard hats to protect us if the earth moves here,’ he said. ‘What I’m saying is: you don’t have to come in with me if you don’t want to. The tunnels could collapse. And whatever attacked the dig team may still be at large.’

Cockaigne saw the Doctor checking a powerful police torch, and so he gave his own stolen photorecording equipment the once-over.

The Doctor noticed this. ‘And we’re checking for biochemical evidence, not trying to complete the dig. Agreed?’

Cockaigne strode forward. ‘The middle tunnel did you say, Doctor?’

Johnson hesitated before following them. ‘Should we take weapons?’ she asked. ‘You said there might be animals.’

The Doctor patted a bag at his side. ‘We have some emergency flares here, to ward off wildlife. I left the guns in the ZooBlock.’

Cockaigne turned on his heel. ‘You did what?’

‘Nasty dangerous things.’

Cockaigne snatched at one of the flares. ‘I hope you don’t live to regret it.’

‘If I live,’ smiled the Doctor, ‘then I will have nothing to regret.’

The tunnels closed in on them. Cockaigne clutched the flare tightly in his hand, wishing he’d taken more careful note of how to light and fire it before they had plunged into the darkness. He thought of everything that Amy had told him about the expedition. She had been wary of describing the events of the previous night in too much detail, but had said enough for him to know that the animal that had attacked them had been big, powerful, and frighteningly fast. But she had also described her astonishing find of the cathedral. Cockaigne’s emotions were confused; after his frightening escape from Kadijk’s men, he had no desire to risk his life again. But he knew that he had to photorecord that underground cathedral, had to get the images to the outside world. And he knew that the Doctor had other ideas about the purpose of their trip here. How could he convince him otherwise?

As they progressed downward, he started to explain to the Doctor about the history and artefacts that he had shown Sam. Perhaps that would engage his interest, particularly as he knew the Doctor would be distracted by worry about his missing friend. ‘She was fascinated by the Jax artefacts,’ he said, ‘said she wanted to know more. That she wished she’d been able to visit the place where –’

‘Perhaps she did,’ came the Doctor’s voice from ahead of him. ‘We were here, did she mention that?’

‘Yeah,’ said Cockaigne. OK, don’t oversell that angle.

‘I don’t think she’d be in any rush to return.’ The Doctor’s voice had become more resonant – there was more of an echo to it. When Cockaigne stumbled forward a few more metres, he realised why. They were in a cavern.

As Johnson followed them in, her police lamps filled the room with sharp white light. He thought of how Amy had described it, looked for the three tunnel exits. Saw the scattered remains of the equipment around the place. The remains of crude white outlines on the cavern floor.

‘This is where most of the deaths occurred,’ said the Doctor. ‘There

may still be some of the animal tissue here.’ He gestured towards Cockaigne with his torch.

Cockaigne set down the flare, and took the torch off the Doctor. ‘We think we learned quite a lot about the Jax before this expedition. It seems ironic that while they were trying to bring to life a race of dead creatures from the distant past, an animal from present-day Saturnia Regna should be responsible for so many deaths.’

The Doctor looked up, intrigued. Cockaigne explained what researchers knew about the Jax. They seemed to be a vulpine race which appeared to have died out in the Cronus system at least a thousand years ago. Evidence from other planets in the system suggested that one of the last planets they had inhabited was Saturnia Regna, and this was one of the major reasons why HALF objected to the Kursaal development.

‘Vulpine,’ said the Doctor as he scanned the sloping floor of the cavern. ‘How can you be so precise about the genus?’

Cockaigne scratched his beard in the darkness. ‘I suppose we were trying to echo ideas of endangered creatures,’ he said. ‘On some worlds in the Cronus system, foxes are still being hunted to extinction.’

Johnson was next to him, nodding. ‘It certainly has more impact than saying they were an extinct race of dogs,’ she said. ‘Better publicity, I’m afraid.’

‘Stress the unusual, rather than the familiar,’ said the Doctor. He had taken a pair of tweezers out of his pocket, and was picking up something from the floor. ‘See?’

Johnson brought a lantern closer. ‘What are they?’

‘Indications of *Canis familiaris*, perhaps.’

‘Ah,’ said Cockaigne. ‘Dog hairs.’

‘There’s another alternative of course,’ the Doctor went on. He put the hairs into a transparent plastic bag. ‘*Canis lupus*. The area around here and further up the mountain shows evidence of extensive forestation, long before Kursaal was being built and the diggers arrived.’

‘I don’t follow,’ said Johnson.

‘A lupine race,’ said Cockaigne quietly. ‘Wolves.’ He was pondering

this when he noticed that the Doctor was walking up the inclined floor, stooped like an old-fashioned detective following footprints. He shone the torch in the same direction. The trail wasn't footprints. It was blood.

He followed the Doctor out. A hundred metres down the winding tunnel, it came to an abrupt end. There was a fall of rock and earth which cut right across the trail. The Doctor fingered the soil, and it trickled down on to the tunnel floor. 'Recent slippage,' he said. 'We should tread softly as we go back.'

As they retreated, Cockaigne's torch shone onto the tunnel wall, then suddenly spilled into another fresh fissure that they had missed earlier. They squeezed through. As soon as he clambered out of the end, Cockaigne could tell from the echo that they were in a huge space. And when Johnson followed him in, angling the lanterns through awkwardly, he just gaped.

It had to be the cathedral.

He stepped aside to let Johnson in properly. The Doctor was shining his torch up at the ceiling of the huge, dark chamber. Around their feet were jagged pieces of smooth white masonry. Behind them, in the light of the lamps, Cockaigne could see that they had stepped through a crazed split in the wall. He followed the wall along with his torch, seeing it stretch off into the dark. He lowered the torch down to the floor, and saw a roughly hewn hole in the brickwork. That must be where Amy had got in. They'd been unable to go that far because of the earlier rock fall.

And the red trail was there again. He followed it along, and gave a sudden shout of horror, which brought the Doctor running over from the centre of the cathedral. Cockaigne's frightened cry reverberated around the room. The slapping sound of the Doctor's footsteps also echoed, like the sound of applause or rain.

'Vulpine or lupine?' whispered the Doctor.

It lay on the white, white floor on a reddish-brown patch of dried blood. Cockaigne could see its cold eyes deep in the sockets of the head, and the dry red tongue smeared through the long upper and lower incisor teeth in its half-open jaw.

He realised he had stopped breathing for a moment. Johnson put a lantern down close to the creature, and Cockaigne could see blood dried all round the fur of its tapering snout. This was the monstrous dog that Amy had described to him in frightened, tearful snatches of conversation, now lying dead on its side.

Its coarse fur had flattened on the body, so it looked thin, skeletal, emphasising the size of its head. The deep-set eyes gave impression of a heavy brow and forehead, coarse hair covering the rounded skull and the broad triangular ears which lay flattened on the sides of the head towards the back. The stained ruff of fur around the neck became a long stripe back down the spine and continued over a wiry tail covered in the same coarse fur.

‘Gray fought it off,’ said the Doctor. ‘He mortally wounded it with his handgun. You can see the damage in the soft tissue of the abdomen, between the ribs.’

‘It’s thin,’ said Johnson. She prodded it with her toe, and gave a short, shocked cry as the flesh crumbled under the fur. ‘It’s like a husk,’ she said, embarrassed.

The Doctor nodded. ‘The legs are broader than you’d expect for a wolf, although they are typically canine in the position of the joints. And look – three smooth, broad toes on the end of each paw, with a fourth one that looks like an opposable thumb. That suggests hand-eye co-ordination skills. The broader skull perhaps points to intelligence and reasoning ability.’

Cockaigne stared at the creature, then at the Doctor. ‘Are you saying this is a sentient wolf? It could think? And it could hold things in its paws? I know you can teach a dog to shake hands, Doctor, but I’ve never seen it happen when a pack of dogs got together.’ He wanted to laugh.

‘Manipulation skills in quadrupeds do seem unlikely, wouldn’t you agree, Doctor?’ said Johnson.

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, reaching forward carefully to take something from the husk, ‘manipulation skills are jolly useful when you’re putting a medallion like this round your neck. Don’t you think?’

He passed the round shape to Cockaigne, who hefted it in his palm

in the light of his torch, the sash hanging down between his fingers. On the face of the medallion he counted thirteen bright stones in a crescent shape, which bounced the light back like reflectors. They seemed to wink at him. He thought of how Amy winked at him when she was teasing him about something, telegraphing the obvious.

‘Look, Claire,’ he said, pushing his hand towards her. ‘This talisman. It’s the Jax symbol.’

And then suddenly, it was light.

Cockaigne and Johnson put down their torches and lanterns carefully, and stared around them. The cathedral was bigger than Cockaigne could have imagined, even after hearing Amy’s ardent portrayal of her discovery. He tried to think of religious temples he had seen on other worlds, palaces, sports arenas. None of them compared for size, or if they did they were not as stark and simple and beautiful in execution. The walls arched up in fluid curves, so that where he had thought before the walls were flat they were actually the starting point for gentle arcs which extended to a point hundreds of metres above him.

Above them, a high circular walkway ran around the whole room, though this remained gloomy and unlit. The nearby wall was crazed with cracks, and a darker split flashed across it up as far as the walkway. But the sight that stirred Cockaigne most was the mural on the wall. Tens of metres high, it showed the outline of a wolf-headed humanoid standing upright, the Jax symbol displayed in outline in the centre of its chest. Below this, dwarfed by the scale, was a slight, green-coated figure. ‘Well,’ said the Doctor, ‘I seem to have found the light switch.’

‘This is. . .’ Cockaigne couldn’t find the words. He fumbled for the photorecorder, but could not stop staring slack-jawed all around himself. He glimpsed Johnson, and realised that her eyes too were filling with tears of joy and disbelief.

The Doctor laughed, his voice bouncing off the walls. He indicated the rows of hieroglyphs which stretched in wide columns from floor to ceiling. ‘Look at this wonderful visual history. And some of the symbols seem to be controls, too. Ah, this looks promising.’ He placed

his palm on one of the shapes near to the base of a column next to him. A wide section of brickwork two metres above him melted and became translucent, like the viewscreen in the police transport. 'A visual information system,' he breathed. 'Not bad for a pack of dogs, eh?'

'But this indicates an astonishingly intelligent civilisation,' said Cockaigne. 'One to rival our own. What can we learn from these records? Whatever happened to them thousands of years ago? What catastrophe drove them to extinction?'

The Doctor nudged him, and pointed further round the cathedral. The decaying husk leered at them in the bright new light. 'Who said anything about extinction?'

Sam had never been in an interrogation room before. She couldn't recall ever being in a police station either. She'd read Amnesty reports about beatings and deaths in foreign cells, torture during incommunicado detention, shocking and blunt descriptions of the horrors imposed by one human being on another. But they seemed remote, detached. Mo and Mikey Clunes at school had been locked up overnight for peeing on the front window of Woolworth's, and boasted at school next week about their bravery in the grim conditions in Coal Hill nick. But Mo had muscle where his brain should be, and little Mikey was alleged to have been moulded out of Mo's spare flesh, which didn't exactly make them reliable sources.

So everything she expected of the Kursaal interrogation room came from watching *The Bill* and reruns of *Prime Suspect*. Plain, hard furniture; stark, cold walls against which tall, scowling policemen leaned in mute witness to proceedings; strong cups of horrid, orange tea with not enough milk. She wasn't disappointed. Even the tea came in white disposable containers.

Kadijk was leaning over the table and staring her down. 'Don't be stupid. It didn't take us long to break the encryption on the datacube. Tell us who provided the information.'

Sam looked at her bitten nails as though they were the most fascinating things she'd ever seen. Kadijk put his finger under her chin.

She pulled her face away, and stared into the photorecorder over his shoulder. 'I was given it by Professor Saraband,' she said in a tight voice. 'That was just before you and your goons murdered her in cold blood.'

Kadijk sighed. 'As soon as we noticed, we were trying to get you all out. It was an unfortunate. . . industrial accident.'

'You dug them out,' spat Sam. 'You must have expected people would die.'

'I expected you to be more co-operative.'

'You expected you could manipulate me,' she retorted. Kadijk sat down opposite her again, and placed his hands palm up on the table. 'We didn't know you and Professor Saraband were working for the HALF terrorists.'

His eyes were in shadow. Sam couldn't tell whether he was lying or not.

'Maybe you weren't working for them. You got mixed up in something bigger than you could have known.' A pause. 'The datacube contains obvious HALF smear tactics, which I'm sure Mr Gray will refute, if he bothers with them at all. Be reasonable, Sam. I mean, Gray Corp funding for HALF?' A short, incredulous laugh. 'That's crazy! The share price for the Kursaal Consortium is nose-diving as the project is delayed. Tell me who created the datacube, Sam?'

He placed it on the table in front of them, inactive, and turned it in the harsh light.

The door behind him cracked open, and Zaterdag came in carrying a white disposable drink container, his yellow hair and blue face marking' him out oddly from his more human colleagues. Sam checked her thoughts there. It was too easy to see him as different just because he was a Fodoran. He was still one of her captors.

'Captain,' said Zaterdag. 'You asked for an update from the hospital. The sat-link is still down, so they've just couriered a couple of messages through. First of all, Mr Gray has discharged himself, against medical advice.'

As Zaterdag had started speaking, Kadijk had stood up and motioned him to the back of the room, away from Sam. She could still

make out what they were saying. In his gruff mutter, Kadijk was telling his subordinate: ‘Typical Gray. The best medical advice even his money can buy on this planet, and he still thinks he knows best. Anything else?’

‘Yes, sir. Another of the corpses from the expedition has been stolen.’

‘Wha-at?’ Kadijk turned a full circle as he considered the information. ‘I thought my orders were to guard the mortuary. Any sign of the other stiffs?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Don’t let anyone near the corpses,’ said Sam suddenly. ‘The Doctor thinks they may be extremely dangerous.’

They stared at her. Then Kadijk ushered Zaterdag across to the interview table, and they both leaned over. ‘The Doctor thinks that, does he? How very interesting. I do believe I see a connection.’ He called over his shoulder, ‘Porlock, any news on that AWOL transport?’

Porlock was lounging against the wall. ‘Lost contact with it between FarmBlock and AquaBlock, sir. Possibly destroyed.’

Sam felt cold sweat trickling down her chest.

“‘Possibly’ won’t do,” shouted Kadijk, making them all jump. ‘Arrange a search of those blocks. Dr Cockaigne shows a remarkable ability to survive. Now, Sam, why don’t you tell me some more about these dangerous corpses?’

She folded her arms.

Kadijk snorted air down his nose. ‘Maybe Dr Cockaigne is collecting them. Shall we go and see for ourselves?’ He nodded at Sam, and spoke to Porlock. ‘Bring her along. And get my flitter refuelled.’

‘Sir.’ Porlock turned to use the wall communicator.

Kadijk straightened and leaned in towards Zaterdag, who was finishing his drink. ‘And where were you during the HALF raid this morning? Lounging around here, as usual?’

Zaterdag flushed a deeper blue, and affected a shocked expression. ‘I was following a lead on the drugs dealers, sir. We received new information about the dope barons yesterday before I came out to collect you.’

Kadijk was already stalking to the door, where he stood framed for a moment while he bawled at the sergeant. ‘The trail stops right in this office, Zaterdag. I know where the only dope in this building is, and I’m looking at him right now.’ Then he was gone.

Sam put her hand in her tunic pocket, and felt the datacube. All that practice she’d had palming objects, and the Doctor wasn’t even here to see it. She felt cold again.

Porlock had finished his call. Sam could see him looking at Zaterdag’s crafty smile now that Kadijk had gone. ‘Don’t look so happy, Zaterdag,’ he said to his fellow sergeant. ‘If you worked really hard for the rest of your career, you might still just make your way up to moron.’

‘Sit on it, Porlock.’

Porlock pulled Sam out of her chair, none too gently, and pushed her to the door. ‘And all that “paperwork” on the drugs case you were doing? All I ever saw you doing yesterday was walking around the office with cups of tea. Why?’

Zaterdag was ahead of them through the door. ‘Because we were out of coffee.’

Not much difference from the last time she was here, thought Sam. She was still being led through the building by people she wanted to escape from. They were still taking her to the mortuary. She would still be faced with the bodies. The corpses.

Kadijk kept up his running commentary throughout their walk, as he had during the short flight here. Porlock had sat quietly next to her in the flitter saying nothing, while Kadijk gently persisted about the datacube, the source of the information, where it was going next. How he knew she was innocently involved with HALF. And, now that their organisation was broken, how she could help him tie up the loose ends and be home before she knew it. Sam sat coldly silent throughout, thinking about home. Then thinking about their destination. Thinking about what she would see.

Kadijk rounded the final corner to the morgue, then stopped so suddenly that the others almost collided with him. ‘Where the hell

are those guards?’ he bawled at Porlock. ‘Didn’t I say that I wanted visible presence here? Are you people listening to me?’

‘Cleall and Harding were posted here first thing, Captain,’ said Porlock.

Kadijk growled in his throat like an angry dog, then strode noisily down the corridor. ‘If I find them in the canteen having breakfast,’ he snarled, ‘I’ll have them for breakfast myself.’

Sam and Porlock reached the mortuary door a second after Kadijk. The room light was off, and the door was ajar. ‘I’ll have their hides,’ snarled Kadijk, and darted in.

Porlock ushered Sam in after him. She pushed the door further open as she went through. It was wet.

Kadijk was staring at the mortuary tables, which were visible only in a shaft of morning sun falling through the room’s high window. Two of the tables were turned on their sides against the far wall. The others were all empty, the black body bags torn and thrown aside, covered with scattered dissection instruments which lay where they had fallen in some struggle.

Sam looked at her hand. It was slick with fresh, red blood. She glanced back to the door, to see if she had cut it on the handle. Then she remembered it was already wet when she had pushed it. Kadijk seemed to be growling again. The growl became a roar, a throaty bellow which reverberated around the room.

It wasn’t Kadijk.

One of the fallen tables was kicked sharply aside, and she could see a police guard’s body lying face down on the off-white floor, twitching spasmodically.

A dark shape looked up from where it was chewing at the guard’s neck.

Chewing at his neck.

‘Jeez!’ bellowed Kadijk, rearing backward against the nearest wall.

The dark shape stood up on all four legs, lips arching back up over bloody red incisors. Its heavy brow furrowed, and the short fur on its long snout wrinkled.

Porlock pushed Sam back against the door, as though to get her out of the room and out of the way. She struck the door sharply, but there was resistance from behind it. It sprang back fiercely, catapulting her across the doorway. She stumbled on an overtopped table's leg, and fell heavily into a crumpled body bag. It reeked of animal, the same heavy musk stench she remembered from the tunnels.

Kadijk was frozen against the wall, staring into the far corner.

Porlock was reaching down to lift Sam, and she was about to take his outstretched arm when she looked past his legs, beyond him to where the door had swung closed. Behind the door was the crumpled, bloody body of the second guard, its head angled against the wall and its neck broken. Looming over this corpse was a long, thin, hairy body standing tall, its own head lolling awkwardly on its shoulders as though half attached. It was humanoid, but its joints seemed bizarrely angled, backwards somehow. It wore the ragged remnants of a mortuary shroud. On one long, hairy front leg it had, insanely, a wristwatch with a band of interleaved gold and silver links. It was a wolf in men's clothing.

Sam bellowed a warning to Porlock, who spun round, stumbled on the debris surrounding him, and fell heavily against the half-open door, where he lay still.

The wolf looked down awkwardly at the police sergeant, and then back to Sam where she lay. It opened a red mouth full of teeth, gave an inhuman scream, and lunged forward into the room.

'I thought you were the expert'

'Doctor,' said Cockaigne, 'the Jax died out over a thousand years ago.' Above him, the strange visual display in the wall sputtered and flickered, but there was no clear image visible.

The Doctor had moved across to the dead husk of the wolflike creature, and was hunkered down beside it. 'You're the one who said this place was marked with the Jax symbol' The symbol that's on the medallion you're holding.'

'Yes, but –'

'And this is a very old wolf.'

Cockaigne stomped over to the Doctor, bringing his exasperation. 'A wolf that lived for a thousand years or more?'

The Doctor smiled his infuriating smile. 'They have made a remarkable job of this place, though. And these glyphs on the wall...' He indicated a long line of stylised illustrations carved into the smooth marble, and faintly illuminated by the light all around them. 'Well, you tell me.'

Johnson was looking at the static glyphs now, running her fingers over the lowest row of symbols. 'Illness? Sleep?'

'Or perhaps suspended animation.' The Doctor gave a short, echoing laugh. 'An amusing ambiguity, don't you think? Still frames of animation, or cryogenic sleep.' Cockaigne could feel his pale eyes boring into him. 'All this time, you've been worried about saving the Jax, Bernard. Well, maybe they've been saving themselves.'

'Could the excavations have woken them up?' asked Johnson.

Cockaigne stared at her. 'Have you gone mad too? Where are the rest of them, then? Or did only one bother to set his alarm clock?'

The Doctor rose, brushing dust from his trousers as he straightened. Then he took Cockaigne's arm, and guided him to another part of the wall. 'This part could suggest a single Jax, A sentinel, perhaps? Whereas here. . .' He took two long steps to his right. 'Well, that could imply a great many more. Perhaps waiting for the right moment to –'

He got no further. There was a distant rumbling from behind and above them, followed by an echoing roar of noise. They whirled around towards the centre of the cathedral.

Earth and small rocks were tumbling in a steady stream through a hole high up in the ceiling above the centrepiece. After a short while, it began to slow to a trickle of fine grains.

Cockaigne let out an explosive sigh. 'I thought the Jax were about to pay us a visit, Doctor. I must be as crazy as you.'

'The whole site is very unstable,' said the Doctor, studying the cracks across the marble walls with suspicion. 'We must be careful that we do not become trapped here.'

Johnson nodded towards the gap through which they had entered the huge room. 'I'll check to see that our exit is secure.'

'Good idea. Bernard, perhaps you could see if there are other routes out, while I try to decipher these images. Or perhaps reactivate this display device.'

Cockaigne moved across the room, his torch penetrating into the far side. Behind him, he could hear the results of the Doctor's efforts as the noise from the display changed, white noise becoming a disconcerting babble of pops and whistles.

Now that he had crossed the arc of round indentations, Cockaigne could see that the far wall had collapsed into a smashed heap, apparently pushed from the other side. But the remains of the wall had been crudely pushed to one side, as though a poor attempt had been made to tidy up the broken pieces of marble. Part of the pile was now covered with loose dirt and rocks, which spilled through the gap in the wall – another slippage of earth, this time spilling in through a hole six metres high. He was about to step forward and climb the pile of earth when he flashed his torch down to the floor briefly – and almost leapt backwards.

It was a sheer drop in the floor.

He knelt down carefully, examining the ragged edges of the hole. Although they were torn into the marble, they were roughly circular, suggesting that some cutting device had been used to rip up the cathedral floor. Three or four metres below, he thought he could make out a large green box covered with familiar markings. They weren't the Jax symbol, and he recalled seeing them on Gray Corp equipment. He was considering how to reach down when he heard a delighted cry from across the room.

The Doctor was staring at the display screen, his face alight with pleasure. It was also alight with the reflections of the pictures that flashed across the screen. Images of men and animals danced before them, and Cockaigne could see they were similar to the static images carved into the walls all around the cathedral.

The Doctor gave another shout of delight. 'I love cartoons. Look at that,' he said, gesturing extravagantly at his handiwork. 'The animation isn't suspended any longer.'

Cockaigne listened to the rumbling accompaniment of the soundtrack, which seemed to be a mix of pulsing music and guttural speech in an alien tongue. 'What do you suppose the narrator is saying?'

'Well, she's explaining the history of the Jax,' said the Doctor. 'Shush and listen.'

Cockaigne had to look away from the screen and stare at the Doctor. 'You're kidding,' he said. 'You can't possibly understand that.'

'Well, I have a certain facility with languages,' replied the Doctor modestly. 'Its roots are surprisingly close to yours, you know.'

'You talk as though you and I don't share a common language.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Do I? Ah, now that looks jolly interesting. I wonder where the pause button is.' He pressed his palm on a variety of glyphs beneath the viewscreen, muttering under his breath as he did so. 'There's one language I certainly do not understand, and that's whatever language they use to write video manuals. Oh, I think I just pressed rewind... hang on... ah, there we are.' He gestured to the screen.

Cockaigne looked up. 'It's a chart of the fourteen planets in this

system.'

'And all points lead to Saturnia Regna,' said the Doctor. He indicated the floor behind them, and then pointed at the crystal centre point, which was now half buried in the earth that had fallen from the ceiling. 'The indentations in the marble floor behind us are also representations of the planets in the Cronus system. That central point, marked by the crystal device, would represent this planet. I thought perhaps this place was a memorial to the Jax, or perhaps a place of worship. But cathedrals and churches have other functions too, of course. They're places for baptisms, a celebration of birth or rebirth.'

Cockaigne felt his own heart beating faster. 'And it explains the Jax symbol, the crescent of thirteen points – the fourteenth is the outer circle itself, representing this planet. This is the Jax's homeworld.' He grinned like a lunatic. 'These indentations arc across the floor – a circular floor. This whole area is designed like the Jax symbol! Am I right? What could you tell from the rest of the message?'

The Doctor stroked his top lip thoughtfully. 'Well,' he began, 'I could understand about half of it.'

'First half or second half?'

'More like every second phrase,' admitted the Doctor. 'It seems like the Jax relied on other races in the system, who worshipped them. And the Jax brought them into the family of their race. Or maybe integrated them into the company of the Jax, or absorbed them into their society – I couldn't quite discern the exact meaning. Then, for some reason, when the final race in the system had all become part of the big happy Jax family, the Jax line ended. This was a thousand years ago. This is their living memorial, or a memorial to the life of the Jax, or all that's left of the Jax's lives. . . again, the interpretation's a bit vague.'

Across the cathedral floor, they could see Johnson making her way back towards them. 'The tunnels towards the surface seem secure,' she said when she reached them. 'But our entry point into this chamber looks a bit risky. The previous rock slide could shift across, and we'd be trapped.'

Cockaigne nodded. 'That's quite an extensive fall, possibly caused

by the Gray excavations. It extends all the way behind this section of wall, and probably all round the tunnel that used to lie behind the rest of the wall.'

The Doctor looked in the direction that Cockaigne was pointing. 'So, Bernard, what did you find?'

Bernard shrugged. 'Nothing as interesting as you, Doctor,' he said. 'One of the cathedral walls has been penetrated, but the gap has been plugged again with fresh earth – looks like an excavation, rather than a landslip. And I almost fell down a big hole. Looks like the Gray team dug that, too.'

The Doctor whirled round. 'That's rather odd. That suggests they were here after Amy's expedition. Why would they break in and dig a big hole, unless...'

Cockaigne felt the colour drain from his face. 'Excavation. Oh, poo.'

They all stumbled their way around the corner, and crouched down by the hole in the alcove. Their torches played over the bottom of the hole, illuminating the Gray Corp equipment down there. 'Double poo with extra poo on top,' said Cockaigne. 'It's just like the one that we stole from them.'

'Just like the *what* that you stole from them?' asked the Doctor in a level tone.

Johnson coughed apologetically, and the sound echoed around them. 'The excavation bomb that we stole from them. They're very effective: they make very large holes. Town-sized holes, in fact.'

The Doctor got up slowly, and dusted his blue overalls fastidiously. 'We'll just have to be careful that we don't set it off, then.'

'I shouldn't worry too much about that,' Cockaigne said, hearing his own voice quaver.

'At what point should we start worrying?' asked the Doctor.

Cockaigne had slipped carefully into the hole, and was now examining the bomb gingerly. 'If the light stops blinking, then it'll be in its final stage of countdown. And we'll be too close to worry any more.'

Johnson coughed again. 'Well, call me chicken, but I think I should go back to ensure that our police transport is ready for immediate launch.'

‘Good idea,’ Cockaigne called up, and listened to the sound of her retreating footsteps.

He continued to make further checks on the bomb. The mud and dirt clinging to it made the visual inspection difficult, and he had to scrape the dirt away carefully with his fingernails. The painstaking work continued for some time, but it was important to know whether the bomb was not only primed but also activated.

To his dismay, it was. He toyed briefly with the idea of defusing the bomb, to prevent it from detonating and thus to save this astonishing archaeological find. Then he thought better of it. ‘We need to get out of here,’ he said, and started to scramble back up the side of the crude excavation hole. The Doctor grasped him firmly by his left wrist and pulled him slowly up into the cathedral again.

Once Cockaigne was out of the hole, they both scurried back across the cathedral towards their original point of entry. Before he stepped through, Cockaigne looked back wistfully at the cathedral interior. ‘There’s so much we could have learned here,’ he breathed. ‘And now I’ll never see it again.’

The Doctor patted his shoulder. ‘Unless you can defuse that excavation bomb, I’m afraid that’s rather the case. On you go.’ They stumbled through the jagged entry hole. Cockaigne stopped for a moment, letting his eyes adjust again to the darkness of the tunnels. Then he moved off ahead of the Doctor, his torchlight slicing through the darkness.

Within minutes, they had reached the expedition’s cavern encampment. On the far side he could see Johnson crouched down over some equipment. He clucked his tongue in annoyance. ‘Get a move on, that thing’s alive and we need to get out of here.’

Johnson wheeled around and up. Only it wasn’t Johnson – she was on the groundsheet, her eyes staring, her mouth gaping and her neck gashed. The creature that had crouched over her shook its head, and spots of blood and saliva sprayed from either side of its muzzle. Its *muzzle?*

Cockaigne gaped. The creature turned around fully now. It was a grey and brown wolf maybe a metre and a half long. Its green eyes

glinted in the floodlights. Cockaigne could see why he had mistaken it for Johnson – the torn remains of some expedition overalls were wrapped around its torso like a bizarre attempt at disguise.

The creature was growling softly, and wrinkled its nose as though testing the air. Its eyes bored into him from ten metres away. For an instant, Cockaigne found himself trying to place where he had seen those eyes before. Then the wolf stopped snarling, and cocked its head quizzically to one side.

‘Oh God,’ whispered Cockaigne. ‘That’s Olivier.’

He felt a soft pressure on his shoulders. The Doctor was gently but firmly pulling him backwards, away from the creature. ‘Move slowly away from it, and get ready to run for the other exit. . . oh dear.’

Cockaigne flicked his gaze at the second exit to the surface, and saw two more wolves sidling into the chamber. But the movement of his head had startled the first wolf, which was now standing with its front legs firmly placed on the groundsheet. Its lips were peeling back over its bloodied fangs. Cockaigne was looking at it again, but could sense the two other wolves moving into the chamber towards them. He backed slowly away from the nearest wolf, and found himself bumping into a pile of excavation tools. They fell aside with a resounding clang, and he found himself holding one of the implements. It was a long-handled shovel.

Behind him, the Doctor seemed to be fumbling in his pockets. ‘Get ready to run back the way we just came,’ he murmured. ‘You’ll know when.’

Before Cockaigne could reply, the wolf by Johnson’s body sprang forward at him, jumping towards his upper body. Instinctively, Cockaigne swung the shovel around in a wide arc, and it connected with the wolf’s neck. He felt a sickening jolt, and the wolf’s body crashed into him. He fell painfully onto the other implements, but leapt back to a crouch again, brandishing the shovel, panicking and looking wildly around for his attacker. The wolf’s body lay decapitated beside him, the neck oozing red blood onto the groundsheet. The head had been thrown against the wall, its tongue curled out between its teeth.

He flicked a look towards the other two wolves. They suddenly started to shake their heads from side to side and whimper. In the same instant, Cockaigne had the sensation that someone had walked across his grave.

‘Come on!’ came a shout from behind him. When he turned, he could see the Doctor beckoning him with one hand, while brandishing some implement in the other. The device shone dull silver in the low light. ‘Come on!’ yelled the Doctor again, leaning towards him, grabbing his arm, and pulling him away from the disorientated wolves.

Barely realising what he was doing, Cockaigne found himself harrying ahead of the Doctor and back down the dark tunnel towards the cathedral. When he dared to glance back, he could see the Doctor running after him, his torchlight bouncing around the tunnel walls and the metallic device still held aloft. Now Cockaigne recognised it as the sonic device that the Doctor had used earlier in the police transport, and it was presumably emitting a sound so high-pitched that only the wolves could hear it. His ears wanted to pop.

They clattered through the crack in the wall. Cockaigne stared wildly around the cathedral, desperately scanning every direction for something to block the crack. He turned back to see the Doctor stuffing a couple of explosive flares into the earth piled outside the gap. Now he was patting his pockets, muttering to himself about matches. Then he produced a round tin, but the lid was stiff and when it suddenly burst open the little sticks inside scattered all over the floor.

‘Hit the ignition switches!’ shouted Cockaigne, reaching forward as he realised what the Doctor was trying to do.

‘No, too close! I’ve jammed them into the landslip, and it would blow your arm off.’ The Doctor was fiddling with the sonic device in his hand, and Cockaigne felt his ears go pop at last. ‘The sonic screwdriver won’t keep the animals at bay for long,’ the Doctor was saying. Cockaigne could hear the sound of animal feet scrabbling in the tunnel now, and snarls of annoyance and frustration were getting closer by the second. ‘Now, stand well back.’

This time, there was an audible sound from the device, and a spark seemed to flash from the end of it. Immediately, the Doctor flung

himself aside. There were two sharp reports in swift succession, and a flash of light followed by a thundering roar. When Cockaigne looked up again at the crack in the wall, it was completely filled with earth.

They both lay for a moment on the cold marble floor, their breath coming in fast gulps. When he had recovered a little, Cockaigne sat up and looked at the Doctor. 'I think I really am going crazy,' he said, unsure of himself. 'That wolf thing – it reminded me of Olivier.'

The Doctor looked at him thoughtfully. 'Olivier from the expedition?'

Cockaigne nodded. 'Did you know him?'

'I saw his body in the HealthBlock mortuary. It was undergoing some kind of metamorphosis. I think we just saw the end result.'

'That's too horrible.' Cockaigne shivered. 'I killed him.'

The Doctor stood up, then helped Cockaigne to his feet. 'You were saving yourself. You were saving both of us. And I think you may need to do so again – that excavation bomb is still ticking away.'

They hurried into the cathedral again, past the static image still flickering on the display screen, and across the floor to the other side. Where they stopped suddenly.

The Doctor groaned. 'Those explosive flares were a little too successful, I'm afraid.'

The pile of earth from the far wall had spread further across the floor. The nearest edge of it had spilled over into the open hole. The Doctor and Cockaigne stared down anxiously, unable to see the excavation bomb. Cockaigne rubbed at his untidy beard. 'We'll need to dig the damn thing out.' Behind them, they could hear a scrabbling, scratching sound from the sealed entrance.

'The wolves,' said the Doctor quietly. 'It seems like we're not the only ones who are digging.'

The mortuary table above her was dented in the middle. Sam looked at the bulging metal, and felt strangely detached from events. Dangerously so, she realised. She had thrown herself behind the overtoppled table in a desperate attempt to escape her attacker, but the wolf man had continued towards her as though the obstruction was not there.

The result was a satisfying clang and a startled whimper. After a moment, Sam had ventured a quick look around, and saw: ahead of her, the wolf man half slumped against the wall, dazed; to her right, Porlock shaking his head as he regained consciousness; left, Kadijk bellowing instructions into his useless communicator, with the other wolf creature positioned just beyond the dead guard's body and sizing him up.

She stared again at the dazed creature, trying to see what it was doing in the shaft of sunlight spilling down from the high window. She could see the wristwatch again, incongruously strapped to its left foreleg. She could also see it was recovering, so she scrambled backward to the doorway. When she reached Porlock, she jostled him to try to revive him. 'Come on, move,' he hissed. Porlock moaned.

The wolf man stopped shaking its head, and turned its baleful green gaze on Sam and Porlock. The other animal was snarling at Kadijk, and now the one in front of her took up the sound too, baring its white fangs again. She could see it tensing to leap at her. She was backing through the doorway when she bumped into something behind her. She stopped breathing, feeling her heart pounding.

It took a moment to work out what happened next. The wolf man sprang towards her, but then seemed immediately to jump backward and slam against the far wall, where it lay twitching. At the same time, a chattering roar filled the room. She realised that Kadijk had thrown himself down to his right, and now lay beside her covering his head with his hands. Further across the room, the other wolf man was slumped unmoving against a mortuary table.

Sam turned round at last, looking up into the doorway. Two security guards filled the frame, the barrels of their sub-machine-guns smoking slightly.

'What kept you?' said Kadijk sourly from her left.

'Sir?' asked the first guard.

Kadijk was clambering to his feet, brushing dirt and hair from his crumpled jacket. Now he moved across to the nearest wolf and poked it experimentally with the toe of his scuffed shoe. 'I don't believe it. This one's got a chronometer.' He stood, arms akimbo, staring at the

two shot animals. ‘Could these creatures have been trained to steal the corpses?’

‘You don’t get it, do you?’ said Sam, standing next to him. ‘These are the corpses.’ She studied his expression, wondering whether he would shout some more or just laugh at her. ‘Unless you think they’re kidnapers who do a bit of pickpocketing on the side. That. . . chronometer was on one of the corpses. And the wolf that attacked you seems to be wearing what’s left of some overalls.’

Kadijk looked at his assailant. Sam could see him studying the shreds of cloth around its torso, reading a name label. ‘Osram,’ said Kadijk. ‘I don’t understand.’

‘I told you the corpses were dangerous,’ said Sam.

Kadijk strolled across the room to her, regaining his composure now. ‘No, you told me that the Doctor said they were dangerous. And how would he know about that?’

Sam snorted. ‘He examined them, Sherlock, remember? Right here in this lab. He’d suspected something way back when he first saw them. But you were too busy giving us a hard time to notice that. It was right under your nose. You didn’t notice the danger in those underground caves.’

She wanted her words to annoy him, provoke a reaction, stop him leering at her. But his smile just got broader. ‘Well, the excavation site won’t be a problem for much longer. Gray Corp’s building a nice new recycling plant on top of it. Any time now the cave system will be collapsed and the whole area levelled. The wrecking crew planted the explosives shortly after we evacuated the team.’

He turned away, still grinning. Sam seized his arm, horrified. He looked at her hand on his sleeve with a look of feigned distaste. Sam let go reluctantly. ‘You can’t do that,’ she whispered.

‘Oh, really?’ snapped Kadijk in exasperation. ‘I have no time for your appeals about biodiversity and ancient burial grounds and who knows what other HALF-baked pleas for a further delay. . .’

‘You don’t understand,’ she shouted into his face, ‘the Doctor went back there.’

There was a long pause. At the end of it, Kadijk’s leering grin had

returned. But when he spoke to the two guards who were standing in the doorway, his tone was brisk, businesslike. 'Contact the breaking gang, and find out when the explosives are scheduled to blow.'

The first guard shook his head in apology. 'Sorry, sir, the comms network's still down.'

'Then try to access the construction records. Jeez, is *everything* routed through the same satellite? Get my flitter round the front of HealthBlock – we leave in five minutes. And arrange to have this mess cleared up.' He looked back at Sam, and she could see he was enjoying himself again. 'I do so look forward to meeting Dr Cockaigne again.'

'Me too,' said Sam quietly.

Kadijk laughed at this. 'I hardly think so,' he said. 'Return Nurse Jones to custody, Porlock. You're in charge here, now.' Then he sham-bled out of the mortuary before Sam could reply, shooing the two guards ahead of him into the hospital.

Sam moved as though to follow him, trying to think of the right words to appeal to him. But Porlock had seized her by the shoulder. 'Hold it.'

She shrugged him off, and spun angrily to face him. 'Don't think that. . .' Her eyes focused past him, to the wall beyond. 'Look out!'

'Not very original,' said Porlock. And then he was thrown violently forward against her.

Sam scrambled free from Porlock, who was now scrabbling on the floor trying to turn over. But the revived wolf creature was pressing down on his back, and snapped savagely at the base of the sergeant's neck. Sam stared about frantically, looking for something, anything, with which to fight the creature off. She seized hold of a small dish of dissection instruments, which clattered noisily in her hands.

Then she became aware of the other wolf man, which was tottering towards her with an uncertain gait. She could see bloody holes where the bullets had entered its body earlier, obviously with limited effect. Now she looked back at Porlock's attacker. Porlock's killer. The sergeant's neck was a mass of glistening red, and the whiskers on the wolf's muzzle were slick with his blood.

Sam sprang back into the corridor, grabbing at the door. She gave a little cry of disgust as her hand slipped on the wet blood on the handle, and the door bounced to – but the lock did not catch. She ran.

Behind her, she could hear the scratching sound of claws. She imagined the creatures gnawing at the foot of the door, trying to force it open again, trying to follow her.

She was in a long, empty, white corridor. She could not possibly reach the end before they caught up with her. There was a triumphal howl, and the sound of the door crashing open. Sam flung herself to the side of the corridor, trying the first door she found. Some kind of storage cupboard? Locked.

The second door was also shut fast. The third looked like a records office. Locked too, but this door had a transparent panel in the top half of the frame. She smashed at it with her elbow, and as the glass spilled into the room she reached through and flicked open the lock. She realised that she was still gripping the metal dish of utensils, so she threw them low and hard away from her. The dish clattered noisily on the floor. Sam didn't stop to watch the instruments skittering down the corridor, but slipped into the records room and pressed herself against the back of the door. She sat as still as she could on the broken glass, aware that the slightest movement would scrunch the shards beneath her and draw attention to her hiding place.

Within seconds, she heard the two wolves panting past at speed, their claws scabbling for purchase on the smooth corridor floor. Sam held on for as long as she could, until the animal sounds had gone, before she allowed herself to take a huge whooping breath.

Light filtered in through the jagged broken glass of the door frame, but otherwise the room was in darkness. It was a cramped room ringed by tall filing cabinets, which made the desk in the far corner look like it was surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. She stood up slowly, carefully brushing glass from her trousers with her sleeve, but froze in surprise as the strip light above her flicked into life. She peered back at the door, half expecting to see one of the wolf creatures with its paw on the light switch. Then she realised that the light must

be activated by a movement or heat sensor, and she finally felt herself relax a little.

She slumped into the office chair, knitted her fingers together, and placed them on the desk before lowering her forehead down on top of them. With the immediate problem of escaping the wolves dealt with, she felt suddenly at a loss. The Doctor was in danger, but maybe Kadijk would reach him in time, even if he also then arrested him. She had no way of reaching him – damn, she didn't even know how to reach the tunnels. Nor did she have any idea where the TARDIS was.

She hadn't felt this helpless since she'd been holed up by the Daleks on Skaro, utterly alone and far from home. Now, she couldn't get herself to safety, and she couldn't rescue the Doctor from the dig site.

Thinking about the dig site reminded her of the excavator. She closed her eyes, and saw it rolling forward towards her again. Smelled the choking dust in the air, heard the roaring intensity of the behemoth engines bearing down on them. Saw the traction wheels roll over Amy. She couldn't rescue her, either. Sam lifted her head and stared at the desk in the harsh strip light, annoyed that she couldn't stop herself crying.

She plunged her hand into her tunic pocket, and brought out the datacube. Amy had considered it important enough to rescue, and essential to hand it over before trying to free herself. Sam studied the palm-sized cube of transparent plastic. One face had fingertip controls. She fiddled with a few of them tentatively, sniffing away the last of her tears. Several seemed to do nothing, but when she activated a third she was alarmed to see a tiny image of herself in the cube, giving a tinny little sniff. So that was the record control – damn, what had she erased?

She switched on a desk light in front of her to examine the cube more closely. As she did this, she saw a larger display screen set into the desk at an angle, and a hole to one side which looked the same size as her datacube. She slotted the cube into the hole, and the display sprang into life, with instructions displayed on the screen –.

She pressed INDEX, then PLAYBACK. And spent an hour learning

everything HALF had discovered about the Gray Corporation.

Amy's life work, she thought sourly. Now she knew what she could do.

Cockaigne was covered in dirt. He had spent forty minutes digging in the circular excavation hole with the shovel he had dragged behind him while fleeing the wolves. The shovel with which he had killed Olivier. Or whatever Olivier had become.

The Doctor had spent the same time experimenting with the Jax technology on the marbled wall, to see if it offered evidence of other escape routes. The obvious entrance and exit route for the cathedral was a huge archway at the far end, surrounded by dancing figures and intricate glyphs. But the doors in it were sealed shut, with no suggestion of whether there was an activation switch hidden somewhere or whether the doors were just held shut by the weight of earth beyond them.

Cockaigne scraped away carefully at the top surface of the bomb. He ran his grimy fingers along a seam in the top, and succeeded in opening a control panel. He wasn't sure which annoyed him more – discovering that the culture he wanted to preserve wanted to eat him alive, or realising that he was about to perish along with their thousand-year-old remains when the excavation bomb went off. He wiped his sleeve across his sweating forehead, but succeeded only in smearing mud into his eye.

The Doctor called across to him brightly, 'How is it going, Bernard?'

Cockaigne grunted a noncommittal reply.

The Doctor seemed unperturbed. 'There seems to be an extensive amount of Jax technology deeper underground. From what I can make out of these controls, that is to say.'

Listening to his voice, Cockaigne imagined the Doctor poring over the Jax equipment with a gleam in his eye. And certainly with no mud in it. 'Have they got instructions on defusing explosives?' he snapped.

'I don't know about that,' said the Doctor from close behind, startling him. 'You've done jolly well there. Would you like me to have a go while you take a rest?'

Cockaigne grumpily dismissed the offer. ‘Why stop now, just when I’ve got to the fun bit?’ He prodded carefully in the control panel. ‘Denis Lambton handled the last one of these I saw, and he had an instruction book. I just hope this doesn’t turn out to be the last one I ever see.’ He sucked his teeth pensively. ‘What have you found?’

‘It really is fascinating,’ replied the Doctor, ‘and not a little worrying. You have to read between the lines, of course, but the information in these Jax records seem to confirm what happened to your friends.’

Cockaigne leaned on his shovel. ‘Do tell.’

‘Well, I think the Jax race went up an evolutionary dead end and could only reproduce by infecting other humanoid life forms. They became parasites, adapting elements of their hosts, probably through an enzyme which metabolises at body temperature.’

Cockaigne stared at him, incredulous. ‘Parasites? Enzymes? And you can tell all this from a few dancing figures on the wall!’ he sneered.

‘Hardly,’ said the Doctor in a hurt tone. ‘My tests at the hospital suggested the enzymes, and you can see for yourself how your friends were infected. They have been transformed into Jax creatures.’ Cockaigne realised that he was gaping at the Doctor now. But the Doctor’s words kept tumbling out, his eyes focused somewhere in the distance as though he could discern the answers from the ether. ‘I’m not sure what triggers the reaction, though. It isn’t immediate, and it didn’t seem to have affected Maximilian Gray or Amy. But the corpses had definitely changed.’

Cockaigne swallowed a lump in his throat. ‘What happened to Olivier?’

The Doctor lowered his voice, speaking gently. ‘I’m sorry, Bernard. The Jax infection was only able to reanimate his dead body. So you didn’t kill your friend back there in the cavern – the real Olivier died when the Jax creature originally attacked him.’

Cockaigne set his mouth in a grim line. He could hear the wolves still digging on the other side of the cathedral. ‘Are those things what I’ve been trying to save? Are they the Jax?’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Not really, no. Those animals have

neither the intelligence nor the manipulative skills to have created something like this cathedral. I think the Jax can only reproduce as intelligent life by infecting live hosts, not corpses. Those poor creatures outside may have some of their victims' physical characteristics, but their overriding motives are instinctive.'

'Their instinct is to eat us alive,' said Cockaigne.

'No no no no no. They behave just like mindless drones. They must have a blind, primal drive. I think they're operating solely on a race memory to return to this place, this cathedral, and to defend it. We were just in the way. As were your unfortunate colleagues.'

Cockaigne screwed up his face in an expression of despair. 'Oh great. So we should have just stepped aside and ushered them in! But now you've sealed us into the one place they want to defend.' He thumbed a gesture back towards the equipment. 'And I thought you were the expert on the Jax.'

'I thought *you* were the expert on the Jax,' retorted the Doctor.

The echoes of their raised voices faded away, and they sat in uneasy silence. Then Cockaigne said, 'Listen.'

'It's very quiet,' whispered the Doctor.

'They've stopped digging,' said Cockaigne, heaving himself out of the hole. They moved back around towards their entry point, and stared at the wall of earth that still covered it. Cockaigne held up his hand to silence the Doctor, and listened. There was the faint sound of angry howling, which stopped suddenly.

Then there was a clattering noise, and the earth at the entrance burst outwards and over the cathedral floor.

10

'No deals, Doctor'

The earth scattered in a spreading semicircle across the marble floor, spraying towards their feet. Cockaigne started to back away, panic rising in him, as he tried to remember where he had propped the shovel. The Doctor held him by the forearm. 'Stay calm,' he was saying. 'They may let us leave.'

A crumpled shape appeared through the hole in the wall. 'You wish,' it said.

Cockaigne goggled at the newcomer, who was pointing a percussion weapon at a point midway between him and the Doctor. The Doctor, curiously, was grinning. 'Captain Kadijk,' he beamed. 'What a relief. Do you know there are dangerous animals in these tunnels?' He peered into the gloom behind the captain, but saw only a couple of security guards struggling through the narrow gap.

'We dealt with them outside,' said Kadijk, then jerked his head in the direction of the Doctor and Cockaigne. 'Bring them through, and hurry – the Big Bang is in twenty minutes.' Cockaigne motioned forward, but stopped when Kadijk's gun moved to cover him. 'It's all right, Captain. I've deactivated the excavation bomb.'

'That must make a pleasant change for you,' snapped Kadijk. 'Move out – it's the other bomb I'm worried about.'

'The *other* bomb?' said the Doctor.

Kadijk had moved behind them now as the guards hustled them through the newly dug hole. 'The excavation plan shows one in here to bring down this structure, and another, smaller charge further underground to collapse the tunnel system. You can stay and watch if you like.'

Cockaigne tried to shrug off the weapon that prodded him on

through the tunnel, but the guard just pushed it back into place more firmly. As they stumbled onward, they passed the torn remains of two wolves, their broken bodies riddled with gunshot wounds. The creatures must have scurried back to face the oncoming security team, and been cut down in a volley of gunshots – too far into the tunnels from the cathedral for Cockaigne to hear. As he passed them, they were being placed into body bags by the police team and dragged towards the exit. He wondered if one of them was Sharstone.

By the time they reached the expedition cavern, Cockaigne had steeled himself for the sight of the other wolf, the one that he had decapitated. He could see Johnson's body on a stretcher, roughly covered with a grubby blanket, the pale skin of her hand and forearm visible where they dangled over one side. Two other police guards hefted the stretcher and carried it from the cavern. The Doctor hurried ahead of his guard, crouching down by the sloping wall of the cavern and staring intently at something.

'Fascinating.'

Cockaigne looked across, and saw a severed human head, with its tongue protruding too far out of the gritted teeth. He recognised it, and felt his stomach make an involuntary convulsion. Beneath the dirt and blood, the head was obviously Olivier's.

Kadijk confronted the Doctor by stepping in front of Cockaigne, mercifully blocking off the Sight. 'Tick tick, Doctor. Fifteen minutes. This is no time for a post-mortem.'

They scrambled aboard the security vehicle, which stood by the collapsed tunnel entrance with its engines gunning ready for launch. Cockaigne realised he must have dropped the Jax medallion in the earlier struggle, and imagined it lying in the dirt of a tunnel floor. He cast a cursory glance around, but knew that escape was hopeless now. Far to their right, visible in all its tatty glory in the light of the full moon, he could see the transport vehicle that had brought them to this place. It was already lifting off into the night sky, reclaimed by the police.

The two wolf corpses were being loaded up the ramp of the larger

vessel by two police officers. Just behind them, Cockaigne saw the stretcher-bearers stumble as though they had tripped over an obstruction. But when he watched their reactions, he realised why they had dropped their cargo. ‘She’s alive,’ one of them was babbling. ‘She’s. . .’

Johnson was standing up. In the attack, her neck had been hacked through at the front, so when she stumbled towards him he could see her head lolling forward awkwardly. In the sharp brilliance of the police vehicle floods, Cockaigne could see that Johnson’s left arm and hand were covered in thick brown hair. The rest of her skin was shimmering, undulating – and then more coarse hair began to sprout from underneath. The police guards stared in disbelief. Johnson took two more steps towards Cockaigne, who shied away. Her green eyes focused uncertainly on him, and she threw back her head in a gargling howl. But the effort was too much, and her slashed neck finally gave way – her head dropping off backward, and her body falling prone on to the muddy ground. The head bounced twice, and rolled into a pool of dirty water.

‘Well, of course!’ said the Doctor, as though he’d just solved a difficult crossword clue.

Then the-tableau dissolved as the spell was broken, and the police team continued loading everyone swiftly on board the police vehicle.

‘Leave the body,’ snapped Kadijk. ‘Whatever the hell it is.’

The Doctor glanced at him as he clambered up the ramp. ‘Don’t you recognise a werewolf when you see one, Captain?’ he shouted against the roar of the engines.

Cockaigne stared back down the ramp, but the exit door was sliding shut and he could no longer see Johnson. The engine note rose louder, and he grabbed hold of the bulkhead to steady himself as the craft rose swiftly into the night sky. Soon the excavation site lay far below, a small series of dark holes in the side of a gradual slope. Then a shimmering wave, like that from a pebble dropped in a pond, dispersed across the hillside, and the ground seemed to fall in on itself – trees tumbling, earth and rock breaking into gusting clouds of dust. The second excavation bomb had collapsed the tunnels and buried the cathedral.

In the main body of the police vessel, Cockaigne could hear Kadijk taunting the Doctor with malicious glee. ‘You’ll be lucky if you ever see the light of day again,’ he hissed.

‘It’s not daylight that’s the problem,’ the Doctor snapped back. ‘It’s moonlight that is the catalyst for the Jax transformations.’

Kadijk spun away from him with a cry of exasperation. ‘Dr Cockaigne, will you forget that HALF gobbledegook now?’ He threw a wild gesture towards the viewport beside them. ‘Take a look, Cockaigne. Your Jax archaeology dig has been buried under a million tonnes of rubble. Your operation HQ has also been demolished – with, I should add, the death of only one operative.’

‘You’re missing the point, Captain,’ the Doctor persisted. ‘You must track down the other Jax creatures before they harm anyone else. They will be making their way to the site that you have just buried. And they’ll be none too pleased to discover they have to get their paws dirty to reach it.’

‘More HALF nonsense,’ hissed Kadijk. ‘You put animals ahead of people every time. Your morality is screwed up, you know that – you’ll kill people in order to save dumb animals.’ He looked up at the Doctor with a sneer. ‘You’ve played a clever game, Cockaigne. You may have fooled us with that stunt in the HealthBlock. For me, that would be reason enough to lock you up and swallow the key. But I am going to have your head on a spike for the murders of the media team. We know how your agent Saraband infiltrated Gray’s expedition and led them to their deaths too. And for loose change,’ he spluttered, ‘we can add criminal damage, obstructing justice, impersonating official personnel, and having a stupid haircut.’

The Doctor let this all wash over him, including a generous amount of Kadijk’s spittle, which he now mopped at with a handkerchief. Then he said, ‘Are you sure?’

This was obviously not the reaction Kadijk had wanted, so he stood on his tiptoes and pushed his face so close to the Doctor’s that Cockaigne wondered if he was looking up his long thin nose. ‘I’m sure that you’re finished. Your headquarters are destroyed and your cohorts are locked up, including the charming Nurse Jones. Your operation is

smashed beyond repair, Cockaigne, and your precious Jax burial site is... buried.’ This last thought seemed to give him great amusement, and he guffawed loudly as he paced away down the police vessel.

Cockaigne watched quietly as the Doctor stalked after Kadijk. ‘Use your eyes, man. You’re a detective, for heaven’s sake. How do you explain that poor dead wretch turning into a wolf before your eyes?’

‘So you’re telling me the werewolves killed the expedition. The werewolves killed the media team. I suppose the werewolves planted the bomb that took out the CommSat. Damn it, if we rounded up those pesky werewolves, why, we’d wipe out petty crime in the city-plex and never issue a ticket for parking violations again. Well, as plausible alibis go, Doctor, yours ranks quite low. Just below “it wasn’t me, Officer, it must have been my evil twin”, actually.’ He indicated the body bags in which the wolves’ corpses lay. ‘You want to protect these dumb creatures, but you want to blame them too. Make up your mind.’

The Doctor took a deep breath. ‘Can’t you accept that you could possibly be wrong, Captain Kadijk?’

‘I can’t accept that you could possibly be right, Dr Cockaigne.’

Cockaigne saw the Doctor’s expression change subtly. ‘Well, for one thing, I am not Bernard Cockaigne.’

Kadijk gave him an ‘oh yeah?’ look.

‘And for another...’ The Doctor leaned forward towards the nearest body bag, and pulled the zip down in one long, swift movement. He stepped back sharply with Kadijk as the contents spilled onto the floor.

Cockaigne gagged. Kadijk was making little noises of confused disbelief. They were staring at the naked, bloody remains of a man.

The Doctor placed his handkerchief over his nose and mouth, so when he spoke his voice was slightly muffled. He pointed carefully with one long finger. ‘There’s still some evidence of the wolf hair and physiology, but it’s mostly reverted to the human form now that it’s dead. You can even see where your team’s bullets entered the body here... here... here...’

‘All right,’ interrupted Kadijk with a shout, turning sharply away, ‘all right, you’ve made your point.’

‘I don’t think I have,’ said the Doctor gently. ‘In the Jax underground cathedral, we found the husk of a wolflike creature. These Jax drones revert to their human selves, but what we found was something different – a real Jax, maybe even their leader. But now you have crudely buried the remnants of the dead Jax race beneath the surface, I don’t think we shall ever know.’

Cockaigne stepped forward now, emboldened by the Doctor’s performance. ‘How does it feel to know you’ve buried the evidence?’ he said. He felt Kadijk’s puzzled gaze on him now. ‘I’m Bernard Cockaigne.’

Kadijk stared.

‘Believe what you want, Captain – HALF did not kill that media crew. We fed them news items, shared our plans with them. We got better, more sympathetic coverage, and they got exclusive footage. We never put lives in danger, we only targeted property. And we certainly wouldn’t wipe out our broadcast access to the networks. Think about it.’

Kadijk jerked out both his arms, and seized Cockaigne by the lapels. ‘You think about it, you HALFwit,’ he snarled. Cockaigne realised with a gulp that Kadijk was taller and broader than he was, and smelled faintly of stale food. ‘If you put out a comms satellite, you put people in danger. At the hospital. In the emergency services. It’s not as simple as “people” or “property”. You may not have killed anyone with your own hands, but enough died as a result of your actions. But I suppose to you it’s all just collateral damage to save the world for the Jax,’ Cockaigne pushed him away. ‘Saturnia Regna belongs to the Jax, not Gray Corp.’

Kadijk brushed past him, snorting with derision. ‘This would be the Jax who were killing people, and turning them into walking corpses, I suppose?’

‘The Jax are instinctive – they can’t help themselves more than any predator.’

The Doctor coughed apologetically. ‘Well, there I must part company with you, Bernard. You saw that technology, which is now so unfortunately buried under a million tonnes of rubble. So you know

like me that the Jax were a sentient race, and that Maximilian Gray appears to have killed the last one.'

'In self-defence,' noted Cockaigne, his anger rising. 'You can't expect me to put the Jax ahead of my friends who died in that expedition.'

'No, of course not.'

Kadijk interrupted: 'Looks like Maximilian Gray was lucky. He almost went the same way as your friends... Are you all right?' He looked at the Doctor, who had staggered back against the side of the room, clapping his forehead in his hands.

'I don't think Me Gray was at all lucky,' the Doctor gasped. 'His test reports showed the same enzyme race as the others – but he wasn't dead when he became infected. He's more dangerous than the others. You must ensure he doesn't leave the hospital. Keep him in quarantine.'

'Whoa, boy,' said Kadijk. 'Reality check. First, he's the boss, he does what he likes. Second, he discharged himself last night.'

'Then he's even more dangerous... Did he seem at all, well, unusual?'

'And third,' persisted Kadijk, 'who swore in the jury that just acquitted you of all charges?'

The Doctor seized him by both shoulders. For the first time, the police guards bristled and raised their weapons. Kadijk shook his head faintly, listening to the Doctor's insistent words. 'We must reach Mr Gray before he does anything rash, tonight more than any other. Mr Cockaigne and I are the only people on the planet who have seen the Jax technology, and have any idea what to expect.' He turned away and looked out of the view port.

Cockaigne watched Kadijk pace the floor, considering the situation. After a few moments he said, 'No deals, Doctor.' Then he went over to the flight-deck door, and started issuing orders to the pilot to change course for Gray Corp HQ in the cityplex.

Cockaigne stood beside the Doctor, who was still looking out of the window into the night sky. When he followed his gaze, he could see he was staring wordlessly at the scudding clouds which were gathering in front of the round white moon.

* * *

Sam had walked for hours.

To begin with, she'd been wary of seeking out people to ask directions. First rule of the city: don't look for trouble. So she had walked purposefully through the hospital, trying to look as if she knew every metre of floor. But she was acutely aware that around each corner, in each room, she might stumble into the two wolf creatures from earlier.

Once out of the hospital, she knew what she was looking for. Her would-be friend, Randy the ambulance pilot, had pointed out the building as they had first arrived – it was broader, more imposing than the surrounding buildings, with a curious ridge towards the top where one floor extended further outwards than the others and created a balcony.

The problem in the streets was that they were empty, and she wasn't sure, if she met anyone, whether her green hospital jumpsuit would be considered unusual. Empty cabs hissed by uncaring as she meandered through valleys of half-finished buildings, eerily unlit as the horizon started to fade and stars began to appear in a sky of scattered clouds.

Then she saw Gray Corp HQ, a brooding presence at the far end of one huge long row of skyscrapers. As she approached it, she thought how it reminded her of the mountains she'd seen on her one holiday to France; they seemed close enough to touch, but you could keep travelling towards them and they just continued getting impossibly bigger and bigger, until one eventually just filled the whole horizon. Maybe it was something to do with being used to the gentle undulations of the English countryside. And maybe she'd grown accustomed to the buildings she knew in central London. The NatWest Tower would look like a flagpole next to some of these.

Sam remembered the layout of Gray Corp HQ from her earlier visit with Amy to collect her flutter. She used her temporary pass, and stepped into the transit lift. Then she activated the viewscreen, and searched for Maximillan Gray. The screen flashed at her: ACCESS RESTRICTED. So she thumped it in frustration. How else could she reach him? Send him an e-mail? Videophone him, in the hope she'd

see 'Room nine million and seventeen' in reverse on the door behind him?

She managed to display a schematic of the building. It was fifty-odd storeys high, but each of these 'storeys' contained up to fifteen levels. Come on, Samantha, think like an executive. Where would you put your office, or your living quarters, or – of course! Nice view, distinctive design, top of the pile. And it was one of the few storeys in the schematic where she couldn't get an exploded view of the levels within, so it was designed to be safe from prying eyes too. She was about to enter a request to travel to level fifty when the lift suddenly lurched, and she adjusted her stance in anticipation of movement. She was thrown over when, unexpectedly, it moved sharply to her left. She got up and seized the handrail, just in time for the lift to make a slow change in direction – the sensation in her stomach told her that it was rising. Then it got faster. For an alarming moment, she wondered whether it was out of control. But the journey upward continued steadily for several minutes, so she spent the time rehearsing what she was going to say.

'Do come in. I have been expecting you.'

Sam peered out the lift, which spilled light into the darkened office. The pool did not illuminate more than a few metres of carpet, so she could not see the face of the man berund the large desk. She stepped cautiously from the lift, peering at each side in case there were others hidden there. But they seemed to be alone.

She walked slowly across the room, feeling her boots sinking into the thick dark carpet. Then she stepped up a short flight of three steps, and was in a more austere office area. Her boots tapped on the parquet flooring of this raised area. She couldn't make out the wall on one side of the room, but the other showed a bank of dimmed monitors. Three of them fizzed with static, presumably those connected to the comms satellite. The other twelve showed scenes from security cameras all around the Gray Corp HQ building.

She looked away from the screens, trying to give her eyes chance to adjust to the poorer light near her. Eventually, she could make out

a low lamp spilling a pool of cool blue light onto the desk. The room smelled of chocolate and cinnamon.

She could see Gray's hands folded tidily on the desk in front of him. The flesh was wrinkled and mottled, but the nails were clean and white and manicured. 'Would you like a drink?' he said.

'This isn't a social call.'

'A business call? How dreary.'

'Unfinished business.' Sam sat down in the visitor's chair, trying to make out his features as she did so. But light from the night sky filtered through the huge expanse of window behind him, turning him into a silhouette. Apart from the hands, which did not move. Now that she was closer, she could see they were holding a medallion of some sort.

She screwed up her courage, and leaned forward. 'Why do you want Kursaal to fail?'

'That is a bold question.'

'You're using a bold strategy. You've been funding the HALF group, who are trying to stop your Kursaal project in its tracks.'

The hands moved, turning the medallion over several times. As it caught the light, Sam could see a curving row of gemstones flash on one side. 'What *has* the unfortunate Professor Saraband been telling you?' purred the voice. 'The late Professor Saraband, I gather.'

Sam flushed hot with anger. 'Amy thought you'd hired her just for political reasons. You'd seem interested in conservation, but you'd eventually go ahead with the building work anyway. You paid her through an unconventional route, convincing her that she'd earn more that way, but in reality making the funding deniable later on if things went pear-shaped. Then Amy worked out that HALF's mysterious benefactor funded them through the same sneaky route you used to pay her. Which meant that you must want Kursaal to be delayed, or even to fail.' She pointed beyond his shadowy form. Her broad gesture encompassed the whole surrounding countryside, which from this vantage point was still faintly visible in the day's failing light.

Sam continued: 'Amy figured the whole thing is a financial scam to bankrupt the project. Kursaal could then be picked up at a bar-

gain price by another of your companies, which would complete the work and make a huge profit unencumbered by the previous crippling debts.'

'What an interesting story,' he said. Then he leaned forward into the pool of light from the desk lamp. For a fleeting moment, Sam was startled by his fierce green gaze. He was smiling broadly, revealing a set of bright white teeth. 'What do you hope to achieve by confronting me like this? A plea for forgiveness? A confession?'

In her sweating palms, beneath the desk, Sam fiddled nervously with the datacube. Stay cool, she told herself. Don't make it sound odd. Don't tell him things he already knows – get him to tell you.

'Perhaps,' said Gray, 'you have rashly allowed your emotions to Cloud your judgement. Never mind.' The smile again. 'I am happy to talk with you now, and I am certain we shall part the best of friends.'

Sam gave a half-laugh at this. 'I don't think so.'

'Because of what happened to Professor Saraband? My security forces can be a law unto themselves, can they not?'

Sam could feel her cool evaporating. 'They could've killed us all.'

'And you feel you could have saved her?' Gray's voice was silky smooth. The white hair around his head looked like a halo.

'Yes,' said Sam calmly, but there was a quavering note in the single syllable. She lifted one hand to her face in a tentative, dejected gesture. She realised what sort of signal this might give, so she tried resting her hand on the desk in front of her.

'Amy was no saint, you know,' said Gray quietly. 'She was using HALF too.'

'I don't believe that.'

'She would have tried to make something out of the information she obtained by stealth, the information you now possess. Money, probably. Share options in the purchasing company, perhaps.'

'No,' persisted Sam softly, her eyes stinging.

Gray set down the medallion, and its jewels shone faintly in the blue light. 'I do not think she would have considered blackmail, however,' he said, holding one palm out. 'Perhaps you would now like to give me the datacube recorder which you are concealing beneath my desk?'

Then we can be friends.’ His other hand snaked suddenly across the desk, and grasped hers. She tried to pull away gently, but his grip slowly tightened until she could feel a sharp pain in her palm.

She gave a little gasp, and he turned her hand over. In the lamp-light, she could see where two of his nails had dug into her flesh, leaving crescent-shaped marks which were starting to ooze blood. Now Gray pulled her hand towards him across the desk with an apologetic noise. He had taken a clean white monogrammed handkerchief from his breast pocket.

She thought he was bending his bald head to examine the marks. And she watched in a dream as his thin red tongue licked the wounds, probing them with its pointed tip. She snatched her hand away with a disgusted grunt, bringing the other up to cradle it. The datacube dropped onto the desktop with a bump.

‘I am sorry,’ said Gray. He made no attempt to take the datacube, but pushed the handkerchief towards her with one hand. Then he grasped the medallion again, leaned back in his chair, and put his hands back together on the desk.

Sam stuffed the handkerchief into her palm, soaking up the two small points of blood. She snatched at the datacube, and pushed her chair back as if to leave.

‘Oh please,’ said Gray’s soft voice again from the darkness opposite. ‘I have said I am sorry. Will you not now stay to learn more? How I arranged the deaths of the media crew, perhaps?’ Sam sat very still. She looked from the corner of her eye at the datacube in her hand. It was still recording.

‘I took the view that Martina Lennox and her *Crime Report* team were getting rather too interested in my financial arrangements. The financial arrangements to which you alluded earlier. And do you know, it was just so convenient to build up the HALF threat by ensuring that they were blamed. So I arranged for my security guards to deliver them some new equipment, which caused an explosion in the media crew’s comms network. Which in turn prevented them from filing their outrageous, if accurate, reports containing unpleasant incriminating evidence.’

Sam felt herself go cold. She gripped the handkerchief in her palm in tight anger. 'How can you be so calm about it?'

'It was merely business. And this is a business call, is it not? Of course, the security guards who delivered the equipment knew nothing about the explosives. Though they themselves died tragically while guarding the hospital morgue, so I suppose you could now say that I am responsible for their deaths too.'

Sam sat up straighter in her chair. 'How can that be?' she asked. She could smell the chocolate and cinnamon again. It was the most chocolaty, most cinnamony smell she could ever recall. 'Those guards were killed by the Jax. I was there.'

'Precisely,' purred Gray. He lifted the medallion up, and Sam could see it was on a chain. Gray placed the chain around his neck and swivelled his chair around to face the window. 'What inclement weather for such an auspicious occasion,' he said, and pressed a button in the arm of his chair. There was a faint hum, and Sam could feel a light breeze blowing across the room. At first she thought it was a ventilator, but then she could tell from the vanishing reflections that Gray had opened the huge glass window in front of him. She thought she could hear noises carried in by the movement of air, including the faint but certain sound of wolves howling. The moon was appearing from behind scattered low cloud.

Sam's eyes seemed now to have adjusted much better to the low lighting, and she could see that Gray had slid his chair towards the window. She wondered whether he was thinking about jumping, after his shocking and unexpected confession. She backed away towards the lift, scraping her chair as she did on the parquet flooring. Gray's chair swivelled slightly. 'Do not leave now,' he said. There was strain in his voice.

A waft of air reached Sam from the window, and she thought she could detect a musky scent on the wind. 'Don't ask me to stay.'

The strain was clear in Gray's voice now. 'I... was not asking you,' he said, and gave a small grunt, as though in pain. 'Too late now... They are here.'

Sam headed towards the lift, but there was no call button. She

scurried back to the desk, looking for a control. Then she remembered how Gray had opened the window.

She saw the controls in the arm, seized hold of the swivel chair, and pulled it around. Gray growled at her, but was slumped back in the seat. She thought for a moment that a shadow had fallen across his face, but when he threw his head to one side, the dark shapes moved with it. His face was covered in coarse black hair, and when he cracked his eyes open they were like brilliant green slits edged with black. He growled again, and Sam staggered back around the desk, her injured hand throbbing under the handkerchief.

Gray stumbled to his feet, tearing off his jacket and then ripping his shirt and tie off savagely. Metal buttons pinged and bounced like scattered change on the wooden floor. Then he lunged on to the desk with a howl of anguish. Sam could see, in the moonlight, an arch of hair splitting out down the skin of his spine. The medallion still dangled on its chain around his neck.

‘They... are here,’ he cried out in a raw voice. ‘The Jax have found me here. They are... here in the building, I sense them... nearby.’

On an instinct, Sam whirled round to look at the security cameras. Two showed the main entrance to the building, where three tall, upright wolf creatures were entering with a shambling gait. Another showed the inside of the lift cabin she had used to get here – two more wolf shapes, shaking their heads to and fro as if mesmerised by the display. She stared, panicky, at the lift display across the room – it showed that the cabin was on its way.

Gray’s obscene transformation continued. She watched his clean white nails suddenly sprout longer, more pointed. He screamed out a howl of anguish as his legs – his rear legs – bent awkwardly in the opposite direction and dropped him to the floor on his haunches, His new claws gouged a short path in the surface of the solid wooden desk. Then he turned his head into the moonlight streaming in through the open window, and Sam could see it distending, stretching, a muzzle forming from the centre of the mass of hair at the centre of his face with a sickening cracking sound. Pointed ears developed from swollen buds on the top of his head, and he screamed in agony

and exultation.

Sam tore her gaze away, scrabbling around for something, anything, with which to defend herself. In the middle of the desk blotter, beside the screen display, she could see a long thin letter-opener, an incongruous antique in the middle of the high-tech equipment, so she seized it in her good hand. The data cube bobbed out of her grip, and bounced onto the desk. She was about to pick it up when a massive paw reached out first and crushed it into the wooden surface.

Gray was facing her. Or whatever Gray had become. It was panting after its exertion. Fully two metres long, with broad shoulders shrugging powerfully behind its large wolflike head. A long red tongue flicked to one side of its slavering jaw. She thought it was going to bark or snarl at her but, more terribly, it formed shapes with its mouth – and spoke.

‘Be patient,’ it said. The voice was low, guttural, and seemed to rise up from the creature’s massive chest. The creature’s front was still leaning over the desk. Sam didn’t know where she found the strength, but she heaved at her side of the desk and managed to tip the contents towards the monstrosity. Glass trinkets tumbled to the floor, the blotter jammed against the creature’s chest, and the lamp fell over with a clatter.

The creature seemed to be amused. ‘You are making quite a mess,’ it said. ‘And in the current financial climate on Kursaal, good help is so difficult to find.’

‘What are you? What’s happened to Maximilian Gray?’ gasped Sam, brandishing the letter-opener in warning.

The wolf rolled its eyes theatrically. ‘We are Maximilian Gray. This is what he wanted. To you, perhaps he was just a frail old man. But when we infected him, we passed on our genetic structure. He struggled for a while in the hospital, but then his body relaxed under sedation and the infection took hold. He realised he need not fight it; he could be reborn, stronger. And now we have a strong new body for the Jax pack leader, instead of the thousand-year-old cadaver which we shrugged off at the Place of Rebirth. We are the Jax pack leader!’ It ran its tongue slaveringly around its jaws. ‘And you shall be our

consort.'

Sam could see no exit behind her, and now edged round the desk. She could feel the cool breeze blowing in through the open window, and it smelled of freedom. The Jax watched her warily, edging around the opposite side of the desk as though pursuing her. Within seconds, they had swapped sides of the desk. The moonlight shone on the Jax's hairy face, and she could see the bone-china white of its eyes, like a newborn child's. The medallion around its neck glittered.

'Grrr,' said the Jax, like someone impersonating a wolf. It was taunting her. 'What do you think? I'm trying for terrifying, but I worry that it may just come across as petulant.'

Sam risked a look behind her. Her spirits sank. There was no balcony, just a sheer drop. The moonlight spilled over her, and she looked away from the window, feeling suddenly giddy.

The lift door slid open and more wolf creatures loped out towards them.

'Join us,' said the Jax.

'I'd rather die.'

'That is not an option,' it replied.

Sam felt another wave of giddiness. The Jax let out an ululating howl. The light level dipped as the moon went behind another bank of cloud, and then the Gray wolf was lunging across the desk towards her.

She brought up the letter-opener in both hands as the creature leapt forward. It impaled itself on the spike, which entered its chest just beside the glittering medallion.

The creature opened its jaws wide and snarled in agony.

The snarl developed into a howl. The two wolves by the lift took up the ghastly chorus.

The Jax pulled itself back off the spike, which came out with a sucking sound. Blood spurted up through the hole, and the creature coughed up more red between its teeth. Its head went up, and it bayed a choking cry to the sky.

The thing that had been Gray stared straight at Sam, who stood numbly in front of it, her head swimming, her vision smearing. The

Jax sprang for her again.

The police transport had swooped down into the main cityplex thoroughfare, scattering three driverless cabs in its passage towards Gray Corp HQ. Throughout the last leg of the journey through the cityplex, Kadijk had urged the police driver on faster and faster, wishing he'd taken the controls himself. The more he'd considered the Doctor's incredible story, the more he'd wanted to disbelieve it. He hadn't been sure whether he was hurrying to prevent the catastrophe the Doctor had predicted, or to call the strange man's bluff in front of his face.

Now, as the engine note died away, Kadijk followed wheezing behind the Doctor and Cockaigne as they hared ahead of him for the main entrance.

Then they heard the howling.

Kadijk barked a series of orders to his police staff, who hurried forward to investigate the noise in the main reception area. There was a brief chatter of gunfire, and the nearby howling was cut off suddenly.

Above them, though, floating on the night air, he could still hear another bestial cry. There was a crashing sound from high in the building, and when he stared up he could make out a falling shape. 'Look!'

The others stared up in the direction he was pointing. After a beat, he thought better of it, and yelled, 'Take cover!'

They scurried back away from the building, and stared up again from their new vantage point near the police vehicle. A body-sized shape was falling from high up the building, its limbs flailing. Just as it reached the last third of its fall, a gust of wind must have blown it into the side of the building, where it struck, spun, and tumbled through three lower-storey canopies. Glass exploded outward as the canopies bore the brunt of the fall, before the body dropped with a sickening crunch into the foliage outside the main entrance.

They ran into the building. Within ten minutes, they had reached Gray's office. Kadijk had used his security clearance to expedite the transport, and he, the Doctor and two armed police officers had squeezed into Gray's private lift cabin.

From his previous visits, Kadijk knew where to find the main room lights. When they flicked on in a blinding rush, Kadijk saw two movements in the room. The first was a pair of Jax drones, uncharacteristically cowering in a corner of the office by a bank of monitor screens. The other was Nurse Jones, slumping down by the huge open window opposite.

He noticed that the Doctor was standing in front of the two armed officers, preventing them from getting a clear line of sight to shoot the Jax creatures. ‘Wait wait wait wait,’ he was saying. ‘They may still be infectious, but they seem motiveless now. You should arrange to have them taken into captivity. For their own safety,’ he added significantly, nudging the gun barrels down to the ground with his hands. ‘As well as for the safety of others.’

The officers looked across at Kadijk, who nodded. ‘Get onto the ZooBlock.’

Kadijk heard the Doctor give a sudden cry of surprise. Then the Doctor hurried over to the window, clearly astonished to see Nurse Jones there.

‘Sam,’ he said, ‘you ought to be locked up.’

‘Oh, cheers, Doctor,’ she said.

‘No no no. I mean, I was told you’d been locked up.’ The Doctor was throwing Kadijk a sour look. ‘Safely in custody.’

Kadijk could feel his blood pressure rising again. ‘That moron Porlock! How difficult can it be to lock up a nurse, for God’s sake? I’ll have his membership of the Imbecile Club revoked on the grounds that he fails to meet minimum requirements.’ He fixed one of the unfortunate police officers with his baleful gaze. ‘With the number of prisoners, staff, and corpses that have gone missing over the past two days, why don’t I just provide an answering service down at the station saying “Sorry, there’s no one here at the moment”?’

He crouched down beside Nurse Jones, and gently removed the letter-opener from her grasp. There was blood all over her green tunic, across the desk, and over by the window frame. He followed the sticky trail around the desk, discreetly allowing the Doctor to squeeze past him and talk with his young friend. Kadijk could hear him talking

to her quietly, calmly, explaining about the destruction of the underground cathedral. Kadijk bit back a sneering comment about HALF's failure to save both the Jax and their cathedral when he saw the girl's reaction to the news. She was howling tearfully against the Doctor's shoulder.

The noise seemed to make the Jax drones by the monitor screens become restless. They swung their heads to and fro, cocking their ears as though searching for the source of the noise. Kadijk and his two officers studied them warily. 'Keep an eye on them,' Kadijk said helpfully. 'This is going to be one litter it's impossible to find good homes for.'

It was quite some time afterwards when Kadijk realised that this must have been the moment when the Doctor and Nurse Jones slipped out behind him and vanished.

But by that stage, he was watching floodlights being positioned in front of the Gray Corp HQ. The emergency teams were clearing foliage from the front of the building to recover the fallen body. Kadijk was patting his pockets to locate his I-card, so that he could ask one of the other officers to bring his personal fitter to the scene of crime. First he realised that the I-card was no longer there. Then he remembered how, an hour earlier in Gray's office, the Doctor had squeezed past him to reach Nurse Jones.

He watched a police fitter scud to a controlled halt by the roadside. This impressive arrival was spoilt when Zaterdag stumbled getting out from the passenger side after catching his foot in the door. 'What the hell kept you?' bellowed Kadijk and, without waiting for an answer, strode across to where Cockaigne was calling him.

He stopped in the clearing where the emergency team had torn aside small trees and shrubbery in front of the main building. Kadijk could see a broken shape lying sprawled on the soft earth, its limbs in weird positions, It was the husk of a man-sized wolf.

'It's decomposing, as you can see,' said Cockaigne. 'But it hasn't reverted back to human, so it must be another real-life Jax.'

'A stone-cold-dead Jax,' muttered Kadijk, poking it with his foot. 'What do you mean, *another* one?'

Cockaigne looked up. ‘It’s just like the remains we found in the Jax cathedral,’ he explained. ‘Except, of course, that one was carrying a sort of talisman around its neck, marked with the Jax emblem.’

The Doctor leaned in through the cab window, and addressed the empty interior. ‘So how much credit have I got left on this thing?’ He waved Kadijk’s I-card around airily. The passenger display showed him. ‘Well, that should be enough for a round trip to one of the outer construction areas and back to town,’ he smiled. ‘And keep you away from the police until we’re long gone. Charge me in advance, and off you go.’

The empty cab powered up again, and then vanished at speed into the night sky. Sam watched it growing smaller towards the horizon, straining to see it in the gloom because the moon was still hidden behind a bank of dark cloud. She watched the Doctor pocket the I-card and turn back to her. He was offering to guide her the last few muddy steps to the TARDIS.

She had felt exhausted throughout the long cab journey. The Doctor had been full of congratulations for her brilliant subterfuge of weeping – embarrassing Kadijk into leaving them alone, when they had made their escape. But she could tell from his slightly brittle, overearnest tone that he wasn’t at all convinced by his own words. Meanwhile, her mind was still whirling, and her hand itched furiously. She didn’t want to look at the cuts until she was safely back inside.

The Doctor gestured grandly upward. ‘Pick a star,’ he said. Sam looked up, but the effect was spoilt because the low cloud covered half the sky. The moonshine filtered through a thin patch of cloud, and she felt giddy again. ‘Let’s leave this gloomy, ill-conceived, half-finished rathole and go somewhere... sunny!’

Sam disengaged herself from his arm, and stared into the darkness. She remembered their first journey across the mud and grime, and thought of the Jax cathedral that Amy had enthused about. That she herself had never seen. ‘I’d want to go back and prevent the destruction. Stop the deaths,’ she said quietly.

The Doctor harrumphed, an apologetic noise he sometimes used in

place of a long debate. His voice was quiet, serious. 'We can't save the excavation. We can't save Amy or the dig team from the original attack. I can't take you to that past, no matter how much I may want to Sam, because it's your past too. I'm sorry. Please don't ask.' He squelched up to the TARDIS, looking rather odd with his green velvet coat over the borrowed blue medical overalls. He produced the key from deep in one pocket, and pushed the door open. Light spilled out, silhouetting him in the frame. Sam thought about Gray sitting in his chair by the window.

'Can you take me to the future instead?' she said suddenly. She could see the Doctor nodding as he went in.

She made her way carefully over the oozing mud, pausing briefly to look down at her borrowed clothes. The medic's overalls were filthy now.

Her scratched hand itched furiously beneath its handkerchief bandage. She lifted her other hand, and studied the medallion. There were thirteen gems arranged in a crescent on its face. She turned the medallion over, wiping off the smeared blood with the edge of the grubby handkerchief. In the wash of illumination from the open TARDIS door, she could see the reflection of her tired face.

She stared for a long moment at her own bright-green eyes before stepping aboard.

'The commander will see you now'

'Stay calm,' said the pilot. 'This is a routine emergency procedure.' He spoke clearly and slowly into his headset microphone, and the words echoed behind him through the passenger cabin of the short-range shuttle. The engine note quavered uncertainly, and the flight displays flashed orange and red.

The co-pilot was struggling with a manual control. The shuttle rolled lazily to one side.

The Doctor craned his neck discreetly to study his fellow passengers. He nudged Sam, who looked back with a bolder, more obvious gaze. He and Sam were sitting in the frontmost of seven curving rows, each row containing twelve seats. They looked like a cinema audience, he thought, peering expectantly forward towards the pilot's position. Three youngsters were rotating their forehead antennae, a familiar Haxalian sign of agitation. Beside them, a long-faced Cabalan flared its horselike nostrils nervously.

'Power surge,' shouted the co-pilot.

'Stay calm,' said the pilot again, apparently unworried, his voice carrying over the speakers.

'That's easy for you to say,' replied the co-pilot, much less composed. 'You've done this trip a thousand times. This is my first. Oh, I should have known this would happen.' Unfortunately, thought the Doctor, his voice also carried across the shuttle cabin. Now he could spot an Alpha Centaurian with a wild expression. Its one large wide eye stared, unblinking in its domed green head. Its tentacles waved feebly as the sound of an explosion outside the ship shook the cabin.

'Scared?' said Sam, her voice slightly raised against the rising note of the shuttle's engines.

‘No,’ said the Doctor, ‘I think they always look like that. It’s a wonder they allowed him in, though. I thought this flight was for humanoids only.’

Sam grinned, staring at the tall green shape. ‘Just be grateful they sat him in the back row.’ The shuttle started vibrating violently.

The Doctor looked back again. ‘But how did they strap him into his seat?’ He watched the mixture of expressions on the other passengers’ faces. The cramped shuttle was already filling with the scent of a dozen different races’ fear and excitement.

‘Going to visual,’ shouted the co-pilot. The Doctor saw the passengers’ expressions change, and turned to the front again to see what they had spotted.

The meteor shield over the front display had peeled back like the Alpha Centaurian’s eyelid, revealing the planet far below. Fiery trails whipped past them at frightening speeds. The view juddered as the shuttle shook again.

‘Watch out,’ yelled the co-pilot, ‘power surge!’

The shuttle lurched sideways at a violent angle. A huge flash of sparks sprayed the crew positions. The pilot appeared to raise his arms to cover his face, and then a further explosion from the controls beside him seemed to throw him bodily from his seat. He slid down the sloping floor and crumpled into a heap by the cabin wall.

The co-pilot flicked off his own seat restraint, sliding carefully down the floor to reach his colleague. With no one at the controls, the shuttle veered wildly, the viewscreen a crazy jumble of light and dark: ‘Captain!’ the co-pilot was screaming above the crescendo of noise. ‘Oh no,’ he moaned. ‘I think he’s dead.’ He stared around, hysterical, his mouth quivering. Another explosion buffeted the craft. Some passengers cried out in surprise.

Come in, shuttle two-seven-niner. The tannoy crackled, and an image was projected on to the viewscreen like a Heads-Up Display. It was a rat-headed humanoid in a shiny red suit, and its fluffy brown cheeks were puffed out in concern. *Come in, two-seven-niner, this is Port Authority Gamma. Are you receiving? ‘Is that a giant chipmunk?’* asked Sam in a stage whisper.

‘A Geomyde,’ replied the Doctor. ‘And don’t be rude. I think he’s trying to help.’

At the front of the room, the co-pilot seemed to have come to a decision. ‘We have a major power outage,’ he was shouting. ‘Control panel’s fritzed. I can’t control it, and the pilot’s down.’

The image of the Geomyde fizzed in and out of focus. *Stand by, two-seven-niner, for emergency instructions.*

The shuttle shook again. ‘Forget it,’ bellowed the co-pilot.

He slapped a nearby wall control, and a panel beside him shot back with a hiss. The Doctor saw a sign above it flashing red: ESCAPE POD.

Another surge threw the ship backward, and the image of the planet on the screen veered down and away. ‘We’re ejecting,’ the co-pilot shouted at the screen. Then he dragged the pilot through the gap in the wall, which sealed after him. The Doctor could hear gasps from the passengers behind him. Then there was a percussive sound from behind the door, and the shuttle veered to one side – presumably the escape pod firing off.

Two-seven-niner? There was an edge to the Geomyde’s voice now. *Come in, two-seven-niner, this is Port Authority Gamma. Your current trajectory puts you on collision course with Colony Augusta.* The rat-head turned sideways, as though talking to someone out of vision. A thin pink tongue flicked briefly out of the light-brown fur of the Geomyde’s face, and his voice seemed to squeak in displeasure. *Abandoned ship?* The calm tone seemed to have vanished.

The rat-head turned back, leaning in towards the camera. *Emergency. Come in, Space Shuttle two-seven-niner, is there anyone on board who can hear me? We need to talk you through the emergency landing procedure. Is there anyone who can hear me?*

The shuttle lurched. The Doctor heard his belt buckle snap open, and then he pitched forward onto the floor by the shuttle controls. When he knelt up carefully, he discovered Sam was sprawled next to him. ‘Looks like it’s up to us,’ she beamed.

Come in, two-seven-niner – hello, anyone? The rat-head seemed to do a double take. *Who are you?*

‘Hello,’ said the Doctor, slipping swiftly into the pilot’s seat, noting

that the fire in the controls had gone out now. 'I'm the Doctor, and your co-pilot today will be Sam Jones.'

Glad to have you aboard. Don't worry about not having flown one of these before, I'll guide you down.

'Thank you, that won't be necessary.'

Oh.

If it were possible, thought the Doctor, that rodent had a surprised look in his little pink eyes. 'Don't be ungracious, Doctor,' hissed Sam. 'Remember our fellow passengers.' The Doctor looked back over his shoulder at the rows of eager faces. He felt like a concert pianist about to give a command performance.

The Geomyde explained that they were going to try to give Port Authority Gamma computer authority on the shuttle, so that they could remote-control the shuttle safely back to the planet surface. The Doctor received step-by-step instructions. He could see Sam watching him, and knew that she'd noticed when he deliberately ignored one vital step.

Careful, Doctor. You're in danger of going out of range of –

The Doctor eased back another control, and the shuttle surged noisily forward. The Heads-Up image fractured into lines, and then vanished in a sudden burst of white noise and a final faint message.

... good luck. . .

From this point, the ride became gradually rougher. The instruments suggested they were heading straight into the upper atmosphere. The Doctor glanced occasionally across at Sam, who showed from her exasperated expression that she thought he was just showing off. She was watching the screen, crying out when asteroids loomed into vision or they seemed in danger of crashing headlong into a satellite. Then she seemed to go completely quiet. The Doctor looked at her briefly, and saw that her attention was riveted to the front.

He looked towards the screen, too. The view jiggled and bounced as the shuttle shuddered. In the centre of the window he could see the moon, half lit by the bright yellow sun.

Then he wrenched the controls to correct the shuttle's alignment. It swooped and rolled. Behind him, the passengers groaned.

Now the planet seemed to rush towards them. No matter which controls the Doctor seized, pulled, or cajoled, the shuttle seemed to gain speed. A fiery glow spread around the front viewscreen, and warning lights started to flash all around the control panel. A visual warning flashed up on the screen:

CABIN TEMPERATURE OUT OF CONTROL

There were shrieks from the passengers, and the Doctor realised that the cabin sprinkler system was dousing everyone with a fine mist of water. Klaxons sounded an urgent note above them.

The last thing the Doctor saw on the screen was a flashing message:

RE-ENTRY TOO STEEP

Then the shuttle shook violently one last time, all the lights went out at once, and the wrenching, screaming sound of tortured metal cut out suddenly.

The noise of a loud explosion boomed from the shuttle speaker system.

A pause.

The sound of hydraulics. Sam laughing. Then all the lights came on again.

The Doctor swivelled his pilot's seat around and studied the passengers. One or two looked a bit shocked, but most were grinning fit to burst.

To his right, the whole wall of the shuttle dropped into the floor, revealing a further, dark area. On one side stood the Geomyde wearing his shiny red suit. A smile full of tiny sharp teeth stretched from one fluffy cheek pouch to the other. 'I'm pleased to see you all survived that fatal accident, visitors. Please show your appreciation for today's guest pilots.'

The passengers applauded enthusiastically. The Doctor nodded modestly, trying not to scowl too much.

'Your seat restraints should now have released, visitors,' continued the Geomyde smoothly. 'Please make your way swiftly to your left and down the exit stairs, ensuring that you take with you all personal belongings at this time. We hope that you have enjoyed your ride on the *Terror Shuttle*, and that you will join us again soon. On behalf of

everyone at Kursaal Incorporated, I'd like to wish you a happy and accident-free stay at the Kursaal ActionPark.'

'Nice one, Doctor,' said Sam, blinking in the bright sunlight outside the ride. 'Why didn't you take the easy option, and listen to Gordon the Gopher?'

The Doctor glowered at her. She obviously didn't understand how tricky these short-range shuttles really were. 'It's rigged,' he said in a sulky tone. She was obviously enjoying it, so to avoid looking her in the eye he pretended that a button on his coat cuff required an urgent repair.

'Of course it's rigged,' said Sam. She had stepped aside to allow the other ride participants to go past into the main street. She acknowledged their smiles and comments, grinning sheepishly and giving 'what could I do?' shrugs.

The Doctor tugged at her sleeve. 'Why didn't the co-pilot get everyone into the escape pod, for example?'

'I imagine,' she replied mildly, 'because he couldn't fit all seventy people on the ride into it. It's a fun ride, Doctor. And we were just cargo.'

The Doctor pouted.

'Or maybe,' she added with a conspiratorial tone, 'it's designed so that you *can* succeed. But then you went and upset Gordon the Gopher by ignoring him, so he crashed you anyway. Can we get something to eat, now? I could eat a horse. Not literally, of course.'

'I should hope not,' smiled the Doctor. 'But that Caballan's looking rather nervous. Look, his ears have flattened.'

They made their way through the press of the crowd. He reached out and grasped Sam's wrist to keep them together, aware that he should not press on the bandage around her hand. All about them, races from many different planets were queuing outside exotic space-theme rides. A small group of Ogrons were blocking the main road where they had stopped abruptly, frowning at a hand-held map display. Perhaps they were having trouble seeing it in the bright sunshine. No, he realised, they seemed to be holding it upside down.

Eventually, they reached an open-air restaurant selling Terran cuisine under a broad canopy covered in stars and crescent moons. They sat on two uncomfortable chairs at the only empty space, a table which looked like an inverted white cone impaled on its point in the pavement. The Doctor ordered tofu satay.

‘How can you eat that?’ asked Sam. ‘It’s like roasted plasticine.’

The Doctor leaned back carefully in his seat, enjoying the light breeze gently billowing the canopy above them. ‘You can’t be marinating it properly.’

‘Even so,’ said Sam, clearly unconvinced. ‘I’m ravenous, so I’ll have the spinach dal, with brown rice.’ She studied the bustling crowd of different races parading past them in the main street. ‘It seems like only a week since we saw this place being built.’

‘Well, for *you* perhaps,’ said the Doctor, considering the couple of nights they had spent recuperating in the TARDIS before returning. ‘For everyone else, it’s fifteen years. Place has come on well, hasn’t it?’

‘This ActionPark is definitely my style.’

The Doctor frowned at her. ‘Didn’t you enjoy the WaterPark yesterday?’

‘It might have been more fun if you hadn’t looked so embarrassing.’

He favoured her with a shocked look.

‘Oh, please, Doctor. That baggy whole-body thing reached your elbows and your knees. And believe me, stripes are just not you.’

The Doctor grinned wickedly. ‘So it wasn’t the otter, then.’ He was childishly pleased to see Sam blush beetroot red.

‘Oh shush, I didn’t realise. I thought an animal had got into the pool. Besides, he wasn’t wearing a swimming costume.’

‘He accepted your apology handsomely, I thought.’

‘Doctor, if it’s all the same with you, I’d like a bit more advance information next time we go bathing.’

The Doctor raised his eyebrows. ‘We haven’t tried the SportsPark yet,’ he said, trying to remember the Kursaal details. ‘And there’s the ThemePark, where they have locations and amusements designed around cultures in the Cronus system. That one even has a ride telling

the history of the Jax.’ He studied her reaction. ‘Well, perhaps not. Whoops, watch out, here comes the food. Now you can chew on that instead of your fingernails.’

He nudged her elbows off the table, and Sam sat back in her seat suddenly. Their circular table seemed to be opening up like an iris. From within the inverted cone, a round tray was rising to their level, carrying three plates.

‘That’s impressive,’ said Sam, propping her elbows back. ‘And how would sir like to pay?’

‘Sir has already paid,’ said the Doctor, withdrawing a small card from a slot in the side of the white cone. ‘Captain Kadijk’s I-card.’

‘Don’t leave home without it,’ said Sam.

‘And his credit’s still good. I thought perhaps he’d have cancelled it fifteen years ago, so I loaded a program on the card to reregister it when I first used it. Worked rather well, don’t you think?’ He could see Sam feigning indifference.

They ate in silence for a while, watching white high cloud in the startling blue sky, ‘Altocumulus,’ said the Doctor absently.

The crowds seemed to be thinning as people found places to go for their midday meal. A uniformed Kursaal attendant was patiently explaining to the Ogrons how to operate their display map, and they were nodding vigorously while plainly not understanding a word.

‘I was surprised you wanted to come back here,’ said the Doctor eventually. ‘I wasn’t sure I wanted to myself.’

‘What changed your mind?’

The Doctor prodded at a piece of tofu. ‘A couple of things. I looked Kursaal up in the TARDIS Information System again.’

‘Did it say the same as last time?’

‘I looked for different information on our last visit. I hadn’t expected the scale of development we saw then. Well, it turns out that the original data was right all along. Kursaal was eventually completed, and struggled through its first few years encumbered with huge development debts. But they scaled it down, made its scope more modest. Designed it around a combination of white-knuckle space rides and themed leisure holidays.’

Sam forked up the last of her brown rice, and mumbled her surprise through the previous mouthful. ‘What about all that terraforming they were doing?’

The Doctor watched a white delivery van hovering around the corner. ‘They stopped transplanting large parts of other planets here, and instead they created new, imaginary locations. People come here to escape real life. People from all over the Cronus system, and some from beyond. Or so the Information System says.’ The white van nudged its way through the crowd. The Ogrons grudgingly moved aside to allow it past. The Doctor let out an exasperated sigh; the vehicle was blocking his view of the arching fountain beside the *Wall of Death* ride.

He noticed that Sam was studying him with a steady gaze that he recognised. It was the one she used when she thought he was hiding something. ‘Doctor, this Information System. . .’ she began.

‘I thought vehicles weren’t allowed into the ActionPark,’ he grumbled.

‘Does this Online History of the Everything Ever tell you things about me?’

‘Perhaps I should warn him Before he gets a parking tickets, eh?’

‘Doctor,’ she persisted. ‘Does your Information System tell you my future?’

He composed his features into what he hoped was a disarming expression – his sincere half-smile, the one that never failed. ‘It’s full of useless information, and not very well indexed. Besides, I could only afford the abridged version.’ He stood up quickly. ‘Come on.’

She rose to join him and seemed surprised when their circular tray disappeared into the cone again. She snatched up her sunglasses before the iris tabletop closed on them.

The Doctor shaded his eyes, and looked into the middle distance. ‘The other reason I decided to come here,’ he said as he stepped into the street, ‘was that I thought it would do you some good. You haven’t been your usual buoyant self recently.’

‘Says the Doctor.’

He stopped briefly to consider her frowning face. 'Maybe you're coming down with something. Your eyes seem a bit glazed.'

'It must be listening to you going on about my health.'

When he persisted, she admitted that she hadn't slept well over the last two nights. She'd had a nightmare.

'What sort of nightmare?'

She started to close up again. 'Oh well, you can never remember properly when you wake up, can you?'

He stooped a little so that his face was close to hers, and waggled his eyebrows appealingly.

'It wasn't very nice. I think it was about Plato, my mum's dog when I was little. Getting rabies. Which he didn't.' She was looking at him thoughtfully again, fiddling with the silver chain that dangled round her neck and under her navy blue 'T' shirt. Then she pointed to a small girl dancing past them, one hand grasping her father's hand and the other brandishing a rag-doll clown. 'Where can we get an ice cream?' Sam said brightly.

The Doctor looked around, and found that the party of Ogrons had meandered up behind him, and were struggling with their data map. He turned back to make a sarcastic comment to Sam, but then felt his ears pop, followed by a punching blow which struck him squarely in the back and threw him forward. That was the last thing he remembered.

'Hold still, mister. You look like you're going to be OK. That blood isn't yours.'

The Doctor lay with his back on a hard surface. He stared at his hands, which were covered in blood and gravel. Above him, a paramedic was completing a biometric scan.

He could feel a faint mist of rain falling across him, soaking into his cravat and shirt. Strange. Climate control for this area was supposed to be working. 'What's happening?' he asked.

'Too early to say, sir,' said the paramedic, offering a reassuring smile. 'Please stay where you are while I download your medical records. Then I'll be able to give you something to ease the pain.' He seemed

to have a strongly lined face and green hair. Sam would think he was an ageing punk rocker.

Sam.

He sat up suddenly, whirling about trying to locate her. But his head seemed to explode with pain. He felt it carefully, locating an egg-shaped bump on one side behind the temple. He considered his other injuries carefully, and concluded that he had bruises but no breaks. Then he smelled the smoke.

He had been stretchered out on the pavement near to the street restaurant. The water was spraying from the fountain in weird spurts. He could see the cause easily enough – oily smoke blossomed out of the blackened shell of the white hovervan. The van had been crunched into the roadway by the force of the explosion, which appeared to have blown mostly in the direction of the fountain and the *Wall of Death* ride. The subsidiary effects had thrown some debris towards the restaurant, and above him the stars-and-crescents canopy was hanging in shredded strips. Half a dozen alarms wailed their complaints from different directions.

To his right, he could see a pile of leather and rough-woven clothing, which he suddenly recognised as the remains of an Ogron – no, two Ogrons. They must have protected him from the brunt of the explosion. The map display device was a tangle of broken components. He couldn't see Sam anywhere.

There was a babble of voices from behind him, and he turned painfully to see who was talking. A crowd of rubberneckerers was being guided away by newly arrived police officers, who pushed the sightseers around the corner while erecting a laser barrier to protect the scene of crime. He could hear only snatches of conversation – terror group, drugs cartel, and someone complaining about the *Wall of Death* being out of service. Two ambulance flitters surged forward with a brief wail of sirens to clear the stragglers.

The police were cautiously examining the debris scattered across the roadway. Random shoes, the odd bag, assorted pieces of takeaway food, a child's rag doll.

Then he saw Sam. She was forty metres away, covered up to her

neck with a sheet and being stretchered into one of the ambulances. He couldn't see any blood, but her eyes were tightly closed as though she were in pain, and her face was as pale as death.

He shouted her name, but the ambulance doors were closing behind her. The Doctor stood awkwardly, testing his weight on either foot. He looked back to see the green-haired paramedic talking with a police sergeant. He was pointing in his direction. And he wasn't smiling any more. The police officer had drawn his gun, and moved over to the Doctor.

'Stay nice and still,' said the policeman calmly. One of his fellow officers had come across to join them, and gripped the Doctor by the forearm.

The Doctor squirmed with pain. 'My friend is in that ambulance,' he gasped. 'Let me go to her.'

'You're going nowhere,' snapped the policeman in a low voice, studying a display screen in the sleeve of his jacket. 'Despite your alias, "Doctor", you don't appear to have a medical record. But you've got a very interesting criminal one.'

The Doctor watched in frustration as the ambulance containing Sam started to lift into the air, wheeled briefly, and then vanished overhead and into the distance. The pall of smoke from the destroyed van soon hid it from view.

He looked at the policeman's identity badge. 'I'm a doctor, Sergeant Bandros,' he shouted at the policeman. 'She needs specialist medical attention.'

Bandros was studying his sleeve display again: 'You've certainly impersonated a doctor, sir.'

The Doctor watched the paramedics loading another ambulance. They were helping a Caballan onto a stretcher, being careful not to jolt it. One hind leg was broken, the hoof splayed out at an odd angle. At least they weren't planning to shoot the creature. The Doctor thought about this, and then studied the policeman's gun.

'You should be flattered, Doctor,' Sergeant Bandros was saying. He indicated a police flitter which was parked thirty metres away, just inside the laser cordon. 'There appears to be a lot of high-level interest

in you. The commander will want to talk to you.'

The Doctor watched a short, crumpled figure getting out of the flitter. It removed its battered police cap, and started haranguing its nearby staff in a familiar bawling monotone. One of its subordinates seemed to be making emollient gestures, and received another burst of invective: 'It'll take more than a few car bombs from those drug barons to put us off the case,' snapped the commander.

'Not a whole lot more,' muttered Bandros quietly from beside the Doctor.

The green-haired paramedic snapped his medical case closed and spoke to the sergeant. 'OK, we've patched them and packed them. I'll be taking this last ambulance to the hospital. See ya.' Bandros nodded an acknowledgement, and then straightened up as he saw movement in his direction. 'Ah, looks like the commander will see you now...'

The shouting man had started walking across towards them, trailing his staff like ducklings behind their mother.

The Doctor didn't need to look too closely. Even at from a distance of thirty metres and fifteen years, he could recognise the shambling figure of the Kursaal security Commander.

It was Kadijk.

Smoke still curled from the wreck of the van, and the spray from the broken fountain continued to fall as fine, sooty rain. Above the sound of the complaining alarms, the Doctor could hear the ambulance engine whining as the power built for takeoff.

He brought his free hand up to his chest, pulling his cravat loose, plucking at the top button of his green velvet jacket, his face contorted into a grimace of pain. 'My hearts!' he gasped, and dropped back onto the stretcher like a rag doll.

'Show me where you are'

'Tell us again how it happened,' said Officer Vereker.

The nurse stared across the small hospital room, twisting the corner of his white jacket between his fingers. 'It was all a bit of a shock, you know?'

Officer Dmowski stopped fiddling with her sleeve display, and leaned forward encouragingly. She enjoyed this part of her job. That's what she'd said at her interview – 'I'm a people person.' So, for the most part, they kept her away from the drug busts and the cityplex searches and the stakeouts. She talked to bereaved relatives. She cajoled the truth from reluctant witnesses. 'I'm sure it was a great shock to you, Nurse Malone,' said Officer Dmowski, giving Vereker a stern look. 'So why not start from the moment this cardiac patient was brought in?'

The nurse licked his lips briefly, and gave a nervous cough. 'OK,' he began. 'The paramedics brought him straight through. He'd been causing them no end of worry. He was brought into this sector of the HospitalBlock because they thought he was human.'

'Thought?' asked Vereker sharply. 'Don't you check, or something?'

Malone seemed to freeze. Officer Dmowski closed her eyes briefly, and adopted her soothing tone again. 'Was he human?'

Malone grabbed at her question like a drowning man at a life belt. 'The ambulance bioscan didn't have many other options, and there was at least a fifty percent chance he was human. So they brought him here.' He looked at the notes on the datacube beside him. 'But pulse rate was seventy percent below normal for a human, breathing seemed to be down to a quarter, and his temperature seemed abnormally low. We thought he was dying on us, you know? The paramedic

said the guy had complained of chest pain. But the electrocardiograph trace suggested greatly increased amplitude.'

Dmowski nodded reassuringly, the way they'd shown her in basic training.

'Then your police team came in, you know?' said Malone quietly, stealing a look at Vereker. 'And just when we thought the guy was about to pull through, he flatlined. Course, we cleared your people out and called for the crash support team.'

There was a long pause. Dmowski nodded further encouragement.

'And when... ' Malone wiped his hand across his mouth and down his chin. 'Just after I'd called the crash team, the patient sat up. Sat bolt upright on the gurney, introduced himself, and said he was feeling a great deal better now, thank you. That was when the crash team arrived.'

'You guys work miracles.'

'Shut up, Vereker,' snapped Dmowski, then leaned forward towards the nurse again. 'What did the crash team think?'

Malone breathed heavily down his nose. 'The chief medic, Dr Brandt, was... really annoyed. We've had a lot to keep us occupied of late. We're all working too much, what with these bombings. And the increase in drug overdoses. You know?' He heaved another big sigh.

Vereker leaned back against the wall, and looked at the white ceiling. 'It's keeping us all busy, son.'

'Yeah, well,' snapped back Malone, balling his fist and placing it on the table. 'I really feel for you, you know? It's so much easier for us in the HealthBlock, yeah? We only have to worry about the undertrained staff and the overused equipment. We've got crummy staff accommodation on the far side of the cityplex, and a flaky comms system run on a shoestring.'

'Yeah, yeah. You do a great job.'

'You try piecing together the bomb victims and pumping out the addicts.'

'What?' said Vereker. 'And spoil your fun?'

Malone sprang to his feet. 'You know, every night when each of the Parks close, Kursaal Incorporated pays a team to repaint any tiny scratches that have appeared that day on the handrails around their Main Plazas. But they haven't refurbished the equipment in our intensive care unit since it opened a decade ago. . . 'He broke off, flustered, as his wrist communicator beeped. 'I have to go, I have another patient,' he said quietly.

Vereker was still staring at the ceiling, unmoved. Dmowski coughed apologetically. 'What happened to your cardiac patient?' she asked.

'Same thing, you know?' said Malone, moving to the door. 'After Brandt chewed me out over the false alarm, I got beeped for another incoming. The guy was gone, I didn't even get a chance to chew him out myself for wasting our time. I don't know how he faked it, but it must have been the best display of biofeedback this dump has ever witnessed. I don't know where the Doctor went.'

'That's OK,' said Dmowski. 'We have already spoken to Dr Brandt.'

'No, not Dr Brandt,' said Malone, opening the door of the small room. 'I mean the cardiac patient. He was called the Doctor.'

Officer Vereker put a call straight through to the station.

At first the receptionist had been no help at all. The Doctor had made his initial inquiries about Sam at the hospital main entrance. But the Angoran had seemed happier combing his pink fluffy hair in a mirror on the the reception desk than answering the Doctor's questions.

'My friend was brought in after an accident,' persisted the Doctor. He flipped the mirror's flat, shiny surface down on the desk and said it again. He tried to think what Sam had been wearing, and wished he'd paid more attention when she had been complaining about the lack of decent clothing in the TARDIS lockers. What had she been asking for? Mr Martin's boots? He closed his eyes to concentrate.

'About this tall.' He indicated with the flat of his hand. 'With shortish blonde hair, blue eyes, and a sulky expression. Wearing a loose brown or khaki jacket, waist-length with open cuffs, dark shirt tucked into blue jeans, and black ankle-high boots. . . '

'Sir,' said the receptionist coldly. 'If you have a name, I can search

the patient database. Or holiday accommodation. I can search on race, I can search on planet of origin, I can search on date of birth. What I cannot search on,' he stated emphatically, 'is ankle-high boots. We are very busy today. You must be aware that there was another bomb in the ActionPark.'

'But that,' shouted the Doctor, 'is where she was injured.'

The receptionist waggled his fluffy pink eyebrows. 'Well, why didn't you say so?' he said, and gave the Doctor directions to the emergency admissions ward.

The nurse on the ward was most apologetic. 'I'm terribly sorry. I do recognise her from your description. And I know that she was here only half an hour ago. Actually, I'm surprised that she's up and about at all. Ordinarily, I'd have said that she was just answering a call of nature, but I can see that her clothes have gone, too.'

The Doctor could see that the nurse was baffled. When he asked how Sam was, the nurse reassured him that her physical injuries appeared superficial. But because Sam had been rolling around in her sleep and whimpering, as though suffering a nightmare, the attending doctor had recommended that she be kept in for observations. And furthermore, she had been lightly sedated.

'Would you like to leave your details with us, sir? Then, if she returns, we could contact you. Do you have any personal identification?'

The Doctor looked at her thoughtfully, then patted his pockets. 'I'm rather afraid that I left my I-card back in my flitter. I'll go and find it, and be right back.'

The nurse's question about identification had prompted an idea. The Doctor stepped swiftly back down the corridor, looking for an empty office with display-screen access. After investigating several side rooms unsuccessfully, he spotted a consultant's office. The name-plate read DR JOSEF BRANDT.

The office was secured with an identity card code-lock, but he worked on this with his sonic screwdriver, glancing furtively down the corridor in case the high-pitched sound was drawing unwelcome attention. Eventually, he was able to break into the room and close the door behind him.

There was no external window to provide illumination from the late-afternoon sun. The Doctor decided not to use the main light, relying instead on the light from the display screen, which was already switched on. Across the room, throwing a little more light through the frosted panel in its upper half, was a connecting door to the next office. Probably Brandt's secretary. He crept up to this other door, but could see no sign of life from that office.

He suspected the security team may have removed Sam from the hospital once her biometric scan revealed her identity, albeit from fifteen years previously. Perhaps the medical log for Sam would give some idea of where she might have been taken.

He tapped a pensive tattoo with his fingertips on the desktop, racking his brain to try to remember which bugs were current in the contemporary computer systems. He was going to have to hack in directly, but at least he had the former Captain Kadijk's I-card as a starting point. He suspected that the security codes would have been changed, but he already knew from the restaurant earlier that not all of the access codes had been revoked. The personal details still identified him as Kadijk.

The I-card slid into the display-screen port. The display chimed a series of musical notes, and he swiftly thumbed the MUTE icon. Then the welcome screen flashed up a reassuring message:

HELLO COMMANDER KADIJK

The Doctor could see his own surprised expression reflected in the display screen. Somehow, he was authorised to access Commander Kadijk's files, although the I-card had previously contained personal details only for Captain Kadijk. His reregister program was obviously much cleverer than he thought. 'My very own smartcard,' he mused aloud.

The screen flashed a further message:

REVIEW PERSONAL FILES?

So he thumbed the YES icon, and read files for ninety minutes.

He paid particular attention to those marked as private to Kadijk alone. The two most recent ones turned out to be the most interesting.

DRUG-RUNNING FILE provided summary information about a lu-

crative start up business in the new Kursaal, and the fight between several drugs companies and their representatives. The more market-oriented sales teams had taken their work much too seriously, and had commenced a bombing campaign to destroy their competitors' source of supply. The report summarised the attraction of Kursaal as a drugs distribution site: instead of having to spread their product all round the Cronus system, the suppliers now had rich customers with disposable incomes who travelled to them and then took the merchandise away for further distribution on outlying worlds. This streamlined the supply process, reduced overheads, leveraged the synergies of supply-and-demand economics, and empowered the lowest levels of distribution management while, by an amazing coincidence, placing the greatest risk of smuggling detection on the most replaceable members of the workforce.

JAX DRONES FILE provided details of an infestation of the creatures in several of the leisure facilities on Kursaal after a breakout from the Zoo Park twelve years previously, The Doctor was unsurprised to learn from the file that this fact was assiduously kept from the tourists, having been deemed by the Kursaal board as a negative influencer on the first-choice-holiday decision-making process. What did surprise him, however, was the name of the person with whom Kadijk was working to eliminate or minimise the problem: Bernard Cockaigne.

From beyond the connecting door came the clatter of something falling over with a crash. The Doctor held his breath, ready to drop behind the consultant's desk if the door opened. But it remained shut, and there were no further noises from the secretary's office.

Back on the display, the Doctor ran an ad hoc query for files first created at the same time as the previous two files. He found only one.

JAX CATHEDRAL FILE

Empty.

The Doctor discovered that the original of this file was private to Cockaigne. He searched for further linked files to which only Cockaigne had ready access. He could not open them, but he could read their descriptive names.'

MAXIMILIAN GRAY – DECEASED

DOCTOR? – WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

SAMANTHA JONES – DANGER

‘Time to make a call,’ said the Doctor, opening Kadijk’s personal address book file.

The display sprang into animated life, and an unkempt figure appeared in the image. ‘What is it, Kadijk, I’m busy...’ The figure did an almost comical double take, and lurched towards the controls of his own display screen.

‘Wait a minute, Bernard,’ pleaded the Doctor. ‘I think I’ve ensured that you can’t disconnect from that end. Please listen to me.’

The Doctor could see Cockaigne trying to make sense of several disparate pieces of new information. From the ident, Cockaigne had obviously expected Kadijk. Now he was facing the Doctor – someone he hadn’t seen for more than a decade, but whom he recognised immediately.

The Doctor considered the image of Bernard Cockaigne. He seemed to have aged more than fifteen years. There was no trace of ginger in his beard, which sprouted in uncombed white tufts from his face. His head of grey-white hair was no better organised but ran thinner over the crown. The deep grooves lining his face spoke of years of anxiety and fear. His nervous eyes darted from point to point, never still.

He was obviously suspicious even before he had answered the call, the Doctor noted. Cockaigne had disabled the 3-D vision at his display, so that callers could see only a limited two-dimensional view and not make out any of the room or its surroundings.

‘Is this a secure line?’ asked Cockaigne. He was trying to check something on his display.

‘I accessed it with Captain Kadijk’s personal details,’ said the Doctor. ‘I admit I’m surprised to find you working with him.’

‘*Captain* Kadijk – where have you been, Doctor? At a health spa, from the look of things.’ Cockaigne snorted a short laugh. ‘I suppose I surprised myself. Kadijk offered me remission on my prison sentence. One hundred percent remission actually, once he realised what he was facing.’

'I need to find Sam,' interrupted the Doctor. 'You have a file about her, which suggests she's in danger.'

'Doctor, *you* are in danger...'

'Danger from what?' insisted the Doctor. 'From what I've seen in Kadijk's files? I know that Gray Corp's new management is a hoodlum bunch of drug pushers who want to make Kursaal the centre of their processing and distribution network.'

'Shut up!' screamed Cockaigne, scrabbling at his display controls to try to sever the connection. 'This line may not be secure! The criminals who made money while Kursaal was being built are now part of its fabric. They're like informal parts of the various security forces. And do you think they won't be able to trace you with that stolen I-card?'

The Doctor smiled. 'I've made it secure.'

'Oh yeah?' sneered Cockaigne. 'And why don't you just shout all this from the window. I'm sure you won't be overheard then, either.'

'Someone should be shouting about this,' said the Doctor coldly, 'They're turning Kursaal into the drugs centre of Cronus. Kadijk should arrest them. Or are they so untouchable?'

Cockaigne was talking in a whisper, as though that would make his words harder to overhear. 'People have invested too much in the project to risk doing anything which might cause it to fail. I shouldn't be discussing this with you like this.'

The Doctor leaned towards his display screen urgently. 'You're talking about several planetary governments,' he hissed. As he peered closer, he spotted an activity monitor pulsing at the bottom of his screen. 'Oops. Not-so-smartcard.'

Cockaigne saw his reaction. 'A trace,' he yelled. 'Disconnect – please!'

'Where is Sam?'

'I won't tell you any more on an open line,' panted Cockaigne. 'I'll tear this screen off the desk. I'll only talk to you face to face.'

'How will I find you?'

'If you really have access to Kadijk's files, you'll know. Watch out for Sam, Doctor.' Then the display went blank as Cockaigne wrenched his

display away from its connection.

Unable to see or hear him any longer, the Doctor cut the remaining connection. He steepled his fingers, and propped his chin on them while he considered the trace at the bottom of the screen.

The alert had come through on Kadijk's system fifteen minutes ago. Since then, he'd been sitting in his office, trying to chase the details through Kursaal's labyrinth of connected systems. If the early simplicity of the original security design had been implemented, his trawl would have been faster. That system had been compromised even before it went online, and they had been patching it and playing catch-up ever since. Of course, it would have helped if Kadijk had a better understanding of how to conduct the trace. But he could not trust any of his staff for this particular pursuit.

One thing was obvious, though, even to him. The access was using one of the original encryption keys, one of the very few that he had left unrevoked all these years.

'So, you *are* back, Doctor,' he said to his empty office with grim satisfaction. 'After all this time, I'd almost given up on that stolen I-card.' He scanned recently accessed files, 'Damn! He's been able to open personal files too.' Kadijk dotted his plump forefinger over his display screen. 'Show me where you are, Doctor. Aha!'

He shouted towards the open door, of his office: 'Bandros, get in here!'

His surly sergeant lounged in the doorframe. 'Sir?'

'Who've we got stationed near to the hospital?'

Bandros pondered this briefly. 'Crowd control,' he said thoughtfully. 'The evening costume parade through FestivalWorld is about to start, and that's next door isn't it?'

Kadijk nodded. 'They'll have to do. Here.' He tossed Bandros a datacube. 'Get this out to them.'

Bandros caught the cube one-handed. 'What is it?'

Kadijk gestured to the display, and Bandros loped across to his boss's desk and slotted the cube into the reader. The display crackled and then displayed a three-dimensional image of a middle-aged

man's head. It was animated, and morphed between several different variants. The eyes stayed the same, but the jawline filled out, the nose lost some of its angularity. The hair was grey at the temples, then longer, then it seemed to melt away from the top of the man's head.

'Lots of choices,' said Bandros, unconvinced. 'We could arrest half the middle-aged men at the hospital.'

'I'll know him when I see him,' said Kadijk.

Bandros looked more closely. 'I think I have seen him. At the bombing this morning.'

Kadijk swivelled round to stare at his sergeant.

'But he was younger than all of these. Much younger.'

Kadijk gestured to the screen. 'Choose the one that's closest, then get it broadcast.' Bandros was looking blankly at the controls. 'Come on,' snapped Kadijk. 'I hired you to decrease the butthead count on my staff. Never mind. Say "when".'

Bandros watched the 3-D sequence play once more. 'When.' They studied the image of a man with long, grey-streaked hair and a supercilious look. 'Still too fat.'

'No more time,' snapped Kadijk, plucking the datacube from its place. The face on his display screen froze. 'It's close enough, Sergeant. Post it out to all our locals. And if the satellite's still up today, send it to all other stations, just in case.'

While Bandros left the office, Kadijk flicked further instructions on to his screen. 'Perhaps these will keep you busy for a while.' He stood up and pulled his crumpled jacket off the back of his chair. Then he went through his usual leaving ritual. Close his office windows. Clear away papers on the desk. Most of all, make sure the dusty metal filing cabinet in the corner was securely locked. Check the display screen.

On the screen, the still image of the older man stared out at him imperiously. 'It's been a long time, Doctor.'

He could see Bandros standing in the office doorway again. 'Mobilise the troops,' said Kadijk. 'And remember – I want him alive.'

The screen was full of file icons. The 3-D display made them look like bubbles rising up, jostling for position on the surface of the screen.

When the Doctor placed a finger over any of them, they would display intriguing titles.

JAX HISTORY

GRAY CORP FINANCIAL

STORY OF KURSAAL

The route to Cockaigne's home still showed in the top corner of the screen. Now the Doctor tried reading some of the new files. Some showed row upon row of light and dark marks, or ones and zeros.

LATEST DRUGS BUSTS

HALF ORGANISATION

One early file featured a three-dimensional rendering of a middle-aged man. He was about to close it, but then considered it a bit more closely. It was a fatter, greyer version of him. 'Charming,' he said to the image. 'Why didn't they draw spectacles and a moustache on as well?'

The files kept appearing. Some had text, but the sentences were broken, the words jumbled, meaningless. Other files were empty. He discarded them as he scanned and closed them.

SECURITY CODE

ACCESS LISTS – RESTRICTED

Then a thought struck him, and he displayed the 'create' date for the uppermost files. 'Oh, very clever,' he said to the person beyond the screen. 'You're trying to delay me. I bet you've been waiting since I first used this card in the restaurant. And for fifteen years before that. And you said you weren't a patient man.'

He opened a program icon, manipulated a few further on-screen items, and posted the results back to the source server. The bubbles slowed, and then stopped. But the trace icon at the bottom of his display did not pop and vanish. No, wait – it had gone, but this one was a new trace that he hadn't noticed when all the other files burst into view. It was on the same local network, too. Someone in the hospital Time to leave.

He stepped briskly towards the door of Dr Brandt's office, slipping the lock undone. Just before he turned the handle however, he heard voices on the other side.

He fastened the lock again, and moved cautiously towards the connecting door. The faint illumination from the secretary's office filtered through the opaque glass, but he could see no movement inside. He swung the door towards him, and stepped through into the light.

The first thing he noticed in the office was the display screen at the secretary's desk. It disorientated him for a moment, because the image was the same as he had seen in Brandt's office. The same icons. The same open files. The unflattering image of himself. Kadijk's on-screen address book, showing the route to Cockaigne's home.

The second thing he noticed was that the contents of the desk were scattered over the floor to one side. He glanced down, and saw a woman's legs sticking across the carpet. And the blood.

He crouched down, peering beneath the desk at the secretary's body. Her pale cream dress was stained dark with her own blood, which was still oozing slightly from the gash across her chest and neck. Her eyes stared sightlessly up at him, her face a mask of horrified surprise.

Behind him in Brandt's office he could hear someone trying the key in the lock. The handle rattling. Then the first blow on the door.

He flicked off the secretary's office light, pulled the connecting door shut, and moved to the door in her office that led to the corridor. As Brandt's door finally gave way and the intruders pushed their way in, the Doctor stepped calmly into the corridor.

He was not observed leaving the room, so he pulled the door shut behind him and walked at normal pace along the corridor and past Brandt's office. As he passed the doorway, the two police officers who had broken in were cursing with frustration. He continued on.

Straight ahead, two policemen moving towards him up the corridor, walking side by side. They cast him no more than a cursory glance, and then moved into single file to walk past and behind him. Clearly, reflected the Doctor, the identikit picture was as useless as he thought it was. At the next junction, he found himself walking behind two hospital staff wearing white coats.

'I'm glad that shift is over,' said the taller of the two, shoving his hands into his coat pockets. 'It's bad enough when it's accidental. I

can't understand the mentality of anyone who could inflict those kinds of injuries deliberately.'

His shorter colleague nodded. 'Let's get out of here and dance it out of our systems. Doctor's orders.'

'My diagnosis is that you've gone crazy, Kepesk.'

'Yeah, it's working in this place. But I was thinking about the FestivalWorld parade.'

'Uh-huh,' agreed the taller medic. 'OK, we can get there faster if we go through the front entrance.'

The Doctor dropped into step behind the two medics. They continued towards the hospital entrance hall, and the Doctor nodded civilly to more police staff when they stepped aside to allow the three men to walk past.

He was moving nonchalantly towards the reception desk, stepping through the automatic sliding doors and waving cheerfully to the Angoran who was still on duty, when he spotted the squat, shabby figure of Kadijk, twenty metres away. The commander was coming through the main doors, and one of his police officers was leaning on the reception desk.

The Doctor faltered for a second, standing by the sliding doors which led back into the hospital. The two medics in white coats had gone over to the reception desk for a brief conversation with the Angoran, asking what would be the best route to the FestivalWorld parade. Then they eased their way past Kadijk and stepped towards the exit.

Kadijk paused in the open waiting area, where a female Caballan was dozing in a chair. Across from her a couple were huddled together, the young man with his arm around the woman as she stared blankly through red-rimmed eyes at a clown toy. A display was showing the admissions waiting time as 29 minutes.

Kadijk raked his eyes over the room. Looked towards the sliding doors. Kept walking.

Fifteen metres away. Passed a glance over the Doctor's face, then towards the receptionist.

Ten metres. Kadijk was moving over to the reception desk. The Doctor had started to walk slowly to the entrance doors when a voice

called out, 'Oh, Doctor!'

He startled, and turned to look at the receptionist. The Angoran had stood up, facing the exit doors. 'Dr Kepesk! You forgot your I-card.'

Kepesk and his colleague were coming back through the main doors. But Kadijk had noted the Doctor's reaction. Looked more closely. Hardened his expression. His eyes narrowed in recognition. 'Working late in pathology, Doctor?' he said.

'Sometimes the obvious is staring right at you'

The receptionist called: 'Oh, Doctor! Dr Kepesk, you forgot your I-card.' Kadijk thought three things in fast succession.

First, the man in the green coat had turned his head suddenly to look across at the receptionist. But doctors in hospitals wear white coats, don't they?

Next, he thought of a tall young man in a grimy green overcoat and tangled brown hair bursting into a gloomy underground cavern surrounded by police officers. And the same man in blue overalls in a hospital room, operating a display screen by Maximilian Gray's bedside. But that was fifteen years ago, wasn't it?

And then he thought about the display screen in his office showing the identikit composite. But Bandros had said the face was too old, hadn't he?

Now he could feel himself smiling a tight smile of relief and satisfaction. It was impossible, yet it was obviously him.

'Working late in pathology, Doctor?' he said. Without taking his eyes off the Doctor, he nudged Bandros, who was standing at the reception desk.

The two real doctors were coming back from the exit doors, and shuffled apologetically in front of Kadijk and Bandros as they tried to reach the reception desk. For a crucial second, they were standing between Kadijk and the Doctor. Kadijk cursed, and reached out with one hand to push them roughly aside, moving quickly towards the exit. The Doctor had anticipated this, and Kadijk could see the sliding doors closing behind his back.

'He's gone back into the hospital!' bellowed Kadijk. He slapped the tall medic on the chest with the flat of his palm. The medic scowled,

but retreated cautiously once he saw Kadijk's dark expression.

Kadijk gestured to Bandros. 'Make sure the exits are covered. I'll get after him.'

He flung himself at the sliding doors, punching at his sleeve communicator as he ran, 'All units, target is in the building. Long, dark-green coat, light trousers. Now has long brown hair. Bring him down, but do not kill him.'

He rounded a corner, and almost ran into a couple of police officers. No one had passed them. Kadijk wheeled around, scanning doors. The lift showed it was going up.

'Anyone above ground level?' he shouted into his sleeve communicator. There was no reply. 'Damn!' The lift seemed to have stopped at two.

Kadijk threw himself through the stair doors, and started a panting ascent. 'Cover the lift doors,' he croaked into the sleeve comm. The two younger officers had overtaken him, and leapt into the second-floor corridor. Kadijk wheezed out after them, only to find them helping a third officer to his feet by the closed lift doors.

'Target knocked the officer down, and continued his ascent,' said the nearest cop.

Two more floors. 'He's going for the roof,' snarled Kadijk, opening the stairwell door again.

He caught up again with the other two officers at the head of the stairs, and leaned heavily on the handrail as his breath came in whooping gasps. The officers were pushing the locked door at the top.

'What are you waiting for?' heaved Kadijk. 'Divine intervention?'

They stared at him in the gloom.

He took another series of deep breaths. 'Break it down, you dimwits. You're not gonna get a ticket for it.'

On the third kick, the door burst outward, and Kadijk pushed through on to the roof. To one side, three huge fans swooped round with calm efficiency behind thin mesh gratings. They were twice a man's height. To the other side, the empty, sloping expanse of the hospital roof led off without interruption to the edge of the building.

Kadijk gestured his officers around the fans in one direction, while he took the other route. He passed the lift exit, noting that the cabin was empty. The doors were jammed open, and the control panel fizzed and spluttered.

‘Commander!

He hurried around. His two officers were moving slowly towards the far end of the roof. The Doctor was standing near the edge, a dark outline against the late-afternoon skyline.

‘Don’t come any closer!’ called the Doctor. ‘I’ll jump.’

The officers stopped. Kadijk kept walking towards him. ‘Come on, Doctor,’ he said, trying to keep the irritation out of his voice. ‘I want to help you.’

‘You want to stop me,’ said the Doctor.

‘Yes, but –’ began Kadijk. At which point, the Doctor jumped.

For one awful moment, the Doctor thought he might have misjudged things. Then he felt a jolt that almost dislocated his shoulders, and he realised it was all right.

The ladder clattered and clanged a bit more, and then flattened back against the side of the building. The Doctor looked up. Kadijk was ten metres above him shouting something down at him, but the words were indistinct. Two more heads appeared over the edge of the buildings. Then he realised that one of the police officers was starting to clamber carefully over the edge and onto the emergency escape ladder.

The Doctor stepped aside, gripped the next ladder, and jumped with his full weight onto it. Like the previous one, it gave a protesting groan before dropping like a stone, taking the Doctor with it. Section by corroded section, the ladder slid out in its grooves – thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk – until it reached its limit, and the jolt shook the Doctor’s body. This time, however, his feet were on the bottom-most rung, and bore the bunt of the impact. The idea of the design was that the ladders slid down and locked before you put your foot on the first rung. But these had not been maintained or serviced for years, and when the Doctor released the catches they just stayed where they were

until some weight was applied to them.

He kicked off another restraining catch and swiftly stepped on to the next section of ladders, dropping another ten metres.

Thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk.

Far above now, the policeman was following him rung by rung.

He could see from a quick look down that he was approaching the last section of ladders. He hopped across, but this time the ladder did not slide freely. He could see that it was more badly corroded than the others. Fumbling in his jacket pocket, he found the sonic screwdriver, which had been so useful earlier in overriding the lift control to get him to the roof. He played the device over the corroded links between the ladder sections, and heard a satisfying cracking sound as the oxidising contamination vibrated off the metal. And then, unfortunately, the rivets popped out too.

Thunk, thunk, thunk –

The last section of ladder dropped out of the bottom groove with a shriek of metal.

The Doctor closed his eyes, bracing himself for the final impact. The last section dropped at an angle away from the building, and landed with a squelch in the ornamental border.

The Doctor opened his eyes again and looked down. He was buried up to his shins in mud, still clutching the ladder, which had also sunk a third of a metre into the border. He pulled his feet out of the dirt, shaking off the topsoil with a grunt of distaste. Then he rescued one of his shoes from the dirt, and slipped it back on his stockinged foot. ‘I only polished these this morning,’ he sighed.

The police teams must have been guarding the conventional exits around the hospital. When he looked around him, he found he was at the side of a small arbour, presumably where patients could come to relax and recuperate in sunny weather. There was a trellis covered in climbers attached to the tall perimeter wall, with further displays of more exotic flowering shrubs all around. Two elderly women wearing towelling robes stared at him from one of the carved benches. ‘Are you the gardener, dear?’ said the first one, fixing him with a gimlet eye. ‘Because you’ve got a devil of an infestation in your roses.’

Her companion nodded at the Doctor's ladder, which was protruding from the herbaceous border at a sharp angle. 'You'll need that if you're going to reach the top ones,' she said, and sucked her teeth.

The Doctor could hear shouting from around the corner of the building. Way above him, the policeman was still only halfway down the second section, but had stopped to point in the Doctor's general direction and shout back at some other unseen colleagues on the ground.

'I think,' he announced to the two old women, 'I'll make a start before my colleagues get here. Awful pests, you can't escape them. On the roses, I mean. Aphids, I shouldn't wonder.'

The old women nodded sagely, as though they understood what he was talking about. He tugged at the ladder, which came free from the border with a sucking sound. Then he hefted it across the trellis, propped it firmly against the woodwork, and hurried to the top.

The women watched this display of gardening in admiration.

From the top of the ladder, the Doctor could hear the cheers and music and laughter of a parade taking place beyond the hospital's perimeter wall. And looking back towards the hospital, he could see three police officers hurrying around the corner. They were gazing up at the side of the building, where their colleague was still gesticulating wildly.

The Doctor straddled the trellis, cautious to avoid the rose thorns, and tugged at the ladder. He was able to pull it, rung by rung, until it balanced on the trellis beside him. Then he stood and, like a tightrope walker, carried the ladder towards the wall. A cry from behind told him that he had been spotted by the police officers.

He looked down at the old ladies, sitting on the bench beneath the trellis. One of them was smiling up at him. 'Gardening,' she said. 'It's a young man's job, really, isn't it?'

The Doctor dropped the ladder down the side of the perimeter wall and, to the sound of a final shout from his frustrated pursuers, scurried to the street below.

He knew that Kadijk and his officers might be able to see him from the hospital roof, so he stayed out of sight, hugging the hospital's outer

wall until he was able to slip into a connecting street. He found that he was in another side road, where a large group of laughing festival-goers were getting into their costumes and preparing to join the carnival parade before it marched triumphantly into FestivalWorld. It would be the biggest and best carnival that Kursaal had ever seen, until they did it all again as usual the following afternoon. Another dozen people appeared, all wearing oversized dancing costumes in a matching shade of lurid blue.

At the other end of the side road, a red-faced young man was lying down, being examined by a couple of white-coated medics. His oversized carnival mask lay on the ground some distance from him, a giant leering dog's head with a thick tongue of red ribbon spilling out over its teeth and onto the road. The Doctor sidled over to the small group. One of the medics was complaining to his colleague.

'We've only been here for five minutes, and already we're back on duty.'

'Shut up, Kepesk,' said his companion, 'and try to keep his feet higher than his head. And be careful not to step on his tail.'

The Doctor picked up the carnival head, and carried it quickly to the street junction where the carnival was getting into full swing. He could see several police officers chaperoning the participants towards the main parade route, waving them on with the bored indifference of people going through a regularly practised routine. Ten half-masked figures in a marching band began a cacophonous tuning of their instruments, and a float full of cartoon animals hissed by. As the vehicle hovered past him, the Doctor could see beyond it to where a couple of police officers were studying the gathering crowd more attentively – examining patterns of movement, looking for the unusual. Looking for him.

He slipped the carnival head onto his shoulders, shrugging off his coat in the process. The inside of the head smelled of fake fur and cheap cologne. A curtain of thin material, painted in irregular blotches of brown and black spots, hung down from the collar of the dog's head and reached to just above his shoes. The Doctor folded his own coat over his arms in front of him beneath the material, and

walked into the gathering stream of people. He allowed himself to be carried along by a gaggle of giant geese which was being pursued by an enormous red fox.

He could turn his head slightly in his huge dog's head, which gave him the privilege of seeing what was happening around him without other people realising exactly where he was looking. The music from the nearby carnival band echoed inside the head, and he began to understand why the previous occupant had fainted. Without trying to move too much against the current of people, he steered himself gradually towards a police officer who was walking along with the parade. By tipping his head towards the dog's big fake teeth, he could listen to the officer's communicator spitting out instructions to his pursuers. He listened cautiously, aware that the parade route was taking the participants past the front entrance to the hospital.

Then he noticed a police sergeant steering past him and into the centre of the crowd. The officer stopped right in front of him as he listened to some particularly obtuse suggestion from whoever was calling him. The Doctor couldn't slow down fast enough without tipping off the carnival head, and so he walked right into the policeman.

'Whoa,' said Sergeant Bandros, peering up. He was looking at the eyes on the dog's head, not at the Doctor's which were peering out from through the teeth. 'Or should I say "heel"? Sorry, friend.'

Bandros walked beside the Doctor now, returning to his call. 'Whad-daya mean? No, we could not stop the parade, you moron. There are ten thousand people, and from where I'm standing it looks like half of them are dressed as giant chickens.' The Doctor couldn't hear what the other person was saying. 'Yeah yeah,' said Bandros suddenly. 'Get back to me when you've switched your brain on.'

Bandros was looking across to the other side of the Doctor. So the Doctor peered out of the dog's jaws, and was alarmed to see Kadijk, puffing along beside him and very out of breath.

Kadijk's eyes scanned the crowd, clearly apprehensive to be surrounded by oversized wildfowl. 'Sergeant, any sign?'

'No, sir,' said Bandros. 'Did you find out where he was headed from the files?'

Kadijk was shaking his head. 'No. By the time we got to check the screen in Brandt's office, there were seventeen hundred files displayed. All with today's access date.'

Bandros laughed. 'Your delaying program?'

'I'm not feeling very funny today, Sergeant,' Kadijk snapped back. He indicated the Doctor's costume head. 'Better hope for your sake my bark's worse than my bite, eh?'

'Yes, sir,' said Bandros contritely.

Kadijk had now skipped around the back of the Doctor, and was standing between him and Bandros as the crowd flowed into the main carnival route. 'Don't enjoy the parade too much,' said Kadijk. 'Comm-Sat Two has started to develop system faults again, and Climate Control aren't guaranteeing clear skies.'

'We'll find him, sir,' said Bandros, watching his superior moving ahead of him into the crowd.

Kadijk glanced back. Then he looked at the Doctor with a thoughtful expression. The Doctor was suddenly aware of all the carnival music echoing inside the huge dog's head. He felt trapped beneath its malodorous weight. 'You know who you remind me of?' said Kadijk loudly.

The Doctor stared at him silently, not allowing his pace to falter. 'My ex-wife,' said Kadijk, and with a snort of laughter he vanished into a flock of inflatable sheep.

Bernard Cockaigne stared out of his third-floor window at the storm clouds gathering, blowing towards him over the nearby ThemePark as the evening light started to fade. The large white disc of moon was growing slowly clearer over the adjacent service buildings. Below his window a green and blue service truck drew up, presumably delivering more residents back to their homes after another long work shift. He watched a group of twenty recent arrivals already scurrying off to their apartments from the public transport stop, and vanishing into dark doorways like mice into a wainscot.

Cockaigne pulled the blind down, almost overturning a document file and a fresh pile of papers which were balanced on the sill. Then he

retreated to the grubby armchair in the corner of his cramped apartment.

He looked around the room, no longer comforted by the proximity of all his notes and research. He pulled his knees up to his chest as he sat, rocking himself gently. He didn't need the light switched on: he knew the position of every item in the room; nothing was moved unless he moved it himself. Darkness fell slowly outside, and he continued to stare across the room at the blank display screen.

Cockaigne considered the room dispassionately now. He had lived here since these service quarters had been built twelve years ago. They were not luxurious, but they offered him the right combination of acceptable comfort and necessary anonymity. He knew each banging sound in the plumbing, every footstep on the landing, each jangling stage of the lift machinery's progress from the ground floor. If anyone bothered to ask, he could tell them where every nail in his wooden floorboards were, and which ones he had knocked back in to cure the creaks and knocks.

Not that anyone would ask, or be given the opportunity, for Bernard Cockaigne never had visitors, never entertained guests. He never had tradesmen call – that would invite comment in the service quarters. He wanted solitude. He guarded his loneliness jealously. Bernard Cockaigne could tell what day it was from the smell of his neighbour's cooking, but he had never spoken to her since she had arrived. He had heard her bawling at his other neighbours when they returned noisily from a late shift, or talked too loudly to their visitors on the stairwell. She had never needed to shout at Cockaigne.

He knew the self-imposed limits of his physical world. And he knew where to find any piece of information in the scattered mounds of paperwork that dotted the floor of his three Spartan rooms.

Now, after more than a decade of fitting in, disappearing into the fabric of this enclosed world, he had felt vulnerable for the first time. His route to the outside world was not the panel door leading out to the hallway and the lift. His doorway was a glass-fronted display screen, through which he could step anonymously and return invisibly. The display screen that was propped on his rickety gate-

legged dining table, its wires dangling loose over the stained tablecloth. Since his conversation with the Doctor, he felt unprotected. Visible. A nail sticking up above the surface of the wood, asking to be knocked back in. Or wrenched out.

The Doctor had found him. He had asked the Doctor to be his visitor. To warn him of the danger. He waited for the sound of the lift, the creak of footsteps on the landing, the knock on the door. Which never came.

The first blow splintered the jamb. Cockaigne scrambled out of his chair, unable to believe he had heard nothing until now. 'Oh, poo,' he said faintly.

The second blow took the door off its hinges. Cockaigne stood by the blinds over his single window, and stared towards the light from the corridor. Two dark shapes stood to both sides. A shorter, slighter figure stepped through between them, and snapped on the room's light.

'Bernard,' she said. 'Shall we make ourselves at home?'

Cockaigne shrank beneath the window, pressing himself against the damp plaster with a moan of utter despair. 'How could you find me?'

There was something changed about her, of course, that was to be anticipated. The jaunty manner was gone, and when she stalked into the room he could see there was no bounce in her step. The clothes were quite different, too, an unfamiliar style of jacket, dark shirt, and faded blue trousers. The worst thing was what had not changed. He would have expected her change in demeanour to be accompanied by a change in physical appearance, yet her short blonde hair looked the same, her face was not lined, her eyes were young and alive in the sharp, unaccustomed light of his cramped room.

'Not very friendly,' said Sam flatly. 'You might even think we weren't welcome.' She twiddled the medallion on the chain around her neck, and Cockaigne could see the thirteen stones catching the light.

The two Jax drones followed her in, and stood beside her like bodyguards. He could see from their shredded clothing and the slash marks across their faces that they were recent kills, possibly stevedores. They placed their heavy boots on his dirty floor rug, crushing what little pile

there was left.

‘Why are you here?’ babbled Cockaigne. But he already knew.

His eyes darted from Sam’s face to the Jax guards and then back again to her.

‘Don’t worry,’ she said, her tone innocent, calming. ‘I won’t let them kill you.’ She crouched down in front of him, so that her face was level with his. ‘But I might let them hurt you a great deal.’

Cockaigne shrank lower down the wall. Sam reached out with two fingers, and lifted his chin. He could feel her long nails digging into the soft flesh under his jaw.

‘Where is it?’

Cockaigne swallowed. ‘I can’t tell you.’ He was not going to give her the information. If he had the chance, if he could regain control of his legs, he would get up. He would throw the pile of papers through the window. Could he perhaps just stand up and push them through the blind? Could he break the window in the same action? The latch was too stiff, he knew that, he hadn’t fixed that yet. So few opportunities to fix things these days. So little time.

Sam pushed his head so that it bumped against the wall. She studied his eyes as he watched the Jax drones move up behind her. ‘Where is it?’

He could get up. He could stand. Just reach the windowsill. . . His eyes betrayed him. She could see his head pressed back against the wall, his eyes flicking up briefly but significantly. When he looked back at her green eyes, they were laughing at him. Then they were looking at the windowsill, and she was rising again. She ran the nails of both hands down the blind in a swift, sudden movement, and it split into shreds of cloth.

He surged upward, trying to prevent her taking the papers. But the two Jax plucked him away effortlessly, whirling him around so that he faced Sam. Beyond her, beyond the ripped blind, the first spots of rain were spattering the window, making crown-shaped marks on its dusty exterior. Sam reached for the small pile of printouts on the sill. Cockaigne pulled forward, but the Jax were too strong for him, their grip biting into his biceps.

Sam flicked through the top sheets, scanning the words. He could only hope that she would not see the significance, that she would be unaware why these of all the papers in the apartment contained the thing she was searching for. But when she saw the design drawing, he could see at once from the spreading grin on her face that she knew.

‘Very appropriate,’ she said. ‘And d’you know, I really should have guessed. Sometimes the obvious is staring right at you.’ She let the papers slip from her fingers, and they scattered onto the flattened, off-white rug at their feet. ‘Do you ever find that, Bernard?’ she asked, looking into his eyes. ‘That you should see it coming?’

She nodded to the Jax, and the grip on Cockaigne’s arms lessened. He could feel pins and needles as the blood ran back down to his fingers.

‘You said you wouldn’t let them kill me,’ he whimpered.

‘That’s right,’ said Sam, stepping forward. ‘I want to do that myself.’

The rain was just starting as the Doctor walked into the gloomy street. The evening had suddenly darkened as the clouds had drawn overhead, presaging the storm to come. Ahead of him, three women in service overalls ran shrieking with surprise as the downpour became heavier. He could tell from their light clothing that they hadn’t expected rain. Climate Control really was out of control. The women fled around a green and blue service vehicle and round the corner into their own building.

In the fading light, he checked a crumpled sheet of paper. It contained directions that he had dumped out onto Brandt’s local printer before fleeing the hospital. Fat raindrops splattered onto the map, but he could see that he had reached his destination. The walk had taken him nearly an hour. After escaping from the carnival parade, he had quickly decided that he could not risk using Kadijk’s I-card any more, so a taxi had been out of the question.

As he crossed the road, the street illuminations flickered on all around him, presumably activated automatically as darkness continued to fall. He stepped past the service van and into the lobby of Cockaigne’s apartment block. He had already taken out his sonic

screwdriver, expecting that he would need to bypass the front lock, so he was surprised to find the door ajar. Closer examination revealed that the lock had been cracked, possibly by a kick to the door. Then he heard the scream, a long-drawn-out cry of abject horror from far above.

He leapt to the lift cage, which was situated in the centre of the stairwell, but could see at once that the lift was three storeys up. He took to the stairs, jumping them two or three at a time. Above him, the scream cut off suddenly.

As he darted up the flights of steps, doors cracked open and shut again swiftly. At the second-storey landing, the lift rattled down past him, but he could only see a couple of dark shapes inside.

He reached the top storey, breathless, and saw at once the apartment he had been looking for. The door was pulled shut, but even on a cursory examination he could see that the jamb was smashed all down one side. A dirty footprint marked one side of the door. He pushed the door open with his toe, and stood back.

The tiny apartment appeared to be empty. He stepped in carefully, wary of the tottering piles of paperwork between the few dusty items of old furniture that made the room appear even more cramped than it was. A large mound of scattered papers lay by the far wall below the window. The window was covered in the torn remains of a cloth blind.

The Doctor moved to his right, carefully checking the cooking area and the bathroom – both empty.

He was about to make a cursory examination of the papers, when he saw the arm protruding onto the dirty rug. What he had taken for a mound of papers was a body, onto which two nearby tall collections of files had fallen and spread. Now these files were naking with fresh blood. The Doctor peeled them away from the man's face.

'Oh no,' he said quietly to himself. It was Cockaigne. His eyes were closed, and his mouth was open. He looked as though he was sleeping peacefully, though it was clear from the deep gash across his neck that he was dead. His crumpled pink shirt was torn across the chest and torso where four deep rips had been scored into the flesh.

The Doctor looked around at the papers, trying not to disturb too much more of the evidence. He could see a sheaf of papers lying by the window, and these did not appear to have toppled from the same piles as the other documents. The file was spattered with Cockaigne's blood. The Doctor stepped gingerly across to it, and studied what he could just by pulling up the corner of the file cover.

They all appeared to relate to one part of the Kursaal construction. A swift examination revealed seismological surveys, concept sketches, architectural layouts, building plans, and marketing materials. Most were stamped with the same logo, and the description: 'Jax Cathedral'. They were the design drawings for the *Jax History* ride in the Kursaal ThemePark.

The drumming of the rain at the window abated briefly, and the Doctor could hear an engine firing in the street outside. Of course! While he was worrying that someone was still hiding in the apartment, the killer had actually been travelling down in the lift and out to his waiting vehicle.

The Doctor leapt up to the window, pushing aside the ragged blind and struggling to open the stiff latch so that he could see out into the street. Peering in frustration out of the apartment window, he could see a dark shape already in the driving position. Another huge man was escorting someone around the other side, and opening the passenger door.

Even through the grimy glass, the clothes looked familiar under the bright street illumination. Blue jeans. Khaki jacket. Blonde hair, spiking a little at the back.

He hammered on the window. Then he seized the dead screen display from the table beside him, and flung it hard at the glass. The window shattered, and the display dropped into the street below. He threw his head into the gap, ignoring the stinging return of the rain as the storm intensified. 'Sam!' he bellowed into the night. But the service van was already moving off.

Cockaigne must have been protecting her, knowing her to be in danger. Now he had paid for that with his life. And his killers had kidnapped Sam.

A noise from the broken doorway startled him, and he whirled around. A broad woman with a florid complexion and an armful of washing was staring in dismay at the mess on the floor near her.

‘I don’t think this is allowed by the tenancy agreement, Mr Cockaigne,’ she stated in a nagging whine.

The Doctor struggled for the right words. ‘I’m sorry, erm. . .’

The woman waddled into the room on squat legs, hitching up her long housecoat to avoid disturbing the dust on the piles of documents. ‘We haven’t met,’ she announced. ‘I’m Mrs Coppington, the new tenancy manager. I think you need to understand a few things about the noise levels. . .’ She broke off as she saw the broken window. ‘Oh, not another break-in,’ she said. ‘I think we’d better call the police, don’t you, Mr Cockaigne?’

‘Quite right, Mrs Coppington,’ said the Doctor, hopping nimbly over the papers, seizing her by her chubby arms, and steering her and the washing through the door with him. ‘I’ll see to that myself.’ He pulled the door shut, but the broken jamb meant that it swung open again.

Mrs Coppington was studying the broken jamb more closely now. ‘What is going on here?’ she said, her face going purple. She pushed past him into the room.

The Doctor bolted down the steps three at a time, bouncing against the walls at each turn. When he reached the lobby, he hared through the front doors and into the dark street.

On the far side, he could see the service van vanishing beyond the street illuminations. The cloud cover was hiding the moon, so the vehicle was soon out of sight.

From the broken window above, he heard a shrill scream. Mrs Coppington must have chanced upon the unfortunate Cockaigne’s body. The Doctor wondered briefly if her face had now gone puce. Then he set off at a brisk jog into the night, following the direction of the service vehicle containing Sam and her kidnappers, and looking all the time for signs to the ThemePark.

'Not the kind you want to consort with'

Webber was over by the window, hunkered down on a plastic sheet to avoid the blood which had soaked into the dirty white rug. He had placed his oversized hat on the top of a tall pile of papers, rolled up his sleeves, and now seemed to be enjoying himself. Throwing himself into his work, thought Kadijk as he watched the pathologist and tried to stay detached.

'These spatters of blood on the papers,' Webber was saying, talking as though he was savouring the sound of his own voice. 'The spatters, here... ' He pointed, a languid gesture in thin gloves. 'You can see from the direction of the crown-shaped splash extensions that these papers were on the floor when he was attacked. And the long, thick run marks of blood suggest the file was picked up subsequently, but not immediately. Probably held by the corner of the file. We may get a useful biotrace off that.'

Kadijk levered himself out of the chair and went over to study the body. Webber was beside him; Kadijk could detect his disinfectant scent. 'What about these documents on top of him?'

'They probably fell on to the body afterwards.'

'So, the papers with the... *spatters* of blood,' Kadijk said, 'would be the ones he was looking at when he was attacked.' He studied them in the see-through bag in which the pathologist had placed them.

Webber pouted. 'If you say so, Commander.'

When the report had come in of a killing in the service areas, Kadijk's first thought had been Cockaigne. He surprised himself by how disquieted he felt when the street address came through, and he knew he was right. He had not spoken to Cockaigne for a long time, reluctant to fuel the man's paranoia further. He had tried to

keep discreet observation on Cockaigne's movements, physically and electronically. But for the past few months there had apparently been none. How the guy ever got to eat was a mystery.

Kadijk sighed. 'Anything else?'

'Difficult to tell until the autopsy.'

'Yeah, yeah,' said Kadijk wearily. 'You say that every time. Give.'

Webber composed his mouth into a disappointed *moue*. 'A swift kill,' he said. 'He tried to protect himself from the attack – you can see where the claw marks have bitten through the shirt and into the biceps, as though he threw his arms up in self-defence.' He demonstrated the gesture. 'Where the shirt's torn, you can see evidence of bruising to the upper arms too. And there are some odd puncture marks in the soft tissue under the chin, just there'. No rigor mortis, so the witness must have arrived shortly after the victim died. And with these injuries, he would have died quickly. Satisfied?'

Kadijk nodded. 'OK. Bag him and book him in for carving.'

Webber's transparent gloves peeled off with a snapping sound. 'I'll do the autopsy tomorrow, unless you're in a rush.'

'I believe it can wait.' Kadijk watched Webber give instructions for the body to be zipped into a body bag. Behind him, he could hear Bandros dispatching police officers to conduct interviews with the other residents. He sat back down on the chair and closed his eyes.

'You OK, Commander?' When he looked up Bandros was leaning over him, giving him a wary look. Bandros was a good kid, and would do well. Kadijk could see himself thirty years ago in that inquisitive, aggressive attitude to investigation. He'd promoted the youngster quickly, never letting him suspect that he might deserve favour or encouragement. Keeping him hungry for success.

'I always believed this planet had potential,' Kadijk said, staring at the two officers boarding up the broken window 'Even back in the days before the first major buildings went up, before weather control. You know, Sergeant, back at the start there were powerful ice storms here, right here where we're standing. The meteorologists used to describe them in terms of velocity, direction, timing. We used to describe them by how long you'd survive outside the hut. "Today, the weather will

be five minutes.” That was back then. Before I got so involved. Before I got in too deep. . .’

‘Sir?’

He smiled a thin smile. ‘You’re doing a good job, lad. Your parents can be proud of you.’

There was a clamour at the door, and a stocky woman with a red face and dishevelled hair pressed at the doorway. She claimed to be the tenant manager for the block, and demanded to talk to whoever was in charge. Bandros put his hand on Kadijk’s shoulder, then went across to the woman.

‘What am I going to do?’ she was wailing. ‘No wonder no one ever came in here – look at this mess. And he seemed such a quiet man, too.’

‘He’s certainly quiet now,’ said Bandros, easing her towards the door.

The woman shrugged off his hand. ‘I’ll never get this place let out again now. Just what am I supposed to do?’

Bandros stood in the doorway, preventing her from coming back in. ‘Well, this is the service block, isn’t it? You should get the cleaners to come and remove all these papers. And they’ll need to shampoo the rug.’

The woman bristled.

‘Please finish giving your statement to the officer, ma’am.’ Then he closed the door on her, and propped a stool against the back of it to keep it shut.

One of the junior officers had only just come into the room, but was already hurrying to throw up in the tiny bathroom. Kadijk watched his shoulders heaving over the basin. He realised that Bandros was watching too.

‘You must have attended many crime scenes like this, sir.’

‘Yeah,’ Kadijk said quietly. ‘One too many.’

Bandros flicked at his sleeve communicator. ‘CommSat Two is still unreliable, Commander. But we have two fairly recent reports in. Break in at the Zoo Park, and Operation Bluebeard.’

Kadijk heaved himself up out of the chair, tugging at his jacket to try to remove the creases. Operation Bluebeard was a sting operation that he had set up six months previously. The big raid on the drugs operation had been planned for this evening, an ambush of a meeting between the drug barons at the PortBlock. The attending officers were all offworlders brought in by Kadijk to ensure the plan was not compromised. Only he and three trusted colleagues knew about it.

Bandros was reading the report from his sleeve comm. ‘Zaterdag, Mallard, and Ducheovsky are all in custody, Commander.’ His face was alight with pleasure at the news, but it faded when he saw that Kadijk’s reaction was more muted. ‘I must say, sir, I was surprised you didn’t want to be in at the kill.’

‘Yeah. I’d have been pleased to see that blue bastard’s face when we broke through his office door. But I needed to be here.’ Kadijk stretched his stiff old limbs. ‘What was that about a ZooPark break-in?’

‘Nothing significant,’ noted Bandros, flicking his sleeve comm to standby again. ‘Stores broken into, some minor vandalism. Oh, and someone let all the wolves out of their enclosure. The staff say they’ll have hightailed it into the forest now –’

Bandros leapt aside as Kadijk kicked out suddenly and savagely at three nearby piles of paper. They swept across the room, the topmost sheets fluttering down onto the dusty furniture.

Kadijk could feel the anger blooming inside him, like a plant he had tended and watered for years finally coming into flower. He lashed out again with his hand, smashing a lamp aside so that it shattered against the wall.

The room had gone totally silent. He could hear the sound of the lift cage clanking shut outside, a door closing somewhere else in the building. A tap running in the bathroom. Everyone was staring at him. He could feel his anger dissipate, turn into a cold despair, ‘It’s starting again,’ he said, ‘like Cockaigne knew it would.’ And he stumped out of the room.

Bandros caught up with him outside in the street, hunched up against the cold evening breeze in the shelter of the front canopy.

A steady dispiriting drizzle blew against them. ‘Do you want to talk about it?’ said Bandros.

Kadijk looked at him closely. Then nodded towards the nearby police flitter.

Kadijk told him about the Jax. He could see from Bandros’s expression that the sergeant thought he was losing it. So he took him back to his office, unlocked the dusty metal filing cabinet, and took out two items. The first was a half-empty bottle of good liquor with a glass inverted over the neck. He poured a generous splash in the glass for Bandros, who accepted it as though it were forensic evidence, and then he took a slug for himself straight from the bottle.

The second item was a battered cardboard box of datacubes, in the old 2-D format.

Bandros watched the display. Kadijk could see he was struggling at times to make out the details without being able to move his head to discern the depth of each image. They showed a police scene-of-crime investigation in a large domed room – no, it was some kind of underground cave. The bodies were a mess. ‘This is fifteen years ago,’ said Kadijk, indicating the date/time icon in the corner of the display. ‘Recognise anything?’

Bandros was frowning, probably thinking he was being tested. He looked to Kadijk for permission, and then began freezing some of the action, zooming in on elements, scanning backward and forward in the sequence of images.

At length, he said, ‘Same MO. Slashes across the victims, some evidence they were caught by surprise.’

Kadijk nodded impatiently. ‘Yes, and...’

Bandros grinned. ‘You had more hair.’

Kadijk pushed his hands away from the screen, and zoomed the image. Then he watched the smile vanish from the sergeant’s face. ‘That’s the same guy that the witness saw at Cockaigne’s place,’ said Bandros. ‘The guy from the ActionPark bombing.’ He checked the date/time icon.

'Yeah,' said Kadijk, studying Bandros. 'But he hasn't lost as much hair as me, has he?'

'He looks exactly the same,' whispered Bandros. 'A facelift, maybe?'

Kadijk snorted. 'After fifteen years, he'd need two or three.' He manipulated the images again, isolating a still image of a grubby-looking teenage girl with short blonde hair. 'Here's someone else who won't have changed. Her name is Sam Jones. She's at the centre of this, and she's dangerous.'

'My mother warned me about girls like that,' smirked Bandros. 'Not the kind you want to consort with.'

But Kadijk wasn't smiling. He slotted in another datacube. This one showed security camera pictures from a dark office. With the image enhanced, it was possible to make out a thin old man and the same blonde girl sitting at a desk.

Kadijk sat back while Bandros watched the whole sequence. Studied his reaction when the old man changed.

Changed into a slaving animal. Attacked the girl. Plunged through the open window.

Bandros drank his glass in one gulp, and gasped at the sting in his throat. Kadijk poured him another. 'The Jax,' said Kadijk.

'I thought they were a legend.' The sergeant's face was ashen.

Kadijk explained that the two strangers, the Doctor and Sam Jones, had escaped from custody shortly after the death of Maximilian Gray. It was only some days later, when Kadijk's staff had reviewed the security camera recordings, that they had seen that Gray had attacked Sam. She had not fought him off after all, and there was evidence to suggest that she had become a carrier of the Jax virus.

'Why wasn't this evidence brought forward sooner?'

Kadijk gave him a thin smile. 'It was suppressed, so as not to scare off investors and tourists.' He watched Bandros, who did not react, and he knew he had trained Bandros well. Maybe too well. 'It wasn't hard to round up all the mindless Jax drones. And once they had finally metamorphosed into wolves, we could keep them in the ZooPark out of harm's way. They weren't a problem. They seemed motiveless, no more dangerous than any other wolf.'

‘And Cockaigne?’

‘He was much more paranoid about the whole thing, so I seconded him to keep an eye on the Jax in case the situation changed. Cockaigne had seen evidence of the Jax leader in their underground cathedral, the sort of thing that Gray changed into. Cockaigne thought Sam Jones had become the carrier. But since she and the Doctor seemed to have vanished into thin air, the danger had passed. With each year, it seemed more and more distant. In the end, I could almost tell myself it didn’t happen. Almost. I kept the datacubes in case I needed reminding. And the I-card, of course – I left that active in case they used it again, gave themselves away. Because even smart people sometimes do dumb things.’

Bandros was listening now, not interrupting, just letting him talk. Kadijk recognised the technique. ‘When the new owners of Gray Corp offered me the security job, and a substantial share interest in Kursaal, I decided it was the right thing to do. They were clever, eh? I wouldn’t want to do anything which might depress my stock value, or lose everything in a corporate takeover.’

‘Even if that meant drug running.’

Kadijk tutted. ‘Naughty boy. You know where I draw the line. I thought Operation Bluebeard would prove that. There’s no comparison between the mobsters and the Jax, The mobsters make their living from other people’s deaths. The Jax were wiped out, no longer a danger to people.’

‘Or so you thought,’ said Bandros, indicating the display screen. The still picture of Sam Jones peered back at them from fifteen years ago. A message icon was flashing over the blonde girl’s picture. Kadijk pressed the screen, and the image of a desk sergeant popped up. The image explained that they had traced the service vehicle from the scene of crime: it had been abandoned in the ThemePark.

‘Near the *Jax History* ride,’ said Kadijk abruptly. ‘Where else?’

Bandros set his glass down on the desk. ‘I’ll bring my car round to the front of the building.’

‘No, we should go in my shuttle. Come on, son. Forget Operation Bluebeard, this is the case that’ll make you. Or break me.’

Bandros nodded. ‘Your chickens have come home to roost at last.’
‘The wolf has returned to its lair,’ said Kadijk, flicking off the display screen. Sam’s picture fizzed and vanished. ‘With Cockaigne dead, the only person who really knows the Jax is the Doctor. We need to reach him before he reaches his friend. Because she isn’t his friend any more.’

The queue for the *Jax History* ride contained a last few hopeful stragglers. They were going to be disappointed. One reason was that the ThemePark was due to close in fifteen minutes, and the ride attendant was not admitting further visitors. The other reason was that a Jax drone was watching them from the shadows, and it wasn’t going to wait in line.

The Doctor had been watching the Jax ride for half an hour, waiting for closing time in the ThemePark. Now it looked as though the ride would close early. The Jax drone was a snarling half-woman, half-wolf. It slouched closer to the queue, then shoved at the last couple in line. The tall Encalian male turned as if to utter a rebuke about the etiquette of queuing, took one look at the slavering half-breed behind him, and vanished into the distance with a squeal, dragging his companion with him. The rest of the queue dissipated almost immediately.

The Jax swung its head round, looking for further opposition. The overhead park lights shone down on it, just before it vanished into the ride, the Doctor recognised the creature. Despite the change in its leg structure and the formations of pale brown fur over its head and torso, it was just identifiable as the hospital secretary he had seen dead in Brandt’s office.

The creature tugged sharply at the remains of its torn pale green dress, casting the remaining shreds of material aside. It looked up to the dark sky, gazing with longing at the pale light shining through the thin, low cloud. And howled, a bestial noise which chilled the Doctor and echoed across the ThemePark.

The Doctor hung back for a few minutes, scanning to see whether there were more of the creatures nearby, perhaps drawn by the other

Jax's cry.

Then he saw Sam appearing in the entrance to the *Jax History*, her small form dwarfed by the massive arch designed in the shape of a wolf's jaw.

He started forward, intending to call out to her. But she seemed to be standing perfectly still, her head raised slightly as though she were scenting the air. At the same time, two dark shapes emerged from the gloom of the ride entrance behind her, and stood to either side of her like mute sentinels. They were tall, humanoid figures, unclothed but covered in coarse black hair. Their heads had started to take on the characteristic Jax features, and their thick limbs were twisting into new shapes. They stood upright, though slightly stooped. Sam looked up at one of them calmly, and then turned to re-enter the enormous false Jax jaws and vanish into the ride.

The Doctor scurried forward, eyeing his surroundings as he did so to ensure he was not followed in.

The first part of the ride was in complete darkness. There was a smell of oil and damp earth. Beside him, the empty ride cars hummed and clattered past on their magnetic tracks, curving off into the first display area around a sharp bend. Silhouetted in the arched entrance to this turning were Sam and her two kidnappers. The Doctor moved on carefully.

Sam had stopped, allowing the other two shapes to move ahead of her. He could tell from her outline that she was still facing away from him, but she had cocked her head on one side as though listening intently. He broke into a short run, and she whirled around into a cautious stance as he approached, still a dark shape against the light.

'Sam,' he hissed urgently. 'Quickly, before they realise you're not with them any longer.'

He seized her by the forearms to pull her away from the light. And then the dark entrance section was filled with sharp white light, casting his shadow high up against the fake-rock walls and machinery in a dancing pattern. He glared round, and could see only the points of two powerful torches shining at him from the main entrance. There was a shout, but he couldn't make out any words. He twisted back to

Sam, whose face now moved out from the shadow cast by his body. A curving row of bright points sparkled in the medallion around her neck. She threw up her hand against the brightness, screwing her eyelids tight over her brilliant green eyes.

The two dark shapes loomed behind her again, reaching into the light.

‘Come on, Sam!’ he yelled.

She reached out, and took hold of his cravat.

The crack of gunfire from behind him sounded shockingly loud in the enclosed space. Chips of rock flew off the wall beside him. Sam growled. She raised her other hand, perhaps to ward off the gunfire, perhaps to shield her eyes from the light.

There was another gunshot. Sam spun around, her hand snatching away from the Doctor and tugging his cravat from the neck of his waistcoat. She clutched at her shoulder, stumbled, then fled around the curve into the next section.

‘Stop firing!’ the Doctor bellowed over his shoulder. He could hear the sound of footsteps pounding on the ground behind him. The torchlights danced madly around him as the two figures raced to join him. ‘Kadijk, I might have known,’ said the Doctor bitterly.

Kadijk stared. ‘We got here just in time,’ he panted. ‘She could have killed you.’

‘They’ve kidnapped her. They killed Cockaigne, and now they may do the same to her.’ The Doctor spotted an access door behind Kadijk. He kicked out at the nearest torch, which spun away in a luminous cartwheel. He barged against Kadijk, throwing him off balance into Bandros. A second later, he was through the door.

He found he was in a later section of the ride. Hard on his heels he could hear Kadijk pounding through the door. The Doctor threw himself along the track. This section was full of illuminated illustrations showing the early history of the Cronus system, and the soundtrack narrative blared from the speakers in the ride cars as they rolled past. He burst through another connecting access door, and into a further section of the ride.

Kadijk struggled to keep pace. ‘Doctor, think about it,’ he was

yelling from fifteen metres back. 'Why would the Jax want her? What can she possibly give them?' He pounded closer.

The Doctor veered across the track between two ride cars, and threw himself flat against the wall. He watched Kadijk's torchlight bouncing along as the commander continued past into the next section of the ride. He was just sighing with relief when he felt the gun muzzle against his head.

'Stand very still,' said Bandros from the access door just behind him. 'Turn around.'

'Well, make your mind up,' grumbled the Doctor.

Bandros yelled for Kadijk to join them, and snapped on his own torch. Then he frisked the Doctor swiftly to check for concealed weapons. When the Doctor turned round again, he saw that Bandros was holding his sonic screwdriver.

Kadijk had stumbled to a halt beside them, and had his hands on his knees as he gasped to recover his breath. Eventually, he was able to straighten up. Kadijk put his hand gently on Bandros's gun hand to make him lower his gun, then took the sonic screwdriver from the other hand and returned it to the Doctor.

The Doctor looked at him with suspicion.

Kadijk said, 'Your friend killed Cockaigne.'

'No.'

Kadijk flicked the Doctor's cravat, which was hanging loosely in front of him. 'Can't you accept that you could possibly be wrong?'

The Doctor ran his fingers through the soft material of the cravat, and could see it had been shredded, as though by razors. He remembered how Sam had placed her fingers on his neck, and how she had snatched her hand away sharply when Kadijk shot her. 'Oh dear,' he said.

As he was speaking, they heard a howling sound from further along the ride. Then there was a scurrying noise, accompanied by a variety of barks and yelps.

All three crouched down behind a display scene which showed a group of men camped around a fire in a winter landscape. With the two torches snapped off, the display cast an eerie light on the opposite

wall; the fake flames lit up and the figures moved their arms over the cold fire as each ride car swung into view and rotated to give its nonexistent passengers a good view.

Within thirty seconds, a pair of wolves trotted by at speed. Kadijk was about to stand up and look down the corridor after them, but the Doctor and Bandros held him back. Another four wolves came running through, followed by a pair of snarling humanoid werewolves in the shredded remains of their holiday clothing. By the time they had all passed, the Doctor had counted twenty creatures, all heading in the same direction.

The three sat recovering their breath. The air was heavy with a musky, animal scent.

Bandros spoke quietly, urgently. 'Commander, we can't handle this on our own any longer. We need help. We need reinforcements.'

The Doctor was astonished. 'You mean you came here on your own? Just the two of you?'

'Look who's talking,' Kadijk muttered.

'We have to close this ride,' Bandros was insisting. 'We have to get the remaining visitors and the staff out, and clear the surrounding area. And we have to call the zoo. And we can't do all that with just the two of us and your police shuttle.'

The Doctor tapped Bandros on the forearm. 'Come on, then, man. Use your sleeve communicator to call for reinforcements.'

Bandros held up his arm into the light from his torch. 'CommSat Two is down again. And I'm not sure how effective this is now we're underground and surrounded by other comms equipment. We should get back to the shuttle.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'No,' he said firmly. 'Sam is in danger.'

'Sam is the danger, Doctor.'

'I won't leave her here.'

Bandros shifted out from behind the display and stood beside the track. The ride cars rotated right next to him, as though people were coming to listen to him. 'We should get back to the shuttle and start making the arrangements.'

‘Good lad,’ said Kadijk. ‘You do that. We’ll see what we can do about the Doctor’s friend.’ He held up his handgun, but the Doctor could not read his expression. ‘We should be all right here.’

Bandros nodded, and stepped smartly through the access door behind them.

The Doctor watched the door close behind the sergeant, and then swung back to observe Kadijk, who was sweeping his torch up and down the display area. The Doctor indicated the dark tunnel leading out of the section. ‘I think we should follow that pack of wolves.’

Kadijk watched the Doctor striding off into the depths of the *Jax History* ride. How much was he aware of what was happening to his young friend? And what could have happened to them in the decade and a half since they had slipped away unnoticed from the Gray Corporation headquarters? The figure was beckoning him now, and Kadijk realised that the Doctor had no torch. He adjusted the focus of the beam, and followed him into the darkness.

They crossed over several further service junctions, each leading to a lower level. On one occasion they came across a group of visitors, screaming their enjoyment of the ride’s many surprise displays. He wondered what other startling things they would see before their ride car returned them to the surface.

The Doctor paused for a while, sniffing the air for all the world as though he could track the animals they had seen. Whatever he was doing, they were moving deeper into the ride with every step.

They paused briefly while Kadijk stooped to examine some footprints in the soft earth either side of the oncoming ride cars. He was about to pose some of his questions when the Doctor spoke first. ‘Where have all these Jax drones come from, hmm?’

The question made Kadijk feel like a naughty schoolboy. ‘The ZooPark,’ he admitted. ‘We weren’t able to capture all of the original ones – some just seemed to go to ground. More used to turn up, usually around the time of the full moon. At first, it must have been one every couple of months. So we just cooped ’em up in the ZooPark for safekeeping.’

‘Safekeeping?’ The Doctor was staring at him now.

'Yeah, they didn't seem to breed in captivity.'

'Breed?' Now the Doctor was spluttering. 'They are dangerous and highly infectious. They *breed* by attacking other people. Human beings, Commander. They kill them.'

Kadijk shrugged expansively. 'We got more drug killings every week in the early days. You gotta prioritise. Get a perspective.'

'No no no no no! It's a growing problem. You sound like the man who fell out of a forty-storey office block. As he fell past the fifteenth floor he was still saying "it's going well so far".' He took a deep breath, as though composing himself. 'Some of the Jax you so carelessly misplaced may have affected the people who built Kursaal, and certainly they'll have attacked the many, many more people who have come here as visitors since it opened. Mindless drones acting on instinct.'

'Yeah,' said Kadijk. 'And that's just the visitors...'. He fell silent when he saw the Doctor's face scowling at him in the torchlight.

'Spreading their foul Jax infection in an instinctive, mindless manner, I shouldn't be surprised,' he said coldly, 'to find that they were responsible for all the legends and half the documented cases of werewolves in this whole galaxy for the next five hundred years. If I still had your I-card, I'd bet all your money on it.'

'You'd need to live a long time to collect,' said Kadijk. But for some reason, when he saw the Doctor's reaction, this suddenly didn't seem so unlikely.

They clambered down a set of steps to the level below, continuing in silence for a while. In the distance they could hear a roaring noise. At first they stopped, alarmed. Then they realised it was repeating every twenty seconds or so, and knew it must be a feature of the ride.

'It must be difficult keeping up your pretence when any of them die,' the Doctor said. 'How do you' account for the mangled remains of real people in your zoo cages.'

Kadijk was glad the Doctor could not see his face, for he was sure he was blushing. 'We hadn't thought of that originally. In fact, unless the humans were recently killed, then when the wolf dies the body decomposes almost immediately. Or is, um, eaten by the others.'

The Doctor looked back at him as they entered the next section,

showing him a look of distaste. ‘So. How many Jax drones are there in the ZooBlock now?’

‘There were about sixty. But they all escaped earlier today.’ Ahead of him, the Doctor let out a low groan of dismay. ‘Hey, we did our best,’ said Kadijk defensively. ‘Cockaigne and I didn’t know that they were... oh.’

The Doctor had stopped by another display. This was the source of the roaring. Every twenty seconds a ride car twisted into view around the nearby corner, and a speaker mounted in the unit roared unconvincingly. A leering stuffed wolf sprang out of a torn hole in the fake wall, its eyes flashing red in the darkness. With each fresh movement, it wobbled precariously, in danger of tipping sideways in a most unwolflike movement. But, like the Doctor before him, Kadijk was looking at something else. Slumped against the foot of the model, impeding its movement, was a dead body.

Or most of a dead body. It was a visitor, torn from his ride car and savagely attacked, probably by several animals. What was still left was striped with long claw marks.

Kadijk could feel the Doctor’s hand on his arm, guiding the light further across the tunnel. There was a werewolf lying sprawled on the other side of the section, one leg flung awkwardly in their direction. The body was perfectly still, except when each ride car rumbled past and crunched over what was left of the limb projecting onto the track.

They hopped across between cars, and studied the body. At first, Kadijk was struck by how human it was in shape. Then he realised what it was.

‘It’s a man in a werewolf costume,’ the Doctor said, baffled.

Kadijk played the torch beam over the body. ‘One of the actors in the ride,’ he said. ‘They play along to surprise the visitors as the cars roll through. Jeez, did he ever get a shock.’

He was startled when the Doctor growled at him. ‘Animatronic wolves and men in fur suits. Isn’t it enough that we’re surrounded by... how many?’

‘Sixty.’

‘Surrounded by sixty werewolves in various stages of transformation.’

‘At least we know where they’re headed now,’ said Kadijk brightly. Though on reflection he wasn’t so sure he should feel cheerful about that right at this moment.

As if to confirm his suspicions, the Doctor said, ‘That’s all the more worrying. Because it’s hardly a mindless individual response. More a pack instinct. If you are right, and Sam is acting as the pack leader, there could be much greater danger. A sentient Jax life form, capable of rational thought, insight, planning. Now that would be a formidable threat to everyone in Kursaal.’

From the depths of the ride, the long, baneful moan of a wolf’s call reverberated down the tunnels.

The distant baying echo startled Bandros as he rounded another corner in the ride. He lay back against the cool wall, placing his head back and taking a deep, calming breath. Then he shrugged himself forward, turned to his right, and came face to face with a snarling, spitting wolf.

He gave a great cry of horror, followed by another, longer one. He staggered backward across the track, bumping into one of the ride cars and stumbling along with it. The wolf’s head vanished back into its hole with a hiss.

Bandros pushed himself past the car to the other side of the section, and fumbled for his gun. The next car continued to move towards him like a huge target in a shooting range. He flicked off his torch, and pointed the gun double-handed towards the opposite wall. The ride car blocked his view, then twisted to face the gap from which the wolf had jumped. There was another hiss from behind the ride car. The creature was leaping out while hidden by the car!

He pumped shots through the back of the car. It fizzed and sparked as the bullets scored a path through speaker electronics and guidance mechanics. The car did not twist back like its predecessor, but continued its journey sideways.

He seized his torch and leapt up, racing around to the other side of

the car and pointing his gun one-handed. He flooded the seat of the ride car with light. Nothing in the front, and nothing in the back seat either, except bullet holes.

He whirled, panicked, to see another car twisting into position. And the wolf leaping out towards it from the hole in the wall, saliva spraying from its yawning mouth, its eyes lighting up red in the darkness.

Lighting up?

Bandros fell to his knees with shock and relief. It was a model wolf. Jeez!

He could hear a voice calling. He squirmed round to look behind him, balancing himself with his torch hand while aiming his gun. There was a dark hairy shape moving towards him, fifteen metres maybe. A tall werewolf moving closer. Bandros squeezed the trigger of his gun, and it went click. Then it went click again.

He had already emptied the magazine into the ride car.

He scrambled backward, falling on his backside, reaching into his pocket for the spare clip of bullets.

The tall werewolf strolled towards him with a rolling gait. 'Are you OK?' it asked, then took a long drag on its cigar.

Bandros slumped to a halt in the tunnel dirt, his head drooping onto his chest, his breaths coming in ragged, lumpy sobs.

The werewolf had stopped in front of him, and blew a stream of smoke into the torchlight. 'Is that a gun?' Then the other, red-eyed wolf popped its head out of the wall again and sprayed him with water. 'Oh blimey,' said the tall werewolf. 'I do that every time.'

The werewolf explained that its name was Roger, and that he was on the evening shift. Sometimes he clambered into the ride cars to frighten the visitors. Most times he stood in the corner and chased their cars into the next section. The money wasn't brilliant, but it kept him in decent cigars and it was steady work. Plus, they did provide him with his own work clothes.

With his head pulled off and his gloves peeled back, Roger looked much less menacing. Bandros asked him what the quickest route out of the ride was, then told him he ought to leave straight away.

'My shift doesn't finish for another fifteen minutes,' said Roger.

'There are real wolves in this ride,' said Bandros.

'Yeah,' cackled Roger, 'and I'm half-Alsatian on my mother's side.'

'They escaped from the ZooPark earlier this afternoon,' snapped Bandros, flashing his police ident card. 'They like it here. It feels like home. Why do you think I'm sitting here ill the dirt, crapping myself whenever I see beady eyes and a snout?'

'Oh blimey,' said Roger after no more reflection. He hopped into the next ride car that appeared, dodging the accompanying gobble of wolf spit as he did so. He peered around the edge of the car as it turned to face forward again. 'These will reach the extt in about five minutes. See ya.' Within seconds, the car had twisted round the bend into the next section, and the only thing left of Roger was the smell of cigar smoke.

Bandros fumbled in his pocket for the spare magazine of bullets, but it was no longer there. He spent a little while searching for it in the dirt of the turmel floor, but then changed his mind when he heard a scuffling sound coming from the section of ride ahead of him.

He crossed the corridor, and had cut across two looped sections of the ride when he remembered Roger's suggestion about the safest route to the exit. Well, if it was good enough for a werewolf, it was good enough for him.

He switched off his torch again and clambered into the front seat of the next available ride car. Soon he was moving into the next section, still able to smell the cigar smoke in the air.

He gradually became aware of another smell, however, and looked down into the footwell of the ride car. As he did, he felt his hand lying in a wet pool on the seat beside him, and he smiled at the memory of the wolf head spraying water. But this moisture seemed tacky. He clicked on his torch, and was aghast to find his fingers were red with sticky blood. And in the footwell of his car was a bare human hand and arm, torn off at the elbow. The fingers were still clutching a cigar.

He gave a little cry of disgust. There was a corresponding low growl from behind him. He turned quickly, and the torchlight splashed wildly into the back of the car.

Bandros sat petrified in his seat. The large grey wolf stared back at

him, blinking its green eyes against the beam of light. It was panting slightly, its tongue hanging out. It seemed to be laughing at him.

Kadijk sat down on a Jax wolf. It was attacking a cowering, defenceless human, who was frozen with fear beneath its ravening jaws. He scratched the Jax behind the ears, but its expression didn't change. The defenceless human made no further attempt to escape. 'I'm getting too old for this,' he sighed, eyeing the Doctor, who was clearly eager to move on. 'Maybe I should use some of whatever you're taking.'

'It's taking too long,' said the Doctor, pacing in front of him.

'Too long for what?' asked Kadijk. 'What exactly are you hoping to do when we catch up with them, Doctor? Train them to walk to heel, perhaps?'

'We need to know whether they've found the Jax cathedral' said the Doctor, talking quickly, urgently. 'Whether it remains substantially undamaged. That would mean they have access to the Jax technology that's controlling Sam. If we cut off the technology, she will revert to normal.' He wet one finger, and held it up in midair. 'The trail is leading down. But they'll need moonlight to effect the transformations, so we could still get to Sam in time.'

'Time,' said Kadijk thoughtfully. 'I've been meaning to ask you about that, too.'

The Doctor didn't seem to be listening, but was talking almost to himself. 'If we could keep them down here overnight, perhaps with a larger force we could capture her in the day and keep her away from moonlight. With the Jax technology disabled, she could fight off the infection. Maybe it was the sedation in hospital that made her vulnerable in the first place.' He looked at Kadijk, who was still perched on the snarling model animal. 'We should move on.'

Kadijk got up with a groan. 'You're right, of course. I should move on. I think it's time to hand over to my boys.'

They walked guardedly towards the tunnel exit of this section, staying close to the ride cars that were moving in the same direction and thus provided some form of cover. 'Your boys?' the Doctor said. 'Do

your sons work on Kursaal, too?’

Kadijk missed a step, but regained his composure before the Doctor noticed. ‘What about my sons?’ The Doctor said nothing. ‘I don’t know where my sons are. I was referring to my officers. I’ve hand-picked them over the last fifteen years. That was my condition for employment. And I’ve seen them all grow into their jobs. Some have left and done well elsewhere. Most have, stayed. A few have turned out to be disappointments, but I suppose you get that in any family. Do you find that?’

The Doctor made a ‘hmm’ sound. Then he said, ‘What about Zaterdag. Is he one of your favourite sons?’

Kadijk growled at the back of his throat. ‘He was the black sheep of the family, the blue bastard.’ He thought about this for a moment, and plunged on. ‘He’s no son of mine. Definitely not the kind you want to consort with.’

The Doctor raised his eyebrows to show he was still listening.

‘Zaterdag worked for one of the drug cartels for at least fifteen years. He had early sight of the entire original security setup on Kursaal. We had to revamp the whole thing, but we couldn’t afford to start from scratch and had to cobble together the right fixes and patches. Kursaal security has suffered from that ever since. Not that we can tell people that. Certainly not the shareholders. And all because of that Fodoran slimeball.’

‘Well, you did seem to treat him like an outsider.’

‘No,’ replied Kadijk. ‘I treated him like an insider, and that was the problem.’

‘I wasn’t thinking about the security clearance you gave him. I was referring to the way you behaved towards him.’

‘Affectionate bullying.’ Kadijk wondered how convincing this sounded to the Doctor. It no longer sounded convincing to himself. ‘Creates character. Look how Bandros has turned out. I’d be proud to have him as my son.’

‘Would you treat your own family that way?’

Kadijk snorted. ‘I did treat my own family that way.’

The Doctor took the torch from him, adjusted the dispersion lens

to throw a wider pool of light, and pointed it at the ground. Kadijk noticed how the intensity dropped, spreading a softer glow on their surroundings and throwing weird shadows up the Doctor's angular face. 'The Jax remind me of a family,' said the Doctor. 'There are a lot of things unspoken, understood. Just known.'

'Who tells them what's best for them?'

'Perhaps we're about to find out,' the Doctor said, dropping his voice to just a murmur. 'I can hear something a couple of sections ahead.'

In fact, as soon as they entered the next section of the ride Kadijk could see where the noise was coming from. The ground suddenly sloped away into the far left-hand corner, and a scuffling commotion rose from deep below the ground. A mound of earth was growing on the opposite side of the section, and the tracks of the ride cars ran through the shallowest point of the pile.

Kadijk followed the Doctor down the first part of the incline which soon dropped away much more sharply. He pulled out his gun, checking it swiftly to ensure the magazine was full.

Ten metres below was a crude rocky platform. From this distance, the many Jax looked not like huge, savage mammals but scurrying rodents. The pile beside him in the main ride was presumably the earth that had been scraped out first. Now the Jax seemed to be scratching at one particular point far below, and discarding the dirt and small rocks into an access duct which they had uncovered halfway down the hole. There were two dozen wolflike Jax scabbling with their claws, and a smaller group of half-human creatures shovelling the resulting excavated materials into the duct. They were all being watched by Sam Jones, who stood to one side in the gloomy hole supervising the activity wordlessly, her arms folded tightly across her chest. When she turned, Kadijk could see that the shoulder of her shirt was soaked in blood where he had shot her earlier. He felt the reassuring shape of the percussion pistol in his jacket pocket.

Kadijk noticed that the Doctor was leaning into the light, and would cast a shadow if he moved any further. But when he tried to grab his arm to prevent this, Kadijk felt his footing slip on the loose earth. A shower of dirt spurted from beneath his foot, and scattered on to the

milling scene below.

At once, Sam looked up.

All the Jax looked up at the same time, their ears pricked, their snouts pointing. Kadijk felt every pair of green eyes staring at him. Sam threw her head back, and a haunting howl filled the air. He couldn't believe it was coming from her throat. The other Jax took up the call, and some started scraping and climbing back up the sharp incline.

Kadijk swore.

He and the Doctor turned to run. But from nowhere a pack of Jax wolves had appeared behind them, snarling, baring their fangs.

'Things are getting ugly,' the Doctor said.

'These things started out ugly,' said Kadijk.

The Jax moved forward, their heads low, growling. Their teeth snapped at their legs and ankles. Kadijk realised that he and the Doctor were being herded down the incline like sheep.

They practically fell the last two metres.

The Jax stood around them in a tight circle. Kadijk could see a darker hole in the wall behind them where they had dug a large, wolf-sized crack in the wall. There was a faint phosphorescence emanating from the crack.

Sam sidled round to face them. 'I thought you'd never get here.'

Kadijk lifted the gun.

'You haven't enough bullets to kill all the Jax,' Sam said to him calmly.

'No,' he acknowledged, indicating the patch of drying blood on her shoulder. 'But one more should be enough to kill their leader.'

He didn't even get to squeeze the trigger. The Doctor's hand shot out and cracked down on his wrist. The gun spun away, out of the ring of Jax. 'No,' said the Doctor with quiet intensity.

'Are you crazy?'

Sam said, 'I'm touched, Doctor.'

The Doctor was holding up the metal hand tool, the one that Kadijk had returned to him up in the main ride earlier. When he pressed the little collar around the top of it, Kadijk felt his ears pop. And the Jax

wolves reared back, shuffling against the edges of the roughly dug platform, shaking their heads, whining, growling.

Sam just stepped forward and snatched the hand tool from his grasp. At once the wolves stopped cowering, and Kadijk felt the sensation in his ears lessen.

‘I have a splitting headache,’ said Sam with a brittle smile. She cast the hand tool aside. The Jax were bristling, re-forming their circle and closing in on the Doctor and Kadijk.

‘No no,’ said Sam. She indicated the crack in the wall. ‘I don’t think we should kill them both. It’ll be a bit of a squeeze, but I think they should come in.’

Kadijk wondered if she was talking to the tall creatures behind them, the werewolves who had still not transformed completely. As if in answer to his thoughts, he felt the half-human Jax pressing on his shoulders, forcing him down so that he could crawl in through the crack in the wall. The other Jax crowded around the back of them. He could feel the wolf creatures snapping at his shoes and trousers, nudging the backs of his legs and moving him and the Doctor towards the crack in the wall.

He stole a glance up at Sam, and could see the light catching the jewels in her medallion, and her green eyes glowing with pleasure and anticipation. ‘That’s right,’ she was saying. ‘I know you’ve all travelled a long way, and that you haven’t eaten. But for the moment, just bring them in.’

Kadijk felt suddenly chilled. He could tell she was talking to the wolf-Jax, encouraging them, reassuring them with her tone. She smiled down at Kadijk. ‘You’ll say I’m being silly,’ she said, ‘but sometimes I think they understand every word I say.’

'She's already dead'

The cathedral still astonished him.

Kadijk's mind flashed back to the last time he was in the huge chamber. He remembered the glittering brilliance of lights dancing from the centre of the curved hallway, the huge dancing figures of men and animals embossed on the white marble walls. And the scale of the place, the towering arched splendour of the underground cathedral.

Now the scale was just as impressive. The same eerie phosphorescence still played about the arches and pillars, but a more muted light shone from the central crystal pillar. The walls were cracked across, and the floor was scattered with chunks of rock and earth, with slabs of marble lying where they had fallen from the walls. It was a ruin. Though it was still the most overwhelming ruin he had ever seen.

And there was something else. He vaguely remembered a large display screen in one of the walls. When he looked across to check this, he was astonished again. Not because the screen was still working, showing a variety of illuminated, animated glyphs changing by the second. But because it was surrounded by eight other screens the same size. Two of these were cracked across, their images indistinct like a badly focused sleeve comm. The other six, however, flashed their incomprehensible messages to the assembled crowd of Jax, speckling the huge room with a chiaroscuro of alien light.

He meandered around the room as the Jax drones flooded into the chamber through the crack in the wall. Sam was staring up at the display screens. The Doctor seemed to be taking in the half-familiar surroundings too. To one side of the chamber, Kadijk found what he'd been looking for. It was a ragged circular hole in the floor, part-filled with earth and with an angular green shape just visible at the bottom

of it, a metre down. He knelt at the edge of the drop, peering into the half-lit hole. And fell in.

At once, the Jax drones nearest to him began to yelp. When he eventually looked up, he could see Sam peering down at him, laughing. She gestured to a couple of the wolf men, who jumped down into the hole and dragged Kadijk back up to the marble floor. He flinched at the smell of raw flesh and the sight of the wounds that had killed them originally. They dragged him back into the centre of the cathedral, and pushed him next to the Doctor, who was staring up at the display screens.

Kadijk brushed the dry earth from the folds and creases in his clothes. He jumped involuntarily when Sam spoke to him from just over his shoulder. ‘You are a clumsy fellow, Captain Kadijk.’ Her voice took on a mock-conspiratorial tone. ‘If I’m honest about it, you know, the Jax drones are like that. Willing, but not very bright. Still, in the current financial climate, good help is so difficult to get these days, isn’t it?’

‘I wouldn’t want your pet-food bill,’ said Kadijk, trying to muster his courage. He nodded towards the ravaged wolf men, hardly able to look at their wounds again. ‘And I don’t think much of your home help.’

‘The process can be slow,’ said Sam. ‘But once it starts under the light of the full moon, it can’t be stopped. Still, you’d know that, wouldn’t you, Captain Kadijk? You were kind enough to gather up my pack in the ZooPark. That made it so much easier for me to find them earlier today.’ She was standing in the middle of a group of a dozen animals. Two or three rubbed their heads under her hands and she scratched them idly behind the ears. One had a V-shaped notch out of its left ear, and the markings around its eyes made it look owlish, almost appealing. Then it snarled at him, and he could see it had most of a set of curling yellow teeth. Sam rubbed it again just behind the V-shaped notch. ‘Well, the gang’s all here.’

‘And they obey you?’

Sam smiled her broad, green-eyed smile. ‘I am trying to display control and confidence with them, but I feel it is coming across as just

bossy. What do you think?’

‘I think that when they realise you’re not like them you’ll be on the menu.’

The smile did not falter. ‘They are hungry.’ She was watching his reaction, so he tried not to let her see his fear. ‘But I have other plans for you when I transform properly into their pack leader.’

Kadijk looked around at the cathedral. ‘And why come here to do that? Why couldn’t you do that up on the surface, baying at the moon with all your doggy friends?’

‘Because she has to be here.’ Kadijk was surprised to hear the Doctor’s voice at last, echoing softly around the chamber. When he looked at him, he saw that the Doctor was staring at the display screens. No, more than that. He was reading them. ‘The Jax aren’t dead,’ he continued. ‘They’ve just been hibernating for the last thousand years beneath the surface.’

Kadijk was alarmed to hear Sam making a low growling noise. Then he recognised it as a kind of low chuckle. ‘Very good, Doctor’ she laughed. ‘You’re not just a pretty face. When the full moon rises I will use it to complete my transformation and fully reactivate the lax technology deep below this cathedral. A fitting place for a rebirth.’

‘Sam’ said the Doctor urgently. ‘Listen to me. You re being used. You must know that.’ Kadijk was alarmed to see that the Doctor had stepped forward, apparently oblivious to the growling circle of wolves at his feet. He had seized Sam brusquely by the shoulders, and she did not flinch despite the gunshot wound. Was the Doctor going to shake her?

‘This is not you, Sam. The Jax technology is controlling you, forcing you to do this. People are already dying from this thing, and millions more could die soon. Resist it! Don’t let it complete the transformation.’

She stared back, unafraid, amused. ‘You look lovely when you’re angry.’

His face was so close to hers, thought Kadijk, they were almost touching. ‘This is not you. Fight the Jax infection, Sam. I can help you!’

Sam raised one hand, and stroked the side of the Doctor's face with her long, pointed fingernails. 'You can certainly help me, Doctor,' she said. She disengaged herself from his grip with a simple step backward, and then moved towards the crystal sculpture in the centre of the cathedral. She placed her hand on the Jax talisman around her neck, and threw her head up Imperiously. When she spoke again, her voice filled the huge chamber with a triumphal sound. 'If I am to become the Jax Queen, I shall need my King. Mr Gray was destined to take that role, but sadly he had to drop out at the last minute. Now you shall be my consort, Doctor.'

'A king to her queen, eh?' said Kadijk, nudging the Doctor.

'Woof woof,' said the Doctor lightly. 'You could call me Rex.'

Sam's eyes glittered green in the light. 'Do not mock me Doctor. I would prefer to have you as my consort. But I can anoint Kadijk just as easily.'

Kadijk shuffled uncomfortably, and looked at the Doctor. He could sense that the Doctor wanted to go to her, probably to talk to her more personally. But the Jax drones were milling in front of him, holding him back, so he had to call out to her instead. 'Don't release the dormant Jax, Sam. You can't let them loose into this world after a thousand years. Let me help you to return them safely, somewhere else where they won't harm other living creatures.'

'You really haven't got it, have you, Doctor?' she called back. 'The Jax aren't the wolves. The Jax is the virus.'

Kadijk watched the Doctor's reaction. He was astounded. 'A parasite? But how can you know all this?'

'Well, it wasn't from my Year 7 Biology class.'

'It must be a race memory,' said the Doctor.

'Race memory is just instinct,' said Kadijk. 'It isn't facts and figures and history lessons.'

The Doctor was shaking his head, talking his thoughts aloud. 'There's no reason why those things couldn't be biologically hardwired by this virus.'

'I don't care where it comes from,' Sam was saying. 'I just understand it. I know it from my dreams. It's just part of me, bone-deep.'

She pointed one sharp fingernail back towards the cracked far wall, and Kadijk and the Doctor had to look. The animated figures danced again across the seven working screens. The Kursaal History of the Jax is an amusing inaccuracy. Humanoid creatures came to Saturnia Regna, infected with the Jax virus. They built this cathedral and everything around it. But they were killed by wolves on this planet. And being better predators, the wolves became the new carriers of the virus, and the Jax took their form. Eventually there were no more humanoid creatures left as prey. The last of the Jax wolves retreated to this cathedral, until the day when more humanoids would come along.

‘More humanoids?’ said Kadijk. ‘She means us, Doctor.’

‘Not exactly,’ said the Doctor. ‘Remember what you learned about the drugs cartels? How they made this their main operations base because their customers came to them?’

Kadijk licked his dry lips, almost too afraid to speak. ‘I remember.’

‘She’s talking about the humanoid visitors to Kursaal,’ continued the Doctor. ‘They are the next carriers of the Jax virus. Instead of the Jax travelling out from Kursaal, people from all over the Cronus system will come here, where the virus is waiting for them.’

‘They’ll take it with them like a souvenir,’ Kadijk spat, disgusted at the thought. ‘And we’re first in the gift shop.’

The Doctor wheeled back towards Sam, but the Jax drones snarled and snapped at him, forcing him to retreat again. ‘Don’t do this, Sam. You know it’s all wrong.’

Sam moved around to the other side of the crystal altar. ‘It feels entirely right.’

She leaned forward, and pressed the Jax talisman into one of the carved recesses in the crystal block. Kadijk could see the outer ring of crystal dropping down several centimetres like a sleeve, and an inner light started to glow underneath the whole altar.

‘The moon is at its zenith,’ she sighed, her voice reedy, ethereal. ‘It neither waxes nor wanes. It shines on a new Jax dawn.’

Kadijk noticed that the Doctor was fumbling in his pockets, turning out scraps of paper, a pair of coloured gloves, two shiny marbles, a

pencil torchlight. He passed a crumpled bag over to Kadijk, who saw that it seemed to contain confectionery. The Doctor was still rummaging when Kadijk heard a scraping sound, like metal on metal, echoing around the chamber. He looked up, and saw that a slab was moving high up in the ceiling, sliding sideways with the protesting sound of long-disused machinery.

Sam threw her hands outwards in a cruciform shape, and her head up towards the ceiling. 'The full moon shines on the new Jax dawn!'

'Well, that's a bit of mixed metaphor,' said the Doctor. When Kadijk stared at him, he saw that the Doctor was adjusting the end of his metal hand tool again.

Then there was rushing sound, and for a crazy moment Kadijk thought he could hear rain. Sam shrieked a cry of annoyance and frustration. When Kadijk snapped his gaze back to the centre of the chamber, he could see a stream of earth and small rocks tumbling from the open gap high in the ceiling and down onto Sam and the crystal altar. The Jax drones started to snarl and bare their fangs.

Kadijk thought they were going to attack. Then suddenly the Jax were shuffling to and fro, whining and howling in a crescendo of noise that filled the whole cathedral with an alarming reverberation. Some of the wolves were shaking their heads from side to side, pawing at the ground piteously. He felt his ears pop, and the Doctor tugging at his arm. 'Come on!'

They stumbled through the crowd of Jax, hopping sideways to avoid their irritable snapping. The Doctor urged Kadijk ahead of him through the crack in the marble wall, and held his sonic device up high. It must be filling the cathedral with a reverberating crescendo of high-pitched sound.

'I thought you lost that,' said Kadijk.

'Palmed it as we first crawled in,' said the Doctor, pushing him onward. 'Keep going!'

Kadijk squeezed through the crack and onto the dirt platform outside. He shuffled round to see the Doctor reversing awkwardly out of the hole. Eventually he was out too, but with one hand still poking through the crack, holding the sonic device into the cathedral.

‘Quickly,’ he gasped, ‘before they bite my hand off at the wrist. Find something to block this hole. I have to keep my thumb pressed on the sonic screwdriver to operate it.’

Kadijk looked around desperately. He found a large, roughly cylindrical chunk of rock, and surprised himself by managing to roll it towards the Doctor. At the last moment, the Doctor slid aside, pulling out his arm and the sonic screwdriver.

The rock did not block the hole.

They heaved at the other side of the rock, trying to wedge it in. Within seconds, one of the recovering Jax was scrabbling at the crack, pulling itself out with its front legs. The Doctor stood up, bent his knee, and booted the wolf right on its snarling snout. With a short howl, it pulled back for a second, and the Doctor and Kadijk finally pushed the rock into place.

‘Tut tut. First rule of policing,’ said Kadijk breathlessly as he scrambled to his feet. ‘No matter how mean you are to the suspects, never kick their dogs. It upsets the general public.’

The Doctor was looking at the rock. ‘That’s not going to hold them for long,’ he said. ‘We should keep moving.’

They clambered awkwardly back up the sharp incline. Kadijk could feel his fingers scrabbling fruitlessly on the loose earth at the top, but then the Doctor’s hand wrapped itself round his wrist and hauled him up. They were back in the *Jax History* ride tunnel. Below them, at the bottom of the hole from which they had just clambered, Kadijk could see paws scratching at the side of the cylindrical rock

A high-pitched warbling sound made him turn. The Doctor was now crouching perilously close to an oncoming ride car, and pointing his sonic screwdriver at the track. Just in time he leaned back to allow the car to pass. Then he returned to his work. The next ride car swung by twenty seconds later. By the time the third car appeared, Kadijk could see what the Doctor was trying to do.

After two more cars, a short section of rail was no longer fully attached to the track. ‘We’ll only get one chance at this,’ said the Doctor.

Kadijk nodded.

Another ride car swung past.

'Heave!' They both pulled with all their strength against the rail, and it slid sideways towards the deep hole. Behind them Kadijk could hear the snuffling sound of Jax wolves trying to squeeze through the hole they had dug.

Kadijk and the Doctor leapt aside as the next ride car trundled around the corner. They watched as it reached the bent rail. The car juddered as it changed direction. Bobbled on the edge of the track. Scraped off the track completely with a fizzing flash.

Then it continued into the tunnel wall, taking a large chunk of cladding and earth with it as it toppled noisily into the deep hole. Kadijk stepped further round, and watched the next ride car follow it into the hole with an explosive smash.

'That should keep them busy for a while,' said Kadijk

'Unless there's another exit,' said the Doctor. 'And there are over sixty of them.'

From below, they could hear Sam screaming a bestial cry of rage.

'What happened to the moonlight?' asked Kadijk as they hurried on through the tunnels, leaving the crashing of the ride cars a distant noise behind them. 'I thought Sam was about to transform, then all that stuff started falling out of the ceiling.'

'That's the problem with hardwired facts,' said the Doctor, putting his sonic screwdriver back into his jacket pocket. 'They assume nothing happens over, say, a thousand years. In this case, the Jax's skylight to the surface was buried by all the excavation and building work. Now, do you have that bag of jelly babies I gave you?'

Kadijk glared at him. 'No time for snacking, Doctor. We need to bury those monsters for good. And I have just the thing for that.'

'No no no no no!' insisted the Doctor. 'You have a ZooPark full of staff who are equipped to deal with dangerous animals. We can wait until it's light, and then rescue Sam tomorrow. It may be too late for those poor people who were killed by the Jax and turned into drones, but even they can have some kind of civilised existence in a quarantined enclosure.'

'Forget it, Doctor. They stay down there for ever,' said Kadijk, bristling at the thought. 'I'm sorry, but you won't be seeing your friend

again. She's already dead.'

'I said no.' The Doctor spoke in a low voice. 'Sam did not die: she was infected with the Jax parasite by Gray while she was still alive. Her mind and body can still be helped to fight off the infection, at least until she's exposed to moonlight and the transformation becomes permanent. That would be a fate worse than death,' He seemed to be pondering the options, looking into the distance, or the future. 'We might even be able to cure the unfortunate creatures who are buried in suspended animation below that cathedral, if they haven't fully transformed.'

Kadijk felt his old anger returning. 'Are you completely crazy?' he shouted. 'No, I guess not, otherwise you'd be suggesting we save your pet parasite too. We could give it a name, take it for moonlight walks in its test tube.'

The Doctor was studying him with what he assumed must be pity.

'You *are* completely crazy!' bawled Kadijk, and stormed off away from the Doctor into the next section of the ride.

And realised he had no idea where he was going.

'Damn,' he said. 'Have you been in this ride before?'

'What, as a visitor? No.'

'Me neither.' Kadijk looked up and down the section they were in, which was lined with grinning models of happy settlers setting up their cheery camp for the night on early Sarurnia Regna. One woman was repeatedly chopping the same fake log with a fake axe. 'I can't tell if these cars are travelling into the ride or out of it.'

The Doctor pointed to one of the ride cars, which was travelling towards them. Unlike the other cars, it was not swivelling and rotating on its juddering passage through the section to give its absent passengers a good view of the happy settlers. Kadijk joined the Doctor hiding behind nearest group of models.

The ride car was empty. It was also smoking slightly and punctured with bullet holes.

'That looks ominous,' said Kadijk.

The Doctor had stepped out from behind the models and was stroking his top lip thoughtfully with his fingertips. 'How long does

this ride take?’

Kadijk stared at him. Then said, ‘Twenty minutes, twenty-five maybe. Like most of the rides on Kursaal.’

‘Then judging from the damage to the upholstery, and allowing for the flames to have died down. . .’ The Doctor was staring at the ceiling now, with the flat of his hand to his forehead, as though this aided concentration. ‘We must be very close to the exit.’

Kadijk gave him an ‘oh yeah?’ look.

The Doctor was chasing after the car, but when he saw that Kadijk wasn’t following he hurried back to him with an impatient sigh. He turned him round, and pointed to the vanishing car, which was still jammed to one side. ‘The ride attendants would hardly have missed that sort of damage when the car left the exit. They’d have stopped it to remove or repair it. Certainly to extinguish it, at the very least. So it can’t have left the ride yet. Allowing for how long it’s been smouldering away, I’d say we must be very near to its reappearance at ground level. Come on, we can follow it out.’

Kadijk was about to comment. Then he looked over the Doctor’s shoulder, and saw another car coming towards them in the flickering lights of the section’s illuminations. There was someone sitting in the front seat, staring up at something on the ceiling above them. Kadijk looked up. There was nothing.

The car had come closer. He could see the occupant.

It was Bandros. His head lolled at a strange angle on his neck. His uniform was soaked dark.

Kadijk staggered closer, gripping the side of the car, wanting it to be a trick of the light. Wanting it to be someone else.

The sergeant’s right arm had been torn off at the shoulder. His eyes were wide and glassy, and his mouth hung open in an amazed look that would not change. There was blood pooling in the footwell.

Kadijk pushed himself away from the car, and fell to his hands and knees by the cheerful campfire scene, where he was sick in two ragged heaves.

The Doctor was putting a calming hand on his shoulder, helping him up, offering him a large, crumpled cotton handkerchief.

'I'm sorry,' said the Doctor gently. He paused for a moment while Kadijk wiped his mouth. 'I'm afraid this means that there's no backup on its way, and the area will not have been cleared.' Kadijk stood up and wiped his mouth on the handkerchief, still tasting the acid sting at the back of his throat. 'I'm gonna clear this area. Finish the job we started fifteen years ago.'

The Doctor looked at him, confused.

'The second excavation bomb's still in the cathedral. The one you and Cockaigne defused before we pulled you out. I knew it was there. It's why I came down here with you. Well, I got into the excavation hole and I primed it.'

'That's terribly dangerous.'

'The original plans were to reduce all that marble to rubble not just bury it. That bomb is far more powerful than the other one they used to collapse the original tunnels.' His mind was full of lights and explosions and brilliance and blood. Blood on tarmac. Blood on uniforms. 'When I get back to the shuttle, I'm gonna blow the bomb remotely. And blast those killing Jax monsters all the way back to hell.'

'You can't.'

He shrugged off the Doctor's hand, and began a faltering jog towards the next section. He had just crossed into it when there was a grinding noise, the sound of machinery dying, and all the lights went out at once.

He had lost his torch when the Jax had pounced on them. And he had lost his damned gun when the Doctor knocked it out of his hand. So he stood in the pitch-blackness, listening to the Doctor's feet as they scrunched over the ground to join him. 'The staff have switched off the ride for the night. Or maybe they found the broken car.'

Kadijk noticed a small pool of faint light. It was the Doctor's pencil torchlight.

'You're going to blow a very large hole in the ThemePark Commander. Won't that be rather hard to explain away?'

Kadijk recognised the tone. Reasonable, reassuring, placating. Dishonest. He used it himself all the time in interrogations. 'It'll be a last blast from the drugs cartel, Doctor. We'll explain how that was

the reason for their arrest today in Operation Bluebeard.’ He peered at the Doctor, watching to see if he could spot a reaction in the small amount of light. ‘The drugs cartel is broken, the Jax are destroyed, and Kursaal can get on with its business.’

‘Do you think people will believe that? I wouldn’t. Why wouldn’t they believe me instead?’

Kadijk snorted. ‘Doctor, you’re a murderer. You’re wanted for the killing of the infamous HALF activist Bernard Cockaigne, for whom you used to work about fifteen years ago. You remember? Perhaps you recall how you fell out with him this week. We’ll probably find that you called him. Then visited him. Then, in a murderous rage, brutally slew him in his apartment and made your escape. But not without being identified by eleven independent witnesses from the same building.’ He could see the Doctor’s mouth setting in a grim line. ‘Unless you help me, that is. Help me, then keep quiet.’

‘Was that the kind of deal you offered Cockaigne fifteen years ago?’

Kadijk found himself laughing. ‘Very astute, Doctor. You’d have made a good policeman.’ He reached forward and took the pencil torchlight off the Doctor. ‘Accept my offer, and you still could.’

When they emerged from the arched exit of the *Jax History* ride, it was no longer raining. But a chill wind was blowing across the dark, deserted plaza between the various ThemePark rides, and the sky was still overcast. Kadijk stared up at the sullen sky, and could see no stars. The moon was obscured by cloud. Now that he had extinguished the Doctor’s little torch, the only nearby illumination came from his own shuttle’s external lights.

And what they clearly illuminated were two Jax wolves. Kadijk uttered an oath.

‘Perhaps they’ve been here all along,’ said the Doctor.

Kadijk studied the lax. One was a huge grey-brown creature, like an Alsatian. The other looked like it was wearing big fur spectacles. Yeah, and even from here he could see the V-shaped notch in its ear.

‘They got out. Must have been another exit. Or they dug one.’ He swore again. ‘Gotta get in that shuttle. How about your sonic

spanner?’

‘Screwdriver,’ said the Doctor. Kadijk felt his ears go pop again.

The two wolves began to squirm in discomfort, pawing the ground and shaking their heads as though they had bees inside them. Kadijk sprinted off first, his eyes swivelling in all directions looking for attackers.

The wolves saw them as they ran into the pool of light from the shuttle. Alsatian was too preoccupied by what must be a terrible high-pitched whine in its head. V-shape seemed stronger, though, peeling its upper lip back in a snarl, revealing a decaying row of yellow teeth and pink gums. It veered close, and Kadijk kicked out. His boot connected with the muzzle, spraying blood and saliva across the tarmac. His hand slammed down on the door-release handle at the back of the shuttle, and he fell in after the Doctor.

V-shape was moving fast. Its paws scabbled at the entrance, claws scratching for purchase on the gangway.

Then the rear door sliced down, catching V-shape at the back of the neck and pressing it onto the gangway. Kadijk knew that the safety cutout would pop the door straight back up again once it felt resistance. He seized the all-metal emergency axe from its frame by the door, and arced it down in a savage blow aimed at the wolf’s head. He missed his target, and the axehead sliced off V-shape’s paw. The wolf howled, lost its grip, and fell back onto the tarmac.

The door clunked into place. Kadijk stared at the paw, which was lying in a pool of shadow beneath the fire extinguisher.

The Doctor was holding up the sonic screwdriver, listening. ‘No whines, no barks,’ he said. ‘No Jax on board.’

Kadijk didn’t wait for his ears to pop again before he hurried onto the flight deck. He slid his I-card from his jacket pocket and slammed it into the console.

WELCOME COMMANDER KAD—

He didn’t wait for the safety checks, pre-ignition sequence, or permission to launch. He hit the flight controls, and the shuttle jolted into the air. He was pleased to imagine the sound of two wolves squealing in agony as the rear retros kicked out two long tongues of fire.

The shuttle continued its sharp ascent, pressing Kadijk and the Doctor into their flight seats as the whole vessel angled precariously.

Kadijk tore the top off the comms microphone, and stuffed the Doctor's cotton handkerchief into the hole. 'This is an all-points broadcast to Kursaal security and emergency teams,' he said in a nasal whine. 'The Blue Hand Consortium has placed an excavation bomb in the Kursaal ThemePark. This is a warning. It is a warning to clear the area. It is also a warning not to interfere with the legitimate business interests of the Blue Hand Consortium.'

He flicked off the communicator. 'That should clear the area, and I can toast the entire area. The bomb's in the heart of their filthy cathedral, and it'll take out a cubic kilometre.'

He heard a familiar high-pitched warbling sound from across the flight deck, and looked across beside the co-pilot's seat. He could only see the Doctor's back turned to him, but knew at once what he was doing with the sonic screwdriver. Kadijk pulled at his shoulder, trying to drag him away from the control panel.

'I can't let you do this, Commander,' the Doctor was saying. 'You'll kill Sam and you could kill many others. We could save her, and maybe many more like her...'

Kadijk wrenched the seat back, and saw that the Doctor had removed the front panel of the bomb remote, which was concealed in the co-pilot's flight panel. He shrugged Kadijk off. Kadijk reached for the axe.

He turned the implement on its end, then reached across and struck a short sharp blow across the Doctor's fingers as he was reaching for the bomb controls. There was a satisfying cracking sound, and the Doctor whipped his hands away with a loud shout. He stared at the backs of the Doctor's outstretched hands, noting idly that fingers on each hand were now bent at odd angles, clearly broken.

'The Jax have had their time, Doctor. They went up an evolutionary dead end, and Sam drove right in after them.' He looked into the Doctor's face, which stared back at him, black with anger. 'I won't help them out. Didn't you say they could infect the Cronus system for the next five hundred years? I'm not going to allow that. They don't

deserve it,' he heard himself shrieking. 'Bandros didn't deserve it.'

Then the Doctor reached for the controls again with his broken fingers.

Kadijk smacked them with the axe handle. The Doctor screamed with pain. But Kadijk had also struck the remote mechanism, which sparked furiously.

With a bellow of rage, Kadijk seized the Doctor and threw him against the flight-deck doors, which burst open with a hissing protest. Now the Doctor was coming through them again, and Kadijk swung the axe. The handle struck the Doctor across the forehead, and he spun backward, his limbs cartwheeling, his momentum carrying him down the angled slope of the shuttle until he slumped by the rear exit doors and lay still.

Kadijk stood breathing heavily, peering into the access area. He could see, right next to the Doctor's head, a severed hand lying beneath the fire extinguisher. The lax's paw had reverted to human appearance again.

Kadijk hurried back into the flight controls. The altitude indicator showed that he was high enough above ground to avoid the blast. He reached for the remote and hit the detonator.

Nothing happened.

He rummaged frantically at the fizzing wires in the remote-control unit. Now he could see that the comms-link relay was completely sheared away. He tried reaching in, but a sharp electric shock sparked across the gap – the unit was live. But the signal was transmitting a short-distance signal, maybe five hundred metres – it was just not being relayed onto the excavation bomb.

So how could he get the detonator within short-distance range?

He started to operate the flight controls, turning the shuttle around from its inexorably rising flightpath. The shuttle levelled, its crazy angle corrected.

Kadijk heard the flight-deck doors hiss open behind him. 'I think that's far enough,' said a female voice.

He turned to see Sam standing in the doorway. She was smiling her green-eyed smile.

He smiled right back at her. 'It's over, Nurse Jones. You're all alone, and the Jax are going to lose everything in the biggest explosion on Kursaal for over a decade. I haven't gone far enough yet.'

'No,' she said, stepping on to the flight deck. 'I mean I think we've travelled far enough above the cloud level. I couldn't launch the shuttle without your I-card. So I waited in the cargo bay and you were kind enough to do it for me.'

Kadijk whirled to look through the viewscreen behind him. 'No,' he said, a lump of fear clogging his chest. Below the shuttle were the tops of the low cloud which hid the ThemePark from view. As the shuttle's nose started to dip in response to his flight programme, the fat white moon filled the upper part of the display.

'No!' he roared, twisting back round. Just in time to see Sam's nails reaching out for him, feel them seize him around the soft flesh of his neck. Watch her pitiless green eyes raking his screaming face. Feel her powerful hands fling him back against the flight controls.

The last thing Paul Kadijk saw before he died was Sam stretching her bloodied hands out wide and stepping into the light.

'Give me the moonlight'

'They say,' said the Doctor, 'that gazing at the moon through glass can drive you mad.'

He could see past Sam to where Kadijk's body sprawled on its back across the flight consoles, blood leaking from the neck wound and spreading in a shining pool in the moonlight. 'Do you know that lunatic comes from *luna*, the Latin word for the moon?' he continued quietly. She lowered her head, but did not turn around to face him. 'Some say that madness fluctuates with the phases of the moon. I wonder if that's already happened to you, Sam.'

He stood in the doorway to the flight deck, leaning carefully on its frame. The wave of dizziness washed over him again briefly. He had the sensation that the shuttle floor was lurching, pitching him slightly forward. He clutched at the doorframe, and winced as his fingers caught on the edge, sticky with his own blood. Then he realised what was happening. 'The shuttle is heading back towards Kursaal.'

Sam lowered her arms, and he could see she was studying her hands as though she had never seen them before. 'I thought you might be dead, Doctor.'

'I was unconscious for a short while. I wish I'd recovered in time to stop you.'

Then she turned around, and he could see her fierce green eyes as though they were lit from within. He thought he should be relieved that her face had not altered, mutated. But it wasn't completely unchanged. It was full of a hard anger that he had never seen there before.

'I don't understand,' she said, talking almost to herself in a voice seething with frustration. 'Something must give me the moonlight I

crave. To complete my transformation.'

'It's a viewscreen,' said the Doctor coldly, 'a projection. It's not direct light from the moon. You are still trapped within Sam – you have not defeated her. She can still survive.' His voice became urgent, insistent. 'Sam, you can survive. Fight it!'

She leapt for him without warning. He levered himself backward into the corridor, crying out with the pain in his fingers, falling to his right.

She was behind him, slashing at his coat with her nails, snarling a guttural, feral noise. He held his hands close to his chest and poked his elbows out, rolling sideways. Sam jumped at him again, but he anticipated her move and she slammed into the bulkhead where he had been lying a second before. He knew he needed to get to the back of the shuttle, to gain the high ground while the vessel was angled so steeply during its racing descent. He scuttled up the incline on his knees and elbows. He reached out for the fire extinguisher and seized it with the heels of his hands, pulling himself up towards the exit doors.

Sam had seized his foot. He worked his shoe loose, and kicked out. Sam slid down towards the flight deck, growling. The Doctor was able to stand at last, and waited for her to come back uphill towards her. Which she did in a sudden, surprising rush. He fainted right, then darted to his left, and she slammed against the exit door, slumping down in a daze. He flung out his hand, smacking the palm fiercely against the escape pod's illuminated access handle. The door opened at once with an explosive sigh.

The Doctor struggled to the side of the escape pod door. Sam was getting to her feet again, groggy and more angry than ever. She was uphill from him, her back to the exit door. He extended his arm, reaching out a hand towards her. 'Let me help you,' he pleaded.

She sprang at him, snatching at him, digging her sharp pointed nails into the outstretched hand. Which came away at the wrist.

Sam's momentum carried her on as she clutched uselessly to the hand that had once been a Jax drone's paw. The Doctor swung round as she passed, shoving her in the back and propelling her into the

escape pod. Then he slapped the door handle, the door hissed shut, and he slapped the handle again to lock it.

He could see her screaming silently behind the soundproof glass, speckling it with spittle as she snarled her anger.

Back on the flight deck, the Doctor peered in dismay at the bomb relay. It had already been activated, yet there had obviously been no explosion. Then he saw that the comms-link relay was sparking. The whole thing could be live. He picked up the axe, but set it down again. The metal handle would conduct the current and electrocute him, and he couldn't be sure that he wouldn't accidentally connect the comms link and transmit the message.

With a muttered apology, he rolled Kadijk's corpse off the navigation controls, and studied the flight programme. It flashed up onto the Heads-Up Display – the flight path was clearly traced in two colours, green for projected and red for completed. The green line arced down into the centre of Kursaal.

Kadijk had aimed the shuttle at the heart of the Jax ride. Just before the shuttle struck the ground, the excavation bomb would be within range of the activation signal, and it would detonate.

Taking the ThemePark and the shuttle with it.

The viewscreen showed clouds rushing upward. Then the engine note started to rise alarmingly. 'Power surge,' said the Doctor. With Kadijk no longer piloting the shuttle, no one was making adjustments for atmospheric changes. The Doctor was thrown sideways, landing awkwardly in the co-pilot's seat. A huge shower of sparks flashed up from the console, and he could feel hot needles of pain in his hands as he threw them up to protect his face. His coat smouldered with a dozen small burn marks.

Come in, Police Shuttle Seven. This is PoliceBlock navigation. Are you receiving?

The Doctor reached for the microphone, and pulled at his vomit-stained handkerchief with the sides of his hands. The handkerchief came away, but the microphone came away with it, and dangled uselessly by a few fizzing wires.

Police Shuttle Seven, said the calm voice. *Your current trajectory puts*

you on collision course with Kursaal ThemePark. Avoid, avoid.

‘Oh yes, very helpful!’ shouted the Doctor at the hole in the console. He tried wresting the directional joystick, but he could feel that it was locked in position. His broken fingers smarted with every movement. ‘Why don’t you tell me something useful?’

Police Shuttle Seven? There was an edge to the voice now. We’ve cleared the ThemePark, but you’re still going to make a hell of a mess. Is there anyone on board who can hear me? Do you need someone to talk you down?

‘Yes yes yes!’ He tried to press control buttons with his undamaged fingers. The shuttle swooped and rolled, but continued its inexorable journey down. Fiery trails were flashing past the edges of the viewscreen now. Then the shuttle burst suddenly through the cloud cover, and the Doctor could see Kursaal spread out below like a toy fairground.

Police Shuttle Seven, please give us computer authority for your shuttle on PoliceBlock channel four-zed-alpha.

A cloud of dark smoke was rising from the pilot’s position, and the Doctor could see a small flame flickering under the console. A visual warning flashed up on the screen.’

CABIN TEMPERATURE DANGER

A klaxon sounded from above him, then fizzled out into a squeaking hiss.

Unidentified pilot, you have been named as a member of the Blue Hand Consortium. Do not, repeat, do not proceed towards Kursaal. Law-enforcement officers are prepar-

There was a further flash of sparks from the pilot’s position. The Doctor backed away, horrified. The shuttle gave a huge lurch, like a car that has gone over a speed bump too fast.

The control console lights all went out, and in the viewscreen Kursaal loomed larger.

He grappled his way uphill and out of the flight deck. The escape pod sign was flickering out to his right-hand side.

The emergency-door handle was no longer illuminated. The Doctor stretched out and slapped it hard.

Nothing.

He realised it was still locked shut. He curled his gnarled fingers around the locking bar and tugged, yelling as he caught two of his broken fingers. The handle lit up. He slapped it with the heel of his hand, the door burst aside, and he fell in.

In the corner, eerily illuminated by the emergency lighting, Sam stirred. The Doctor wasn't sure if she was hiding, or cowering, or sleeping. He struck the handle to close the door; noting with some alarm the frenzied scratch marks in the surface surrounding it. He hurried to the small bank of pod controls, which had now sprung excitedly into life, and was strapping himself into the nearest seat when he, felt a shadow fall over him.

Sam was looming over him, looking dazed and bruised and angry. Her hands reached out towards his face.

He thumbed the big red switch: EJECT.

It was like being punched in the stomach. The escape pod reverberated with the sound of explosive bolts being fired, and the Doctor felt the lapstrap dig into him. Sam seemed to leap backward suddenly, rolling completely underneath the seats attached to the opposite wall, where she lay still.

There was a short period of calm, and then the Doctor remembered that he ought to steer the escape pod as far and as fast as possible. A minute later, he had the sort of feeling he got when a lift went up. Except that a lift doesn't then bounce up and down accompanied by a terrible rushing, roaring sound.

The shuttle had obviously reached Kursaal.

A gout of brilliant yellow flame roared past the observation window as the massive excavation bomb vaporised the centre of the TheMePark. The Doctor gripped controls as effectively as he could with his broken fingers as the escape pod bucked and reared in the blast. The vessel rattled as debris spattered its exterior, and a series of secondary explosions buffeted it further. Then the escape pod slowly righted itself, and eventually the silence was broken only by the clicks and hums of the controls.

The Doctor piloted the escape pod for another ten minutes, until he

could hear movement from the other side of the little room. He saw Sam struggling to free herself from beneath the chairs.

He locked the controls, snapped off his safety harness, and went to help her from underneath the seats, wincing as his fingers spasmed.

Sam shuffled out, and lifted her bruised face up into the light. She looked at the Doctor in a mixture of confusion and affection and he could see that her blue eyes were rimmed with red.

‘Is this a leisure cruise or a pleasure cruise?’

The Doctor looked up from his deckchair. ‘What’s the difference?’

‘Nothing, I suppose,’ said Sam, looking away so that he wouldn’t see her grinning. ‘Unless you’re taking the “p”.’

She heard the Doctor slurping his iced tea in protest.

She looked out over the rear of the cruise ship as its paddles cut a steady swathe through the turquoise water. They were spending a day enjoying the balmy atmosphere of a river trip through the Chawaran jungle. It was guaranteed to be free from biting insects, inclement weather, and dangerous animals in the undergrowth. As they should expect of any of the FantasyRides they could have chosen in this area of Kursaal.

A purple fish flipped out of the water, whistling, and dropped back below the turquoise surface with a sploop. She looked at her glass, and went back to the table for another iced tea.

The Doctor had chosen their destination, saying that he hadn’t been to Chawara for at least three hundred years and that he remembered enjoying it. Sam looked through her palmtop TourMap, and noted to herself that all the rides in this area were, by definition, Fantasies dreamed up by the Kursaal engineers. FantasyPark was one of the areas that had not been affected by the shuttle crash a month earlier. There had been very little left indeed of the ThemePark, and many adjacent Parks were closed because of the fallout of debris. News reports had speculated that the explosion was caused by an asteroid strike.

‘I think,’ said Sam after her next glass of iced tea, ‘that I’ve had enough fantasy now, thank you, Doctor.’

He grunted. 'I'm pleased to see you've made a full recovery. Thanks to your fighting constitution, I might add.'

'And your bag of TLC from the TARDIS. And no midnight trips for a week, just in case.'

The Doctor was humming. Sam joined in, laughing. 'Give me the moonlight, give me the girl, and leave the rest to me.'

Sam rubbed her shoulder where her wound had now healed completely. She could not remember anything after the bomb explosion outside the ThemePark restaurant, and the Doctor had explained that this was where she had hurt her shoulder. He refused to be drawn further on precise details of what had happened afterwards, only that she had not been herself until she had recovered from the Jax virus.

She reached across to where he was slumped in his deckchair. His hand was curled around the frosted glass, balanced on the middle button of his waistcoat. She chinked glasses, noticing that one of his fingers looked crooked. 'How are your hands?'

He wiggled his fingers in the evening sunshine. 'Fine, fine, fine. How are yours?'

She looked at her chewed nails, and was silent for a while. She thought about the Tractite again. She still had not told the Doctor. Could he forgive her if he ever discovered that she had taken a life? 'Doctor, when I recovered, did I kill the Jax virus?'

'Think of it as self-defence.' He was using that brusque tone that told her he didn't want to discuss it. Or that he was hiding something.

'But it was alive. I mean, it was... sentient.'

The Doctor had his eyes closed under his battered sunhat, 'Interesting dilemma. You know, for similar reasons, four countries in your time still keep samples of the smallpox virus in laboratories.'

Sam sighed her favourite, world-weary sigh. The Doctor was avoiding the question again. 'So our work here is done?' she said, trying to sound like Batman. 'Is that how you see it, Doctor? The Jax have been wiped out. The drugs guys are behind bars. We've done our bit. Made a difference.' She peered closer at him. 'Left our mark.'

This made him open his eyes and squint up at her against the sunshine. 'I'm not sure that's true. Sometimes one just has to do...

enough.'

'Oh, come on, Doctor. But what's enough? We could make a real difference.'

The Doctor propped himself up awkwardly in his deckchair. 'What should we do? Prevent the First World War, perhaps? Save millions of lives? Imagine the effects on history. Smaller scale perhaps. Warn Lord Cardigan ahead of the Charge of the Light Brigade? Save six hundred lives, six hundred ripples through history. Cardigan would never become a hero, and you'd lose a valuable item of knitwear.'

'That's not what I mean. . .'

'Save just one life, then. Make one short visit to 1948, nudge Nathuram Godse's arm just as he fires the fatal shot at Gandhi. One life, with immeasurable effects on humankind. But what effects? But how would they have affected your life, Sam? Would your father have gone into medicine, would your mother have become a social worker, if they hadn't seen things they wanted to change? And if you and I, with the benefit of our hindsight, control their lives for them, is there any element of choice in any of it? And would you even exist?'

'I think I'd rather die than survive knowing I allowed an innocent person to die,' Sam bridled. 'My little life would be nothing compared to the many that we might save.'

The Doctor grasped her arm gently. 'But the very existence of that little life would have been the means for saving them.' He smiled a warm smile in the afternoon sun. 'Just one of Time's little paradoxes, eh?'

She looked deep into his old-young eyes, wondering what was in there, what swam beneath the surface. 'What we do here on Kursaal can't affect my timeline, though. Can it?'

'It is your timeline,' said the Doctor softly. 'And even so, how can you ever be sure?'

'How are *you* ever sure? Or can't you tell me?'

He didn't answer straight away. Then he said, 'I just do my best.' She sat silently for some minutes, listening to the splashes of the water, watching the sun setting over the river as their cruise came to a conclusion.

‘Did our visit here affect my timeline, Doctor? Do you know? Tell me.’

‘Who knows?’ said the Doctor, stroking his lip. Sam pulled his hand away, and looked at his crooked finger,

Mrs DuPre had seen them come ashore, and walked behind them for a short while. After a few minutes, she could resist no longer. She adjusted her voluminous sunhat and bustled past them for a few metres, then made an excuse to stop by dropping her leather clutchbag. They stopped behind her, as people always did, and helped her collect her scattered belongings.

So kind, said Mrs DuPre, so thoughtful. They looked like a lovely couple. Hadn’t she seen them on the cruiseboat? Sipping iced tea on the deck at the rear. Lovely. Are they on their honeymoon? No? Oh well, Kursaal is a *lovely* place for a honeymoon.

She should know. Goodness, she’d been coming here every year since it opened. There was always something new and exciting every year. Her late husband, bless him, loved it, may he rest in peace. Mrs DuPre confided in a stage whisper to the good-looking blonde girl that it had made her late husband, bless him, feel very special, if you caught her meaning.

She watched the nice blonde girl and the good-looking man with the light-brown curls walk hand in hand to the corner. She thought they were going to kiss in the moonlight, but instead he was opening the door to the tall blue cabin. Hadn’t they just jumped past the queue? Mrs DuPre frowned. That wouldn’t be nice at all.

Then the blue box made a very strange sound, flashed its light, and disappeared.

Mrs DuPre agreed with the others in the queue that this was a bit of a disappointment. Still, she observed, there were lots of other attractions to see before the evening was over. That was what she liked most of all, she supposed: Kursaal was full of unexpected surprises.

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Welcome distractions: Adam and Samuel Anghelides

Epilogue

The woman in the large hat had finished talking to the other humans. They had moved away, leaving her behind and hurrying towards the busier areas in the light near to the machines that whirred and hummed and splashed.

He didn't like the water. He stayed in the dark here, in the bushes beneath the trees, watching her.

The woman in the large hat was walking towards him, staring at the fat leathery thing in her hand, looking inside it. Perhaps it was a kill, and she was eating its insides.

So he followed her with his eyes. She was moving out of the area with lights which shone from the top of thin trees. He didn't know what they were. All he really understood was his instinct to survive, and hunger – always hunger. He didn't even know his own name.

If he had once thought of himself as Bernard Cockaigne, that was no longer important.

Licking its thin lips, the wolf moved swiftly after Mrs DuPre.



Kursaal is a pleasure world, a huge theme park for the Cronus system – or rather it will be if it isn't destroyed during construction.

Eco-terrorists want the project halted to preserve vital archaeological sites – areas containing the last remains of the long-dead Jax, an ancient wolf-like race, whose remains are being buried beneath the big-business tourist attractions.

Sam falls in with the environmentalists and finds her loyalties divided. Meanwhile, the Doctor's own investigations lead him to believe the Jax are not extinct after all.

Cut off from the TARDIS, separated from his companion and pursued for murder, the Doctor realises Kursaal hides a terrible secret – and that Sam is being affected by events more than anyone would guess...

*This book is another in the series
of adventures featuring the Eighth Doctor and Sam.*

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