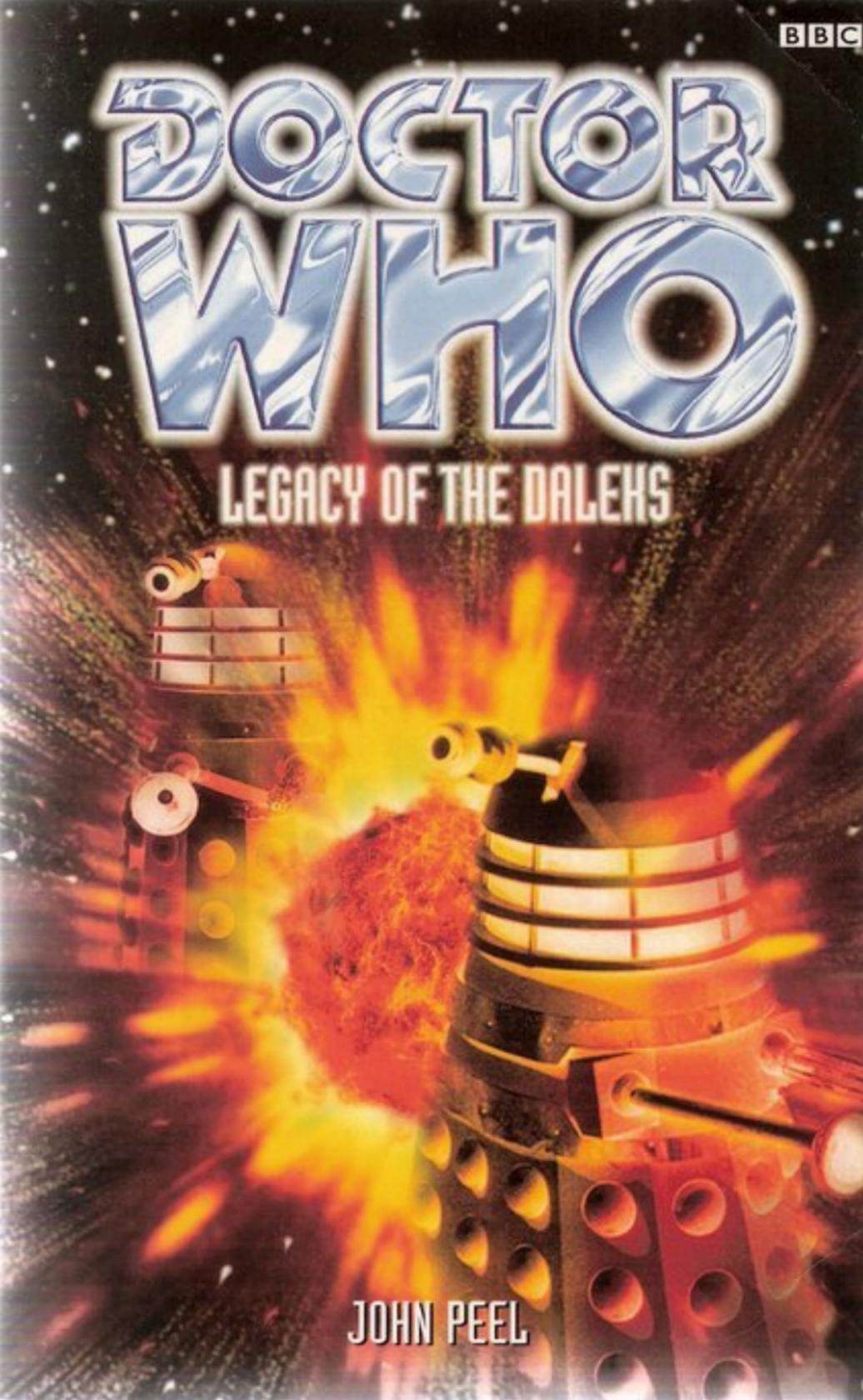


BBC

# DOCTOR WHO

LEGACY OF THE DALEKS

JOHN PEEL



England in the late 22nd century is slowly recovering from the devastation that followed the Dalek invasion. The Doctor's very first travelling companion – his granddaughter, Susan – is where he left her, helping to rebuild Earth for the survivors. But danger still remains all around...

While searching for his lost companion, Sam, the Doctor finds himself in Domain London. But it seems that Susan is now missing too, and his efforts to find her lead to confrontation with the ambitious Lord Haldoran, who is poised to take control of southern England through all-out war. With the help of a sinister advisor, Haldoran's plans are already well advanced. Power cables have been led down a mineshaft, reactivating a mysterious old device of hideous power. But has the Dalek presence on Earth really been wiped out? Or are there still traps set for the unwary?

The Doctor learns to his cost once again that when dealing with the evil of the Daleks, nothing can be taken at face value...

*This is another in the series of adventures featuring the Eighth Doctor.*

# DOCTOR WHO

LEGACY OF THE DALEKS

JOHN PEEL

**BBC**

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For Kate Nation,  
and for Joel and Becky



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# 1

## Knigh's Gambit

Becca had wandered further from home than she had intended. The woods were dark and threatening about her, thick twisted trees hiding who-knew-what. Some of the village men had killed and skinned a lion in the woods only a month or so ago, and she knew there could well be more waiting for her in the gloom.

But Becca was eight now, and she had confidence in her own abilities. She had her bow, and a quiver almost half filled with arrows, and she knew how to use them. A full-grown lion might not take much notice, but she could certainly scare off anything smaller.

Besides, she *had* to find out where Serenity's kittens were. They were even less safe out here in the woods than Becca was. The half-wild cat had been visiting the farm more and more often during her pregnancy, looking for whatever handout she could get. But Becca had only noticed the feral cat a couple of times in the last fortnight. From her shape, Becca could tell Serenity had given birth, and today she had followed her. Serenity rarely lived up to her name, but it had been the biggest and best word Becca had known when the cat had first come around, and somehow it had stuck.

Serenity herself refused to stay on the farm, even though she would have been very handy. The rats had bred strongly again this year, and were constantly after the grain. One or two cats about the place would keep them down, but with the price of cats on the market these days, Becca's father simply couldn't afford one.

So it was up to her. If she could find Serenity's litter, she could take one or two of them, and raise them. They would then stay on the farm, unlike Serenity, and make it their home. They'd keep the rats down, and Becca would be a heroine. How proud her parents would be of her!

Which wouldn't stop them from killing her if they found out how far she'd gone into the woods, of course. Becca couldn't plead ignorance, because staying clear of the woods had been one of the earliest lessons drilled into her. Her father had told her, as he puffed on his pipe half filled with the rare tobacco, 'Them woods have never been the same since the Daleks, young girl. When I were a lad, you could play in there with nary a worry. But since the Daleks. . .'

He had shaken his head. ‘Stay clear of them woods.’

Since that first cryptic warning, he’d unbent enough to explain a little more. ‘When the Daleks invaded,’ he informed her, ‘they killed off most of the people here on Earth. Almost everyone I grew up with were dead. They seeded a plague from space that ruined the world. Corpses piled up faster’n we could bury them. I lost my best friends and my first girlfriend that way. But, looking back, them might have been the lucky ones. After the plagues were over, the backbone of the country were broken. Nothing worked like it used to; there weren’t enough people to keep more than the barest necessities going. And then *they* came – the Daleks.’

He’d sunk back into his memories now, and Becca had listened, spellbound. He didn’t like talking about those evil days much, and Mum never spoke of her experiences. ‘I were five then, younger than you. Me mum had died – not of disease, but because food were short, and she’d tried to scavenge some. A looter killed her for what she’d found. So me dad and me tried to get along. That was when the saucers came.’ She remembered the darkness in his eyes. ‘You young ’uns have never seen a Dalek, and I pray you never do. Metal, they are, as tall as my shoulder. There’s a living thing inside them, but you’d hardly know it from the way they acts. Hate-filled, they are, cold and evil. They put everyone they could to work in their camps. Some they made into living robots, controlling them by helmets. We called them Robomen, because they were more like robots than men. They did whatever the Daleks told them, because their souls were gone.

‘The Daleks were up to something here in England, but it were as bad all over the world. We didn’t really know it at the time, because almost everything had been destroyed. A few had radios, and heard broadcasts, but Daleks destroyed every radio they found and killed anyone using them. They didn’t want humans to get together and fight them. But we did. . . oh yes, we did. A lot of us died, but so did the Daleks.’

Becca nodded solemnly. She’d been warned any number of times that when she was bad ‘the Daleks will come and get you’. Even though she knew they were real, it was so easy to put them in the same class of creatures as dragons and fairies. Fine for children’s stories, but not the sort of thing you believe in when you’re eight years old. ‘But if they’re all dead,’ she asked, ‘where’s the harm in the woods?’

‘They left a lot of stuff behind them,’ her dad explained. ‘They brought. . . things with them. And some of them got loose.

‘And then there’s the worst stuff,’ he added, brooding. ‘The Artefacts.’

‘Artefacts?’ Becca asked. She’d never heard that word before. ‘What’s an artefact?’

‘The Daleks tore up the countryside. They built all sorts of strange things

that we still don't understand. There's nowt as dangerous in all this world as the Dalek Artefacts. So you must stay out of the woods at all times, Becca. The Daleks have caused the death of too many that I love.'

And now, here she was, ignoring his explicit commands. But they really *needed* those kittens. Without them, there might not be enough food for the approaching winter. Her parents would understand – surely they'd be pleased with her?

Serenity had been cautious as she headed through the trees, but she didn't seem to be too bothered by Becca's presence. Half-wild she might be, but Serenity liked her. Becca didn't think for a second that Serenity didn't know she was being followed. The cat was too canny for that. So she wasn't objecting today, which made Becca feel better.

Just ahead was an old house. It had mostly fallen apart owing to weather, time and neglect. There were so many places like this, all over. The village had more than a hundred houses that had been abandoned. There weren't enough people yet to fill more than a few dozen homes. Becca was used to seeing these shells, and Serenity headed straight for this one. It would be the perfect place for her to hide her litter. With mounting excitement, Becca moved through the overgrown garden, and clambered into the house through the same broken window the cat had used.

A chorus of mewing greeted them both, and Serenity padded across to the corner of the room. It was filthy and ruined, but Becca could see several small bundles of fur ambling about. The kittens were clearly almost weaned now. Serenity went to them and lay on her side, allowing the hungry infants to cluster around her and fight for space at her teats. Becca moved cautiously, peering down at them. There were eight in all, most of them the same smoky grey as Serenity. But one had dappled white, and one was a dirty brown in colour. The kittens ignored her, concentrating on getting their nourishment. Becca was entranced, and watched them quietly as they fed. Serenity raised her head once, to stare directly at Becca, but then lay back down. She seemed fully aware that Becca meant no harm.

Eventually, the kittens were finished. They started to play with one another, and Becca moved slowly forward. The kittens looked at her in curiosity but with no alarm. Serenity seemed content to allow her to approach her babies. Reaching out, Becca touched one of the grey kittens. The little creature immediately tried to nip her fingers, wrapping her tiny paws about Becca's hand. Then she licked a finger instead, and started to purr. Becca was enchanted. She stroked the kitten, and then the others came around, obviously wondering what this new game was that made their sibling so happy.

Her hand buried under a small mound of moving fur, Becca was laughing. She glanced at Serenity, who suddenly stiffened and hissed a warning. Think-

ing she'd transgressed somehow, Becca began to move the kittens. Then she realised that the mother was looking beyond her, at something outside the wrecked house. Becca froze, and listened.

The roar was almost deafening. Even as she shook, terrified, Becca realised that no normal creature could ever make a sound like that. It was as if two voices, in slightly different pitches, were screaming at the same instant. Serenity hissed, and immediately grabbed for the nearest kitten, obviously intending to take it in search of safety. There was the sound of something moving outside of the house.

Becca scooped up the remaining kittens, hastily stuffing them inside her sweater. It was tucked into her trousers, so the kittens wouldn't tumble out. They were smart enough to be scared and to freeze, which helped. Heart pounding, Becca crept after Serenity, who was heading out of the room. She seemed confident somehow that Becca would follow.

There was a flash of motion in the window, as *something* crawled up the outside wall, and over the broken sill. Becca caught a glimpse of something dark-coloured, with what looked like tentacles, and an eye on a stalk. The unfamiliar creature roared again, and slithered after her. Becca screamed and ran. Serenity stayed ahead of her, dashing through the litter-strewn floors, and out of the broken doorway. Becca had to duck under the shattered door, and she could hear the thing crawling at an astonishing speed behind her. Whatever it was, it wanted her.

Becca sprinted back towards the overgrown pathway she'd followed to reach the abandoned house. There was no sign of Serenity now, and she was concentrating only on escaping with her life, and that of the bundle of kittens she was carrying. The thing behind her roared again, its two-tone voice echoing horribly. Panicked, Becca's mind blanked, and all she could do was focus on running.

The thing was astonishingly fast, though. She could hear it as it slithered across the ground in pursuit of its meal. She glanced back, and saw that it was only about twenty feet behind her, and gaining. Now it was out of the confines of the house, it somehow put on a burst of speed, even though it had no visible legs. A nightmare thing. She had to escape it somehow.

Her chest was burning as she whooped in air. Her legs were aching, and the kittens were scratching at her in fear. Becca tried to ignore all the discomfort, but it wasn't possible. Struggling to escape, she leapt over a fallen log, and landed badly. Her body collapsed under her, and she rolled into the bracken and bushes. Twigs ripped at her exposed skin and hair, and she yelped. Winded by the fall, she was determined to move on.

But the creature was now blocking her escape. Growling in its two voices, it shot forward, its tentacles quivering, and its two eyes focused directly on

her. Becca knew that she couldn't evade it as it prepared to leap at her.

'Ha!'

Becca snapped around astonished. She hadn't heard anyone else arrive, concentrating as she had been on her attacker and escape. But there was a figure on horseback on the pathway, looking as if it had stepped from the pages of one of her mother's old books. The horse was tall, dark and regal. Becca recognised it as a Friesian, mostly from its build and the feathering about its hooves. On the stallion's back was a figure in armour, complete with helmet and lance – surely a knight, she thought.

'Ha!' the figure cried again, spurring on the horse. The Friesian snorted steam and leapt forward, and the knight moved the lance into place. The creature, recognising its danger, whirled astonishingly fast to face the new foe. It took only a second to realise that it was unlikely to win this fight, and the creature tried to move away to safety.

The lance came down, and pierced the creature's flank. It screamed, echoing about the trees, and dark-purple blood flowed from the wound. The knight ripped the weapon free, as his steed slowed to a halt. Whirling the lance about, the knight stabbed at the creature a second time, tearing another great, raw wound in it. The roar was more subdued this time, and the monster struggled to move before collapsing, dead.

Becca managed to stagger to her feet, cuddling the frightened kittens to her. The knight wiped the ichor off the lance, before turning to regard the young girl.

'Don't you know any better than to be alone out here in these woods?' The voice was odd, coming as it did from inside the knight's rather battered helmet. It was impossible to tell if the voice was tinged with anger or worry.

Becca stared at the apparition in amazement. 'Who are you?' she asked, ignoring the knight's own question.

The knight snorted, burying the point of the lance into the ground. Two metal-clad arms reached up to unfasten and then remove the helmet. The knight shook out her cascade of golden hair and grinned at Becca.

'I'm called Donna,' she answered. 'I'm a knight of Domain London.' She nodded at the dead creature. 'You were almost that slyther's lunch. What are you doing out here, unarmed, in the woods?'

'I'm not unarmed,' Becca answered indignantly. 'I'm a good archer.'

Knight Donna looked pointedly at the quiver, still carrying its unused shafts. 'Arrows are no good against a slyther,' she observed. 'You need something with a bit more force to get through them. Like my lance.' She shook her head. 'Honestly, some parents shouldn't be allowed to have children if they don't have the sense to keep them out of the woods.'

'It's not their fault,' Becca admitted. 'I followed Serenity to get some kittens.'

'Kittens?' The knight frowned. 'You risked your life for *kittens*?'

'We need them for the farm,' Becca explained patiently. 'To keep the rats down.'

'Oh, I see.' Knight Donna moved her steed closer. 'Well, I think I'd better take you back to the farm before you get into any more trouble.' She leaned forward, holding out her left hand. 'Grab hold, and I'll hoist you aboard.' Becca did so, and the knight jerked her upward, and lowered her effortlessly in front of her in her saddle. 'Good. Don't worry, I'll go slowly.' She reached out and picked up her lance, and then glanced down at Becca. 'I assume the squirming bundle down your front is the kittens?'

Becca nodded. 'Seven.'

'Quite a catch,' the knight said approvingly. 'Now, hold on.' She started the horse moving. Filled with excitement, Becca had already forgotten her scare. Nobody she knew had ever been rescued by a knight before. This was some adventure she could tell all of her friends. . .

Mark, Lord Haldoran, strode into the control room and nodded slightly for the report to begin. Haldoran was a tall, spare man with a trim beard, inclined to greyness. He understood little about science, but more than enough about power – of all kinds. And power was his, thanks to this nuclear reactor, so carefully preserved and restored. He glanced in boredom about the room. There were scientists and technicians at work at the various panels, monitoring God knew what. It was state-of-the-art, the best you could find anywhere in the twenty-second century, yet virtually meaningless to Haldoran. But not, of course, to the men who mattered.

Murdock, the chief scientist, moved forward. The man was carrying one of his ever-present clipboards. He seemed unable to face reality without one in his pudgy hands; he probably even slept with one for comfort. As always, he didn't even look at it as he delivered his long-winded report. Haldoran allowed him to ramble for a minute or two before cutting to the chase.

'So everything's working fine?' he summarised. 'No problems, no radiation leaks and no theft of power?'

'Uh. . . none,' Murdock agreed, looking bewildered at being interrupted in the flow of technical jargon. 'Everything's functioning satisfactorily, my Lord.'

'Which is what I pay you to be able to tell me,' Haldoran replied with satisfaction. 'Very well, continue.' He spun on his heels and marched from the room. Estro, his adviser, was beside him, as usual. 'Why the devil do these scientists never learn to speak English?' Haldoran growled.

Estro smiled, the humour lightening his deep eyes. 'Oh, they've learned to speak it, my Lord,' he replied with a chuckle. 'They're just afraid that if they

do, you'll be able to understand what they're saying, and they'll lose their positions of power.'

'Perhaps you're right,' Haldoran agreed. 'But as long as they keep the energy flowing, they'll be well taken care of. I value my men, Estro, unlike some of my brother Lords. You get better results by treating them with kindness. As long as they understand that there's steel to back it up if kindness should fail.'

'Generosity should always be tempered by sense,' agreed Estro. 'And, in your case, it always is.'

'Flattery, my dear Estro, will get you nowhere.'

'I know that, my Lord,' the adviser replied. 'And I assure you that I would never be so foolish as to attempt to use it on you. My remark was simply an observation.'

Haldoran laughed. 'You amuse me, Estro. There are days when I think I should have made you my jester and not my adviser. We might both have profited more by the arrangement.'

'Except for the fact that I'm a poor tumbler,' Estro answered. He seemed amused, though, and not insulted, as a lesser man might well be.

'Then perhaps we should allow the arrangement to stand.' Haldoran marched down the antiseptic corridor, Estro at his side, and out of the decontamination shield. Though he knew he was in no danger inside the reactor, it still disturbed him to go inside. However, since the reactor provided the backbone of his own personal sphere of power, Haldoran insisted on being around it. It might disturb him, but no fears ruled his life. 'Now, what remains to be done this afternoon?'

'There are the usual requests for audiences,' Estro answered, without the need to check his schedule. 'Most of them can be dealt with by underlings, but since you enjoy these audiences so much, I've three of them that you might want to look at.'

Haldoran nodded in approval. 'It's all very well having capable underlings,' he pointed out. 'But if they solve every little problem for me with my people, then the people might start thinking that *they* are the ones they should be grateful to, and not to *me*. It's important for them to see that justice comes from me.'

'Again, a wise decision.' Estro paused. 'And then we must discuss your strategies, my Lord.'

Haldoran stared at him. 'Still on about that?' he asked. He stopped dead in the corridor. 'Why is this so important, Estro?'

'The balance of power is shifting,' Estro explained patiently, even though this was the third time he had given the same lecture. Haldoran admired his ability not to get irritated or bored by constantly having to reformulate the same arguments. 'Domain London is virtually independent of us, with its own

power station fully operational. Several of the other Domains are considering switching to London for their own power needs.'

'London's power cannot be as affordable as our own,' Haldoran objected.

'True,' agreed Estro. 'But there are fewer political strings attached.'

Haldoran stroked his chin thoughtfully. 'You think that my brother Lords are restless? That they are regretting swearing allegiance to me?'

'London has traditionally always been a centre of political power in Britain, my Lord,' Estro pointed out. 'I suspect the other Lords are looking to it for leadership. With all the rebuilding, they're even calling it New London these days to show how improved it is. And Lord London is very ambitious.'

'You don't have to tell me that,' Haldoran growled.

'Now,' said Estro, bowing his head slightly, 'if I may be excused, my Lord, I shall return to you once your audiences have been concluded.'

'Of course.' Haldoran waved dismissively. 'I'll meet with you later.' He marched off to his meetings.

Estro watched him until he passed through the next set of double doors, then retraced his steps back to the power centre. There he cornered Murdock. 'The new power line,' he said gently, 'is it ready yet?'

The scientist nodded. 'The last segments are being installed,' he replied. 'Testing can commence in approximately two hours.'

'Excellent, Estro replied. 'You've done very well, Murdock, and I'm extremely pleased with you.'

'Thank you.' Murdock frowned. 'But I don't understand why you wanted this kept from the report I gave Lord Haldoran earlier. If he knew, I don't think –'

'Exactly,' Estro said, cutting the tiresome man off in mid-flow. 'You don't think. You don't need to think, Murdock. *I* will do the thinking for the both of us.'

'But shouldn't Lord Haldoran know about this?' Murdock insisted. 'The projected power drain is quite significant. It will impact on future earnings.'

Estro sighed. 'He *will* know about it,' he promised. 'I shall tell him personally. If there is any blame, I shall assume it all. But there won't be. There will be only credit when he sees what we have done together.'

Murdock smiled slightly. 'I'm glad to hear that. But –'

'Murdock.' Estro leaned forward, gazing into the scientist's eyes. His own had a curious effect on the man. He seemed to lose coherent thought. 'Enough *but*s for one day, I think. There is no problem. Everything is fine. Do as you have been instructed, and all will work out as it should. Do you understand me?'

'Yes,' Murdock replied, his voice very close to a whisper. 'I understand.'

‘Good.’ Estro stroked his beard. His eyes burnt into Murdock’s again. ‘I know what I am doing. You will obey me without hesitation or question. I am the master; you are my tool.’

‘I understand,’ the man agreed.

‘Good.’ Estro smiled gently. ‘Now, go back to work. There’s still a lot to be done this evening. I’ll be back later to check on progress. I expect to hear good news.’ Murdock nodded, and hurried off, his sluggishness vanishing as he threw himself back into his work.

Estro turned to look back. Haldoran was now hard at work, talking to his serfs, or whatever ridiculous name they called themselves these days. The fool honestly imagined that he was in charge here.

‘Enjoy your rule while you can, Mr Haldoran,’ he murmured.



## 2

# The Campbells

‘Damn it, Susan, what’s wrong with you?’

Susan Campbell shook her head, hardly believing that they were having this same argument over again. ‘David, what’s always wrong with me?’ she demanded. Why couldn’t he understand?

He came to stand behind her as she stared into her dressing-table mirror. It had been thirty-odd years now since they had married, back in the ruins of a London that had been virtually destroyed by the Daleks. Now, if she looked out of the window, she’d see only new buildings, a pleasant walkway beside the same Thames as had held bloated bodies of resistance workers and slaughtered Robomen – and the occasional Dalek. The horrors had gone, leaving everyday life to continue as it must.

And it was everyday life that had now become a horror to her.

She loved David. She had done almost from the first time she’d seen him, gun in hand, in the wreckage of the city. And he’d been attracted to her, too. In a world where he could trust so little, he’d come quickly to trust and love her.

And that was when their troubles had begun.

Susan looked at his image in the mirror. He’d been twenty-two when she’d first met him, and now he was fifty-four. She could still see the shadows of the man she’d met and fallen in love with, but they were overlaid with thirty years of work, hardship and struggles. His hair was thinning and grey. He was getting fat – no, that was unfair. He was getting stout. But he was still David, in many ways the same man.

But not in all ways.

And she? Well, that was the *real* problem. There was no fault to be found in her man. The fault was within *her*.

Despite his anger, David was as restrained as ever. He laid a hand gently on her shoulder. ‘Susan, shouldn’t you get over this by now?’

‘Get over it?’ she demanded, glaring at him. She knew she was wrong, that she was being foolish, but she couldn’t help it. ‘Look at me, David!’

‘I *am* looking at you,’ he said, quietly. ‘I love to look at you.’

‘And I at you.’ Susan felt the tears beginning again, and she fought them back. She stood up and turned to face him. She didn’t need the mirror to tell her what she always knew. ‘David, I can’t take it.’

His face froze. ‘Do you want a divorce? I know they’re strict about them these days, with the need to rebuild the population and all, but –’

‘No!’ she yelled, furious. This was his nastiest barb, the one she hated. ‘David, you *know* that’s not what I mean. I love you, and I always will. But *that’s* the problem, isn’t it? I *always* will.’ She turned away from him and looked at her own image in the mirror.

She looked eighteen – if that. Her elfin face stared back at her in disgust, the hair cropped close to her head. She was in truth so much older, but she wouldn’t look that way for several more centuries. It was part of the blessing, and curse, of not being a human, no matter how intimately she might pass for one.

Not having children was another curse. It wasn’t impossible, of course. Her species – who called themselves Time Lords – and humans could interbreed at times. But this wasn’t guaranteed. She’d tried to give David children, and failed miserably at it, as she had failed at so very much in her life. Their three children had all been Dalek war orphans, adopted and raised as their own. She had loved – and still did love – Ian, Barbara and David Junior.

And they all looked older now than she did.

All of them had moved out as soon as they could. None of them had ever said it was her fault, of course. But Susan knew the truth that they could never hide from her. They could hardly bear to be around her, a permanent testament to their own humanity and fragility. Unlike her, they would age and die in less than sixty years. If she was lucky, in sixty years she’d look like she was in her early twenties.

Susan had not thought this through. When she’d fallen in love with David Campbell, she had assumed that love was enough, even though they were of different species. In some ways, that was true. She didn’t regret a single day of their life together, really. But love wasn’t enough when one person aged and decayed, and the other stayed eternally young.

‘You’re making too much of this,’ David insisted. He didn’t add ‘as always’, but she knew he meant it. ‘I love you, Susan.’

‘David.’ She turned back to him. ‘I love you, too, and that’s the problem. I want to be what you need. And what you need isn’t a teenage wife right now. These silly dinner parties want David Campbell and middle-aged, greying wife.’ She gestured at the make-up on her table. ‘Oh, I can apply it again, David. I can add lines and wrinkles. I can wear a greying wig. I can look like I’m fifty. But I can’t *be* fifty, David. Not a human fifty. And I can’t keep doing this. I can’t keep living a lie. It’s bad enough that I have to do this each day for

work. I don't want to have to do it in the evening for another silly function, where everybody's talking about their age and the good old days when we were killing Daleks, not trying to run a world. I just can't take it any more.'

He glanced at his watch. As always, that human preoccupation with time! Well, they had so little of it. 'Susan, I promised the Brewsters I'd be there. *We'd* be there. Do I have to make excuses for you?' Once more, he didn't say 'again', but it was there, unspoken.

'I can't face them,' Susan answered. She *couldn't*. Tammy Brewster was a nice enough person, but she was obsessed with her health. Or, rather, her un-health. She was a hypochondriac of the worst kind, constantly discovering new diseases that she was dying from. And yet she was grimly determined to hang on to her fading youth in the worst possible way. Her husband didn't know that she'd taken two lovers in a desperate attempt to convince herself she was still desirable. It was terrible to watch someone she'd known most of her life face her own mortality and crumble under the impact.

It was something she'd probably not know for several centuries yet. It terrified her to think that one day she might act like these humans. Would she, too, snatch at whatever she could to try to pretend she was still the way she always had been? Would she struggle to stave off encroaching time? Were these frantic flailings for some measure of peace her own eventual destiny?

The thought scared her to death.

'Susan, I don't want to argue with you,' David said, trying hard to keep his temper in check. She appreciated this, even if it didn't help much.

'Yes you do,' she replied. 'That's *exactly* what you want. You want to argue with me, batter me down, convince me I'm a fool, and force me into my ageing make-up for yet another asinine gathering. David, I'm sorry; I can't go through with it.'

'Fine!' he yelled, yielding at last to his anger. He threw up his hands. 'Sit here and sulk the whole damned evening! I'll go on alone, as always.' He stormed towards the door.

'David,' she called desperately. 'I love you. I *do*. Never forget that.'

He hesitated, and glared back at her. 'If you really loved me,' he snarled, 'you'd do this for me. But you don't, so you won't.' He left their bedroom, slamming the door behind him.

Susan wanted to collapse and cry herself to sleep, as she had so often before. It was no use, really. No matter how many times she tried to explain herself to him, David never understood. She knew what would happen now: he would go to the party, make some excuse for her absence, drink and eat too much, and come home feeling dreadfully sorry for himself.

Well, as always, she'd be here, waiting. One of the advantages of barely ageing was that she still had the body and desires of a human teenager. He

wouldn't want to be cheered up after spending an evening getting thoroughly depressed, but she could do it. Put on a revealing outfit, play up to one of his fantasies, and then bed him before he had the time to remember he was supposed to be furious with her and not aroused by what she was doing.

That would work. It would exhaust him, and stave off another argument for at least a few days. She wished that it wasn't necessary. No matter how hard she tried to explain, he never understood.

Thirty years was a drop in the ocean of her life. But it was half of her husband's. And that was where the pain came in. She loved David, and watching him deteriorate for the next ten or twenty or however many years he had left would be torture beyond endurance. David's hollow offer of divorce might actually be better. If she could go away, ignore him, and live her life. . . . But it wouldn't work. Susan knew that. For one thing, she loved David too much to hurt him by abandoning him. But not, she admitted to herself ruefully, too much to avoid hurting him by arguing with him.

And, anyway, even if she could somehow put David out of her life, it would only begin again. She'd meet someone, fall in love, and be doomed to repeat this dread in another thirty years. She couldn't live her life like this, forever chained unevenly to people whose lifetimes were so ephemeral compared with her own. It hurt too much.

'Grandfather,' she breathed, for the thousandth time, 'why did you abandon me?'

She was wallowing in self-pity, she knew, but she was beyond her ability to climb out of it. Blaming her grandfather for leaving her here was the simplest way to avoid taking the responsibility on her own head. After all, she'd been the one who'd fallen in love. She had begun everything. Her grandfather had simply made her decision for her, one that she would otherwise have had to face herself. She could imagine how much it had hurt him. Was that why he'd taken the decision for her? Had he condemned her to a life of loneliness in revenge?

He had promised to return, too, and see how she was getting along. But he never had. In thirty years, she'd never even seen him. She knew the TARDIS was erratic, but surely, after all these years. . . . the Ship had always loved visiting Earth, after all.

Susan knew she was being foolish, but she felt abandoned. As if he'd banished her from his life and now ignored her. It was hard to believe how close they had once been, and now. . . .

Tears were trickling down her cheeks, but she ignored them. She needed a good cry right now. It wouldn't solve anything, but at least it would make her feel better when it was over.

The phone beeped at her. Susan cursed and threw a pillow at it. She didn't

want to talk to anyone right now. It beeped again.

‘Hold all incoming calls,’ she snapped.

‘Priority override,’ the phone informed her, in its somewhat prim voice.

Frowning, Susan crossed to it, and looked at the message pad. It was from Peace Headquarters, of course. Nobody else she knew had a priority override. And she couldn’t ignore this. ‘Voice only,’ she ordered. She didn’t want the duty officer seeing her like this. Then she laughed, ironically. She’d meant without her full makeup on, so she appeared to be fifty. She’d almost forgotten that she was wearing nothing but underwear. There was something odd about that being her second concern, and not her first.

‘Susan.’ It was Don Spencer. Susan liked the younger man: efficient, intelligent and gentle, he reminded her of a younger David. ‘Is something wrong with your phone?’

‘No,’ she answered, wiping away the tears at last. ‘With me. I’m not dressed.’

‘Oh. Well, you’d better get dressed, and fast. There’s a priority alert from DA-17.’

That made her forget her problems. ‘Does it check?’

‘As well as it can from here,’ he answered. ‘I’m downloading coordinates to your runabout now. We need you on the spot.’

‘Understood.’ There was no begging off from this, of course, but the idea didn’t even cross her mind. ‘I’ll report in once I arrive. Out.’

The phone switched off, and Susan hurried to her wardrobe. She’d worked as a Peace Officer for more than twenty years, patrolling and checking out the Dalek Artefacts. It was astonishing how many stupid people there were who wouldn’t stay out of them, no matter how often they were warned, or however many people were killed by booby traps the nasty little vermin had left behind. If someone had managed to get into DA-17, it was Susan’s duty to extract them and seal the place off again. She grabbed her uniform from the wardrobe and pulled on the dark coveralls. She reached for the padding she normally wore to simulate an extra twenty pounds in body weight, and then hesitated. It was night, and she wasn’t going into headquarters. There really wasn’t any compelling need for her normal disguise. Disgusted as she was with it, she was happy for any excuse not to wear it. She’d just be herself tonight. The chances were that whoever had intruded in DA-17 was already dead, but if they weren’t, they weren’t going to know that Susan should look a lot older than she did.

She hurried down to the garage, sealing the house behind her. She left a brief message for David, telling him where she was going in case he arrived home before she did, and then slipped into the runabout. It was a small model, electrically powered, of course. She brought it on line, and checked the

computer. The location and information about DA-17 were still downloading, but they would be ready by the time she was. The fuel cell was fully charged, and the Artefact was within cruising range. Not a problem.

The runabout moved silently off into the night, its headlights picking out the way from the city. Susan estimated a trip time of about thirty minutes. As she drove, she had the computer play back the data on DA-17. It was – no surprise! – an unevaluated site, just a few miles from the main Dalek mining camp in Surrey. Basically a tunnel leading into the ground, with blast doors at the base. There had been no power readings after the invasion was over, so it had been locked and sealed and left for later. And, as with so many other sites, later had never come.

Still, the information was reassuring. It meant that there was very little chance that the intruder had managed to get inside the Artefact. Very few people could break Dalek encryption codes. And the chances that the tunnel entrance was booby-trapped were pretty small. By the time Susan arrived, the intruder or intruders would be either frustrated or long gone.

This wasn't going to be much of a problem at all. Still, it would serve to clear her mind of her own problems, at least for an hour or so. . .

The TARDIS was too large, and too small. The Doctor stomped through the corridors, not really paying attention to what he saw. The skin on his face still itched from where he'd restored it, and his memory still pained him from the causes of those scars.

He and Sam had become mixed up in the plans of the deadly Kusks on the dying planet of Hirath. Struggling to contain the damage the creatures had managed to inflict, he had narrowly escaped with his life. It had been a long time since he'd been raked over the coals quite so nastily, and it wasn't easy getting over it.

Especially alone.

To be honest with himself – and he hated to be other than that – it was the loneliness that hurt the most. He knew his own failings, and one was the fact that he loved an audience. It wasn't simply that he liked to astound his companions with his brilliance – though there was a certain measure of that in his personality – but that he genuinely enjoyed talking to other people. It was no fun at all being alone.

He needed a new companion.

No. He needed *Sam*. He stopped still in the corridor, absentmindedly scratching at the regenerating skin.

He didn't blame her for leaving the Kusk base as its life-support shut down – and yet she'd held his body, he'd smelt it on his clothes. Had she thought him dead? Had she gone to help Anstaar? The Kusk ship had gone and he prayed

she had been safely on board, but he had no way of knowing where she might be.

His companions always left him; he was used to that. Their lives were lived at a different tempo from his, and he understood it. Each was so short and so intense, and each had needs that he probably could never really comprehend. But there was always some sort of closure when they left him, a feeling that their time with him was done, that they had learnt what they must, even that their lives thereafter would be helped by the time they had spent with him.

Not so Sam. Their journeys were not yet finished. Their purpose was not yet accomplished, whatever that purpose was. The Doctor knew that he was rationalising his own insecurities, but he was sure of this. He and Sam were not yet finished with each other. He couldn't simply let her go.

'Emotion,' he said loudly. 'That's the trouble. I can pretend I'm not involved, but it's a lie.'

Wonderful. Now he was talking to himself. Was he *that* desperate for company?

Yes. He was.

'This isn't about me,' he said. 'It's about *her*. She's probably in trouble, in desperate need of me.' He reached out to touch one of the roundels in the corridor wall. 'Come on, old girl. We can find her. I know we can.' He let his hand fall. Who was he trying to fool? The TARDIS knew his every thought before he did. And he knew what a sham he was. He hurt, and he needed companionship. Had Sam taken a rational decision to walk away from him, to leave the TARDIS and their travels for ever? What had happened to her down on Hirath?

Well, there was nobody else around to feel sorry for him.

He hurried on his way to the main console room. Inactivity chafed his soul. He had to do *something*, anything, to try to find Sam. If she was fine, then he could walk away and leave her if that was what she wished. If she was in trouble. . .

He hated himself for hoping she was in trouble.

Stars whirled overhead as he strode into the console room. Usually he could enjoy the view, but now he was too bothered. He hurt. He hadn't felt this alone since his decision to leave Gallifrey. That had been hard enough, and even harder when he'd decided to take Susan with him. He couldn't leave her behind to be brainwashed and regimented in the thought patterns of the rulers of his homeworld. But the decision to flee had been so hard. . .

Why was he thinking of that now? It had absolutely nothing to do with Sam, or his recent ordeal. Was his mind starting to wander? Was he so reliant on having someone around to admire him?

He collapsed into his chair and poured himself a cup of Earl Grey. He sipped at it, but tasted nothing but bitterness. He replaced the cup and glared at it. Was there no relief for him anywhere? He picked up the book he'd been reading, and was surprised to discover it was *Songs of Innocence*, a first edition, personally inscribed by William Blake. He couldn't remember reading it, but it was open at 'The Divine Image'. He read:

‘For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity, a human face:  
And Love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.’

The Doctor sighed. ‘I think you got it wrong, William,’ he murmured. ‘I have human dress, but no peace.’ Blake had used a child as the symbol of innocence in those poems, and it had been far, far too long since he was either a child or innocent. Perhaps that was what attracted him to humans so much – their almost endless capacity for being children, and being so innocent even in a hostile universe. He strove himself for a lack of guile, but it was so very hard to achieve.

‘What have I done?’ he asked the room at large. ‘I’ve run from my people, and hidden myself. I’ve fought for what I believe is right. Sometimes I’ve even won. But what has it gained me? What do I have to show for it? I’m sitting here alone, arguing with myself! And, worse, I’m losing!’

Wasn't the first sign of dementia talking to oneself? Or was it answering oneself?

He jumped to his feet and crossed to the console. ‘We have to find her,’ he informed the empty console room. ‘She can't have gone far. I have to know. Where is she?’ He slammed his fist down on the panel as if chastising the TARDIS itself. ‘*Tell me!*’

There was no reply. The TARDIS was probably sulking.

‘Earth,’ the Doctor decided. ‘Maybe she'll have gone home.’ He shrugged. It was a better place than most to start his search. Besides, he had exactly three options: forget about her, look for her, or sit and mope. He'd brought Sam out among the stars, and shown her wonders and terrors she'd never dreamed about before. He couldn't abandon her now.

While he wasn't exactly convinced he was doing the right thing, he was at least doing *something*. In Thannos time it had been 3177, so allowing for that. . . His hands flickered over the controls, setting the destination coordinates for London, in the year –

A light pulsed on the console, and the Doctor stared at it. The telepathic circuits. . . Sam. Had she –?

Then a blast sent him tumbling across the room, his mind a searing blaze of pain.

*Agony. Despair. Death.*

The Doctor managed to crawl to his hands and knees, his mind scorched by the strong telepathic message that had broken past all of his normal safeguards. His limbs shook, and he couldn't focus his mind on anything but the appalling – the terror –

*The end of everything. Nothingness. Pain. Obliteration.*

And: *Kill!*

He was aware that he was whining slightly as he staggered to his feet and lurched back to the console. He slammed his hand down on the telepathic contact, cutting off the message, and freeing his mind again from its dreadful grip.

He breathed deeply, leaning on the panel until the shaking in his body had ceased. The message had been so strong it had threatened to overwhelm him. But he had recognised it in the few seconds it had lasted.

'Susan...' he whispered. Was it merely a coincidence that he'd been thinking of her only minutes before? Or was coincidence just another word for causation?

What had happened to her? What or who had she been wanting to kill? That wasn't the Susan he'd –

Then he stopped himself. What she was like *now*, he had no idea. A twinge of guilt needled his mind as he realised that he'd hardly thought of her in ages, let alone visited her as he had promised so glibly. If it hadn't been for Rassilon's Game, he'd never have seen her at all in all these hundreds of years. And even then, he'd barely talked to her.

What was behind this message? He was starting to think coherently again, though his head still throbbed. A mental blast like that, amplified through the telepathic circuits, could do a great deal of damage to any Time Lord close to the source. He checked the space-time co-ordinates and discovered something very strange. First of all, the mental blast had come via the telepathic circuits of *another* TARDIS. Which didn't make any sense, because Susan certainly didn't have access to one. Did she?

And second, it had come from a world other than Earth, and at a distant time.

Somehow, obviously, she must have come into contact with another TARDIS. Or was it his, but from some other incarnation? It wasn't one of his past selves, of course: he'd have recalled such a meeting.

Which didn't, of course, rule out either his own future self or a future regeneration. He checked the records, though, and discovered that the carrier wave didn't match his own TARDIS. So she had somehow made contact with

another Time Lord, and used his or her ship to get off Earth, either voluntarily or as a captive. The latter was only too plausible, considering only renegades made a habit of picking up people from one world and transporting them to another.

Like himself.

But, then, there was the *content* of her message, racked by pain and anguish that he could hardly understand himself. What could have driven her to this? And there had been that sensation that death was hovering close beside her. Susan hadn't been *fearing* impending death – she was *facing* it. Not with doubt, but with certainty. Was her message, then, aimed at him – a cry for help?

No. He had not sensed that it was a cry for anything other than death and revenge. But *why*?

The Doctor opened his eyes at last, staring at the console. Susan was on the verge of death, and already sunk into despair. She needed his help. Guiltily, he realised that he'd abandoned her for far too long, and she had been far too young when he had cut off all of her ties with her own heritage. At the time it had seemed to be the right thing to do... hadn't it? He didn't know.

But maybe now he could do something about it.

His hands moved towards the controls, to alter the TARDIS's flight towards the co-ordinates he'd gleaned from the telepathic circuits. And then he stopped.

They were set for his search for Sam... Thirty-odd years after the Daleks had invaded Earth. Where Susan should be, *before* she sent the telepathic message... Perhaps he could take care of both tasks together. Discover what had happened to Susan, and search for Sam at the same time... Susan's husband... what was his name? Oh, yes! David Campbell! He'd been high up in the resistance movement. He was bound to be a part of the restructuring that took place after the clean-up. He might even be the best person to ask about Sam. If she was in New London, David would probably be the right person to talk to for information.

Yes. That was the answer. He smiled, suddenly. If he found out what had caused Susan's problem, then perhaps he could prevent whatever had caused her to send that message in the first place. So it would be tweaking the laws of Time, and he would no doubt get a slap on the wrist the next time he visited Gallifrey. But what did that matter, compared to all of the complaints they undoubtedly had against him already? One more minor violation on his record. Well, laws should be tempered by compassion.

Enough thought, enough moodiness: it was time for action...

### 3

## Eminent Domain

Donna couldn't help being amused by the discomfort of Becca's father, but she tried to keep it off her face and out of her voice. He was one of those people who are the backbone of the community – independent, strong, and generally quiet. He and his wife had raised a good family – at least six children that Donna had seen as they had come to gape in awe at a female knight and to stroke her warhorse – and they undoubtedly had as little to do with outsiders as possible. On the other hand, they could hardly ignore the fact that she had saved the life of their daughter.

'I'm truly sorry, sir. . . ma'am. . .' the father said, confused and uncertain. Knights were generally addressed as *sir*, and she'd faced this particular embarrassment before.

'There's no need for any titles,' she said gently. 'It's just a job.'

'Begging your pardon, but it's more than that,' the farmer replied. 'Risking your life as you do, and all. But, as I were saying, I'm sorry that my Becca made you risk your life for to save her. I'll see that she's properly punished for it.'

'And rewarded, too, I hope,' Donna added.

The father looked confused. 'Rewarded?'

'For bringing home her prizes,' Donna explained. 'As healthy a litter of kittens as I've seen in many a year.' The bundles of fur were on the floor, gathered around a dish of food, nibbling at it and playing with one another. 'Becca told me how much you need their help with the rodents, and she only did what she did because she wanted to help.'

'That's as it may be,' her father agreed stubbornly. 'And I'm not saying that they won't be a grand help and much appreciated. But she has to learn not to go off into the woods alone.'

'I couldn't agree more,' Donna replied. 'If she doesn't learn, well, next time I'm unlikely to be there to save her. But I'd ask that you temper her punishment with appreciation.'

'I knows best how to take care of my own,' he said stubbornly. There was, at the same time, an unspoken accusation in his bold gaze: *Why aren't you taking care of your own?* She'd seen it many times, and would undoubtedly

see it as many times again. In this terribly underpopulated world, women were valued mostly for their fertility. And it was neither his nor anyone else's business why she was not at home, tending a gaggle of her own brats. Donna ignored that aspect of his challenge.

'I can see that you do,' she agreed. 'Well, I have to be on my way. I'll stop by the next time my patrol brings me this way, and see how Becca's doing.'

'If there's anything we can do for you, to show our gratitude... ' the hitherto-silent mother said.

Donna smiled at the tired-looking, grey-haired woman, who could hardly be more than about ten years her senior. 'Perhaps there is,' she suggested. 'When the next generation of cats comes along, I'd like the opportunity to purchase one from you.'

'Purchase?' the woman answered, as if she'd said something indecent. 'We'll give you your choice. Our word on that. It's the least we can do.'

Donna inclined her head. 'Then I thank you.' She turned to the two girls still stroking the horse. Now, young ladies, if you'll stand aside, I have to remount. Trust me, this armour's heavy, and if I fall on either of you, it'll break a limb or two. And not mine.'

Laughing, the girls scampered back. Donna wasn't exaggerating about the weight of her armour. She used a portion of a log to stand on, getting her closer to saddle height. From this, she was able to swing a leg across the stallion's back, and settled into place. One of the boys handed her the helmet, which pulled into place. 'A good day to you, gentlefolk,' she called, and then urged her steed into movement. She turned its head away from the farm, and back towards the London road. It was approaching evening, and she wanted to make it back before it got too dark.

She heard the door to the farmhouse close behind her and sighed. Becca was in for a strapping, that was obvious. It was harsh, but the punishment might save her life one day. What the girl had done was brave but extremely foolish. On the other hand, Donna could hardly fault the child, considering her own choice of career. She urged the horse onward, glad that at least Becca would live to lie on her stomach all night.

It had been pure coincidence that she had been close enough to hear the slyther roar, of course. Still, she had recognised the sound of the hunting call, and knew that something was in trouble. She'd never have guessed the prey to be a human child, but she hated slythers enough to kill them whatever their intended victims. One of the nastier little gifts the Daleks had left in their wake.

Donna had never known the Daleks, of course. They'd been dead almost a decade before she'd been born. But her father had fought them, and most of his men, too. And there were damaged casings all over London. Some were

in museums, but others were rusting trophies in front yards. Many had been beheaded and used to hold flowers, which doubtless amused their owners: weapons of terror become containers of peace. Donna had always thought the Daleks looked evil, and the idea of using them for anything gentle appalled her. But, she realised, people coped in whatever ways they could, and it wasn't her place to criticise them.

Her steed carried her almost automatically on the path that led homeward. She was starting to itch badly, and would enjoy removing her armour and having a good, long soak in a bath. Maybe even put on a skirt, and enjoy astonishing her colleagues. The armour was a pain, but the people, she'd been told, needed symbols of the government in action. And the knight was an almost universal stereotype of the gentle stranger. Donna had to admit that it worked: people *did* accept that she meant them only well when they saw her. But was it really worth wearing this horrible weight of metal?

The sun was sinking, and Donna eyed it with concern. It was starting to look like she'd not make it back before dark. Though she was prepared to set up camp if necessary, she really didn't like the idea too much. It would mean getting out of her armour all alone, which was a chore, and then carrying it back on her saddle in the morning, which was simply embarrassing. She considered urging her horse to go faster, but that wasn't really advisable. He wasn't her usual mount, and she wasn't too sure how much endurance he had. And, she didn't feel right pushing him simply because she'd taken the time out to rescue a young girl and then call on her family. It looked as though she'd have to grit her teeth and make a camp in a couple of miles.

The horse's ears suddenly pricked, and he whinnied softly. Donna was snapped from her thoughts, and she peered around the apparently still woods. Her steed had detected something, and she knew his hearing was far more acute than her own. She patted the side of his neck comfortingly, straining her own ears.

It started softly, building up to a loud crescendo, and then cut off abruptly. It *almost* sounded like an angry animal, howling and screaming. Donna was puzzled and worried, though, for she'd never heard anything quite like it before. Was this some beast that the Daleks had left behind that she'd never encountered before? But there had been something... vaguely mechanical about it.

Her horse was nervous, but he accepted the prod she gave with her knees and started towards the source of the sound. Donna decided that the possibility of facing an unknown foe was worth the trouble of using precious bullets. Sticking her lance through the rest in her saddle, she drew the rifle instead. Warily, she edged into the small clearing where the odd sound had originated.

There was no sign of life, but there was something very much out of the

ordinary there. It was a tall blue box, with small windows. Above them was the sign: POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX. Donna scowled. The box certainly hadn't been here on her last trip through the area. And what on Earth was a 'police public call box' anyway? There hadn't been any police as such since before the Dalek invasion. This didn't make any sense. Added to that, there was no obvious way that the box could have been brought into the clearing. It would have required some kind of truck, or, more likely, a horse and cart, either of which would have left tracks. And there were none.

Was this strange box somehow the source of that terrible noise? Donna didn't see how it could be, but there was no sign of anything else.

Then a door opened, and a man stepped out. He seemed almost as surprised to see Donna as she was to see him. She held the rifle at the ready, but without making any gesture towards using it, and studied the man.

He was tall, slender, and handsome, in a dark, poetical sort of way. His hair was down to his shoulders, waved and slightly curling. His eyes, as they studied her, were piercing, giving an indication of strong intelligence. His clothing was a little antiquated, but not too strange. A frock coat in dark green, trousers that were slightly over-sized. He wore a dark-blue cravat, and a blazing-white shirt.

'Interesting mixture of periods,' he murmured finally. 'Or have I arrived in time for Hallowe'en?'

Donna ignored the question and gestured at the box. 'Are you a policeman?' she asked.

The man glanced up at the sign as if he'd never seen it before. 'Not in any sense of the word that you'd mean,' he confessed cheerfully. 'I'm the Doctor.'

'Don't you mean a doctor?' she asked.

'No.' He gestured at the rifle. 'Are you going to use that, or ask me to stick up my hands, or something?'

'I heard a strange noise,' Donna explained, feeling inexplicably embarrassed suddenly. She replaced the rifle. 'I thought it was some animal.'

'I'm afraid it was probably just me,' the Doctor answered. He patted the box, and then swung the door closed. She heard it latch shut. 'The old girl is a bit wheezy.'

'What girl?' Donna asked. This was a very confusing person.

'My transport.' He gestured at the box. 'The TARDIS.'

Donna decided that this was too much to accept. 'You *travel* in that thing?'

'Ssh!' he replied, putting a finger to his lips. 'She's very sensitive. If we're going to talk about her, let's move away from her first.'

He was deranged, Donna decided. Probably lived alone in the woods, and used the police box for shelter at nights. 'What's your name?' she demanded.

‘I told you: the Doctor.’ He grinned up at her, a very engaging smile, and offered his hand. ‘And you are...?’

Well, if he was a lunatic, he seemed to be harmless enough. Still, she’d do better keeping alert. Reaching up, she removed her helmet, shaking her hair free. ‘Donna, a knight of Domain London,’ she replied. She accepted his hand and shook it.

He raised an eyebrow. ‘Refreshing to know your order accept women members.’

‘They don’t,’ Donna admitted. ‘Usually.’

‘But you’re not usual, eh?’ The Doctor seemed amused. ‘Splendid. We should get along just fine. You wouldn’t happen to be heading back to London, would you?’

‘I would,’ she said. She glanced at the sinking sun. ‘But I don’t think I’ll make it tonight. I’ll have to camp out, and continue in the morning.’

‘Very reasonable,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘Would you have any objections to my accompanying you? There’s a man and a woman or two in London that I have to see.’

Donna shook her head. ‘I don’t see why not – provided you don’t slow me down.’

‘I’ll try to keep up,’ the Doctor promised. He considered for a moment. ‘You wouldn’t happen to know a David Campbell, would you? Former Dalek fighter.’

‘Campbell?’ Donna peered at the man more intently. ‘He’s a Peace Officer. I know him by name. He’s a liaison for Lord London.’

‘Splendid!’ the Doctor said, rubbing his hands together briskly. ‘I rather thought the boy would do well for himself.’

‘Boy?’ Donna laughed. ‘He’s over fifty, Doctor.’

‘That young?’ The Doctor shook his head. ‘It’s all relative. Which is what he is to me, in fact. He married my granddaughter.’

‘Granddaughter?’ Donna stared at the man in confusion. ‘I met Susan Campbell at a party once. She’s in her fifties, Doctor. She can’t be...’ Her voice trailed off, as she finally made some sense of what he was saying. ‘You’re from offworld, aren’t you?’

‘Very,’ he agreed.

‘So *that’s* it,’ Donna breathed, finally starting to understand. ‘One of the colony worlds, and you’ve come home again. You’ve been in cryo-suspension, haven’t you? That’s why you’re younger than they are? You haven’t seen them since you left.’

The Doctor looked amazed. ‘That’s marvellous deductive reasoning,’ he complimented her.

Donna smiled smugly. ‘Thank you. You know, Doctor, I was starting to think you were a little touched in the head, but now it’s starting to make some sort of sense.’ She looked around for a fallen tree or a rock she could use to dismount.

‘I said it was marvellous,’ the Doctor answered. ‘I didn’t say it was correct.’ He smiled. ‘If you’ll wait here, I’ll fetch you a stepladder to help you down.’ He turned and used a key to open the box behind him.

Confused again, Donna waited for him to come out. Had he been claiming she was wrong? But how could that be? It was the only logical way to explain his statements, and logic always worked.

The Doctor emerged from the box again, carrying an eight-foot stepladder. Donna simply stared at it, completely at a loss. It was at least a foot taller than the box itself. Seemingly unbothered by her look of shock, the Doctor set the ladder up beside her horse.

‘There you go,’ he said cheerfully.

‘How did you do that?’ Donna asked in a weak voice.

‘Do what?’ He seemed genuinely puzzled by the question.

‘Get that out of there.’ She gestured at the ladder, then at the box.

‘It’s where I store it,’ he said, patiently, as if talking to a child.

‘But it’s too big to fit in there,’ Donna objected.

‘Oh.’ The Doctor smiled again. ‘The TARDIS is a bit bigger than it looks. Now, are you going to sit up there all day, or would you like to come in for tea and crumpets?’

‘Come in?’ Donna had the strangest feeling that she was suddenly Alice, and the police box was a rather unusual rabbit hole. ‘Tea and crumpets?’

‘Freshly brewed,’ he promised her. ‘If you come down.’ He held out a hand to help her.

What else could she do? She accepted the hand and clambered down from the horse. She placed her helmet on the saddle, and then turned to the – what had he called it? – TARDIS.

‘After you,’ he said, politely.

Donna walked through the rabbit hole and into Wonderland.

Haldoran took his seat on his throne, and looked around the room. Soft electric bulbs illuminated it, and the men within. There were eight of them, his hand-picked council. Estro sat to his direct right, a symbol of his position that was lost on none of the other men. They were all ambitious and eager, and each of them had hoped for the seat of secondary power that had been lost to them when Estro had arrived a few months ago, and proven himself to be utterly invaluable. The other seven resented this deeply, but not one of them was stupid enough to mention it aloud.

‘They are all plotting your downfall,’ Haldoran had told Estro before the meeting.

‘I’d be disappointed in them if they weren’t,’ Estro had replied. ‘We have no use for chicken-hearted men who are too afraid to strive for what they want.’

The answer had amused and pleased Haldoran. Estro was a dangerous man, of that there was no doubt. But not dangerous to Haldoran, because he had the means to control the man’s ambitions – and to profit from his advice and help.

To the right of Estro was Barlow. He was the youngest of the council, but both skilled and relentless. His late father had been one of Haldoran’s staunchest supporters, and now the son had inherited the father’s place – and abilities. The dark-haired, intense young man was carefully not looking at Estro, which almost certainly meant that he was *thinking* about the adviser.

Beyond Barlow was Tomlin. He was inclined to stoutness, thanks to his liking for beer, and had a genial humour about him. His ferocious temper surprised those who thought him a pleasant-natured oaf. He was a man others followed out of fear, rather than from respect. But they followed, still, which made him useful.

At the end of the table sat O’Hanley. He was poker-thin, and utterly humourless. Nobody had ever seen him smile, and he spoke almost as infrequently. He had a razor-sharp mind, though, and a tactician’s brain. He was utterly invaluable to Haldoran.

On the Lord’s immediate left was Portney. Unlike the others, he was no fighter, but a bookkeeper. He was the kind of man whose face you never remembered because it was so bland and guileless. This was to Portney’s liking, since he was in fact an avaricious crook. He was skimming his own profits from Haldoran’s takings, and didn’t know that Haldoran knew this. In fact, Haldoran secretly approved, because it meant that Portney maximised Haldoran’s profits, in order to gain more for himself. Nevertheless, one of these days Portney would have to be disciplined. Haldoran was considering having his left hand sawn off, but hadn’t made the final decision yet.

Beside him was Malone, who openly scowled at Estro. Malone was a large man, ferocious in his loves and hates, and utterly incapable of hiding either. You always knew where you stood with him, and he never bothered to lie about his feelings. A superb fighter, he was adored by his followers.

Next was Craddock. He was the oldest here, going on sixty, but nobody would dispute him his place. He’d been a battler all of his life, switching from fighting men to destroying Daleks and back to fighting men. His hair was almost nonexistent, but his eyes were as shrewd as anyone’s, his mind sharper than most.

Finally, there was Downs. Haldoran still didn’t know whether he actually

liked the man or not. He was reputed to indulge in his vices to excess, and some of them were definitely vile. There were rumours of young boys and teenaged girls going missing and never being seen whole again. Haldoran carefully avoided looking into these stories; as long as Downs kept his perversions reasonably well hidden, he was welcome to them. There definitely seemed to be some inner demon that drove the man, and that was what made him so valuable to Haldoran. He was vicious and, so far, entirely victorious in warfare, and that more than made up for the price he extracted for his loyalty.

'I've been discussing matters with Estro,' Haldoran said abruptly. He never bothered with any kind of formal nonsense to open meetings. 'He has raised an... interesting suggestion!

'I'm sure he has,' Malone said, scowling. 'I knew he had your ear for some purpose.' The others leaned forward, their gazes on the adviser.

'He has my ear because I choose to listen to him,' Haldoran answered harshly. 'And I think you'd all be advised to do the same. Estro.' He jerked his head, giving the dark man permission to speak.

Estro smiled slightly, the smile of a tiger about to take prey. He held his hands together, fingers linked, and stared around the table. 'The time has come,' he said quietly, 'for Britain to have a single authority again. A king, if you will. It is time to fill in the power vacuum.' He paused, waiting for reactions.

'King?' Tomlin asked. 'Aye, it's an interesting thought, man – and I can guess who the obvious candidate is. But can it be done?'

'No,' Malone said. 'The man is flattering you, my Lord, and catering to your ego. But he can't possibly deliver on such a scheme.'

Craddock looked bored. 'It would be amusing to hear his plan, though,' he murmured. 'Before we all agree that it will fail.'

Haldoran smiled at this. 'Yes,' he agreed. 'It would be better if you all spoke with knowledge instead of prejudice.' His eyes flickered to Estro's again, and he read the amusement there. Estro was deliberately baiting the men.

'Lord London is poised to make his own thrust for the throne,' Estro said gently. 'Our informants have made this perfectly clear. He's building up his forces, and his knights are patrolling the borderlands between his Domain and ours. With his own nuclear power station back on line, he's attempting to curry favour with the other Domains by undercutting our Lord's prices. Some will go along with that, which will reduce Haldoran power. That cannot be allowed. The only way to retain them as customers is if their current leadership were replaced.'

'I can see that,' O'Hanley agreed. 'Their rise would be our downfall, certainly, and that can't go unchallenged. Yet, if what you say is true, London seems to be expecting just such a move.'

‘He is,’ Estro agreed blandly. He gestured to the video screen on the far wall, and switched it on with the remote he held. It lit up with a map of southern England. Haldoran’s land in Surrey was illuminated in green. London’s spread showed in red. The other Domains – Canterbury, Edmonds, Salisbury and Devon – were blue, yellow, orange and brown respectively. ‘Ignoring the north for the moment – which, after all, is not buying from any of us as yet – only London and Haldoran provide power. We cover the most ground at the moment, but London is expanding. It is also the traditional capital of Britain. If we were to take it, we would control all of the power supply in southern Britain. The other Domains would never dare stand against us.’

‘It’s all very well to talk of taking London, man,’ Malone objected. ‘But it’s no easy task. He has large forces. And it looks like he’s *asking* for a fight.’

‘Because he thinks he can win it,’ Estro answered. ‘And, as matters are, I think he has a sixty-per-cent chance of being right. If he provokes us into attacking, he has the advantage of his home grounds and an extensive army to rely on. He would probably win such an encounter.’

‘So what are you saying?’ Downs demanded. ‘That we provoke him into attacking us openly? That we would have the advantage on *our* home grounds? That we should allow our territory to be razed, our homes sacked and our men, women and children be raped and murdered?’

‘No,’ Estro answered calmly. ‘I propose we change the current situation. Given matters as they are now, London will most likely win. This is why he is pushing for a war. He believes he can win and so do I – *unless* we change the game.’

‘And how do we do that?’ Barlow asked with interest.

‘Weaponry,’ Estro explained. ‘At the moment, both sides are in a situation of parity. Neither of us has anything larger than small rifles – oh, except for those two tanks you’ve been keeping hidden, Craddock,’ he added. Craddock said nothing, but Haldoran saw the flicker of anger in his eyes. ‘I’m sure London has one or two he’s looted from a museum, as well. But the problem is that there are very few shells for such heavy weapons, since none have been manufactured in more than thirty years. And neither side has any air capability.’

‘We know what we lack,’ Malone snapped. ‘What do you propose to do about it?’

Estro turned and snapped his gloved fingers. One of Haldoran’s soldiers came forward and placed a metal case on the table. It was three and a half feet long, and a foot wide. As the man stepped back, Estro snapped the catches on the case, and flipped open the lid.

Nestled inside the case was a Dalek ray projector.

‘*This* is how, gentlemen,’ he announced. ‘I have discovered a cache of Dalek

guns. Using these, our troops will outclass the enemy. These will hand control of London – and subsequently the entire country – to us.’

The warriors stared at the gun in disbelief. Portney was the first to find his voice. ‘All Dalek weapons were destroyed after the war,’ he protested. ‘I don’t know where you found that, but there can’t be any more.’

‘Portney’s right,’ Malone agreed. ‘My Lord, this is some kind of a con game. Estro’s promising something he can’t possibly deliver! There are no more Dalek weapons.’

Haldoran smiled. ‘Estro has delivered eight of these ray guns so far,’ he replied. ‘They are all in working condition, because I’ve had men try them. And he has promised me several hundred more of them once we begin the assault. With these –’ he gestured at the case – ‘we cannot fail.’

The men were still astounded by the news. Finally, O’Hanley leaned forward. ‘Where are you obtaining these guns?’ he demanded.

Estro smiled and shook his head gently. ‘I see no need to inform you of their source,’ he said. ‘Not that I distrust any of you, of course, but there would be a great temptation for you then to... remove me and usurp the source for yourselves. I prefer not to give you that option.’

‘I know where they’re coming from,’ Haldoran said firmly. And that’s enough. You will all begin to ready your troops for action, gentlemen. I want our lines pushed forward towards London. We will provoke a response from London, and then use that complaint as a pretext for our attack. These Dalek weapons will be spread among your men, and at the right time, we shall use them.’ He smiled happily. ‘I estimate that London should fall within a week. After that, the other Domains will be given the choice of joining us voluntarily – or of being annexed. By the end of the year, I expect the entire country to be behind me. I shall be the first monarch of Britain in thirty-eight years. And you, gentlemen, shall all share in my power.’ He laughed. ‘Britain will be united once again – under me.’ He picked up the Dalek weapon and brandished it. ‘With the power that these represent, we shall be invincible!’

## 4

### The Pit

Susan cut the power on the runabout, and let the small electric car glide to a silent halt. She was about a mile away from DA-17, and feeling more and more uneasy about matters. The site was close to the border between Domain London and Domain Haldoran, and Susan knew that the current political situation between the two groups was deteriorating. It might even end up in armed conflict. Not that this should affect her directly – Peace Officers were allowed to go wherever they must to investigate Dalek Artefacts, and it wasn't likely that the fact that she lived in London would prompt Haldoran's men to prevent her from travelling through their Domain. But. . .

She glanced at the mostly mud-and-dirt road she'd been travelling the past fifteen minutes. It showed evidence of a lot of traffic recently, and that didn't look good. She'd been working on the assumption that whoever had tried to gain access to DA-17 was either an individual or a small group of idiots. But the wear on the road suggested it was a more concerted effort than that. Perhaps even one that Haldoran was sponsoring, for some insane reason. Nobody in their right mind would interfere with a Dalek site. Haldoran was pushy and aggressive, but she'd never heard him described as insane.

Still, driving any further could lead to trouble. Susan had driven off the road and parked in the shade of several trees. Anybody passing by wouldn't be able to see the little runabout, especially since night was falling. She would go the rest of the way on foot – just in case. She carefully strapped on her revolver, praying she wouldn't need to use it. She still didn't like the idea of harming anyone, and had managed to avoid doing so for most of her thirty years on the job.

The most sensible thing to do right now was to check in with Spencer. She picked up the microphone, and sent the pulse. The only response was static. That bothered her seriously, because it meant that the frequencies were being jammed. And that suggested a very deliberate attempt to hide what was going on.

There was nothing else for it but to carefully check things out. Then she could drive out of range of the jamming and report back. Susan had a serious suspicion that she'd need a lot of backup to handle whatever was going on

here. She slipped out of the car and walked parallel to the road, heading for the site.

Darkness closed about her, and she saw a glow ahead of her through the trees. Haldoran must have run a power line out here, then. He had to be very serious about this to go to such lengths. But whatever did he expect to gain from all of this? It didn't make any sense. Well, perhaps it would, closer up.

Barely leaving a ripple in her wake, Susan made her silent way up to the site. It was, as she recalled, at the base of a cliff in an old quarry. DA-17 was simply a shaft the Daleks had sunk into the ground, with nothing of particular interest to it. But somebody was certainly very interested indeed. . .

Susan gained the top of the cliff, and then went down on her stomach to inch her way to the very edge. She slid between bushes, and then reached her target. The quarry was spread below her, some sixty feet down.

Arc lights had been set up around the pit itself, six of them blazing away, illuminating the activity there. Several thick cables led from the far end of the quarry and disappeared into the shaft. There were at least twenty people down there, and three lorries. The people were all working at the mouth of DA-17, some with instruments, others assembling equipment. She was too far away to see what was happening, but there was really only one conclusion she could reach: Haldoran's men were supplying DA-17 with power for some reason. Those cables were capable of transmitting quite a lot of electricity. But for what purpose? What did Haldoran think he was doing? Did he want something that lay in the shaft? Did he *know*, somehow, what was down there?

It hardly mattered. The most important thing was to leave now, and call in a strike team. This was far more than she could handle by herself. Central would have to organise a full-scale assault to put a stop to this.

There was a sharp, metallic click close by, and then cold metal touched her temple. Both her hearts thudded, and she realised she'd been paying too much attention to the scene below and not to that around her.

'Slowly,' a grim voice said. 'Rise to your feet, and keep your hands where I can see them.'

Susan had no option but to obey. She'd been caught so easily she felt ashamed. As soon as she was upright, a light flashed on, almost blinding her. A hand pulled her revolver out of its holster. Squinting, she tried to make out her captors.

'Peace Officer, eh?' the voice said again. 'I knew we must have tripped some sort of alarm when we broke in, whatever Estro said.'

'What do we do with her, sir?' a second voice asked. Susan could just make out three shapes behind the light.

'Do?' The first man grunted. 'The Peace Officers are going to wonder why

they haven't heard from her. We'd better let them know. She's going to have to die.'

Susan shuddered at the grim certainty in his voice, and steeled herself as the men closed in.

Donna accepted the cup of Darjeeling with an increasing feeling of unreality. The Doctor had produced a framework to hang her armour on from somewhere in his TARDIS, and she had to admit that she felt more comfortable wearing casual clothing again. At least comfortable in her body. Her mind, however, was in a profound state of shock.

Somehow, the box was larger inside than it had any possible right to be. Instead of a cramped space, there was a huge room, dominated by a many-sided control console that lacked only a large, hookah-smoking caterpillar to qualify it for a place in Lewis Carroll land. Close by this were the chairs they were now relaxing in, and the table holding the steaming pot of tea and the freshly buttered crumpets. Donna stared around, unable to work out how this was done.

'I didn't know that they were this technologically advanced on the colony worlds,' she finally managed to say.

'They're not,' the Doctor said. 'Transdimensional engineering is practised by very few species, and the human race isn't one of them.'

Trying to take in this new fact made Donna leap to a logical conclusion. 'You're claiming that you're not human?' she asked, dazed.

'We have our differences,' he murmured. 'Crumpet?' He held out the plate, and Donna took one. Biting into it at least gave her time to think.

'And this granddaughter of yours, Susan,' she said slowly.

'She's about the same as me,' he admitted. He frowned. 'I can't understand why she'd look about fifty yet. She's only a child really. Our people do live a terribly long time.'

'Like elephants,' Donna said solemnly.

The Doctor laughed in delight. 'You're taking all of this very well,' he said. 'Many people wouldn't.'

'I'm trying to stave off insanity till tomorrow,' Donna told him. 'I've had a busy day, and I don't have the time for it now.'

'An admirable decision.' The Doctor took a sip of his own tea. 'Now, perhaps you can help me a little. I've been away from Earth for thirty of your years, so I really don't know a whole lot of what's been happening. Would you be so kind as to fill in the blanks for me? You mentioned that Susan's a Peace Officer, for example. What would that be?'

'Well, after the Daleks were defeated,' Donna began, 'everywhere was...'  
She suddenly stared at him. 'There was a man involved in that!' she ex-

claimed. 'He was called the Doctor! And he had some sort of disappearing box. . .' She looked around the TARDIS. 'Is this it?'

'This is it and I am he,' the Doctor replied.

'But you can't be,' Donna said firmly. 'He was an old man, with long white hair. You're. . . well, you're *not*.'

'Yes, well, I seemed older then, I know. . . Eventually that body wore out, and I needed a new one.'

Donna shuddered. 'What do you do – take over other people's bodies when your own one packs in?'

'No!' he exclaimed, indignantly. 'Our bodies restructure themselves and we become literally a new person. This is still the same body that I had when I was older, but it's been. . . restructured a lot since then.'

'Isn't that sort of thing against Newton's Third Law?' she asked weakly.

'Yes,' he agreed cheerfully, 'but I have to admit that I do violate a few laws now and then. Only when absolutely necessary, of course. Now, about Susan. . . ?'

'Oh, yes.' Donna tried to gather her thoughts, but it was difficult. Sitting so close to this *alien* in a bizarre spaceship was seriously damaging her ability to think. Especially since he seemed to be so friendly. 'Well, when the Daleks were destroyed, the human race tried to pick itself up and go on with life as usual. The problem was that the Daleks and their plagues and slavery had killed about nine-tenths of Earth's population, and most of the industrial infrastructure. Rebuilding wasn't technically possible. As a result, we've been forced to compromise a lot.'

'Knights in armour carrying carbines,' the Doctor mused. 'I begin to see. But didn't the colony worlds offer to help?'

'Certainly,' Donna agreed. 'But they were refused. Doctor, this is our *home*. We don't need anybody's help to rebuild it. We can do it ourselves.'

'Really?' The Doctor sighed. 'It sounds like the human race began rebuilding with arrogance, stubbornness and stupidity. Well, you've survived a long time with those traits.'

'We don't need help from others!' Donna insisted sharply.

'Donna, you're a knight,' the Doctor said gently. 'It's your job to help others. Why is it so hard for you to consider *accepting* help as well?'

'I only help when I'm needed,' Donna replied stubbornly. 'I don't insist on helping if I'm not wanted.'

'I see.' The Doctor sipped more tea. 'Well, I operate something along those lines myself, so I can't fault you for that. But if you discover you need my help, you need only ask. I promise not to rub your nose in the fact that I'm an alien. So, you tried and failed to rebuild. . .' he prompted her.

‘We haven’t *failed*,’ she answered. ‘It’s simply taking time. Anyway, when the Daleks were destroyed, there were an awful lot of sites where they had been that were left behind. Some of them were booby-trapped; others were simply dangerous by their nature. The provisional government of the day ordered that all Dalek Artefacts were to be off limits to everyone. They were sealed, and the Peace Officers were formed. Their job is to make certain that nobody interferes with any of the sites, and to prevent people from being harmed by them.’

‘A sensible precaution,’ the Doctor agreed. ‘A bit like bomb sites in London after the Second World War. Rope them off, and keep everyone away until they can be exploded.’

‘You’ve read about them, too?’ Donna asked. ‘Yes, that’s exactly it And Susan’s one of those Peace Officers. They have unlimited power to go where they wish, even across Domains.’

‘Domains?’

‘The area controlled by a Lord and his men,’ Donna replied. Britain’s split into Domains. The early attempt to form a one-country government didn’t last very long. Instead, the whole place fragmented. Initially there were about a hundred Domains, but over the past twenty-five years, most have consolidated into the ten surviving ones.’

‘Consolidated *how*?’ the Doctor asked darkly. ‘By persuasion or by force of arms?’

Donna shrugged. ‘A bit of both,’ she admitted. ‘Now the situation’s getting rather critical. The Domains that are left are all rather large, and the only way for them to grow is by absorbing a neighbouring Domain.’

‘Same old human race,’ the Doctor muttered. ‘Recover from the Daleks killing you and start killing one another instead. It’s so foolish! You need everyone you have to rebuild, and instead you waste your time and lives on murdering each other in an asinine struggle for pointless power. How typical.’

Donna’s face burned. ‘Domain Haldoran is provoking Domain London!’ she exclaimed. ‘He wants to take control of the country, and my father won’t allow it!’

‘Ah.’ The Doctor gave her a piercing look. ‘And would this father of yours happen to be Lord London?’

Donna sighed, cursing her stupid mouth. She hated people to know that. ‘Yes,’ she admitted. ‘But don’t spread that around.’

‘Why?’ he asked lazily. ‘Don’t you get on with your father?’

‘I love him,’ she insisted. But honesty made her add, ‘Most of the time.’

‘Typical father-daughter relationship,’ the Doctor said. ‘So, why keep it hidden?’

'Because people always treat me as if I'm fragile when they know who my father is,' she explained. 'They get all funny on me, bowing and scraping. And they're scared that if they upset me, I'll have them executed or something.'

'And would you?' he asked.

'Of course not!'

'Good.' He grinned. 'Then I don't have to worry about you getting my head chopped off. That's a relief.' He sat forward, his eyes burning into her. 'But I think you're accepting the party line a little bit too readily. Is it possible that your father is the one starting the aggression?'

'Certainly not!' Donna insisted. Then she hesitated.

'Ah... ' the Doctor said with a sly grin. 'Now you're starting to be honest with yourself. Don't worry, I'm not trying to pass judgement. In fact, I'm just here to say hello to Susan and David and to look for a friend whom I seem to have -' he frowned for a moment before continuing - 'misplaced. Then I'll be on my way again, leaving you all to get along or murder one another, whatever the case may be.'

'You don't have to sound so condescending,' Donna said, stung a little by his tone.

'I'm not.' He sighed, 'In some ways, you and I are very alike. I, too, travel all over, trying to make things a little better where I stop. But neither of us can cure every ill, can we? So we have to choose our battles carefully. And sometimes we make little mistakes.'

Donna smiled. '*Surely* not?'

'Perhaps you're right,' he said, smiling faintly. 'I never make little mistakes. My mistakes are always huge blunders.' His eyes narrowed slightly. 'Earth's underpopulated, you said. At a guess, I'd say that everybody's into rabbit mode right about now, trying to breed like crazy.'

Donna's throat tightened, and she nodded. 'Yes. It's government policy that everybody should marry young and raise large families, to get the population back up as soon as possible.'

'And that doesn't apply to you?' he asked perceptively. 'I don't mean to pry.'

'Then don't,' she snapped, blushing again.

The Doctor held up his hands in surrender. 'My mistake,' he murmured. 'Apparently, another of the major ones I told you about. Would you like another crumpet?'

'What I'd *really* like,' Donna informed him, 'is a good bath. You have no idea how sweaty and smelly you can get inside a suit of.'

'Actually, I do,' he replied, not meeting her eyes. 'I'm sitting down-wind of you. Let's see about getting you cleaned up, shall we?'

'You have a *bath* in here?' she blustered, trying to disguise her embarrassment.

‘Of course,’ he grinned. ‘Otherwise I’d smell worse than you do. And I’m sure I can find you a nice change of clothes, too. And a bed for the night. Unless you want to camp out with your horse.’

‘If there’s a genuine bed in the offing,’ Donna replied firmly, ‘my horse can sleep alone.’ She scowled at the Doctor. ‘This bed wouldn’t have any conditions attached to it, would it?’

‘Conditions?’ The Doctor looked puzzled, and then realised what she meant. ‘Ah. No, no conditions. I rarely sleep.’

Donna grinned. ‘It’s not whether you wanted to *sleep* in it that concerned me,’ she admitted.

The Doctor cocked his head to one side in the manner of a puzzled dog, then spun neatly on one heel away from her.

Smiling, Donna allowed him to lead her off in search of the bathroom.

‘Barlow – a word in your ear!’

Slowing his steps to allow the other man to catch up with him, Toby Barlow found himself looking into the steady gaze of Craddock. He inclined his head slightly. ‘Is there some way I can help you?’ he inquired politely.

‘Yes,’ Craddock answered. ‘You can cut the polite crap, for one thing. I think we need to talk.’

Barlow nodded, glad that this was to be on a personal level. ‘Here?’

Craddock managed a thin smile at that. ‘It’s probably the safest place,’ he said, gesturing down the corridor they were traversing. ‘It’s simple to bug a small room, but it would take a fanatic to wire the whole castle for sound.’

‘And you think Haldoran isn’t a fanatic?’ Barlow mused.

‘He’s not *that* kind of a fanatic,’ Craddock replied brusquely. ‘Just what kind he is remains to be seen. What do you think of this idea of using Dalek technology?’

Barlow had been fairly sure that this was what was on Craddock’s mind, and he was pleased to discover that he was right. ‘It will give us quite an edge in the coming war.’

‘A safe, if disgustingly poor, answer.’ Craddock sighed. ‘Let’s agree to trust one another, Barlow. To be frank, you’re the only one of us all I’m willing to trust.’

‘I’m flattered.’

‘Don’t be.’ Craddock gave him a sharp look. ‘The others are all fools or self-servers. They’d turn me in to Haldoran in a second, not even aware it wouldn’t be in their own best interests. You, however, are different.’

‘You mean I’m neither a fool nor self-serving?’ Barlow suggested. He was amused by Craddock’s perceptions – particularly since they matched his own

almost exactly. He would have selected Craddock to confide in himself And, perhaps, Malone.

‘Whatever you want to be in the end doesn’t bother me. How you want to achieve it does.’

‘I gather you object to using the Dalek guns,’ Barlow said gently.

‘Damned right I do.’ He rubbed his almost bald head. ‘I spent years fighting the Daleks, and the one thing I learnt from it was that Dalek technology is just as nasty and tricky as the Daleks themselves. I think we’d be insane to use those guns.’

Barlow nodded. ‘I can see your point. But there’s one you seem to be overlooking. We don’t have a choice about using them Haldoran’s made up his mind –’

‘Haldoran’s a fool,’ Craddock snapped. ‘Just as his father was. He wants to be king so badly his judgement’s shot to blazes.’

‘Agreed,’ said Barlow. ‘And Estro is the one with the supply. He’s chosen to help Haldoran for reasons of his own that I’ve not been able to fathom. The price for his help seems to be utilising Dalek technology. If we persuade Haldoran to give it up, I’ve a strong suspicion that Estro would then offer the same deal to London. In *that* case, we’d end up at the working end of those Dalek weapons. And, given a choice, I’d sooner be firing them than dodging them.’

Craddock smiled. ‘Well thought through,’ he said approvingly. ‘I’ve no doubt that you’re correct. Given the chance, Estro would certainly go over to London’s side. *If* he were alive to do so.’

Barlow was starting to understand the point now. ‘You favour killing him and wiping out the supply right now?’ he asked. ‘I doubt that Haldoran would look kindly on the thought.’

‘Haldoran’s gone too far,’ Craddock said. ‘Even thinking about using Dalek technology is too much. We have to stop this now.’ His eyes narrowed. ‘Are you with me?’

Barlow considered his answer carefully. ‘No,’ he replied, holding up a hand. ‘I’m simply not convinced that using the Dalek guns is necessarily a bad thing. I want to think about it some more, and see if my agents can’t find out what Estro’s up to. I’ve been watching the man carefully, and he doesn’t look like he’s willing to play second fiddle to anyone. I don’t think he’s got Haldoran’s best interests at heart.’

‘I’m *certain* that he hasn’t,’ Craddock answered.

‘You may be right,’ Barlow agreed. ‘But I won’t tell anyone what we’ve talked about until I give you my decision.’ He held out his hand. ‘You have my respect. You know that.’

‘Yes,’ Craddock agreed, taking the grip. ‘And I appreciate your candour.’ He released Barlow’s hand and nodded. ‘I’ll talk to you again later.’ He hurried away, and left through a nearby door.

Barlow considered his next move very carefully, and then looked up at the ceiling. ‘Estro,’ he said, ‘I think we had better talk.’ He considered repeating the comment, but decided that there was no need. If he was correct, Estro was monitoring him; if he was wrong, repetition was futile, and the man’s worth would go down a notch in his estimation.

Less than thirty seconds passed before the dark-clad adviser stepped into the corridor, and Barlow turned to look at him. Estro smiled, and spread his gloved hands. ‘You were so sure I was observing you?’

‘You’d have to have been a fool not to watch two of Haldoran’s lieutenants conferring privately,’ Barlow replied. ‘And, whatever you are, you’re no fool.’

Estro moved closer. ‘Neither, I perceive, are you.’

‘I doubt that a man who has access to Dalek technology needs to do anything as crude as planting microphones all over the castle in order to monitor someone,’ stated Barlow.

That made Estro laugh in delight. ‘My dear Barlow, you’re very refreshing,’ he said. He held up one hand, and a small fly landed upon his outstretched finger. ‘A mobile camera. It’s very sensitive, and virtually unnoticeable.’

Barlow nodded. ‘I quite agree.’ He’d have to be more careful what insects he allowed in his rooms from now on.

Estro released the fly. ‘Well, now that we’ve evaluated one another’s keen sense of perception, what is it that you wish to discuss?’

‘Craddock,’ Barlow said bluntly. ‘You heard his intentions.’ He’d promised not to tell anyone what Craddock had said, and he wasn’t about to break his given word – especially since Estro knew everything anyway.

‘Indeed.’ Estro spread his hands helplessly. ‘I’m afraid it would be most inconvenient to my plans if Mr Craddock were to succeed in killing me. I shall have to take measures.’

‘No.’ Barlow gave him a scowl. ‘I shall make sure he doesn’t follow through on his plan to kill you.’

‘In return for what?’ Estro seemed amused.

‘Two things. First, you don’t try to pre-empt his strike and kill him.’

Estro raised his eyebrows. ‘Sentiment?’ he inquired politely.

‘Not entirely,’ Barlow confessed. ‘He’s also too valuable to us. O’Hanley’s a fine tactician, but he’s cold. Tomlin has little respect. Malone is too blunt, and Downs is... sick. Craddock is the key to the war you’ve proposed we start.’

Estro nodded. ‘I quite agree. You and he are the only two men in this plan that I can rely on. In your own way, you’re honourable people. So, as long as

you can keep him in line, I agree not to murder him first. And your second condition?’

‘I never lie,’ Barlow said. ‘What you heard me tell Craddock was the truth: I’m not yet convinced that using Dalek weaponry is a good idea. Oh, I’m not so paranoid about it as Craddock is. His problem is that he simply hates the Daleks so much that he can’t contemplate touching anything of theirs. It’s his one major weakness. But there are others like him who’ll be fighting for us, and they’ll have the same problems with those guns.’

‘Surely you can talk them around?’ Estro suggested.

‘I can’t persuade my men unless I’m first persuaded myself. If you win me over, I guarantee my best efforts to convince our troops and the rest of Haldoran’s advisers.’

‘I see.’ Estro barely had to consider. ‘Mr Barlow, I admire your candour. I will show you the source of those Dalek weapons, and convince you of their worthiness. You will then, I am certain, join with me in urging their use.’

‘Excellent.’ Barlow smiled. ‘Then I am very pleased we’ve had this talk.’ With a slight incline of his head, he marched away.

Estro watched him leave, an amused smile on his face. ‘Such a bright young man,’ he murmured to himself. And such refreshing honesty.’ He raised an eyebrow. ‘Such a shame everyone isn’t as candid and open as he . . .’ Humming cheerfully, he returned to his work.

## 5

### Domain London

Alan Tomlin settled back into his modified runabout's back seat. 'Move on,' he ordered his driver, satisfied with progress. The dawn was attempting to paint the skies, but in a half-hearted fashion. Rain looked possible for later, and that always caused trouble for foot soldiers. The further they could get before any rains came, the better.

The push had begun, and Tomlin was pleased that he'd been chosen to lead the initial thrust. To be honest, he'd expected Craddock or Barlow to have been chosen. He had no illusion about his own skills being better than theirs. But, of course, he had one immense advantage – he was unswervingly loyal to Haldoran, and it was difficult to be sure if either of the other men was. They were fools, not seeing which side their bread was buttered on, and incapable of true commitment. Tomlin was no such fool: he'd risen through absolute service to Haldoran's wishes. That had placed him in the forefront of the Lord's council, and would keep him there when Haldoran was crowned king. Such a move was inevitable.

Tomlin's only regret was that he didn't have more runabouts or horses for his men. Infantry moved so damned slowly. He wished they could be at the gates of London today, instead of in three days. But he'd do what he must, and he'd horsewhip any man who caused him further delays.

All about him, Tomlin could see marching men, moving through the mists of morning, as the sun glanced down on the world. *His* men, and *his* fight.

This would be a glorious day.

Haldoran watched the final rank of Tomlin's troops moving out. It gave him a slight twinge – but only a slight one. 'A fine sight,' he murmured to Estro, who stood beside him on the castle ramparts. 'Are you sure it is absolutely necessary to sacrifice them?'

'Without a doubt,' Estro assured him. 'You know that London has spies in the castle. The man's no fool. So he's bound to be expecting an attack. As soon as he knows where it's coming from, he'll commit his troops to combat. Once they're engaged, we can move the *real* forces into action around them. Barlow will strike east, and Craddock west. Downs and Malone are ready to move their men to support whichever unit breaks through first.'

Haldoran nodded, pleased with the plan. He, too, knew that London was expecting the attack, and that sacrificing a pawn was often necessary to bring about success. 'It's a shame it had to be Tomlin, though,' he said with a sigh. 'He's absolutely loyal to me.'

'Which makes the fake attack so much more believable,' Estro purred. 'With him in command, London is going to accept that it's the real thing, since Tomlin is known to be your favourite.'

'I know,' Haldoran agreed. It was a shame to lose Tomlin, but you couldn't have a war without casualties. Those men would die so that he could win. 'How many of my men are armed with the Dalek guns?'

'Only eight, with the first shipment I brought,' Estro replied. 'I'd like to see how they do before I bring in further guns. And I want the other soldiers to see how effective those guns are. By the end of this battle, they'll all be clamouring for them.' He smiled. 'It's always best to allow the demand to exceed the supply. You'll be able to reward good service with one of the Dalek weapons.'

Haldoran frowned. 'I suppose. Still, it might have been better to have had more of them in this first fight.'

'There's no need for more,' Estro assured him. 'Don't forget, London's men don't have a clue what they'll be up against. When they find themselves up against Dalek guns...' He smiled. 'It will be most... interesting.'

Tomlin's men pressed onward into Domain London territory. It was shortly after dawn that the first skirmish began. A small patrol of London knights were surprised by a patrol of Haldoran men. The three knights tried to fight, but they were taken by surprise. Armour-piercing shells from two rifles picked off the first two men. The third managed to turn and flee. The rifleman was about to shoot him down when his sergeant stopped him.

'Let him go, lad,' he ordered. 'He'll take word back that we're here. That's what we want. They have to know, and we need them here to fight.' He turned to his other men. 'Two of you, secure those horses. They'll be very handy.' He walked to where the two knights had fallen. One was dead, the other dying. The sergeant raised the knight's visor, and looked into the young man's agonised eyes. It would probably be a mercy to shoot the man and put him out of his misery. But bullets were expensive. Removing his stiletto, the sergeant smiled at the man briefly, and then thrust the point through the left eye and into the man's brain. He twisted, and pulled the knife free. Wiping it on the grass, he resheathed it and stood up.

'Take their weapons,' he ordered. 'And any ammunition. Then we move out.' He was already forgetting about the man he had just killed. There would be further casualties yet.

\* \* \*

Donna had decided to ride into London in everyday clothes instead of her armour. This close to the city, there were no wild animals to worry about. They'd been eradicated long ago. And she couldn't face the bother of getting into the hot, heavy metal only to remove it again in a couple of hours.

Her night in the TARDIS had been wonderful. A warm bath, complete with a wooden back-scratcher that had been heavenly, then a comfortable bed. Breakfast had been tea and crumpets again, but she wasn't about to complain. It was better than strips of dried meat, which was all she had in her saddlebags. Her horse had been patiently cropping grass when she'd untethered him and then loaded on the armour. The Doctor had watched her with what she now took to be his usual good humour. He seemed to be quite an amiable companion.

'I'm afraid I can't offer you a ride,' she apologised, vaulting into the saddle. 'My steed's rather loaded already.'

'Not a problem,' the Doctor assured her. 'I enjoy a brisk walk.' He glanced at the sky. 'Sixty-percent chance of rain, I'd say.' He was carrying a rather garish umbrella with him, twirling it about. 'It's nice to be back in England.'

'Yes, well,' Donna said carefully, 'a word of advice. Don't mention that you're an offworlder, let alone an alien. It's not likely to go down too well if you do. There's a bit of prejudice, you understand.'

'Yes,' he agreed mildly. 'I had noticed.' He smiled to take the sting from his words. 'But you seem to be overcoming it fairly well.'

'I'm a quick learner, Doctor.'

Donna nudged the horse into motion, and the Doctor moved to her left side. She kept the animal to a slow walk, so that the Doctor could keep up. 'So,' she suggested, 'tell me a little about yourself.'

'It's a long story,' he replied, his eyes twinkling. 'And I'm not just saying that – it really is.'

'We've a couple of hours to kill,' Donna answered. 'And I don't want to spend it all in silence. I'd love to hear what you've been up to.'

The Doctor brightened. 'Well, if you insist...'

The rattle of gunfire alerted Tomlin to the arrival of the first of the London units. Then the field radio buzzed.

'Alpha Patrol,' the radio man reported. 'They've encountered a small force, and have taken cover. They estimate twenty men, four on horses, the rest on foot.'

Tomlin growled. 'Taken cover? What do they think they're doing? Order them to engage the enemy. Hiding will get them nowhere. Send Epsilon to reinforce them and let's get moving.' He was impatient to get on with things.

These small sniping fights weren't what he was after. Where were the bulk of London's troops?

Haldoran stood in his war room, listening to Tomlin's orders being given. All communications channels were being monitored, and he had a large map of the area spread across the floor. He'd seen a picture of Winston Churchill with such a map, and realised that it was wonderful for the morale. His own troops were shown in green, London's in red. Of course, there were few of London's shown yet, since the main forces hadn't been committed.

'It's a small thrust,' Estro decided. 'Probably to lure Tomlin into committing his men, as he is doing. I'll wager that London has his main forces moving up beyond the next hill. He's almost certainly committing to this as the main fight. But *almost certainly* isn't good enough yet.' He studied the map, and looked at both Barlow's and Craddock's positions. 'Another half-hour, and we should know enough to have them start their pincer attack.'

'That's my thought, too,' Haldoran replied. 'We'll wait – for now.'

Donna was surprised when the first buildings of New London started to appear. She'd hardly been aware of the journey, so fascinating were the Doctor's stories. If he was to be believed – and, despite the fact she had no proof, Donna was willing to accept everything he'd told her as perfectly true – he'd lived several lives to the full. He'd fought Daleks, Cybermen, Ice Warriors and other creatures she'd never even heard about. What she found refreshing was the lack of machismo in his words after years of listening to her colleagues glorifying their tales of combat. She could tell he loathed the death and destruction that seemed to dog his footsteps.

She felt there was an emotional vulnerability in him, something lacking inside, that prompted his wanderings. What was it he was *really* looking for? Still, his tales had done more than simply pass the time. She was becoming more and more convinced that he was a genuine and pleasant person. And she was certain that he and her father would hate each other on sight.

'It might be better if you didn't actually meet my father,' she suggested. 'I can get you to see David Campbell anyway, since he'll be in the castle. My father's likely to have questions about you that are probably best left unanswered, at least for now.'

'You know him better than I do,' the Doctor said mildly. 'Naturally, I'll take your advice. I'm sure he's a busy man, and looking through records won't particularly appeal. David will do me fine.'

Eventually they reached the town wall. When he saw the ten-foot wall circling the main portion of the town, the Doctor's eyes narrowed.

'Houses in ruins, roads impassable, civilisation barely on its feet,' he muttered darkly, 'and you waste time building protective walls against other humans.'

'It's no waste of time, Doctor,' Donna assured him. 'It's a necessity. I told you, the political situation is very unstable, and Haldoran is looking for war.'

'I'm sure he doesn't have to look very far,' the Doctor complained. He sighed. 'The human race never improves, does it?'

'Maybe not,' Donna answered, with a twinge of sadness. 'But wishing won't change anything.'

'It's a start,' he told her. 'Before anything happens, someone has to wish for it.'

They had reached the gateway, where the guard recognised her and unbarred the double door to allow her entry. 'You're to report immediately to your father,' he informed her. He glanced at the Doctor. 'Who's this?'

'A friend,' Donna said. She wasn't going to get into lengthy explanations.

The guard laughed without humour. 'Well, we need all the friends we can get right now. Haldoran's started his move, and there's fighting broken out down Bexley way.'

Donna frowned, and her throat tightened. This wasn't entirely unexpected, but it wasn't anything she'd been looking forward to, either. She glanced at the Doctor and saw his sombre expression. 'It seems to have begun,' she observed.

'It's nothing to do with me,' he said darkly. 'This isn't my fight I just want to say hello to my granddaughter, check your records for Sam and then be on my way.'

Feeling slightly disappointed, Donna nodded. She clambered from her horse, and handed the reins to the guard. 'Can you have him taken care of, and my armour sent to my chambers?' she asked.

The guard nodded. If there was any reluctance to do as she'd asked, she couldn't see it. Perhaps the request would be fulfilled then, instead of being conveniently 'forgotten' or sidetracked somehow.

'Well, Doctor, it looks like you're going to meet my father after all,' she said. 'And, since he wants me immediately, we get to ride.' She led him through the gatehouse and into the garage behind it, where a small red runabout waited. The Doctor followed her in silence, brooding. She started the electric car, and moved it out into the streets.

She loved New London. She'd never known the old one, of course, but she'd seen pictures and videos of it. Dirty, cramped, and overladen with people. Rebuilding since the end of the Dalek invasion had concentrated on the old City of Westminster, and a great deal of the wreckage had been razed, the ground cleared, and new buildings erected. Most were three storeys or under,

since there were far fewer people living in New London. Space wasn't at a premium yet. Donna regretted that some of the old buildings were gone for ever, but some had been too badly damaged in the fighting to be allowed to stand. There were, though, still some historical treasures left standing. Big Ben had somehow made it, and the restoration of the Houses of Parliament was still progressing. Westminster Abbey remained, somehow untouched by all of the destruction. St Paul's was gone, destroyed in some battle or other, and then flattened to make room for houses and shops. The South Bank, too, had been regenerated. There was little need for large concert halls these days, or theatres. What little music and drama were performed could barely fill the smaller venues.

There were plenty of people about, most of whom either didn't know about the battle being fought over at Bexley, or else weren't worried. They seemed to be untroubled.

'Lemmings,' said the Doctor with the faintest trace of a sneer on his face.

'They're just trying to live their lives as if nothing were happening, Doctor,' Donna pointed out. 'Commerce and industry must go on.'

'Typical,' he answered. 'Banking, and stock markets, too?'

'Banking, yes,' Donna answered. 'There's always a need for money. But the stock markets are dead. There are no companies to invest in, really. All of the ones in production are owned by the nobility.'

'Nobility?' The Doctor laughed hollowly. 'I don't suppose any of them can trace their pedigrees back more than a couple of generations.'

Donna's face flushed. 'No, they can't,' she agreed. 'The royal family was wiped out by the Daleks, as were most of the Lords. The current bunch took their power and titles when reconstruction began.'

'The biggest thieves and crooks rose to power, no doubt,' the Doctor said moodily. 'As is always the case.'

'My father is one of those *thieves and crooks*,' Donna pointed out, irritated by his accusations.

'Well, you know him better than I do,' the Doctor said. 'Is that a good description of him? Or is he an enlightened ruler, a kindly, gentle patron of the arts?'

Donna wished she could lie, but there was something about the Doctor's manner that assured her that an untruth would be instantly detected. 'We've had our... differences,' Donna admitted. 'But he's a lot better than most. And a world away from that bastard Haldoran.'

The Doctor sighed. 'That's hardly a recommendation. Look, Donna, this is none of my business, and I don't intend to stay here once I've made my calls. You're the one who has to live here and deal with this. But don't you think things could be run on better lines?'

‘Of course they could!’ she snapped. ‘But when in human history could that *not* be said?’

The Doctor laughed ruefully. ‘Never, I have to admit. And it’s not only in human history. My own people are no better.’

‘Then you can’t talk,’ Donna complained.

‘I can!’ he said, seemingly puzzled. ‘Talking’s what I do best. What differences do you have with your father?’

‘They’re personal,’ she answered roughly ‘And, while I like you, I have no intentions of opening up my private life for your inspection, OK?’

He nodded. ‘Understood. I’ll try to restrain my curiosity and my inclination to meddle and offer advice.’

‘That will help us get along better,’ Donna advised him. She turned the car into the approach. The Doctor raised his eyebrows.

‘The Tower of London?’ he commented. ‘Your father’s taken over that? Why not Buckingham Palace, while he was at it?’

‘The Daleks blew it up,’ she replied tersely.

‘Ah, so it’s now a fixer-upper.’ The Doctor watched with interest as they halted beside the guard post. ‘Did Daddy appropriate the Crown Jewels as well?’

She shook her head. ‘They were evacuated during the occupation, and nobody’s quite sure where they went.’

‘That must have disappointed him,’ the Donor commented. ‘Can’t have a proper coronation without the right headgear, can one?’

Donna glared at him. ‘Are you deliberately trying to provoke me?’ she demanded.

‘No, it’s purely a side effect of my thinking out loud,’ he assured her ‘I always have a problem with authority figures. Do *you* think your father would make a good king? Or even a mediocre one?’

He had this habit of asking questions she’d rather not answer, and, at the same time, making you feel as if you had to. She ignored him, leaned out of the window, and called to the guard, ‘Hey! What’s taking so long? Have you forgotten what I look like already? I’ve only been gone three days.’

‘We’re on war footing,’ the sentry answered. ‘Security’s a lot tighter.’

‘Really?’ Donna half recognised the man as one who’d given her trouble in the past. ‘Well, since my father wants to see me, I’ll be certain to tell him that you’ve been so astonishingly thorough. And I’ll be sure to spell your name correctly in my report.’

‘I’m only doing my job,’ the man answered, his face darkening.

‘I’m sure my father will commend you, then.’ Donna glared at the man, and he finally opened the barrier for her to pass.

As they drove through, the Doctor observed quietly, 'You don't seem to be terribly popular here, which I find rather odd. You're the Lord's daughter, and might be stepping up to Princess any day now. It can't be a smart career move to antagonise you.'

Donna glared at him. 'I told you, I'm not opening my private life up for your inspection and approval. Let it drop.'

'Ah.' He nodded, as if she'd just confirmed something he'd suspected. 'You're the black sheep of the family, eh? He's not too worried about irritating you. Only about annoying your father.' He frowned. 'But if you'd been disinherited, Daddy wouldn't want to see you. Or have you running around in fancy dress.'

'Let it drop,' she snarled. She wasn't sure if she was angry or pleading. For some reason, she was worried about what he would think of her.

He gave her one of his high-powered grins. It was like having a spotlight shone into her face, almost powerful enough to make her wince. 'Let's consider it shelved – for now,' he suggested. 'So, where's your father set up house? The Bloody Tower? It would be appropriate.'

'The White Tower,' she replied, pulling into a parking space on what had once been Tower Green. She gestured at the imposing building. She'd grown up here, but the hundred-foot tower still impressed her. 'Off we go.'

There were more troops out, and a lot of people hurrying here and there. Most ignored her, and she returned the lack of attention. Warfare always meant activity, though how much of it was actually productive she couldn't say. The Doctor stayed with her as she hurried up the ramp that led to the main door. There were further guards on duty, but these, at least, didn't give her a second look. However, they were not so kind to the Doctor.

'He can't go in,' the sergeant decided.

'He's with me,' Donna informed him. 'If he doesn't go in, then I'm staying here, too. Perhaps you'd like to go and inform my father. I'll wait.' She moved towards one of the chairs inside the entrance.

'He doesn't have a security pass,' the guard replied, clearly trying to sound reasonable.

'Yes, I do,' the Doctor replied cheerfully. He fished in one of his coat pockets and pulled out a wad of cards. 'Hang on a moment.' He started flipping through them. With a smile, he offered one.

'UNIT?' the guard said, puzzled. 'Dr John Smith?' He glanced up. 'It doesn't even look like you.'

'I was younger then,' the Doctor explained. 'I've got several others if you like. I'm the most security-passed person I've ever known. I even have one signed by Queen Elizabeth the First somewhere, though I may have left it in my other coat.'

Donna had to force herself not to smile. The sergeant turned to her.

'Is he all right?' he asked. 'He seems a little...'

She nodded. 'He *seems* it,' she agreed, 'but he isn't. Now, do we stay here or go on in?'

The sergeant looked at the Doctor, who was grinning amiably and replacing the cards in his pockets. Weighing the possible consequences, the man sighed. 'Well, if you vouch for him, miss...'

'On my head be it,' she stated, flatly. 'Come on, Doctor.' She led him through the security post. 'Try not to do anything embarrassing, would you?'

'Cross my hearts,' the Doctor promised, crossing both sides of his chest.

There were more soldiers in here, including a couple of her father's commanders. She threaded through them, heading for her father's council room, where he was bound to be. The Doctor stuck carefully to her side.

There was another guard at the entrance to the council room, but he simply opened the door for her. He didn't give the Doctor a second glance, obviously figuring that if he'd been allowed this far he had to be acceptable. The Doctor favoured him with a smile, and swept into the room behind her.

Donna's father sat at his big wooden desk, on which a large map was currently spread. He was as irritated as always, his dark hair turning grey, his beard neatly trimmed, with a slight affectation towards a goatee. He was carefully dressed in deep burgundy, and there were the customary oversized rings on all the fingers of his right hand, flashing in the light as he gestured at the map.

'- strong force moving through Bexley,' he was saying. With him were McAndrew and Durgan, which was no surprise. They were her father's two biggest sycophants, and couldn't be trusted to do any real work. All of the actual fighters would be out in the field by now. Her father looked up, and saw Donna.

'Ah, there you are,' he said, gruffly. 'What kept you? Been out slaying dragons again?'

'Slythers,' she replied, moving closer.

She could see him wince at the mere mention of the name. 'When are you going to be sensible and give up this foolish business? There's no need for you to go off like this, you know.'

'And what else can I do?' she asked bitterly. It was the same old tired argument, and she really didn't want to air it in front of the Doctor. 'So, why did you want to see me?'

'I wanted you safe, of course,' her father replied. 'I'm sure you must have heard that there's a war on by now. Haldoran's attacking via Bexley.'

'And you, of course, did nothing to provoke him?' the Doctor asked quietly.

Her father's eyes narrowed as he stared at the newcomer. 'Who's this?' he demanded.

'The Doctor,' Donna answered. 'I'm trying to help him find...'*His granddaughter* would sound very odd. 'A couple of friends. David Campbell, the Peace Officer, knows them.'

'Oh. Another of your lame ducks.' Her father felt he knew all he needed. 'Fine, I can't see any harm in you helping him in that way. It'll keep you out of trouble.'

She *hated* it when he did that. 'I'm not a child,' she snapped.

'You're my daughter,' he growled back. 'Whatever else you are. And I don't want you hurt.'

'That's very touching,' the Doctor murmured, 'but she's really able to make her own decisions now. Even if they're not ones you like.'

Donna winced. 'Doctor!' she hissed, reprimandingly.

'I don't know who you are,' her father said coldly, 'and you don't seem to have it quite clear in your mind who *I* am.'

'You're Lord London,' the Doctor said cheerily, holding out his hand.' And I'm the Doctor. If I was staying longer, I'm sure we wouldn't enjoy getting to know one another better, so it's probably just as well that I'm here on a flying visit.'

'I'm usually referred to as "your Lordship" and treated with respect,' London snapped.

'I'm sure you are,' the Doctor agreed blandly. He gestured to the window with the hand her father had been completely ignoring. 'It's the chopping block otherwise, eh? Must be convenient, setting up shop close by.'

'I think,' London said ominously, 'that it might be a good time to get him out of here. Before he says something that I might regret.'

Donna couldn't agree more. She grabbed the Doctor's arm. 'Come on, let's find David.'

'Good idea.' The Doctor smiled politely at the bearded man. 'I wish I could say it's been a pleasure, but, well, you know.' He spread his hands. 'A word of advice on this war, if I may. Think about peace as a wonderful alternative.'

'Haldoran's pushed for this for long enough,' London said. 'And now he'll get what's coming to him.'

'Perhaps,' the Doctor agreed darkly. 'But a lot of innocent people are going to get the same thing on both sides. And *they* don't deserve it, even if he does.' He looked at the ageing man imploringly. 'Call it off before that happens.'

London shook his head. 'It's too late for that, even if I wanted it.'

Donna spun on her heels and marched out of the room. She didn't even look to check that the Doctor accompanied her. Hovering behind her, he cleared his throat rather theatrically.

'A trifle overprotective, I'd say. Though I imagine that's because he loves you.'

'Imagine what you like,' she snapped back. 'I'm sure you will anyway. And you're mistaking concern for love.'

He gave her an odd look. 'That *can* be a very similar thing.'

'It might be if it was *me* he was concerned about.'

'Ah.' The Doctor finally understood. 'You've embarrassed him somehow, and he doesn't want it to happen again.'

Her face burned again. 'Yes.' She poked a finger under his nose. 'And –'

'– that's personal,' he finished for her. 'I'm quite incorrigible, aren't I?' He smiled gently 'Though I think you're making a mistake. I'm almost as good a listener as I am a talker, you know. And I'm hardly ever judgemental.'

She could hardly believe his cheek. 'You say that, after what you said to my father?'

'I said what he needed to hear,' the Doctor replied, 'and won't listen to. He sees Haldoran's attack as an opportunity. Well, I hope he's right, but I fear he's not.'

Donna slowed down and stared at him. 'Doctor, you hardly know the situation. How can you make such a blithe accusation?'

'I don't need to know the specific situation,' he answered soberly. 'I've seen this same thing a thousand times before. Do you think arrogance and ambition are limited to just this time and space?'

Donna shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, remembered the tales he'd told her on their journey. 'Why do you think my father's wrong?'

'Because Haldoran clearly expects to win,' the Doctor replied. 'He wouldn't have attacked otherwise. I suspect he's got some sort of ace up his sleeve, and that your Father's in for a nasty shock.'

That made her very uneasy. 'You're just guessing,' she accused him.

'Yes,' he agreed. 'But it's based on a lot of experience.' He tapped the side of his nose. 'I've an instinct for these things, you know.' He looked as if he were trying to reach some hidden recess of his mind, but gave it up with a shake of his head. 'I can't help feeling the situation's more complicated than it looks. But, as I said, I'm just passing through. We were looking for David,' he prompted her.

Donna led the way to Wakefield Tower, which was where the Peace Officers were stationed.

'This must be the place,' said the Doctor. 'Capital.' He rubbed his hands briskly together, and then used the handle of his umbrella to rap on the door.

It was opened by a Peace Officer Donna recognised. 'Spencer,' she said in greeting. 'Is David Campbell in?'

'For about the next two minutes, I'd say,' Spencer replied.

'Clearly a busy man, always was, splendid,' breezed the Doctor. 'Now...'  
he removed a piece of paper from his pocket and a photograph of a young girl

with shortish blonde hair and a slight scowl on her oval face. 'This is a girl called Samantha Jones. I need to find her very urgently. All her details are written down here. . . ' He suddenly stared at Spencer aghast, as if a terrible thought had just occurred to him. 'You can read my handwriting, can't you?'

Spencer looked at the strange man sympathetically. 'One more missing person,' he sighed, reading the piece of paper and nodding wearily. 'We'll try for you.'

The Doctor continued, 'Of course, she might look slightly older – or even a lot older, I suppose – but –' The Doctor paused. 'David's rushing off?'

Spencer nodded. 'He's getting ready to go out into the field.' The Doctor moved suddenly very swiftly. 'Trouble?' he asked, brushing the officer aside and striding into the ground-floor room. Donna followed, in time to see him dash across the room and grab David Campbell's hand, pumping it warmly. 'David, my boy! So good to see you again.' He examined the startled man's form. 'You've filled out a bit,' he commented.

David scowled at his assailant. 'Who the devil are you?' he demanded. 'Never mind, I don't have time for –'

'For your grandfather?'

That stopped David dead in his tracks, his face now filled with confusion rather than irritation. 'Doctor?' he asked faintly. When the Doctor grinned and nodded, David shook his head. 'Susan. . . warned me that this might happen,' he said in a faint voice. 'That you might. . . change.' He stared at the Doctor in astonishment. 'You've grown younger!'

'Several times,' the Doctor confessed. 'My dear boy, I'm sorry I never came back before this to visit as I promised. But you know how it is when there's a universe out there to visit. You put things off, and before you know it a lifetime's gone by. But I'm very pleased to see you again. I need to find someone, a very dear friend of mine, she's – Wait. Where's Susan?'

'That's the problem,' David said grimly. 'She's missing.' He gestured at a bank of electronic equipment that lined the walls. 'We lost radio contact with her last night, and we're only getting a very faint reading from her transponder. I'm afraid something must have happened to her. I'm just getting ready to go after her.'

'Then I'll come with you,' the Doctor decided.

'So will I,' Donna surprised herself by adding.

The Doctor glared at her. 'I don't think your father would approve. He made it plain that he wants you here in the Tower, where you'll be safe.'

'Doctor, it's a war zone out there, and you aren't even armed.' Donna glared back at him, refusing to allow him to intimidate her. 'And he told me to help you, remember?'

‘I rather think he meant while I was *inside* the family estate,’ he answered. Then he held up a hand. ‘But, as I told him, you’re a big girl and capable of making your own decisions. If David has no objections, I’d be happy to have you with us.’

He was a very confusing person, taking both sides in an argument like that. But Donna felt oddly warmed that he valued her company. It had been a long time since anyone had.

‘It’s fine with me,’ David decided. ‘Another gun along would be of great help. The fighting’s not reached DA-17 yet, but it might well do.’

‘Dalek Artefact?’ queried the Doctor, and David nodded grimly.

‘Good,’ Donna said briskly. ‘Have you organised a runabout?’

‘Yes.’ David took a machine rifle from a rack beside the door and tossed it to her. ‘Technically, you’re not supposed to have that, since it’s Peace property. I might even make a mild complaint, provided we get back safely.’

Donna nodded. ‘Understood.’ She checked it, and discovered it had a full clip. It would cost a small fortune to buy one of these on the open or black market. He must be worried if he was simply handing her one. He took another, and turned to the Doctor.

‘Are you using guns these days?’ he asked.

‘You know me better than that,’ the Doctor answered, ramming his hands deep into his pockets. ‘Nasty, noisy things that could get you killed.’

‘Well, I feel better having one if I know the other fellow’s got one, too,’ David replied. ‘Life insurance.’

‘Not for both of you.’ The Doctor sighed. ‘However, you’d probably prefer to go off naked than unarmed, so there’s not much point in protesting, is there?’

‘No,’ David agreed. ‘Right, then – let’s go. And pray we find she’s just had a minor accident or something.’

‘I doubt that,’ the Doctor said, glumly. ‘In my family, all accidents tend to be major. I’ve a very bad feeling about this.’

Donna *really* didn’t want to hear that. But she slung the rifle over her shoulder and followed, unsure where this latest decision of hers was taking her. Or whether she’d survive it.

But, at the very least, with the Doctor along, she suspected it would be interesting...



## 6

# Death in the Line of Duty

There was no real warning before disaster struck. Tomlin was watching the progress of his men, hearing the sounds of gunfire all around as they made slow but steady progress. The next second, there was a loud burst of sound, and the hillside in front of them suddenly blazed into a wall of fire.

Ears ringing, Tomlin was thrown from the runabout, which spun and overturned. The driver and the radio man were both tossed out, too. Tomlin was completely deaf, and dazed, but he could see two more bursts of flame close by. He staggered slowly to his feet, realising he was bleeding from a gash in his forehead. He dabbed at the wound with his handkerchief, and looked around in confusion. What was happening?

Slowly, his hearing began to return. He could hear, faintly, gunshots and screams. He abruptly realised that one of the screams was coming from close by. The radio operator! Tomlin lurched to where the man lay, his left leg shattered and bleeding badly. One of the man's eyes was gone, too, and there was blood over his chest. The screams were dying as the man did the same. There was nothing to be done for him, and Tomlin turned away. The driver was clearly dead, his neck snapped. Tomlin saw he'd been astonishingly lucky to have suffered only the minor injuries he had. He made his way to the runabout, and saw that the rear axle was shattered.

But the radio was still operational. As his hearing cleared slowly, he reached for the controls, and picked up the microphone. 'Tomlin to Haldoran. Emergency.'

'What's happening?' asked the operator on the other end. 'We heard an explosion.'

'They've got some kind of big guns,' Tomlin replied, shaken. 'They fired them three times. I'm lucky to be alive. I haven't made contact with the rest of my troops yet, though. We're going to need reinforcements.'

'Understood,' the operator replied. 'I'll pass along your request.'

'Request?' Tomlin repeated angrily. 'That's not a *request*, that's a military necessity. Put me through to Lord Haldoran immediately!'

'I'm afraid that's not possible,' the man answered. 'Find out your situation and report back. It see when his Lordship will be able to communicate.'

Tomlin stared at the radio in anger. What the devil was going on? How could Haldoran not be available to communicate with his own general? What could possibly be more important than this war? He threw down the microphone in disgust. Well he needed to know what was happening, anyway, so it wouldn't hurt to take a look.

Drawing his pistol, Tomlin clicked off the safety catch, and then started forward carefully. The trees thinned out as he approached the summit, skirting the smoking crater the artillery had caused. He dropped to his belly for the last few feet, skulking behind a bush and examining the ground beyond.

There were ruins of ancient houses, all gouged with fresh pits. Tomlin could see about thirty of his men – though in most cases he could see only portions of their bodies. There wasn't one of them left alive. It was like a scene from some medieval painting of the tortures of Hell – a steaming landscape of destruction, littered with bloody body parts.

On the far side of the ruins, he could see London's men advancing, checking for survivors to slaughter. He couldn't stay here, that was obvious. He slid back down the hill towards his wrecked runabout, and hurried as fast as his aching body would take him. He didn't know what had happened to the rest of his troops, but it was unlikely they were in much better shape than this group. His men had taken the brunt of London's assault, that was obvious. Without reinforcements, they were doomed.

Snatching up the microphone, he snarled, 'My troops have been decimated. We need support *now!*'

There was no reply at all.

Tomlin checked that the transmitter was still working. No problem there. They *had* to be receiving his message. So why weren't they answering? He glanced nervously at the summit of the hill, knowing he didn't have long before London's men arrived. With a curse, he flung down the microphone once more and turned away from his command. He was on his own, and in retreat – something he'd never known in his life before. But this wasn't the end. It was merely a regrouping, to find fresh advantage.

And some answers.

Limping slightly, he hobbled away from the scene of his only defeat.

'It's proceeding exactly as I anticipated,' Estro announced, examining the map. 'London was convinced that Tomlin led the main assault. He threw his assault force into action, determined to break through your lines. He even dredged up some howitzers from a museum somewhere. He can't have much ammunition for them, though, so I think we can discount them in overall strategy.'

Haldoran nodded. 'It's time for Barlow and Craddock to strike.' He turned to the radio operator. 'Order them forward. And have Downs and Malone

move in to contain London's advance. He's bound to think he's winning, and overreach himself. Once we have his troops surrounded, we can annihilate them.'

Estro nodded, smiling. 'Exactly. He doesn't stand a chance against you.'

Haldoran smiled at the thought. 'No,' he agreed, 'this is the start of the reign of Mark the First.' It was a historic moment, and a shame that nobody had thought to record it. Well, he could always remount the scene later for posterity.

'My Lord,' the radio operator said, with due deference, 'General Tomlin is requesting reinforcements. What shall I tell him?'

'Nothing,' Haldoran replied. 'He's giving his life for my cause, that should be sufficient for him, Ignore any messages he sends me.'

'Understood, my Lord.' The man turned back to his equipment, and Haldoran dismissed his message from his attention. He had many more important matters to consider.

Barlow received his orders from his radio operator, and ordered his men to begin their advance. He had the eight men with Dalek weapons, and kept them as a separate unit, determined to see their effect on the enemy. Apparently London had fallen for Tomlin's feint, as Haldoran had expected. The casual gesture of throwing away a general who had always been blindly loyal to Haldoran was not lost on Barlow. He knew that he, too, was just as expendable to his liege lord – but a lot less stupid than Tomlin. He, at least, was aware of the true nature of things. Like anything else, he was a potential sacrifice to Haldoran's ambitions. They didn't bother him.

But Estro did. For all his obsequious air, the man was no fool. He was cunning and careful, and very, very dangerous. He was the one to be watching here, and Barlow had one of his best operatives doing precisely that right now. . .

Estro managed to get out of the war room by pleading the need to go to the toilet. Haldoran had – with casual arrogance – given him permission, and Estro hurried down the corridor from the room. Then he slipped into an alcove he'd carefully noted earlier in his visit and waited. In his right hand he held a small, black, bulbous weapon.

As he'd expected, barely twenty seconds later a man moved cautiously down the same route as he'd used. With a faint smile, Estro waited for him to pass the alcove, and then fired.

The man died with a silent scream on his lips as his every atom collapsed in on itself. His six-foot-plus frame compacted down to just over six inches.

Estro picked it up carefully, with a chuckle and slipped it into a convenient vase.

'Clever, Barlow,' he murmured, with respect. 'But hardly clever enough.' If Barlow had been really intelligent, there would be a second man watching him, but Estro didn't believe there was. These humans were interesting – but very, very limited.

His plans were proceeding nicely.

Barlow's forces moved forward smoothly. He had more mechanised troops and cavalry than Tomlin, which made progress easy. Also, he was advancing along old, wrecked highways. Even with the potholes in the road and the collapsed buildings to skirt, it was faster than through the woods. The sight of such devastation always disturbed him. He wanted only to build, but, it seemed, the only way to restore was first to tear down. While London was in the way, nothing could be done. He and Haldoran were too busy feuding and working out their own machismo to have any grander plans. Both wanted power merely for the sake of power.

And, curiously, he had been born to power, being the only son of his father. He had inherited his hold on the world, and discovered that it was vaguely dissatisfying. There had to be more than this, even though he didn't have a clue what it might be. He was a superb soldier, but even victory brought little joy to his life.

Which didn't mean that he wouldn't give this attack everything he could. He was scanning the approach as his man drove, and considering his options, constantly revising his estimates. His own runabout was flanked by four others, each of which contained two of his men armed with the Dalek guns. It would be time to employ them soon, and he wanted to see their effects. They could be the weapon that would win this war – or dismal failures.

The radio hiccuped, and the operator beside him bent over it. Then he looked up, moving one earphone off his head. 'Forward Three reports contact.'

'Excellent.' He examined the small, electronic map in his hand. Forward Three was near the Thames at Woolwich, so it must have contacted the rear-guard of the force that was annihilating Tomlin's men in Bexley. 'Swing us around,' he ordered the driver. 'Towards Bexley Heath.' The man obeyed, and the other four cars moved to keep up with him.

The game was almost ready to begin.

Craddock watched his forces moving in. He'd come up through Croydon and Bromley, and his men had made contact with the outriders of London's forces. He could hear the rattle of rifle and handgun fire just ahead. London's troops had been taken completely by surprise, as anticipated. They had been killing

the wounded of Tomlin's troops, expecting no more serious fighting. Many had died before they'd even managed to get their weapons.

Believing in leading from the front, Craddock was in the thick of it now. Crouched behind a long-shattered wall, he waited for the burst of enemy fire to die down, and then nodded to the troops with him. The whole patrol rose to its feet, and opened fire. London's men had taken cover in an old bakery, but it was too broken to offer sufficient hiding places. Rifle fire raked through the men. Craddock stopped firing, and there was a sudden silence, only the stench of cordite and blood in the air. There were several of the enemy still moving. Three of his men slipped forward, and there were single shots signalling the death of the wounded.

'Collect all weapons,' Craddock ordered, though this was hardly necessary. His men knew that was standard procedure. 'We move on in two minutes.' He walked past a fallen soldier – barely out of his teens – pausing only to rip the gun from the boy's lifeless, bloodstained fingers, and to check his corpse for spare ammunition. Then he moved on.

This was his life. This was war.

Donna sat in the front of the runabout, hunched over the instrument-display panel. The sky was darkening, as the storm drew closer, and this made it easier to see the faint traces of the transponder they were attempting to locate. David Campbell sat to her right, driving. The Doctor was hunched over in the back, morosely watching the passing landscape, and thinking his own introspective thoughts. Whatever mood had gripped him, at least he'd stopped prying into her life.

'It's really faint,' she informed David. 'But I think it's only about a mile ahead. Something's definitely happened to it.'

'Some kind of accident, most likely,' David said gruffly. She could tell by the pinched muscles in his face that he was worrying about his wife. It was almost a relief to see that some men, at least, could have such feelings. If only she'd ever met one like that. . . . But it was no time to be thinking of herself. Susan could be in trouble, and need their help.

The runabout slowed down, as the three of them scanned both sides of the road. It wasn't in great shape, but surely Susan would have known to take care? Still, she'd been driving by night, and some of these potholes might have been almost invisible.

'There,' said the Doctor suddenly, reaching forward to grip her shoulder. 'To the left.' He pointed.

It was another five seconds before Donna caught sight of whatever it was his sharper eyes had seen. It was a runabout, all right, and severely damaged. The entire front had caved in when it had ploughed into a tree. Shattered

glass lay all about, and one of the doors had torn free and sailed thirty feet further down the road.

There was a figure inside the car, slumped over the wheel.

David brought the vehicle to a halt and leapt out. Somehow, though, the Doctor beat him to it. Both men raced across to the wreckage, as Donna hurried to join them. Then she hung back slightly, realising that this was family business and she was an intruder.

David's face went ashen as he stared at the body. Donna could see that the whole face had mashed into the shattered windscreen. Shards of glass had sliced away virtually all of Susan's features, and had rammed through to her brain. Mercifully, she must have died instantly.

The Doctor seemed grim, but not as distraught as Donna would have expected. He bent over the corpse, sniffing slightly, and then looked around carefully.

'We have to get her back,' David said, his voice on the verge of breaking totally. How he was holding himself together, Donna couldn't say.' We argued just before she left, Doctor, and I was angry with her. I –'

'– will most likely have lots of time to make it up to her,' the Doctor replied. 'This isn't Susan.'

Both Donna and David were stunned by this announcement. 'How... How can you be sure?' David asked, obviously begging for good news.

The Doctor tapped his nose. 'Human blood,' he replied.

Oh... And Susan was his granddaughter, and therefore as nonhuman as he. 'Then who is that?' Donna asked, confused.

'Some poor soul who looked a little like her,' the Doctor said savagely. 'For that, she was killed, to try to make us think it was Susan.' He stared off into the distance. 'No need for a post-mortem, so whoever planned this might have got away with it if I hadn't been here. And if Susan hadn't been Gallifreyan.' He gestured at the body. 'She'd have walked away from a death like that, most probably.'

Donna wasn't sure she liked the idea of people able to live through such horrendous deaths. It sounded too much like something out of Bram Stoker to her. 'So why do this?'

'To make it look like Susan died on her way to her mission,' the Doctor replied. 'But they messed it up. The car's facing the right way, but the skid marks on the road aren't. This... "accident" was staged to make you think she never made it to DA-17.'

'You mean that she did?' David said quietly. He had taken a blanket from the boot, and thrown it over the poor woman's body. Not being able to see it made Donna feel a lot better.

'Almost certainly,' the Doctor said. 'And, logically, she ran into trouble that somebody is trying to cover up. I'd say that's where we'll find her, the answers, and whoever committed this disgusting and unnecessary crime.' Spinning on his heels, he marched back to their runabout. 'Don't dawdle,' he called.

Feeling like a reprimanded schoolchild, Donna hurried after him. David took one last look at the covered corpse, and followed.

Susan was certainly relieved to discover that her 'death' was, in fact, nothing more than a ploy. Her captors had wanted to throw the Peace Force off the trail, and had manufactured an accident with her runabout. It had been decided that she would be of more use to them as a hostage than dead, a decision she'd been happy to comply with. Since this was a work area rather than a prison, they'd been forced to lock her away in a shed, with a guard outside the door, while they reported back on her presence.

More fools they.

The shed was only about eight feet across in both directions, and about the same in height. There were a few empty barrels in it, a couple of boxes, and nothing that she could use to help her to escape. Her captors had considered these adequate precautions and locked her in. She almost felt sorry for their lack of imagination.

She'd been forced to wait, though, before taking action. The shed was in plain sight of anyone working on the pit, and if she'd made a break too soon, she'd certainly have been seen, given the number of people active in the area. But the storm that had been gathering finally broke around five o'clock, cloaking the world in darkness, shattered only by stabs of lightning and roars of thunder. Rain hammered down on the roof above her.

Susan felt a small glow of satisfaction from knowing that her guard would be getting absolutely soaked.

This would bring all work to a halt for the time being, at least. And the darkness caused by the storm would hide her from any casual eyes. She moved from the drum she'd been sitting on to the back wall of the shed. One of the nice things about wearing a uniform was that there were always shiny decorations on it. Removing her Peace Officer's badge, she turned it over to expose the point. Using this, it was the work of only minutes to undo several screws holding panels in the back wall in place. Carefully, she slid the panel aside, and looked out.

The sky was black, rain hammering down on to the dry ground and forming puddles. A jagged burst of lightning illuminated the scene briefly, showing her that there was nobody in sight. Steeling herself, she wormed through the gap.

She was soaked to the skin almost instantly. The rain was falling so hard that it stung. Her hair was plastered to her face, her clothing drenched and

clinging. She moved through the darkness, keeping the shed between her and the man on guard, heading towards the shah. She could see no one, and in this storm nobody was likely to notice her.

Ignoring the chill and the mud, Susan made her way to the power cables. She touched the closest, feeling the hum of energy. Her eyes narrowed as she stared through the darkness. Whatever was going on here, power was flowing to *something*. Following the cable in the darkness brought her to the brink of the pit. Water was pooling at the top, and streaming down the sides. She chanced a look down, but there was nobody looking back. They weren't anticipating trouble here. The border patrols would intercept intruders, of course, as they had captured her. And brought her conveniently through their lines.

There was a ladder leading down into the pit. She swung on to it, gripping the slippery rungs carefully. Water sloshed over her as she clambered down, and she forced herself to ignore the discomfort. She had to know what was going on here. Her feet slipped more than once, but her strong grip on the rungs kept her from falling. Finally, she was at the bottom of the ladder, standing in about four inches of freezing water. She wiped the rain from her eyes and glanced around.

The pit was about ten feet across, and she'd clambered down almost a hundred. Across from the ladder was a doorway of metal, apparently set into the solid rock wall. The door itself was open, the cables running inside.

How could anyone be this foolish? She moved to the door and checked beside it. Yes, there was a Dalek lock there, its cryptic inscriptions unreadable to her. Somehow, somebody had been able to open the lock. And that made her pause. She could probably have managed it eventually, but who else on this planet could? And, most importantly – why?

Carefully, she peered around the doorway. She'd had visions of men with guns pointed at her face, but there was only the empty passageway, with the power cables snaking inside.

Susan took a deep breath. There was only one way to find out where they led. . .

Estro glared at the video screen in frustration. He'd installed a vid-comlink in DA-17 to enable faster, more efficient reports to be fed through to his quarters; and to make this seem less suspicious, he had provided Haldoran with a few more dotted around his headquarters. Now he'd been forced to excuse himself from the war room again, just as things were getting interesting, to answer this call from his blundering guards.

'What is it now?' he growled.

‘We’ve caught a Peace Officer, sir,’ the guard reported. ‘I’ve got her locked up. We set up an “accident” a few miles back with a plausible body in it to throw the Peace Officers off the track for now, but I’m sure they’ll be back. I thought we could use the girl as a hostage.’

Well, for once the morons had used what few grey cells they had. ‘Good work,’ he said grudgingly. ‘But I want the girl sent to me here. I can’t slip away right now –’ he smiled, vaingloriously – ‘we’re in the middle of a war. Double the patrols, and if anyone else turns up, bring them here immediately. If the Peace Officers are interested, we may have to be careful until the power’s flowing properly. Are there any current estimates?’

The guard smirked. ‘I just spoke to Lockwood,’ he replied, pleased to show his initiative. ‘He estimates another three hours.’

‘Fine,’ said Estro approvingly. ‘I’ll try to get to you then. If I can’t, he knows what to do. I want regular reports every half-hour once breakthrough has been achieved. No excuses!’

‘Understood, sir,’ the guard agreed. He saluted, and then switched off the contact.

Estro rubbed his beard reflectively. Everything was proceeding well. It was a shame he was forced to stay here and help Haldoran while the task force did the more interesting work, but that was the problem with humans: no sense of timing. Still, if he was not there for the actual opening, it would hardly matter. What could possibly go wrong?

The rain was falling heavily, but Barlow had no intention of heading for cover. He waved his men forward, ignoring the soaking they were all getting. A force of some forty of Lord London’s men were in the buildings ahead of them. They didn’t have a clear view of his men, thanks to the storm, so there were only occasional shots being fired. Still, if Estro’s information was correct, his men wouldn’t be so limited. He gestured to the eight men with the Dalek guns.

They moved forward, raising the alien technology. A shot cracked from one shattered window, and one of his men turned and triggered the gun he carried.

An arc of radiation hissed through the rain, spraying across the target area. The enemy soldier screamed, his body glowing in the lethal blast, and he collapsed forward. Barlow stared at the sight in fascination.

It had also affected the other soldiers in the ruins. More shots rang out, none coming near to a target. All eight men returned fire, concentrating their deadly beams at any site that might hide a foe. Howling in agony, man after man died in the terrible fire. Barlow couldn’t look away, watching as the enemy died.

*This*, this was why the Daleks were remembered with such terror! To be able to deal out death like this – grim, implacable death at the touch of a finger on a trigger – *this* was power! The Daleks must certainly have been terrifying foes, with weapons like this at their command. It was astonishing that *any* of the human race had survived their invasion. A feeling of awe gripped him.

And now, *he* had their weapons. Why, with forty men, all armed with Dalek guns, he could take London! Better, probably the whole country! He stared in rapt fascination as the eight men dealt death to anyone in their path. One part of him felt slightly sorry for the victims, but the greater part revelled in the devastation.

He turned to his aide. ‘Today,’ he murmured softly, the face of war has changed completely. This is the way of the future. Here and now, a new rule begins.’ He was entranced.

# 7

## Secrets

Within the ruins, Broadhurst stared at the devastation in horror. Time after time, those dreadful rays burst out of nowhere, annihilating his men. Rain sizzled and turned to steam in their path, and their victims might well have done the same. What in the devil's name were Haldoran's men using?

'We can't fight this,' he whispered to his aide. 'Tell the men to pull back, immediately. We can't stop this.'

'Dalek guns,' one of the sergeants said briefly.

'*Dalek* weapons?' Broadhurst stared at the man. 'But they're *men* out there.'

'I fought the Daleks,' the older man said coldly. 'That's how they killed, Haldoran's using Dalek guns.'

But how? thought Broadhurst. 'We have to pull back,' he repeated, as another of his men died writhing in agony. 'London's got to know about this.' He called out, 'Pull back! Pull back now!' Clambering to his feet, he led the retreat. The bitterness of defeat and loss was mixed with dread of this new instrument of war. If Haldoran had somehow found a cache of Dalek weapons, then God help them all.

Susan crept down the passageway, pressed against the metal wall. It was short, but completely open. If anyone passed the entrance, they would need only to glance around to see her. There was nowhere for her to hide. But her luck held, and she made it to the next doorway without being detected. This one was a regular Dalek door, with the sliding panel, and the Dalek-shaped opening. She shuddered. The last time she'd seen anything like this was back in their city, on their homeworld of Skaro, when she and her grandfather had helped the Thais to destroy the Daleks. For ever, they had believed.

Until the Daleks reappeared here, as the masters of Earth. The first Daleks she had encountered had been confined to the city, needing static electricity generated there and available to them through the metal floors. The Daleks here on Earth had been more sophisticated. They had used some kind of antenna system, with dishes attached to their backs allowing them to receive broadcast power.

This must have been some kind of Dalek site, not simply a pit. A lot of work had gone into this. She chanced a quick look around the door, and pulled

back. Beyond it was an octagonal vestibule of some sort. It was about forty feet across, and there were several doors leading off from it. All of these were closed, and apparently untouched since the place had been sealed. The power lines she'd followed down here led to one of the two doors to the left of the entrance, and this was where the technicians were gathered. There was some sort of instrument there that they were working on. They had seemed very busy, so she chanced another glimpse.

It was some kind of a computer panel, and there were four men there with it. One of the power lines fed this, but the second was rigged into a wall panel beside the door. The men were too preoccupied with whatever they were doing to look up and notice her. And there was something that wasn't quite right. . .

It took her a moment to realise what it was that was troubling her, because it was such a small thing. When she finally figured it out, she almost screamed in anger and horror.

The light in the ceiling of the chamber was casting a soft glow over the whole room, which was why she could see everything so clearly. And that could only mean one thing. These idiots were feeding power into the Dalek systems!

Whatever DA-17 was, they were reawakening it. . .

'They're pulling back, sir,' the radio operator reported to Haldoran. 'Barlow is reporting a complete rout.'

'Tell him to pursue and kill them all,' Haldoran ordered impatiently.

'No,' Estro suggested mildly. Haldoran glared at him, disliking having his orders questioned. The man spread his hands. 'They've seen what the Dalek guns can do,' Estro explained. 'Let them run back to London, whipped. Their panic and fear will spread once the story gets out. I think your experiment has worked perfectly. It's time for me to fetch you more Dalek weapons from my store. I don't think you'll have any trouble now getting volunteers to use them – do you?'

'No,' Haldoran agreed. He considered Estro's suggestion. 'All right,' he decided. 'Tell Barlow to advance, and hold as much ground as he can, but not to pursue the fleeing rabble. Let them take their tale of terror back to their lair with them. Then they can all burn up with fear as they wait for their coming day of judgement.' He turned back to Estro. 'Fetch me more of these guns – many more. How many can you bring me? And how soon?'

Estro smiled. 'Another forty by morning,' he promised. 'Perhaps a further hundred within the week. I really don't think you'll need any more than that to conquer this entire island, do you?'

‘No,’ Haldoran agreed. ‘that will be more than enough. Good work, Estro. I promise you a high place in my council once London is taken.’

Estro bowed slightly. ‘I shall be honoured,’ he murmured. ‘I’m proud to be able to serve you so well. If you’ll excuse me. . .’ He hurried out, obviously off to fetch the guns from his mysterious stockpile. Haldoran waited a moment or two, then signalled a man to follow him. While Estro was indeed very helpful, it would be more helpful if Haldoran himself knew where the guns were being brought in from.

Portney cleared his throat. ‘You don’t trust Estro?’ he asked.

‘I trust nobody outside of my own skin,’ Haldoran answered. ‘Least of all you.’ The man had the grace to blush, at least. ‘But even a man you don’t trust can be useful. And can be relied on to do as you wish, if you know what motivates him. I know what motivates you, Portney – greed. And as long as I’m the ticket to the wealth you’re accumulating, I know you’ll be loyal to me. It’s the only reason I haven’t had you killed yet for theft.’ Portney blanched and started to stammer. Haldoran waved him to silence. ‘Don’t bother to deny it. Portney. I’ve known about it for quite some time, and I have copies of your duplicate records. I could have had you killed any time I wanted.’

Portney was starting to regain his wits. ‘Then. . . then why haven’t you?’

Haldoran sighed. ‘Because you’re no use to me dead,’ he answered. ‘You’re on notice: you cross me even once and I take your left hand. The second time, your right. And there are plenty of other parts of your anatomy I can take before you even get close to death. But you’ll be on very, very intimate terms with excruciating pain.’

The white-faced man nodded his understanding. ‘I take it that you have something you want me to do, my Lord?’

Perceptive; it was one of the reasons he was so valuable. ‘Indeed there is. Barlow and Craddock have been getting awfully chummy of late, and I don’t like that. When my two most powerful generals are on good terms with one another, it may be a sign that they’re aiming to be on bad terms with me.’

Portney nodded his understanding. ‘You want me to find out if that’s what they’re doing?’

‘No, you blithering idiot! They’d trust you about as far as I do. Which means they’d be stupid to let you in on their plans.’ Haldoran took a deep breath. ‘No, what I want you to do is much simpler. I want you to make them distrust one another. That way, they won’t plot together. Concoct something to set them at each other’s throat.’

That brought a smile to his face; it was the sort of thing he’d enjoy. ‘I quite understand, my Lord,’ he said. ‘I promise you, by this time tomorrow, their relationship will be rather. . . strained.’

‘It had better be,’ Haldoran said. ‘If they’re talking tomorrow, you can kiss

your left hand goodbye.’ He savoured the look of fear on the man’s face for a moment before turning away. Portney would do what he promised, of that he was certain. Otherwise, he’d take great pleasure in hacking off Portney’s hand himself. . .

Estro hurried to his room in the castle, pleased with progress. The Dalek weapons were having precisely the effect he’d been expecting: professional soldiers blessed with a devastating weapon in their hands wanted more. It was an addiction he had every intention of feeding.

His room was spartan, since he didn’t actually live in it – merely a bed, a desk, a chair and a large wardrobe. He opened the door of the ‘wardrobe’ and stepped inside to the welcoming hum of his console room. He crossed to the controls, skirting around the boxes that contained one hundred and forty Dalek guns, ready for delivery. There was no need for Haldoran to know that the weapons were already in his possession. His supposed trips to collect them gave him the excuses he needed to slip away from time to time.

He switched on the viewscreen, wondering how long it would take the man Haldoran had sent after him to try entering his room. He imagined the look on the henchman’s face when he discovered the room was empty and his quarry gone.

He checked the co-ordinates again, and then flicked a number of switches. . .

Susan leaned back against the corridor wall, both her hearts pounding. These people had to be stopped, and stopped now, but there were simply too many of them for her to tackle. How could she delay them?

She smiled slightly as she realised that there had to be some sort of power-relay coupling in the immediate vicinity. If she could overload that and burn it out, then –

Her skin suddenly prickled, and she gave a slight gasp. There was *something*. . . She shook her head, unable to identify what she was feeling. A kind of tension in the air, as if. . .

There was a faint sound, growing louder, and then a large computer console stood in the open area of the vestibule beyond.

Susan stared at it in shock. There was only one thing that it could possibly be: a TARDIS. But not her grandfather’s, surely, unless he’d made a tremendous amount of repairs. It was almost soundless, as it was supposed to be, and the chameleon circuit was obviously fully functional.

‘Grandfather?’ she whispered, hoping and afraid.

A panel in the ‘computer’ opened and an unfamiliar traveller stepped out. Susan took in the dark suit, the severe manner, the neat beard and the gloves.

A person who isolated himself from others, cold and self-contained. It wasn't – couldn't be – her grandfather. Was it even a Time Lord?

The man moved away from her, towards the technicians. She realised the humans hadn't been surprised to see a TARDIS materialise. And that could only mean that whatever this traveller was here for, it was something he'd set up a while ago.

She understood suddenly how the outside lock had been breached. It would be virtually impossible for a human to crack, but for one of her own people. . . But surely, even the Time Lords knew better than to tamper with the Daleks. With their policy of non-intervention, how could they possibly justify. . .

She crept forward to listen at the doorway as the man approached the technicians.

'Lockwood,' he purred, in a controlled voice, 'how goes progress?'

'Extremely well, Estro,' the man answered, gesturing towards one of his panels. 'The power levels have remained stable for several hours, and the computer beyond the door is now almost up to being opened.'

'Excellent.' Estro nodded. 'Prognosis?'

Lockwood considered the equipment. 'Another thirty minutes, and we should be able to begin sequencing the coding. I estimate another hour before the doors can be accessed. It will take that long to establish the correct codes.'

'Acceptable,' Estro agreed. 'Well, I've a war to conduct, so I'll leave you to it. You're doing very well, Lockwood, and I'm most pleased with your efforts.'

'Thank you, Estro.'

Susan moved back, so she wouldn't be seen as the renegade returned to his TARDIS. This Estro was planning on broaching the Dalek installation for whatever insane reasons of his own. It would have been bad enough had it simply been humans acting so foolishly, because there would have been little enough chance of their succeeding. But one of her own. . . That was an entirely different matter. She had no doubt that he'd be able to do precisely what he intended, using these obviously mind-controlled human slaves.

With a whisper, the computer console vanished again.

She *had* to stop whatever was going on here, before the maniac returned. And, oddly enough, Estro himself had given her just the tool she might be able to use to defeat his plans. . . All it would take was conviction and a great deal of courage. She took a deep breath, composed her face and her thoughts, and stepped out into the vestibule.

The rain seemed to be letting up slightly, which made Donna feel a little better. She was still soggy from their examination of the wrecked runabout. David looked as soaked as she did. The Doctor, curiously enough, looked slightly

rumpled, but almost dry. Maybe he had specially treated clothes, or maybe it was another of his alien gifts.

'How are things between you and Susan?' he suddenly asked David, after a period of silence.

Wincing, David shot him a quick glance. It didn't take a genius to realise that the Doctor had hit a nerve. 'They've been better,' the older man admitted.

'I thought so,' the Doctor muttered. 'She had such a feeling of great loss... Is it the ageing problem?'

'It's *her* problem, not mine,' David said, almost angrily. 'I can deal with it, but she can't.'

'What are you talking about?' Donna asked him, confused. 'I've only met your wife once, but you look about the same age.'

'Look, yes,' David replied grimly 'She uses make-up to age her appearance. Without it, she looks even younger than you.'

This wasn't making any sense to Donna. 'But why make yourself look older?' she asked. 'I mean, what's wrong with a younger girl married to an older man?'

'Like I said, it's not my problem,' David answered gruffly. 'But she only *looks* young.'

'To you she's an alien, remember,' the Doctor pointed out. 'We age at a vastly slower rate than humans. She'll look about eighteen now, even though she's so much older.'

'Oh.' Donna understood the problem. 'She's not going to get wrinkly and grey – and David is.'

David glared at her, then turned to the Doctor. 'It's as if she's looking at me and seeing me decay and crumble in front of her eyes. I know it can't be easy on her, but I don't know what to do about it.'

'It's an unpleasant problem,' the Doctor said sadly. 'But it's one that my family seems prone to.'

'Got a genetic weakness for humans?' Donna asked lightly.

He managed a charming grin. 'You're so full of life,' he replied, and Donna could find no trace of condescension in his voice. 'Unlike my people. We live so long that everything takes longer with us.' He smiled. 'Getting a waiter's attention in a restaurant can take about a week. But you humans live so intensely. You've no idea how appealing that is to us. You burn so brightly in our eyes.'

'But briefly,' David put in bitterly 'Susan's scared of watching me grow old and die. I can tell. If I could, I'd just leave her. Walk away and let her get on with her life. But that wouldn't help, would it?'

'No,' the Doctor agreed sadly. 'Because she'd only look for you. She has to face it,' He sighed. 'It's my fault for leaving her here. She should never have

married you.'

'Yes she should!' David said ferociously. 'We've had a long and happy marriage, Doctor – until now. I just wish that there was some way I could help her through this.'

David pulled the runabout over, and they climbed out into the slowing rain. Night had fallen completely, but the Doctor vetoed the idea of carrying torches. 'I have excellent night vision,' he murmured. 'And Susan's misadventure suggests that there will be guards about. Let's go. Stay together and be as silent as possible.' He drifted into the darkness.

This was almost second nature to Donna, and she had no problem in trailing him quietly. David, bringing up the rear, tried his best, but he wasn't as skilled a field worker as she. The occasional crack of a twig or clump as he hit an overhanging branch testified to that. But he was game, and pressed on. She found herself liking the Peace Officer. He seemed like a very decent, loving man, caught out of his depth in what was, after all, an unusual situation.

The Doctor led the way through the trees, approaching the cutting where DA-17 was situated. Donna was scanning the darkness as well as she could, and neither saw nor heard anything out of the ordinary. An owl hooting; mice in the undergrowth; a small predator that she couldn't identify, but probably a Dalek rat. That she could hear such activities showed that the three of them weren't making as much noise as she had feared. If the wildlife wasn't scared off, they could hardly be alerting the humans.

Finally, the trees thinned, and they were standing on the top of a small cliff, where mining had sheered away the rock. Below them, illuminated by arc lights, was the entrance to DA-17. Donna stared down at it, angry and confused. There were workers down there, and two large cables snaking across the ground and into the pit.

'Crazy,' she murmured. 'Who'd be mad enough to do this?'

'I don't know,' the Doctor whispered back. 'But if we put our hands up nicely, maybe the guards behind us will tell us instead of shooting us.'

Donna was taken by surprise at his announcement, and turned. She saw nothing at first, as the Doctor raised his own arms, but she heard the sound of rifles being readied and then raised her own hands.

'Smart move,' said a voice from the darkness. 'Stand perfectly still while my men search you for weapons.'

Donna felt ashamed of herself. 'I didn't hear a thing,' she said bitterly.

'Don't feel so bad,' the Doctor commiserated, peering at their captors' equipment. 'They're using infrared detectors.'

That puzzled her. 'I didn't know Haldoran had access to that level of technology,' she said, surprised. 'Or that he'd bother using it out here, instead of for his war effort.'

'It's Draconian technology,' the Doctor said darkly.

'What's Draconian?' she asked, wondering how he could be so certain.

'Exactly,' he answered. 'The Draconians haven't visited Earth yet. So where did it come from?'

One of the guards patted Donna down, none too gently, and with obvious enjoyment. She felt like punching him, but knew this wasn't the time to complain about chauvinism. Her pistol and her knife were both taken. Two other men checked David and the Doctor. It took the one looking over the Doctor quite some time to empty all of his copious pockets.

'Do I get a receipt?' the Doctor asked cheerfully.

'Enough wisecracks,' the officer in charge replied – a captain, Donna supposed. 'You're just lucky that Estro wanted to interrogate any further intruders, or I'd have slit your bellies open and watched you die.'

'You really should stop watching so much television,' the Doctor murmured. 'It's a bad influence on you.' There was an odd note to his voice, though. 'Estro... ' he breathed.

'You know the name?' asked David.

'Not as such, no,' the Doctor admitted. 'But it has a very familiar ring to it...'

'This way,' the captain ordered, finally approaching close enough for Donna to make him out, and confirm his rank. He held a machine gun at the ready, and was obviously tempted to use it. 'We've a runabout over here, and you're going on a short trip.'

'Travel broadens the mind,' the Doctor said lightly. 'And I suspect this trip will prove to be most illuminating. We're going to Castle Haldoran, I imagine.'

'You imagine well,' the guard captain replied. 'Now move it.' He gestured with his gun.

'Ladies first,' the Doctor murmured, gesturing for Donna to lead the way. Since they had absolutely no other option right now, she obeyed.

Susan strode briskly towards the four technicians, hoping that their minds were strongly enough conditioned to accept anyone with an air of authority as being authorised. 'Progress report,' she snapped.

Lockwood turned around, puzzled. He frowned at her. 'Who are you?' he asked.

'Foreman,' she replied, and then wondered why she had given the name Grandfather had adopted for her on Earth in the 1960s instead of her married name. Camouflage? Or a... what did the humans call it – a Freudian slip? 'Your master sent me to help with the pulse coding. It's my field of speciality.'

'Oh.' Lockwood nodded, as if that made perfect sense to him. Perhaps it did. 'We're almost ready to begin encoding.' He gestured to the machine they

were working at.

Susan bent to examine it. It was about four foot square. There were two panels, inclined at a slight angle, so that it looked like a technological dog kennel. It was hooked directly into the Dalek control panel in the wall by several wires. Some kind of signal analyser and computer, she realised.

‘We’re starting to register signals from the Dalek computer behind the door,’ Lockwood explained. ‘It’s taken a great deal of power to get it operational, though.’

Susan frowned. That didn’t make much sense to her. The Daleks were very efficient in their use of electricity. Since it was literally life to them, they could do wonders with very low levels of power. She should have been able to restart the computer with a flashlight battery. ‘How much power has this taken?’ she asked.

‘A couple of gigajoules,’ Lockwood answered.

‘Gigajoules?’ Susan was horrified. ‘That can’t possibly all have been used for the computers! Shut down the power flow at once!’ She knew her cover was gone but was too outraged to care.

‘Impossible,’ Lockwood replied. ‘Our master has ordered the flow to continue.’

‘Then he’s a bigger fool than you are,’ Susan snarled. She reached across to try to deactivate the analysis. Lockwood gave a strangled cry, and grabbed for her.

‘She’s not one of us!’ he exclaimed. ‘It’s a trick!’

The other three male technicians whirled around, and all reached out to hold her. Susan tried to fend them off, but their hands grabbed her. One slammed her hard against the wall, knocking the breath from her. She shook off his grip, only to be punched in the stomach. She reeled forward, gasping. Another man punched her hard across the back of the neck, and she collapsed to the floor.

The analyser made a fluttering sound, and then everyone froze. Susan gasped, trying to struggle to her hands and knees. Several lights were flashing on the device. Lockwood stared at it in surprise.

‘It can’t have finished already,’ he exclaimed. ‘It must be a misreading of some kind. Cooper, check the inputs. Davis –’

He broke off as the overhead light suddenly increased in intensity. Susan became aware that the humming she heard wasn’t inside her skull after all.

The six doors around the vestibule all suddenly hissed open.

Behind each one stood a grey form. They were familiar to her from so many nightmares: short, metallic bodies, with vertical lines of half-globes; the central section with the gun and armsticks; the grille, mounted by the

dome and eyestalk. Two lights blazed on each dome. As Susan stared in horror, one of them moved its eyestalk, followed by its gun, towards her.

'Exterminate!'

The Daleks had been reborn.

Their stubby metal guns spat death. . .

## 8

# Transformations

Susan tried to move, but her body was working far too slowly. She watched, more stunned than horrified, as Lockwood and his technicians were caught in the lethal crossfire from the Dalek guns. The men screamed, burned and fell lifeless and smoking to the metal floor.

The Dalek guns trained on her next, and she faced her own extermination.

‘You will come with us,’ one of the Daleks grated. ‘Immediately!’

Relief washed over her, as she realised that she had been reprieved, for whatever reason the Daleks might have. Wincing, and still having trouble catching her breath, she managed to stagger to her feet.

‘Are you damaged?’ the Dalek inquired coldly.

‘No,’ she assured it. Daleks despised weakness, and it might change its mind about allowing her to live if it thought her below even their standard for prisoners. ‘I just need to catch my breath.’

The Dalek regarded her. Its body swivelled to face away from the vestibule, though its eye never wavered from her. ‘Humans are inefficient and inferior. You will follow me or die.’ The eye swung about to face the direction in which the Dalek was moving. Susan limped along behind it, knowing she’d be cut down instantly if she attempted anything else.

Where were these Daleks from? All of the Daleks on Earth had been destroyed – so how were these alive? Susan could only hope that she learn the answers by pretending to cooperate with them, but a cold fear knotted her stomach.

What could the Daleks possibly want with her?

Tomlin sat in the shadow of a shattered wall, breathing heavily, and shivering because he was soaked to the skin. But at least he was no longer being pursued. The enemy soldiers had simply stopped following him after a while. He’d continued to flee, but then become aware of something odd. The sounds of battle had died away.

His professional interest had finally overcome his fear, and he had slowly made his way back to the battle zone. He found dozens of bodies of his men, and some of London’s troops, but of the main bulk of London’s army there

was no sign. It didn't make any sense to him at first, so he'd followed the line of retreat of London's men, and stumbled eventually across the truth.

In the distance from where he sat, he could make out flares of light and screams of tenon There was only one possible explanation for this – the Dalek guns were being used. And not to back him up. This was a separate thrust, and, as he sat in the ruins, he finally began to work it all out.

He hadn't been *honoured* to lead the initial attack on the enemy – he'd been sacrificed as a decoy. Craddock and Barlow must have led the real attack, once his troops had drawn the bulk of London's men.

Haldoran had betrayed him.

Tomlin sat alone in the cold, wet darkness, lost in his thoughts. All of his life he had gladly served the House of Haldoran with unswerving loyalty, And *this* was his reward? To be sacrificed as a pawn in Haldoran's unlimited ambitions? Was that his only value – as cannon fodder, and not as a friend and a confidant?

His whole world had come crashing down about his feet. Everything he'd striven for and believed in was nothing more than the mud he walked in. His entire purpose in life had been decimated. He had been betrayed.

It had to be the work of that smug bastard, Estro. The man had somehow poisoned the mind of Haldoran against him. Something had to be done to remove the poison. But what?

In the distance, lights flashed and men died. Oblivious, Tomlin sat and considered his own future.

Barlow was more than happy with the way the war was progressing. As he'd anticipated, London was pulling his surviving troops back towards the city. Craddock's men had flanked them and attacked, speeding the retreat to a rout. He and his men continued to press on slowly. There was no rush at this point – in fact, the more time the enemy had to witness the advance, the more terrified they were likely to get, which could only help. From time to time, his troops came across stragglers, or units left to try to delay them. In each case, the men with the Dalek guns annihilated all opposition.

Barlow had no real desire to kill more men than was necessary, so he had issued strict orders that anyone who wished to surrender should be allowed to do so. They had already collected some twenty broken men that way. His purpose was to take over London, not to destroy it, and the more men who came over rather than fought, the better.

'Message from base, sir,' the radio operator reported.

Twisting in his seat, Barlow nodded. 'Lord Haldoran needs a progress report?' he asked.

'No, sir, it's not the official channel. It's your private line.'

That was odd. Barlow gestured for the headset, which the operator handed over. 'Barlow here,' he said.

'Sir, pardon me for disturbing you.' It was Arkwright, his aide. 'I know you're busy, but I thought you'd want to know this immediately. We caught a man going through your private files about half an hour ago. He was... hurt during capture, but we've been able to determine he's an agent working for Craddock.'

Craddock? 'Are you sure about that?' he asked sharply.

'Quite sure, sir,' Arkwright answered. 'He was paid to try to access your private files and copy potentially damaging information to be used against you. He's currently undergoing medical assistance to keep him alive. Any further instructions?'

Barlow considered for a moment. 'No. Make sure he stays as fit as can be expected, for the moment. I'll want to speak with him when I get back. Were any files copied or stolen?'

'No, sir. Security caught him before he got too far.'

'Understood. Thank you.' He handed the headset back to the operator, and then sank into his seat, deep in thought.

Craddock had paid a man to ransack his files while he was out? Why would the soldier do that? Perhaps to gain some leverage in case Barlow decided to turn on him? It was plausible – for anyone other than Craddock. Craddock was a blunt man, who preferred to face a foe and fight him. Blackmail was hardly his weapon of choice.

And, besides that, he wasn't an idiot. He wouldn't hire a man who was incompetent enough to be caught so simply.

Barlow had to strongly consider the possibility that Craddock was the one being framed here. That some other player in this game had hired a thief, claiming to be from Craddock, in order to set the two generals at each other's throat. That made a lot more sense. Who? Short answer: anyone who stood to gain if he and Craddock were to distrust each other. Obvious suspects? Estro sprang to mind. The adviser was a devious and dangerous man, and he had already expressed a desire to remove Craddock from the picture. Barlow had tried to protect the older soldier: was this move one of Estro's aimed at removing Barlow's support of Craddock? It did make sense.

It also left an obvious way of checking things.

Barlow turned to the radio operator. 'Get through to General Craddock personally,' he instructed. 'I want to speak to him immediately.'

It took a couple of minutes, but eventually Barlow was handed the headset. 'Craddock?' he inquired.

'Yes.' The reply was hard and noncommittal.

'I'd like to suggest that you have a man check your offices,' Barlow informed him. 'I suspect that you'll find a thief in there raiding your files, and claiming to have been sent by me.'

'Ah.' There was a faint chuckle at the other end of the line. 'I see you must have had someone similar in your office. My men discovered the thief just a few moments ago. Someone appears to be attempting to drive a wedge between us, wouldn't you say?'

'Indeed.' Barlow was relieved to discover his instincts had been correct. 'My own theory is that it's Estro. He overheard our earlier conversation in the hallway.'

There was a sharp expelling of breath from the other end of the radio. 'And?' Craddock prompted.

'I believed I had persuaded him not to harm you,' Barlow explained. 'It's starting to look as though I might have been wrong. You'd better watch your back very carefully.'

'Understood,' Craddock answered. 'I'm... a trifle disappointed that you didn't mention this to me before.'

'I didn't see any need before,' Barlow answered candidly with this new move, 'I do. It appears that we may both be in rather a precarious position.'

Craddock considered the idea for a moment. 'And what do you think we should do about it?'

Barlow smiled. 'I think we should act as though we believe what we're supposed to have believed,' he suggested. 'We should act very coldly and even hostilely towards one another. Let Estro think he's broken us apart. Then, when he makes his next move, we can strike against him together!'

'It seems sound to me,' Craddock agreed. 'Very well, from this moment on, we're not speaking. Out.'

Barlow handed back the headset, amused. If Estro was indeed behind this attempt to split him and Craddock, he'd just made a very serious mistake...

Donna was furious with herself for being captured so easily, intrigued by what was going on and very, very worried about what was going to happen to them, the three emotions chasing each other wildly. The Doctor and David might just be fortunate enough to be simply executed. There was absolutely no chance of that fate for her. Haldoran wouldn't waste her in that manner.

She glanced at David. He seemed just as worried, though she suspected it was his missing wife that occupied his mind the most. Even as she thought this, David looked at the guard leading them to the runabout. He seemed about to speak, and then thought better of it.

'They've captured her,' the Doctor said gently 'Don't be afraid that you'd be betraying her by asking.'

‘How can you be so sure?’ David demanded, furiously. You might just have told them what they want to know!’

‘I saw female footprints on the rise where we were captured,’ the Doctor explained. ‘Surrounded by guard prints. That was why I was so sure we were about to be captured. If they could sneak up on Susan, they could sneak up on us, too.’

‘The Peace Officer?’ the guard captain asked. ‘Yes, we’ve got her. In fact, you’ll be meeting her any moment. I’ve sent one of my men to collect her. We might as well get rid of all of the vermin at once.’

David sighed in relief, and Donna felt glad for him, even as she realised that it didn’t improve their situation at all. The Doctor smiled slightly, as if there was something he knew that was still hidden from everyone else. He enjoyed being a bit mysterious, so it might be nothing more than affectation. Then again...

The runabout they were led to was an electric van, with the back isolated from the front. Before they could be herded inside, another guard came running over, his face twisted with worry.

‘She’s escaped,’ he reported.

‘What?’ The captain was furious. ‘You imbecile! How could she escape?’

‘She’s very bright,’ the Doctor offered helpfully.

The captain threw him a disgusted look, and then rounded on the hapless guard. ‘Search for her everywhere. The perimeter alarms haven’t sounded, so she must still be on the grounds somewhere. Move!’

The guard saluted, and then bolted, presumably relieved he had escaped punishment – for the time being.

‘My commiserations,’ the Doctor murmured. ‘It’s always terribly embarrassing to have to report that you’ve lost a prisoner.’

‘Well, I’m not losing any more,’ the captain snarled. ‘Into the runabout now, or I start breaking legs.’

Since it was absolutely clear that he meant what he was saying, Donna obeyed with alacrity. David and the Doctor were just behind her, and then the door was slammed and locked.

‘Some people don’t take setbacks very well,’ the Doctor opined, sitting cross-legged on the floor and ignoring the seats around the blank walls.

‘I’m glad she got away,’ David said fervently.

‘She’s not gone far,’ the Doctor informed him. ‘I know Susan, and I’m willing to bet she’s down in DA-17 right now. It’s where I’d be if I were free. We have to know what’s going on down there. It’s the most important thing in your world right now.’

Donna glared at him. ‘I rather think the war Haldoran has caused is the most important thing,’ she snapped. ‘I know this isn’t your home, Doctor, but

it is mine.'

'That war,' he replied darkly, 'is *nothing* compared to whatever's happening in DA-17. These idiots are feeding power to it, and power and the Daleks mix rather combustibly.'

David obviously shared the Doctor's concerns. 'What do you think *they* think they're doing?' he asked.

'I've no idea yet,' the Doctor admitted. He shook slightly as the runabout started up. 'But it appears that we're on our way to find out the answers.'

Shaking her head in despair, Donna said, 'They're planning on interrogating *us*, not the other way around!'

The Doctor grinned, apparently unconcerned. 'Yes, but what they ask us will tell me what they're interested in – and, by extension, what they think we're after. It should be simple to piece together their plans.'

David grunted. 'And we'll only be inside Haldoran's fortress, under guard and possibly under torture. The knowledge of what they're doing will, I'm sure, be a great relief to us.'

'Oh, I don't know,' the Doctor answered. 'I'm sure I'll be able to think of something.'

'Well, the faster you do it the better,' Donna informed him. 'Look, you two are likely to only get killed in all of this. I won't be so lucky.'

'Lucky?' The Doctor raised an eyebrow, 'Ah – the daughter of Haldoran's archenemy. You'd be a valuable hostage. Do you think he'll recognise you?'

Donna raised her eyes to heaven in silent plea. 'Doctor, you may not *live* to be interrogated by Haldoran. I won't be *any* kind of hostage. I couldn't be that lucky. And, yes, he's definitely going to recognise me. I haven't changed that much since we were married.'

At least she had the satisfaction of seeing the Doctor speechless for once.

Estro whistled cheerfully to himself as he walked down the corridor towards Haldoran's war office. The decor was hardly to his taste – a trifle too plastic and metal, and with rather gaudy baubles scattered everywhere – but there was the air of success about the place. His plans were proceeding perfectly. A small cart followed him, carrying the promised forty Dalek guns in their crates.

When he entered the war room, Haldoran looked up from the map he was playing with, adjusting the positions of his forces. 'Estro,' he called and glanced at the cart. 'Are those the promised armaments?'

'Naturally.' Estro stood aside, and let the cart park itself. 'All charged, and ready for distribution.'

Haldoran nodded, as he came around the table. 'One of my men came to fetch you shortly after you left,' he said slowly. 'You weren't in your room.'

‘Of course not,’ Estro agreed smoothly. ‘I was fetching your weapons. After all, I’m sure you searched my room and already knew that they weren’t hidden there.’

‘Of course I did,’ Haldoran said, not bothering to lie. ‘Your wardrobe was also missing.’

‘Really?’ Estro allowed his eyebrows to rise. ‘How sad. Some people will steal anything, won’t they?’

‘Is it still missing?’ Haldoran asked.

Estro inclined his head slightly. ‘No, I rather think the thief has seen the error of his ways and returned it to me.’ He smiled innocently.

‘I am glad to hear that,’ Haldoran said. ‘Around here, we discourage thieves by cutting off their hands.’

‘A splendid idea,’ Estro approved. ‘I am, therefore, surprised to see that Portney still retains both of his.’ He was pleased with the look of venom and fear he was treated to from the clerk.

‘He may yet lose them,’ Haldoran mused. ‘And yours are not so firm that they won’t come off with a little effort.’

‘Mine?’ Estro feigned complete innocence. ‘I’m giving you things, not taking them.’

‘And that’s the sole reason you still have both gloved extremities,’ Haldoran assured him. ‘Because you are taking something of mine. A few gigajoules of power?’

‘Ah!’ It had taken the clod long enough to figure that out. ‘You mean my power lines.’

‘Yes.’ Haldoran leaned forward, attempting to look menacing. ‘That is precisely what I do mean I’ve been having. . . words with Murdock, who for some reason seemed to think he wasn’t supposed to tell me about your little secret. But Portney discovered it.’

‘Set a thief to catch a thief?’ Estro asked, amused. ‘Most droll.’

‘You have thirty seconds to explain your actions to my satisfaction,’ Haldoran snarled.

How crude the man was. ‘I need only five seconds.’ He gestured at the Dalek crates. ‘There is your answer.’

Haldoran glanced at the crates. ‘You’re getting those guns from this DA-17 thing?’ he asked. ‘That’s where the power’s going?’

‘Yes,’ Estro lied. ‘Dalek guns from a Dalek Artefact. How else do you think I managed to obtain them?’ Since there was no way for him to know the answer to that question, there was no way he could possibly know that this was a complete fabrication.

Musing, the Lord stepped around the table and looked at the guns. ‘You’re using the power you’re stealing to obtain those guns?’

‘Exactly,’ Estro agreed. ‘The power I’m borrowing is being used to an end you desire,’ He spread his hands. ‘And, once the Artefact is completely opened, there may well be even more weapons inside it. So far, we’ve only penetrated the first level. Who knows how many more there might be?’

Haldoran considered the point, an old, deep-seated fear gnawing at him. ‘But the Peace Officers say it’s dangerous to meddle with the Dalek Artefacts,’ he protested.

‘Dangerous!’ Estro scoffed. ‘The only danger is to *them*. You’ve got your hands on the weapons you need to make you master of this entire planet! Of course they’ll claim it’s dangerous! They want this power for themselves. It’s why they’ve excluded you from their investigations for this long. They’ve been secretly searching for precisely what I have found. If they had these weapons in their hands, do you think they’d be braying “peace”? No, they’d be seizing control with them, just as you’re doing! Only we’ve beaten them to it.’

‘More weapons. . .’ Haldoran mused, rubbing his chin. Decisively, he nodded. ‘You’re right, Estro. The work must continue. We must have whatever is down there.’

‘And so you shall,’ Estro lied.

‘But why didn’t you tell his Lordship?’ Portney demanded, realising his little scheme to depose Estro had gone awry.

If he was worth the sport, Estro would have killed him. But where was the joy in murdering a worm?

‘Because I wasn’t certain it would work,’ Estro said gently. ‘I’m pleased to report that it *is* working, and the next batch of Dalek guns will be ready by morning. Besides. . .’ he smiled at Haldoran, ‘I need to keep *some* secrets in order to remain valuable. If I’d told you initially that the guns were coming from a Dalek Artefact, you might well have protested, knowing no better. Or you might have tried to cut me out of the loop, thinking you didn’t need me.’

‘What makes you so sure that I won’t do that now?’ Haldoran asked, grinning.

The fool. He was wasting his time posturing. ‘Because you’ve. . . spoken to Murdock. I’m sure he didn’t tell you very much before he died. And nobody else involved will tell you any more. You won’t get anything further out of DA-17 without my help, and you must know that.’

Haldoran, of course, did. He’d simply been hoping that his threat would worry his adviser. He nodded curtly. ‘So – I get my weapons. But I’m curious – just what do you get out of all of this?’

It had taken him long enough to ask the obvious. ‘Power,’ Estro replied, knowing this lie would be believable. ‘I have the weapons, but not the men to use them. We need one another. What I want when all of this is over is my

own Domain – under your rule, of course. As your right-hand man, I'm sure little would be beyond my grasp.'

Haldoran smiled, obviously relieved. The story was logical, and it appealed to the man's own baser instincts. 'I can see you and I are very alike,' he said.

Estro smiled, tightly. After all, he'd be gone long before Haldoran would discover the truth. 'It would appear so,' he agreed blithely. 'Now, if you're happy, can we continue with the war?'

'By all means,' Haldoran agreed, rubbing his hands together. 'Especially since I'm winning it. . .'

The Doctor stared at Donna, and she was pleased to see him confused for once. 'This. . . marriage of yours,' he murmured. 'Would that have anything to do with the private areas of your life I wasn't supposed to poke into?' he inquired.

'Yes,' Donna admitted, feeling herself flush even now.

David looked at him. 'You didn't know about it?' he asked. 'It's common knowledge,' Then, realising who he was saying this in front of, he blushed as well. 'I mean. . . ' he said, stumbling to a halt.

'I've only been on this planet a day,' the Doctor complained. 'I really haven't had the time to collect all the local gossip.'

With a great sigh, Donna steeled herself. 'Well, since you're bound to get it out of him anyway. . . ' she said. It still hurt terribly to think about it. 'I was seventeen, and innocent enough to still believe in love. My father needed peace with Haldoran, so he arranged for me to marry him.' She shuddered at the memories this resurrected. 'The man's a monster,' she said simply 'Pure ego, with nothing to control it. Anything he wants, he gets. *Anything*. What I wanted was irrelevant. At first. . . well, like I said. I was naive, and I believed in love. Oh, I knew he didn't love me, and I didn't know him. But I thought we'd come to love one another, and everything would be fine. Yeah. Right.

'Lust is what consumes him. He enjoyed the thought that he was using me, corrupting me. If I protested, I was punished.' She could still sometimes feel the pain, even after all this time. 'I still have the scars across my shoulders.'

David looked very uncomfortable. 'I didn't know any of this,' he protested.

'Of course you didn't,' Donna agreed coldly. 'Nobody was interested in hearing *my* side of the story. Not even my father. *He* was the worst of them all, believing the lies and the deceits, without ever asking *me* what really happened.'

'If this is too painful. . . ' the Doctor said gently.

'No,' Donna insisted. 'Oh, it's painful all right. But what scares the hell out of me is that I'm going back to it. You have to understand my fears, Doctor, because I want you to kill me if we can't escape.'

He glanced at her sharply. 'Retreat into death isn't the answer.'

'That's easy for you to say,' she snarled. 'You've never been through what I have. Haldoran is a monster, and he enjoys his power. Especially his power over others.' Donna calmed her emotions as much as she could. 'Haldoran forced me to do things, horrible things. Then, when he discovered that I was barren, he threw me away like a piece of trash.'

'The fault wasn't yours,' the Doctor said gently, wiping at the tears she wasn't even aware were on her cheeks.

'Yes, it was!' she yelled. 'You don't understand!'

'No,' he agreed amicably. 'I don't.'

'A society attempting to rebuild itself, Doctor, values children above everything else,' said David, wearily. 'Being barren isn't a crime, but it's a terrible stigma. Susan and I have suffered it, too – we couldn't have children, either. We adopted three, which mitigated things a little, but we're still on the edge of being ostracised from polite society. As if they fear that infertility is contagious.' He looked down at the ground. 'It's only these last few years, now they all *think* Susan's too old...'

Donna interrupted him, her angry words tumbling out. 'Haldoran didn't want me as his wife if I couldn't bear children. How could a monarch hope to rule with no heir? I was useless to him.' She didn't even try and stop the tears now. 'So, he had me removed. And the bastard took my own cousin in my place. She was in his bed before my side of it even got cold. And Brittany's a proper baby factory. She's had half a dozen brats already. Haldoran publicly divorced me, humiliated me, lied about me...'

The Doctor shushed her, gently 'But you weren't to blame for *any* of this.'

'Don't you think I *know* that, you idiot?' Donna screamed. 'That's not the point. When I came home again, *everybody* had heard the stories. They treated me like I had some contagious disease. My father barely speaks to me, and every man I meet looks at me like I was a leper. I can't have any kind of a normal life any longer. That's why my father was only too glad to allow me into knight training. This way, I'm out of the castle more than I'm home. And, with luck, I might get myself killed, and remove all embarrassment from my being alive.'

'Nonsense,' the Doctor said briskly. 'Donna, most of this is simply in your own mind. Oh, I'm sure people talk about you, and doubtless enjoy it. But nobody who gets to know you would ever do the same. You've shown great courage. You've made a new life for yourself, you've...'

The Doctor's platitudes trailed away as Donna turned her back on him and her voice became quiet, like a child's. 'When Haldoran threw me out, he promised that if I ever returned, he'd make what I'd endured before pale in comparison.' She turned round and stared at him, panic-stricken. 'Doctor, he's

going to destroy my spirit! I would never live through what he'll subject me to. That's why you have to kill me first!



## 9

### Journeys End In...

Despite Donna's plea, the Doctor shook his head firmly 'suffered enough,' he replied gently. 'I won't add to it. And I certainly won't kill you to prevent a fate worse than death.'

'Doctor,' Donna said desperately, 'I'm serious.'

'And so am I,' he assured her, touching her lightly on her shoulder. 'You should not be punished for the actions of another.' He stared at her almost hypnotically. 'I promise you, I will not allow Haldoran to harm you again.'

Donna faltered. 'I know better than to trust the word of any man ever again,' she said bitterly.

'Don't,' the Doctor agreed cheerfully. 'Trust the word of a Time Lord.'

'How?' Donna gestured around them. 'We're trapped in here, in case you hadn't noticed, and being taken to Haldoran's castle. We'll be surrounded by his troops there. There's no way out.'

'Don't be such a defeatist,' the Doctor answered. 'We're only prisoners because I thought it was the best way of getting answers.'

Donna stared at him suspiciously. 'You're trying to tell me you *allowed* them to capture us?'

'Of course.' He looked at her innocently. 'I thought we'd meet up with Susan that way. I should have known she'd have escaped, of course. And since she's now investigating DA-17, it seemed to me that it was my duty to check on what Haldoran thinks he's up to. And allowing us to be taken to him was the obvious method.'

Donna was feeling more and more uncertain now. She was wavering between fear and hope – but at least there *was* hope. 'I thought this was none of your business,' she said finally.

'That was before the Dalek Artefact,' he answered. 'That changes everything. I have no option but to act now.' He smiled. 'As long as you've no objection to accepting help from a non-Earthman, that is.'

Donna managed a weak smile back. 'Personally, I'm all for it,' she assured him. 'Just as long as my father never finds out you're an alien.'

'I promise not to tell him.' The Doctor's eyes sparkled as he held up a slender, wandlike object. 'A little proof that I really can get us out when I

wish. My sonic screwdriver.’

David scowled. ‘Didn’t the guards take that away from you?’ he objected.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor said with a grin. ‘But I’m most adept at sleight of hand. You should see my Las Vegas act sometime.’ He hardly seemed to move his hand, but the device had vanished again ‘I can do wonderful things with coins, too. But they took all of those.’

Hope was starting to win out in Donna’s mind now. He seemed to be more than a trifle eccentric, but there was something about the Doctor that made you realise that there was more to him than what you saw. A little like his TARDIS, really – when you penetrated the surface, there was far more than you dreamed possible.

The runabout came to a halt, and a moment later the doors were flung open. Four armed guards stood there, rifles aimed at the prisoners. ‘Out,’ one of them said.

Donna’s stomach knotted, as she prepared for what was bound to happen. The fear was back in full force now that she was so close to Haldoran.

The Doctor hopped out of the runabout, and looked around, acting for all the world as if he were a tourist on some trip. ‘Leeds Castle,’ he exclaimed cheerfully ‘One of my favourite places. Though I don’t think much of the fresh decor. It ought to be light Middle Ages, you know, with perhaps just a hint of Regency.’

‘Shut up,’ the guard said. ‘You ll be told when it’s time to talk.’

‘Most kind.’ The Doctor held out his hand to help Donna down from the runabout. Her eyes darted about the all-too-familiar walls and buildings of Castle Haldoran.

Hell was about to be revisited. But at least this time she had company.

The Doctor took her hand in his. ‘Brave heart,’ he murmured.

Susan couldn’t help feeling flashes of *déjà vu* as she was led by the Dalek through the corridors of the complex that was DA-17. It wasn’t simply a shaft, she realised, but a small city of some kind. It was so similar to the one in which she’d been trapped on the Dalek homeworld of Skaro. Completely metallic, with long corridors, slightly too low to stand comfortably, since they were built to Dalek height. Doors that slid upward when activated. And no decorations or windows of any kind. Claustrophobic and inhospitable.

So what was it doing here on Earth? Clearly the Daleks must have constructed it during their invasion, but why go to all that trouble? She glanced at the Dalek in front of her, and immediately dismissed any thoughts of escape. But where would she go even if she *could* somehow overcome it? They had passed several dozen other Daleks by this point, all of them intent on their own arcane functions. The only minor relief for Susan was the presence

of the broadcast-power receiver on the Daleks' backs. This ensured that they couldn't travel very far from their source of power, which had to mean they were limited to being inside this underground complex, at least for the time being.

'You couldn't all have survived down here all of this time,' she said suddenly. 'You were all killed off thirty years ago.'

'Answers are unnecessary,' the Dalek informed her. 'You do not need to know.'

'Perhaps not,' Susan conceded. 'But I *want* to know. How did you survive?'

'We did not,' the Dalek replied. 'You will speak only when given permission. You have not been given permission.'

'But –'

The Dalek swivelled around suddenly, its gun-stick pointed firmly at her. 'A prisoner is needed for interrogation. It need not be you. You will be silent until told to speak, or you will be exterminated.'

Susan swallowed, and then nodded her understanding. Daleks, as ever, were blunt and to the point. And totally without interest in, or mercy towards, their victims. The Dalek swung back around, and continued to lead her deeper into this maddening, mysterious complex.

Tomlin waved his arms in the air to stop the approaching runabout. It came to a gentle halt about ten feet from where he stood in the ruined road. Moving with calm, Tomlin approached the vehicle, recognising the colours of Barlow on the bonnet. He bent down to smile at the driver, a young man.

'Thank you for stopping,' he said politely. 'Do you know who I am?'

'Uh, yes, sir,' the youngster replied. 'General Tomlin, sir.'

'Very good,' Tomlin said approvingly. He brought his pistol up and fired once scattering the man's brains all over the back seat of the vehicle. 'I have greater need of this than you do.' He pushed the corpse out of the door, and clambered behind the wheel.

He set the runabout in motion, and turned it back down the road, heading for Castle Haldoran.

'There's a message from General Craddock, my Lord,' the operator called.

Haldoran looked up from his map and nodded. 'And what does he want?' he asked.

'To speak to you, my Lord. Says it's urgent.'

'Is it, indeed?' Smiling to himself, Haldoran walked over to pick up the proffered headset. 'What is it, Craddock?'

'My Lord,' the soldier's voice replied, 'I've been observing the effect of the Dalek weapons. They're tremendously effective.'

'That I already knew,' Haldoran snapped. 'Come to the point.'

'I want the next batch issued to my men, my Lord,' Craddock replied bluntly. 'Barlow has enough of them already.'

Haldoran's smile widened. As he'd hoped, there was a wedge between the two men. Perfect! 'I'll give your *request* some thought,' he promised. 'Now, get back to taking my capital.' He returned the headset to the operator, and strode back to his war table grinning at Estro. 'It looks like Portney gets to keep his hands,' he said cheerfully. 'At least for now Craddock is demanding the next set of Dalek weapons for his men.'

Estro smiled back. 'And you plan to give them to him?'

'Certainly not,' Haldoran answered. He turned back to the radio operator. 'Call Barlow and tell him that he can come back here in person and pick up the next hatch of weapons.' He smiled at Estro. 'That should make the rift even stronger,' he said. 'They'll both work for me, but they won't work with one another, of that I'm certain.'

'A sound decision,' Estro agreed.

A guard entered the war room and saluted. 'Sir, a batch of prisoners has arrived. They were taken at DA-17.'

'Were they indeed?' Estro purred. 'With your permission, my Lord, I should like to interrogate these prisoners personally I need to know how much London's men know about the Artefact.'

Haldoran inclined his head in permission. 'Take Downs with you,' he decided. 'He has a . . . wonderful capacity for extracting information.'

'I have my own methods,' Estro answered.

'I'm sure that you do,' Haldoran replied coldly. 'But that was not a suggestion.'

Estro hesitated, and then nodded acquiescence. 'Of course, my Lord. I'm sure his talents will prove most . . . interesting.' He spun on his heels and left the room.

Looking after him, Haldoran was disturbed. He had noticed in the past how undeferential Estro tended to be. He very rarely addressed Haldoran by the honorific. Now he'd used it twice in a minute. For some reason, that disturbed him. If the man wasn't so vital to his plans, Haldoran would have had him executed just to be safe. But the damned plotter no doubt knew that.

What was he to do with the man?

Despite the Doctor's firm grip on her hand, Donna was terrified. Stepping back inside the castle had meant nothing but pain, humiliation and disillusion to her, and it was the hardest thing she had ever done. She tried to remind herself that she was a knight now, trained to fight and overcome all foes. But

all she could think of was the horrors she'd suffered. Her body stiffened in anticipation of those pains being reborn.

She couldn't face it. She couldn't.

'Be strong,' the Doctor urged her. 'This won't be for long. And it won't be like last time. I promise you.'

Another hand took her free one, and she realised that David Campbell, too, was offering her what small comfort and strength he had left. 'Courage,' he whispered. 'You're stronger than they are.'

Stronger? Who was he trying to fool? She felt as though her bowels were going to let loose any second, and she'd soil herself. She had neither strength nor courage. All she had left was the pain that she would feel, when –

The guards ushered them into a holding room, and then stood at their posts outside. There was no door, nor anything inside the room. It was simply four blank walls, a floor and a ceiling. There was nothing to sit on, look out of, or use for an escape.

Donna collapsed to the floor, dragging her hands free of both men's. At least here she could go no lower, and she lacked the energy or will to remain standing. Her spirit was ebbing, and she knew that this place would destroy her, even if its master didn't.

'Well,' drawled an old, hated voice. 'This is surely a sight I never expected to see again. The Lady Donna, back from exile.'

Somehow she managed to force herself to look up at Downs. He stood casually, lounging against the entrance. His bright, nasty eyes were examining her, as if seeking a target for the first of his barbed attacks. Donna's mouth was dry, and her heart pounding. She couldn't focus her thoughts.

'Hello,' said the Doctor cheerily, stepping forward and shielding her from that hated gaze. 'I'm the Doctor, and I'm very pleased to meet you. And you are...?'

'Possibly your death,' Downs replied, staring at the intruder.

'Then possibly I'm not,' the Doctor answered, refusing to be intimidated. 'In which case, a name might help. Or should I just call you Fred?'

'His name,' Donna managed to grate out, 'is Downs. He's one of the worst pieces of scum in this whole stinking fortress.'

'Really?' asked the Doctor. 'I'm a tidy person myself, and I don't think scum belongs in a nice cell like this.'

Downs frowned slightly. 'Watch your tongue, Doctor,' he replied. 'Otherwise I'll cut it out and hand it back to you so you can *really* watch it.'

'Oh, you won't do that,' the Doctor said, radiating self-assurance. 'You're supposed to interrogate me, and how could I speak without a tongue?'

'You could still write,' Downs snapped.

'With my tongue in my hands? Don't be silly.' The Doctor smiled cheerfully. 'I think we've got off to a bad start here. Couldn't we just sit down for a nice chat over tea and scones?'

'*Doktoro,*' said a fresh voice, one that Donna had never heard before. '*Mi ĝojas ke vi estas tiu kiun mi bezonis por kompletigi la ludon.*'

The Doctor spun around to stare at the newcomer. '*Tiam kiam mi aŭdis la nomon "Estro", mi opiniis ke tiu devas esti vi. Via vanteco estos la fino de vi, estro de malbonestroj.*'

David looked as confused as Donna felt. 'Do you know each other?'

'Oh yes,' the Doctor said. 'We know one another very well.' He looked extremely grim. 'He's fond of calling himself the Master.'

Barlow received the radio operators recall with amusement. 'Arkwright,' he said briefly, 'you're in charge until I get back. Keep moving on. I want London pressured constantly to fall back. I'll return as soon as possible.'

'Understood, sir.'

Arkwright was a capable officer, if of limited imagination. Still, at this stage in the game, nothing much should go wrong. He could leave for a couple of hours to claim more of the guns. Then he would return and press home the final assault, aided by Craddock. It seemed as though their plan was working perfectly. Haldoran evidently believed there was a serious rift between the two men, and was working to exacerbate it.

Haldoran was clearly weak.

Barlow knew that what he was thinking would certainly get him killed if anyone else knew about it. But Haldoran could not be allowed to take the reins of the kingdom he was forging. Barlow knew what the man was like, and he despised it. A man like that should never be allowed the power that he sought, because he would simply abuse it. What Britain needed now was a strong hand, but also a disciplined one. And Haldoran was far too undisciplined. . .

It was almost time for a change. . .

Donna stared at the sinister bearded man, who in turn was staring intently at the Doctor.

'Was that your native tongue you spoke just now?' Donna asked, amazed to find she was still curious, despite her shakes.

'No, actually,' the Doctor replied. 'It's an artificial human language called Esperanto, invented in 1887 by a Polish oculist named Zamenhof. He wanted it to become the universal language of peace. Typical of the Master to corrupt it. *Estro* is the Esperanto word for *Master*.' He smiled grimly. 'I had my suspicions when I first heard the name.'

The Master stepped forward, and Donna saw him clearly for the first time. He was dressed almost entirely in black, some odd sort of jacket that fastened right to his neck. He wore gloves, a slightly greying beard, and a rather unpleasant smile. She disliked him immediately. He just... *seemed* dangerous, more so than Downs, because he had a strength of purpose about him, and an air that suggested he would do whatever was required to meet his goals. She saw the intelligence burning in his eyes.

'And yet, Doctor, here you are, caught like a moth by a flame,' the Master said. 'You should surely have known better.'

'What better way of getting to you?' the Doctor asked, spreading his hands. 'And I'm sure you'll be quite willing to explain your latest little scheme to me.' He turned to wink at Donna. 'It's a weakness of his,' he confided. 'He tries to look and sound so bold, but he's actually quite insecure. He's always trying to excite my imagination and approval for his nasty little plans.'

The Master regarded the Doctor mildly. 'I'm rather tempted to just kill you here and now and have done with it,' he said, sighing. 'You really are no fun any more. Perhaps it's age catching up with you. So you've changed bodies again? Getting through them aren't you?'

'And you're still in the same old body,' the Doctor mused thoughtfully. 'Quite remarkable. You're rather well preserved.'

'Thank you,' said the Master with a small ironic bow. 'Life has been rather good to me of late. As a result of which, I will indulge your puerile curiosity before I leave you to your fate.' He turned to Downs and the guards. 'Why don't you run along and prepare whatever tools you need for your questioning?' he suggested. 'I assure you, I am more than able to keep these three captives until you return.'

Downs scowled at him. 'Are you sure of that?'

'Quite sure,' the Master said firmly. 'Off you go, I insist. You'll want to be well prepared for these... guests.'

'Suit yourself,' Downs agreed. He gestured to the guards to accompany him. As he left he called back over his shoulder, 'If you're wrong, I shan't mourn you.'

While the Master was occupied, the Doctor leaned forward to whisper quietly to Donna. 'I seem to have done something naughty. My people usually have a law that we must meet each other in a linear progression along our relative time-streams. But I've slipped back in regards to the Master – I've met him in two and a half bodies since this one.'

'I don't have the faintest idea what you're talking about,' Donna confessed, wearily.

'Well, it's important he doesn't find out,' the Doctor informed her. 'I think I must have bent the law out of all shape by backtracking Susan's psychic call

instead of simply answering it. I suspect that means I'll be in trouble again. . .'

Donna was about to reply when the Doctor held his hand up. The Master turned back to them and the Doctor gave him a cheerful smile.

'What a charming fellow Mr Downs seems to be,' the Doctor said, when they were alone. 'You certainly manage to gravitate towards the diseased centre, don't you, *Estro*?'

'Please, Doctor,' the Master answered calmly. He studied Donna and David the way a taxidermist studies his subjects. She shivered at the touch of his eyes. 'I see you've collected humans again. It's a terrible weakness of yours.'

'Actually, it's a strength,' the Doctor assured him. 'But don't let me stop you from gloating. Just what are you planning on using DA-17 for?'

The Master stroked his beard and smiled. 'You naturally found out about that. Well, you may recall that a short while ago I did the Daleks a slight favour.'

'He tried to start a war between Earth and Draconia in the future to weaken both empires,' the Doctor explained helpfully.

'Quite. Well, I was in their. . . employ, I used my time to raid their computer files. They alerted me to a few interesting facts that I'm making use of.' The Master reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a stubby device that he held casually in his hand. 'Just in case any of you feel terribly heroic,' he said.

'That's a Tissue Compression Eliminator,' the Doctor said softly, for Donna's and David's benefit, 'it will kill you and compact you into six small inches. And he'll use it on the slightest provocation, or just for pleasure, so don't even think of rushing him.'

'Quite so,' the Master said, almost kindly, before returning to his gloat. 'The first useful item was a Dalek hatchery on Sayomin Three. It occurred to me that I could reprogramme it so that the Daleks would obey me instead of that ridiculous Dalek Prime. Unfortunately, I miscalculated, and the entire brood had to be wiped out. Fortunately, I found a use for their gun-sticks. I brought a supply with me.'

The Doctor stared at him in horror. 'You've supplied Dalek weapons to Haldoran and his men?'

'Yes, Doctor,' the Master agreed. 'They're finding them most useful in expanding their territory. I've just handed over the latest consignment. I estimate that Haldoran's forces will overrun London sometime in the next two days.'

The Doctor frowned. 'But why are you doing this?' he asked. 'You surely have no interest in ruling this insignificant little island?'

'Of course not,' the Master agreed. 'It's of absolutely no interest to me who rules at the end of the day. This whole business is simply a diversion to pass

the time. I was forced to wait for the implementation of my main scheme, so I dabbled in local politics in the meantime.'

Donna stared at him in horror as she realised what he was saying. 'You mean you started this war between Haldoran and London just to stave off boredom?' she demanded.

'Quite,' he agreed without shame. 'I needed something to do while I waited.'

'You murdering, festering little scumbag!' Donna yelled. She realised that, to him, her life and the lives of everyone else here on Earth were of absolutely no significance, except as amusements. She jumped to her feet, intent on throwing herself at him, whatever he might be armed with. Two inflexible hands grabbed her arms, and the Doctor held her tightly.

'There's no point in getting yourself killed,' he advised her. 'Wait for your opportunity.'

The Master laughed. 'Ever the optimist, Doctor!' he crowed. 'That chance will never arise. But do, please, continue to delude yourself into believing that it will. It makes the game so much more interesting.'

The Doctor glared coldly at him. 'You were about to tell us the real reason you're here,' he prompted. 'DA-17?'

'Oh, yes, do forgive me. The other item I discovered from the Dalek database was the existence of that very installation.' His face was animated now. 'It was a Dalek research facility here on Earth. They were testing a new device when you managed to... shut them down and seal them off. The device was sealed into DA-17. All that was needed to free it was to repower the locks to the installation, and to walk inside and collect the device. Naturally, the Daleks left certain... safeguards. Computers, keyed into specific Dalek codes.'

'Which, of course, you stole,' the Doctor filled in.

'Naturally.' The Master was preening now. Donna saw that the Doctor's earlier evaluation was quite correct. For some reason, defeating the Doctor wasn't enough for the Master: he perversely wanted praise from his foe at the same time – confirmation of what he saw as his genius. 'At this very moment, there is a computer at the base of the shaft that is decoding the entry protocols so that I can walk in and take the device.'

'And you needed Haldoran's power station to light up DA-17,' the Doctor guessed. 'Which is why you came here in the first place.'

'Precisely,' the Master agreed. 'And I shall have what I need very shortly. Then I shall leave this miserable, backward little planet and –'

'Go on to conquer the universe,' the Doctor completed. 'Yes, yes, I know. I've heard it all from you before. So, what is this mysterious device that will hand the universe to you on a platter?'

The Master clicked his tongue and shook his head. ‘Really, Doctor, there’s no need to be so rude. Or for you to know exactly what *I* know. But the Daleks’ final transmission back to Skaro before you and your allies destroyed them signalled they were ready to begin testing. It never happened, of course, and so the completed device is sitting at the base of DA-17, waiting for someone to claim it. . .’ He smiled. ‘And, of course, to use it.’

The Doctor nodded slowly. ‘And you’ve decided finders keepers.’

‘Exactly, Doctor,’ the Master said cheerfully. ‘I knew you’d understand. I will offer worlds the chance to ally themselves with me – or else face utter annihilation.’

Donna stared at him, appalled. ‘You’re insane,’ she gasped. ‘To threaten entire *worlds*. . .’

‘Don’t be so provincial!’ the Master snapped, clearly annoyed. ‘I’m talking of power on a scale you can’t even dream about.’

‘You’re talking, as usual, about death on a cosmic scale,’ the Doctor snapped. ‘And, I’ve no doubt, you’ve made your usual arrogant blunders in the process. This won’t work out the way you’re planning.’

‘Of course it will, Doctor,’ the Master retorted. ‘You’re as shortsighted and foolish as the pitiful humans whose company you enjoy so much.’ There was a sound in the corridor. ‘Ah, this must be Mr Downs returning, hoping to begin his pleasure. Well, Doctor, I shall leave the three of you in his more than capable hands. I’m sure he’ll enjoy killing you humans. But *you*, Doctor. . . you are *mine*.’

But it wasn’t Downs returning. Donna felt an incredible relief. She’d been tensing herself for unimaginable horrors at his hands, and it was something of a letdown to see only a worried guard hurry in.

‘Estro!’ the man exclaimed, breathing hard. ‘It’s Lockwood and his men – they missed their report. I tried accessing DA-17, but there’s no reply.’

‘What did I tell you?’ the Doctor asked, crossing his arms. ‘Your best-laid schedules *always* gang a-gley.’

‘Be silent!’ the Master snarled, his urbanity gone now ‘This is merely a slight glitch in my plans. I shall go there and take charge myself.’

‘You do that,’ the Doctor agreed cheerfully. ‘But I imagine you’ll be in for a shock.’

There was further noise in the corridor, and this time it *was* Downs returning. ‘I’m ready for them now,’ the soldier stated, ‘You’d better be done with them.’

‘I am,’ the Master agreed. ‘Take them, and kill them – the more slowly, the better.’

‘Believe me,’ Downs assured him, ‘I have no intention of allowing them to die quickly.’ He moved over to Donna. She couldn’t stop herself from

trembling. He stroked her cheek. 'This one I am especially looking forward to. This is going to be exquisite pleasure. . . for me, at least.'

Donna closed her eyes, felt her heart freeze with fear. She knew that he meant every word he said.



## 10

# The Trap

As the Master strode away down the corridor, Donna glared at the Doctor, her expression half pleading, half accusing. 'You promised,' she whispered.

Somehow he heard her, or simply understood her 'I always keep my promises,' he said. Glancing at David, he added, 'Eventually.' He cleared his throat and stepped forward. 'Really, there's no need for any violence,' he said, smiling. 'I'm quite willing to tell you anything I know.'

'Really?' Downs asked, smiling back. 'And who are you?'

'I'm the Doctor.' He held out his hand, which Downs ignored. 'So, where shall we start?' He moved to put his arm around Downs's shoulder. Angrily, the soldier slapped it off.

'We start with you all screaming a lot,' Downs snapped. 'Do you think I'd trust anything you said unless it was dragged out of you?'

The Doctor sighed and shook his head. 'You're determined to have your sick fun, aren't you?' he said mildly. 'I'm afraid I can't allow that. You see, I promised Donna that she wouldn't be hurt again, and you wouldn't want to make me a liar, would you?'

'I'll make you a dead man – eventually,' Downs vowed. He gestured to the two guards. 'Escort them to the dungeon.'

'Sorry,' the Doctor said, shaking his head. 'I have a prior engagement.' He tipped a nonexistent hat, and started to turn his back on Downs. Furious, Downs grabbed his arm and spun him around, lashing out with his fist. The blow caught the Doctor on the right cheek, and sent him stumbling back with a cry. He collided with one of the two guards, and both of them crumpled in a heap on the floor.

The next few seconds were very confused. The second guard turned to where the Doctor was struggling to get back to his feet, and David took his opportunity. He leapt for the distracted soldier, and slammed him against the wall. Downs snarled again, clutching for the holster and his revolver. Which, somehow, wasn't there.

He didn't have time to figure out what had happened before something flew through the air from the Doctor towards Donna. She grabbed it automatically, and realised that it was Downs's missing weapon. The Doctor must have lifted

it when he was greeting the maniac. Donna spun the gun to hold it correctly, but in the moment that took, Downs launched himself at the Doctor, a knife in his hand.

Donna didn't need to think. All of her fear and rage welled up inside her and exploded as she pulled the trigger. The shot caught Downs in the back of the neck, exploding through his face. He didn't even have time to scream before he collapsed, dead, across the Doctor.

Pushing the body away, the Doctor managed to stand up. The guard he'd 'accidentally' collided with was unconscious. David had managed to subdue the one he'd jumped, and he, too, was out cold on the floor.

The Doctor glanced down at Downs's still form, blood puddling beneath it. 'Did you have to kill him?'

'No, Doctor,' Donna said, her voice steady at last. Seeing the bastard die had managed to exorcise some of her demons. 'I could have let him kill you instead.' She bent and wrenched the knife from the corpse's hand.

The Doctor said nothing, and David looked up from the guard he'd felled. 'Now what, Doctor? How do we get out of here?'

'We don't,' Donna said firmly, before the Doctor could reply. 'We've got work to do here. Haldoran has more of those Dalek guns the Master gave him.'

The Doctor looked at her with sympathy. 'Donna, there's trouble at DA-17. I hate to say it, but I suspect it must be Daleks. And they're more important than anything else right now.'

'Maybe to you,' Donna growled. 'But those guns are going to be used against my family and my one-time friends. They may all despise me, but I can't let Haldoran murder them. We have to destroy the guns.'

The Doctor was obviously torn. His fingers twitched, and he blinked rapidly. 'The Daleks are the most urgent,' he insisted. 'Haldoran may kill a few people, but the Daleks will wipe out the human race. They lost the last battle, and they're unlikely to be calling it a day.'

'They're also stuck down a sodding pit!' Donna yelled 'Go after them if you must, but I'm going to destroy those weapons first. If you won't come with me, then fine. I'll do it alone.' She started to brush past him, but he grabbed her arm.

'You'll never manage it alone,' the Doctor said gently. 'So I suppose I'll have to come with you.' He shook his head. 'What we need is a plan.'

'Doctor, Donna,' David said urgently. 'What about Susan? You said she was down DA-17.'

The Doctor nodded. 'She is. But there's nothing we can do to help her for the moment. Courage. David. Perhaps Donna's right, and those guns are the most important thing.'

Donna saw David agonising over the decision. 'You're a Peace Officer,' she said softly. 'I know you're scared about your wife. But wouldn't she want you to save as many lives as possible, and not just one?'

'That's easy for you to say,' David complained.

'No,' she answered. 'It isn't. I know you must be hurting. But, please...'

Swallowing, David nodded at last.

'A plan...,' the Doctor mused. 'The Master said he'd just handed over the latest consignment. Haldoran will have those guns wherever he is; he won't trust anyone else with them yet.'

'His war room,' Donna said firmly. 'He's been planning this takeover for a long time. That's where he and they will be.'

'Marvellous,' David said. 'Right in the heart of his castle. And how are we supposed to get there? Everybody here seems to know what you look like.'

Donna's stomach churned again. 'Then let's make the most use of it,' she suggested, hating herself as she said it. 'You two can be guards bringing me back for Haldoran to play with.' She was deathly pale as she said this. It would be the hardest thing she could ever do in her life.

The Doctor gave her a sharp stare. 'Are you sure you can do this?' he asked.

'Yes,' she insisted. 'And I won't have to fake the fear, either. That should greatly amuse him. But how do we destroy the Dalek guns when we're there?'

'Leave that to me,' the Doctor answered.

'And what about getting out again afterwards?' David asked, checking the rifle he'd taken from the fallen guard.

'Let's improvise,' the Doctor suggested. 'Overplanning never works. Trust me, I've been there, done that.'

'And does improvising work?' David insisted.

'Mostly,' the Doctor assured him. 'Come on, let's get moving before we come to our senses.'

Susan stood shivering in the centre of the Dalek control room. It was some twenty feet long and ten high and wide. Computer banks and monitors lined both walls. There were doors in both end walls, both with Daleks on guard. In the room, most of the Daleks were operating the control systems. Only two were paying attention to her. The deep, metallic throbbing in the complex sounded like a vast electronic heartbeat, the pulse of the Daleks.

'What is happening?' she asked the Black Dalek that surveyed her. 'How is it possible that you're still alive?'

'You do not need to know,' the Dalek replied. 'You are here to answer questions.'

'It would help if I understood what was happening!' Susan insisted. 'My information would be useless to you if I'm ignorant.'

The Dalek considered the point. 'You do not know why the humans are here?'

'No,' Susan admitted. 'I was not one of them. I came here to try to stop them.'

'If she does not know,' the second Dalek stated, 'then she is of no value to us and should be exterminated.'

'No!' Susan said, hastily. 'I am of a faction opposing them! We are trying to stop them, so we know many of their plans.'

The Black Dalek regarded her. 'Do not attempt to deceive us,' it warned her. 'Of course I won't,' Susan promised. 'I want to live.'

The second Dalek turned slightly away. 'Humans are weak creatures,' it decided.

Keep on thinking that, Susan said to herself She *had* to discover what was happening, in order to halt it before any greater damage was done.

The Black Dalek finally spoke. 'Very well,' it agreed. 'Then you will tell us what you know.'

'Of course,' Susan lied. 'Now... how is it that you are alive? All of the Daleks were destroyed thirty-odd years ago.'

'That eventuality was prepared for,' the Black Dalek answered. 'There was always a small chance that the humans would defeat us temporarily. This unit was created as a secondary measure.'

'A backup plan,' Susan realised. 'In case the primary one was defeated.'

'Yes,' the Dalek confirmed. 'Information was placed in data banks that this was a research facility, and that a powerful weapon had been tested here.'

Starting to comprehend, Susan nodded. 'So that some humans would find the information, come looking for the device and be forced to introduce power to your systems to access the device. Your computers then siphoned off the power to other uses.'

'Correct,' the Black Dalek said. 'The device was a trap. This unit is a factory.'

'Factory...' Susan realised what it meant. 'Where fresh Daleks would be created for a second attempt to conquer Earth.'

'Embryos were frozen, awaiting revival,' the Dalek informed her. 'The assembly line was prepared. All that was required was power.'

Susan was cold with terror. 'And the device? Is it real?'

The Dalek regarded her. 'The device is real, but untested. That is all the knowledge you require.' It turned to face the closest control panel. 'Report.'

The Dalek at the panel swivelled at what should have been its waist. 'The device is powered up,' it reported. 'Testing can begin within five time units.'

'The target will be the city the humans call London,' the Black Dalek announced. 'Set the device accordingly.' It turned back to Susan. 'Now – you will tell us what we need to know.'

Susan nodded bitterly, trying to get her thoughts in order. She had to lie successfully about plans she couldn't know to stay alive. And then she had to escape and somehow stop the Daleks before they wiped out London – and everyone that she knew and loved.

Tomlin powered down the runabout, and parked it inside Castle Haldoran. The gate guards had seemed surprised to see him back, but not suspicious. Naturally, they wouldn't have a clue about Haldoran's plans. They had allowed him through, and Tomlin had smiled and moved on. Now he exited the vehicle, tapping his revolver, absolutely certain that what he was doing was the right thing.

It was time to set things straight. . .

As the runabout came to a halt, Barlow hopped out, eager for what was to come. More Dalek guns. . . With them, his troops would be invincible. And, naturally, loyal to him rather than to Haldoran. With Craddock at his side, Barlow could take London and then between them they could decide what was to be done with the rest of the country. Haldoran had proven himself unfit to rule, and had to be eliminated.

And that thought stopped him dead in his tracks. Barlow had been certain that *he* was the one pulling the strings here, that everything was proceeding according to his plans. But what if Haldoran suspected? He already had attempted to split Craddock from him; was that simply suspicion, or more? Was this recall *really* to hand over more Dalek guns. . . or was it to get Barlow alone, and then kill him?

That was the trouble, of course, with plotting: you never knew how much your enemy knew, or simply suspected. Was it a wise move, going alone into the castle now? But what excuse did he have to take a bodyguard with him? Barlow hesitated, unsure of how to proceed. Was this what it appeared to be – or was it a trap?

All right,' hissed the Doctor to Donna. 'We're getting to the hard part. Eyes front, and try to look like a scared prisoner.'

They were approaching the war room. Only a few moments away from meeting Haldoran again. Donna didn't need to pretend to look terrified.

The Doctor took a deep breath. 'It's show time. . .'

They marched towards the guarded doors.

The Black Dalek watched over the activity in the control room, noting with satisfaction that the power levels were still rising. The production of new Daleks was continuing at an increased rate.

A Red Dalek glided into the room, moving to report. This could, of course, have been done through their inbuilt communications, but being physically present to make a report stressed the Black Dalek's importance. 'Strike unit is prepared,' the newcomer reported. 'Internal packs are working at optimum.'

'Noted,' the Black Dalek replied with satisfaction. 'Strike unit is to engage immediately.'

'I obey.' The Red Dalek sent its command.

The guard captain checked his instruments again, and then shook his head. Maybe they were malfunctioning. They were insisting that there was movement, and yet the perimeter alarms were registering nothing at all.

'There's no sign of intruders,' his second in command said, just as puzzled. 'All guard stations report absolutely no activity.'

'It doesn't make sense,' the captain complained. 'These instruments have never given us any trouble before. I think I'd better call in to Estro and let him know there's a problem. Take charge here and stay alert. I'll be back shortly.' He turned to head down towards the communications array, which was established close to the pit of DA-17, and then spat out a curse.

There *was* movement, but not from outside the perimeter.

*Something* had risen up the shaft, and was emerging from DA-17. It reflected light from the arcs set up around the pit, as if it were covered in metal. Or made of metal. . .

The captain realised what he was looking at the same second the Dalek opened fire. The blast took down two unprepared guards, and then the Dalek moved out. Behind it, a second rose in the shaft.

'Oh my God. . .' the captain gasped. He'd been a little worried when Estro had announced his plan to ravage the Dalek installation – but this. The Daleks were *dead*, for God's sake!

Two Dalek guns fired on the guards now, their bright flashes illuminating the night. The captain could hear their screams and his shocked mind was brought back to Earth.

'Emergency!' he announced. All guards, targets at ground centre. Immediate firing!' He quickly opened fire himself. But at extreme range, there was no visible effect on the two Daleks.

A third rose from the shaft. How many of them were there?

'Get closer,' he ordered his men. 'Hold your fire until it will do some good.' He dashed forward, keeping low, and seeking every last scant bit of cover he could. The humans had only one small advantage – the heavy rain had turned a lot of the ground to mud. The Daleks seemed to be moving on some kind of wheels, and the mud slowed them down. But it didn't stop them. Guns blazing, there were now five Daleks spreading out from the shaft.

The captain threw himself to the ground, close enough now for accurate fire. He aimed his machine gun, and let loose a burst. The closest Dalek swung its eyestalk to look at him, and the human could see that the bullets were bouncing off the Dalek casing without effect.

‘Small-arms fire is useless,’ he reported to his men. ‘Fall back until we can bring in something heavier.’

‘That’ll take too long!’ his second in command yelled. ‘These things will have seized the area by then.’

‘Fall back!’ the captain repeated, knowing what the man had said was true. But they couldn’t stand against Daleks with nothing better than rifles and pistols. They were too well armoured. He rose to a crouch, ready to run, when the Dalek he’d targeted fired.

His body was filled with agony, and he screamed as he collapsed to the ground. To his surprise, he wasn’t dead, but he discovered that his legs were paralysed and his spine was on fire with pain. The Dalek rumbled forward, spared a quick glance down at him, and then moved on, looking for further targets.

The captain groaned in agony and fear. It had deliberately left him alive. But why?

‘We’re losing ground,’ McAndrew reported, as Lord London stared at his display board. London’s lips were dry, and his stomach hurt. That damned ulcer again, and there was little enough he could do about it. New London might be the most renovated city in England, but it still had shortages of certain medicines, and ulcers were considered a low priority. At least by anyone who didn’t have one. He winced as he examined the map.

He’d been outmanoeuvred, he realised. Haldoran had deliberately tempted him by sacrificing Tomlin’s men. Then two other forces had struck, shattering his main attack. Worse, one of the forces was using some new weapon that McAndrew was convinced were salvaged Dalek guns. They had greater range than any automatic weapon, and any kind of a hit was lethal. His men, demoralised, were in full retreat. Haldoran’s soldiers pressed forward, heading slowly but implacably towards London.

‘I can see that,’ London snarled. ‘We need to be able to wipe out those enemy with the new guns. Isn’t there any way to get at them?’

‘With the weaponry at our disposal?’ Durgan asked. ‘Not a chance. We don’t have tanks, or field guns, or bazookas or –’

‘I get the picture, you imbecile!’ London snarled. The man was a jackass, braying on and on. He needed time to think. There had to be some way to strike back at Haldoran’s troops, to regain the initiative in this battle. But how?

Broadhurst looked up from his tactical table. 'We're estimating two hours before they reach the outer walls,' he reported. 'There's already panic in the city. Rumours are flying about their new weapons, and there's already call for surrender.'

'Surrender?' London glared at his underling. 'Surrender is not an option. Haldoran isn't likely to grant any of us terms. The man's a sadist, and he's got a long memory and a lousy temper. If we try and surrender, we're all of us in here dead men. And our families, too – if they're lucky. We fight on, no matter what. It's better than the alternative.'

'We can't win,' Durgan complained, pale.

'Then we lose, but we lose on our feet, our guns in our hands,' London told him coldly. 'We won't be led to our own executions.' He glared at the men about him. 'I don't want to hear any more defeatist talk. There's a way to win this – them *must* be. I'm not going to let everything I've struggled for fall apart because of the actions of one monster. We fight on!'

The men all nodded, bending back to their tasks. They weren't inspired, but at least they were willing to act as if they were. London winced at the pain in his stomach, and tuned back to the operations board. It might be a good idea to start thinking up some plan of retreat. . . Two of his sons were still in London, as well as Donna. She might be a terrible disappointment to him, but she was still his flesh and blood. He'd have to see about saving them and their families – as well as his own skin. If they could just get out before Haldoran's men encircled the walls and made escape impossible. . .

Would this nightmare never end? Donna was breathing raggedly, her vision blurring slightly from the panic that had seized her. She was going where she had sincerely prayed she'd never have to step again – into Haldoran's inner lair. The memories of all the disgusting things he'd ever done to her tried to overwhelm her, but she struggled to fight them off. It wouldn't be the same this time. It wouldn't! The Doctor had promised her, and she *had* to believe he would keep his word.

Besides, this was no longer simply her own life and dignity she was concerned with. If Haldoran had more of those Dalek guns, then London and her entire family were doomed. Despite everything, she *had* to be strong. Even if it killed her.

David rapped on the door, and then entered, saluting. The Doctor touched her elbow, and she almost shrieked. But she forced her feet to carry her inside the door.

*He* was there, along with other people she couldn't even focus on. All her attention was on Haldoran's back, as he crouched over the map table, gloating. The Doctor tapped her arm, and then gestured subtly. She followed his

gaze, and saw a stack of crates against the wall. The Dalek weapons – it had to be. She felt a surge of hope that died the second Haldoran looked around.

‘Guard detail,’ David said crisply. ‘The captain thought you’d want to see this intruder yourself.’

‘Yes,’ Haldoran said, eagerness in his eyes, and a slight smile on his lips. ‘Yes, indeed I would.’ He moved across the room towards her, and reached up to grip her chin. ‘Donna, darling, it’s been so long... You’ve no idea how glad I am to see you.’

‘What’s the matter?’ she gasped, wincing at his touch. ‘Couldn’t find some other helpless woman to torture?’

‘There are plenty of other women,’ Haldoran answered. ‘But none as... interesting as you. Believe it or not, I’ve missed you. It’s so good having you back. I’m sure I can think of something special to celebrate tonight. After my men have taken New London and murdered your family, of course.’

Donna wished her mouth wasn’t so dry. She really wanted to spit in his face. She knew that the Doctor had to be up to something, but she couldn’t spare her attention. She was locked once more into this confrontation with this monster, and despite everything, it was all-consuming. He was dominating her again, just as he always had. Making her quake as he dreamed up new ways to humiliate and hurt her. Hell was in session anew.

No! She was no longer that naive young girl he’d taken and abused. She was now a knight, a warrior in her own right. She’d faced danger and death before without this bowel-churning fear. She wouldn’t allow him to intimidate and conquer her again. This time she was stronger. She could face him down, no matter what he threatened. He was not as strong as he thought he was.

Haldoran bent and gave her a kiss on the lips, which stunned her in a different way. It was unlike him to make even a single pleasant gesture. Then she yelped as he viciously bit her lower lip, drawing blood. He backed off, smiling, licking her blood from his lips. ‘Just a taste of what’s to come,’ he promised her. Then he pulled out a pistol and whipped around, holding the gun to the Doctor’s head. The Doctor had been edging towards the cases of Dalek guns, and was now caught in mid-step.

‘I think not,’ Haldoran purred, his finger tight on the trigger. ‘I know all of my guards, and you two aren’t right.’ Another guard had moved in to disarm David, who stood silently. Did you think I’d be so distracted by the sight of my ex-wife that I wouldn’t think straight?’

‘Actually, yes,’ the Doctor admitted. ‘It was quite a touching reunion.’

Haldoran inclined his head slightly ‘It’s a shame you won’t live to see the rest of it. It’s going to be quite fun.’ His hand lashed out, clubbing the side of the Doctor’s head with his pistol. The Doctor gave a strangled cry, collapsing in pain to the floor. There was blood in his curly hair, and he reached up to

touch the place where it hurt. Haldoran laughed at what he had done. He aimed the revolver at the Doctor and pulled back on the trigger.

## Death — and Worse

Donna ignored the pain and taste of blood in her mouth. Seeing the Doctor in trouble, she threw off the handcuffs, and reached for the gun she'd secreted down the back of her tunic. Before she could get to it, the door to the war office opened again.

Haldoran glanced around, distracted for a moment, and he frowned, his finger loosening on the trigger. A dishevelled older man stormed in, his own gun drawn. It took Donna a moment to recognise Tomlin. Her ex-husband's favourite was wild-eyed and furious.

'Traitor!' he screamed. 'You betrayed me!' The gun came up, but Haldoran was faster. He shot once, the sound echoing around the room loudly. Tomlin gasped, glanced down at the hole in his chest, and then crumpled to the floor, leaking blood.

'If you're going to shoot,' Haldoran snarled at the corpse, 'then shoot. Don't talk.'

'Good advice,' Donna murmured. Coldly, she aimed her gun and fired.

The top of Haldoran's head exploded, and his body was hurled back to collapse across his map table. Bloody detritus littered the floor and one wall. Two of the guards started to move, but Donna covered them swiftly.

'I'm in a seriously bad mood,' she growled. 'Don't tempt me.'

They didn't. David collected their guns, and shoved them to one side. Now that it was over, Donna felt weakness wash over her, but she refused to give in to it. It was mixed with elation as she stared down at the body of her tormentor. 'That was much too fast,' she whispered. 'He didn't suffer enough.'

'Really,' the Doctor murmured, sadly. 'He won't hurt you or anyone else again.'

'I know,' Donna sighed. 'But I *owed* him —'

'I don't want to listen to you,' said the Doctor simply, turning from her. 'Now...'. Immediately, his attention was somewhere else. He removed his sonic screwdriver from his pocket and aimed it at the cases lined by the wall. A small amount of fiddling with its controls brought a smile to his face. 'That should do it. I've overloaded their power packs. The whole lot will explode

in about thirty seconds.’ He looked at them all. ‘I think we’d better say our goodbyes quickly.’

David hurried to the door, gesturing to the two guards and the other three shocked men in the room. ‘Time to run for your lives,’ he advised them.

‘And get everyone else out, too,’ the Doctor advised. ‘It’s going to be quite spectacular.’

Donna grabbed his arm and almost dragged him through the door. Together they sprinted down the corridor, running for the courtyard.

‘Bomb!’ the Doctor screamed at the top of his lungs. ‘Everybody out!’

Panicked people followed the general rush for safety, and the place emptied quickly. Donna was gasping for breath as they halted in the courtyard. Refugees streamed about them and then the ground shook. Part of the roof erupted and the wall of sound slammed her to the ground. Sharp pieces of debris and stone rained down on her, drawing blood and bruising her. She forced her mind to ignore the pain, feeling only relief.

The weapons were destroyed, and Haldoran was dead. Her family had to be safe from his insane ambitions now. Relief flooded through her at the sudden sense of closure she felt.

Until there was the sound of weapons being levelled at her. She looked up from where she lay on the ground, beside the Doctor and David. They were surrounded by armed men, rifles pointed down at them. A youngish man she knew stepped forward and looked mildly down at them.

‘Well,’ Barlow said, ‘it looks like you held a party and forgot to invite me. How very rude of you.’

Susan sat alone in her cell, concentrating hard. The Daleks had finished their interrogation of her, and had transferred her to this solitary room. They might simply leave her here to die, or come for her with further questions. There was no way of knowing. She didn’t know whether or not they believed her story that the humans were on their way to destroy the installation, but it hardly mattered.

Her one advantage was that the Daleks had arrogantly assumed that she was merely human when they had thrown her into this room. It wasn’t really a cell, because the Daleks had little need for one in this facility. It was simply a room not being used for any other purpose right now. And that meant that there was a lock on *both* sides of the door. It was meant to be operated only by a Dalek, of course, and no human being would be able to subvert it.

But she wasn’t human.

Her mind having calmed again, Susan rose to her feet and crossed to the door. The lock was about three and a half feet from the floor. It was a small panel, about eight inches on either side, with a depression for a Dalek pad.

There was no way for her to manipulate that, since a Dalek would simply place its pad against the door, extend its sensor and make contact with the lock via its onboard computer. But there was a way around it. She took off her Peace Officer pin once again – it was amazing how useful something supposedly ornamental could be – and used it to take off the panel face.

Beneath the plate were the logic circuits. Examining them carefully, she used the point of the pin to tap them, getting them to register. They responded quickly, and she smiled. All that she had to do now was to work out the logic codes, and the door would open.

And, with luck, there wouldn't be a Dalek guard on the other side. . .

Refusing to be pessimistic, she set to work.

The Master guided his TARDIS back to DA-17 once more. What had gone wrong? Everything should have been working perfectly, and now it seemed as though there was a glitch in his carefully laid schemes. If he didn't know better, he'd swear that the Doctor had done something to sabotage his plans. But the guards had been adamant that the Doctor had been taken as he'd tried to penetrate the complex, before even he could have attempted anything.

The Doctor. . . and with a new face. He'd used up another of his lives, obviously. Probably through some foolish good deed or other. Despite his best efforts, he had never been able to convince the Doctor of the pointlessness of attempting to do good in a chaotic universe. The only important thing was power, which he understood perfectly, and the Doctor refused to grasp. Survival of the fittest – the weak being led by the strong. That was the way of life, and the way things inevitably had to be. The Doctor struggled against the natural order of things, his foolish head filled with notions such as compassion, love and pity.

Idiot.

It was unlikely, though, that his appearance here was a coincidence. Even if he'd not managed to interfere yet, he was bound to do so before very much longer. And somehow, the Doctor always evaded his traps. It was frustrating in one way, and yet. . . what the Master wanted more than anything from his old friend-turned-foe was for the Doctor to see the Master win and admit for once which of them was superior. Killing him would prove it, but that way the Doctor couldn't acknowledge his defeat. And he *needed* to have the Doctor do just that.

Well, let the fool do what he wanted – he couldn't stop *this* plan that simply. The Doctor was in Castle Haldoran, without his TARDIS, and therefore an hour from DA-17 by human transport. The Master was arriving now. If the entry codes had been broken, he could simply take what he'd come for and leave. If not, he still had at least an hour to break them, and it shouldn't take

that long. Either way, he'd have his weapon and be off this stinking planet before the Doctor could possibly arrive to interfere.

Assuming, of course, that Downs hadn't managed to torture and kill the Doctor. It was an appealing thought but, frankly, rather unlikely. The Doctor could think rings around a cretin like that in his sleep. The most the Master was expecting was for Downs to delay the Doctor, and perhaps kill one or two of the human assistants the Doctor always seemed to pick up like stray dogs.

With a sigh, his TARDIS landed in the anteroom of the Dalek installation, and he reflected irritably on the Dalek scrambling-technology operating inside the Artefact that prevented his TARDIS from landing inside. He used his scanner to check the area outside, but there was nobody there. His eyebrow rose when he saw that the doors were open. The programme was complete, then, and access to the weapon was his! Eagerly, he left his craft, locking it carefully behind him, and proceeded through the main door.

And stopped immediately. From either side of the door, Daleks trained their guns on him. He didn't know where they were from or how they had come to be here, but they were not likely to be in good humour.

'Ah, there you are,' he improvised, with a small bow. 'Good, I'm glad to see that you're on the alert. Take me to your control centre immediately.'

'Daleks do not take orders from humans,' the one on the left stated.

'I'm not a human,' the Master explained patiently. 'I have been working for the Daleks now for some time. I must check in with your commander to receive an update on my orders.' He gestured towards his pocket. 'I have confirmation for what I say here. Don't be alarmed while I retrieve it.'

'Proceed,' the Dalek agreed. It did not, however, lower its gun-stick.

The Master reached into his coat. His fingers brushed his TCE, and then moved to a small computer disk which he brought out slowly. 'These are my credentials from the Dalek Prime,' he explained. 'If you check them you will see that I am telling the truth.'

The Dalek considered. It was most likely calling for orders from higher up, unable to make decisions like this on its own. After a moment, it said, 'You will go before me. Your information will be investigated.'

'Of course,' the Master agreed. He slipped the disk back into his pocket and palmed his TCE. 'As you command.' He started down the corridor. One Dalek fell in behind him, the other remaining on duty to guard against further intruders. The Master walked swiftly, scanning the corridor and side corridors as he went. There didn't seem to be many Daleks about, which was to the good. While his credentials were reasonably good, he could hardly chance their being checked. If these Daleks had access to Skaro Central, they'd be sure to read that the Master had failed the Daleks on his last mission, and they had only one punishment for failure.

As soon as he was alone with his escort, therefore, the Master spun around, and applied his TCE to the dome of the Dalek. Triggering it sent powerful energies tearing through the Dalek. It didn't even have sufficient time to fire at him as its computers and the living thing inside the shell were both attacked and compressed by the Master's weapon.

Brushing the six-inch inert Dalek into a side room, the Master followed it in. There was a small computer panel there, and he smiled. Just what he needed. A little hacking, and he'd discover just where in this complex the weapon he was after was stored. . .

Lord London stared at his map board again, his stomach churning worse than before. He'd managed to take a little milk, but it had done him no good. The claws were starting to move into place about New London now, and it would be only a matter of an hour or so before his escape route was cut off completely. If he stayed here to fight, he was bound to be captured, tortured and then executed. Haldoran would never allow either him or his immediate family to live. They would only be a seed for rebellion.

He'd arranged for his sons' families to get to runabouts that would take them to safety. All that was left now was himself and Donna – and he was unable to locate her anywhere. He was becoming more and more certain that she'd disobeyed his strict instructions once more and gone off somewhere with this Doctor she'd found. Damn the girl!

Well, that was her problem now. He'd done all he could for her, despite her treatment of him and his honour. She'd shamed him publicly, ruined his plans for any kind of peace with Haldoran, and disobeyed him constantly. Perhaps it was time she paid for her mistakes, instead of his sheltering her once again from the consequences of her actions.

He turned to McAndrew, Durgan and Broadhurst. 'I'm leaving now,' he informed them. 'I have to get out of the city before Haldoran's men arrive. You may do as you wish, but I would strongly advise against waiting for the inevitable.'

Broadhurst scowled. 'You've changed your tune. You're fleeing New London without even putting up a token defence?' he growled.

'What defence is there?' London asked wearily. 'They've wrecked most of our army. All we can do now is to escape.'

'We'll never be able to get our families out before they arrive,' Durgan whined. 'There isn't time for that. They'll be trapped here and killed.'

'You should have planned for it,' London informed him coldly 'I did.'

'So did I,' McAndrew added, smiling slightly. He moved, and London was abruptly aware of something in the man's hand a second before McAndrew used the knife to slice through his throat. . .

\* \* \*

McAndrew watched as London gasped, choking on his own blood, clutching at his half-severed neck as if to somehow stop the spray. Specks dotted McAndrew's jacket and face, but he ignored them and the near-dead man, turning to look at his shocked comrades.

'We now have something to offer for our lives,' he explained. 'Proof positive that London is defeated and dead.' He kicked the former Lord as he collapsed, choking and dying, to the floor. 'This carcass can buy us our lives and our freedom.'

Durgan looked ready to faint any second; the man was a weak fool. But Broadhurst nodded his understanding. He, at least, seemed to appreciate necessity.

'I think we'd better contact Haldoran,' Broadhurst said slowly. 'And negotiate our surrender.'

Nodding, McAndrew moved towards the communication equipment. Something could yet be salvaged from their defeat. . .

It seemed as if her torture was never going to end. Donna stared up at Barlow's astonishingly impassive face as he regarded her, David and the Doctor. His men had them surrounded, and there was no way they could fight their way free. Barlow held out his hand and she meekly turned over her pistol.

'I have a strange suspicion that I'm looking at the remains of the weapons I returned to collect,' he commented.

'Quite correct,' the Doctor agreed, sitting up.

'Ah.' Barlow nodded slightly. 'I was looking forward to using them, too. Well, can any of you think of a good reason why I shouldn't have you executed here and now?'

'Yes,' said Donna and the Doctor at precisely the same moment.

Barlow raised an eyebrow. 'Well, it looks as though I may have been a trifle hasty.' His eyes met Donna's. 'Perhaps we'd better let ladies go first.'

'Because there's no point to it,' she answered. 'Haldoran's dead. I blew what few brains he had out.'

That got some reaction at last from the soldier. Not grief, certainly, and not exactly relief. Donna couldn't recall Barlow very well. He'd been considered a good soldier, but he'd never indulged in the popular pastime of torturing her that Downs and Portney had so enjoyed. He'd been considered a trifle odd. All she could remember of him was that he had a wife and a couple of children, and that he was a brutally efficient warrior. Complicated emotions seemed at play within him right now.

'Interesting news,' he finally decided. 'But that's not an argument against shooting you. Quite the reverse, if anything. You've just confessed to murder.'

‘Mercy killing,’ Donna corrected. ‘But I’m the one responsible, not the Doctor or David. Kill me if you like – to be honest, I think it would be a good trade. I dispose of Haldoran and Downs, and you put me out of my misery.’

‘Downs as well?’ Barlow was back to his faintly mocking attitude. ‘My, you have been a busy girl. Though I have to confess you show good taste in selecting your victims.’ He studied the Doctor. ‘And what’s your reason why I shouldn’t execute you?’

‘Daleks,’ said the Doctor simply.

‘Daleks?’ Barlow laughed. ‘There are no Daleks! It’s my men, armed with Dalek guns I swear, people are really paranoid about those metal monsters. Take it from me, they’re dead.’

‘Not necessarily,’ the Doctor answered. ‘The man you know as Estro has been subverting power from your nuclear reactor and feeding it into DA-17.’

Barlow’s eyes lit up. ‘Ah. So that’s where he’s been getting the guns from.’

‘No it isn’t,’ the Doctor snapped. ‘He stole the guns while he was working for the Daleks. I doubt they’re very happy about that, especially since he had to destroy one of their hatcheries to do it. He’s after DA-17 because he believes there’s a weapon within that will make your new weapons seem like peashooters.’

That perked up Barlow’s interest. ‘And is there?’ he asked.

‘How should I know?’ the Doctor retorted. ‘I was on my way to investigate it when I was brought here, hit about the head and threatened with death several times over. If you’ll be kind enough to spare our lives, I intend to go there immediately to check on the place.’

David gave a tight smile. ‘Estro lost contact with his men there,’ he added. ‘Something’s gone wrong.’

Barlow nodded. ‘And what makes you think it’s Daleks?’ he asked.

‘Every instinct in my body,’ the Doctor answered. ‘And I have a lot of those. It doesn’t seem to matter how often I destroy the Daleks, they always come back. And Estro is arrogant enough to have reactivated them without knowing it.’ He stared earnestly at Barlow. ‘Trust me, man – if the Daleks *have* revived, this little war you’re waging for control of Britain is going to become utterly insignificant.’

‘My father fought the Daleks, Doctor,’ Barlow said grimly. ‘He impressed on me how dangerous and evil they are. If you’re right in your belief, I’m inclined to agree with you that we should stop our own war and attack them. But I’ll need proof.’

‘The only place you’ll get that is DA-17,’ the Doctor pointed out.

‘Fair enough,’ Barlow agreed.

‘And the first thing you need to do,’ the Doctor said, ‘is to cut off the power that’s going to the site. The Daleks are using it for their own purposes.’

'Agreed.' Barlow turned to one of his men, and sent him off after Murdock with firm instructions to cut the power flow to DA-17. He then offered a hand to Donna. 'As far as I'm concerned, you all have amnesty for now. I may extend it later.'

Taking his offer of help, Donna stood up. 'Do I get my gun back?' she asked.

He grinned. 'If we see any Daleks, I'll arm you myself,' he promised. 'Until then. . . well, just be satisfied with today's kills, OK?'

She didn't know how to take him. He was almost impossible to read, and even harder to understand. 'We're going to need transport,' she pointed out.

'That I can arrange,' Barlow answered. 'But first, we have to do some clearing out.' He turned to one of Haldoran's men, who had been standing around looking scared and confused. 'I want all of your officers out here immediately,' he announced. 'And any of Haldoran's family you find. Move.' The man hesitated, saluted, and then headed at a trot for the intact portions of the castle. Barlow nodded to two of his men. 'Go with him. If anyone causes trouble, shoot them.'

'A little ruthless, aren't we?' the Doctor asked mildly.

'If we're going off to fight Daleks,' Barlow informed him coldly, 'I'm not leaving anyone here I can't trust. I don't want to have to fight another battle when I return.'

Donna gave him a disgusted look. 'So you're seizing power now Haldoran's dead?' she asked contemptuously.

'Someone has to do it,' he replied. 'And, frankly, I can't think of a better man for the job. Unlike most of your ex-husband's men, I'm not a sadist or a thief. But neither am I stupid. We move from here just as soon as I'm certain I can come back if I want to.'

'If you want to?' Donna scowled. 'And what's that supposed to mean?'

'It means that I might be moving into your father's old suite when we're done,' he answered. 'New London is just about ready to fall.'

'Is there *anywhere* you're not about to attack?' the Doctor asked distastefully.

'I'm doing what I must, Doctor,' Barlow answered calmly. 'Britain needs a firm hand and a guiding vision right now Haldoran and London are – were, whatever – both fools. I'm not. There's a power vacuum right now, and I intend to fill it.'

'If the Daleks don't beat you to it,' the Doctor muttered.

'In case you'd forgotten,' Donna said furiously, 'I happen to be Lord London's daughter. You're talking about deposing my father and murdering him.'

'Yes,' Barlow agreed. 'I'm sorry if you become a widow and an orphan in one day, but sometimes the world doesn't work the way we want it to.'

‘Did anyone ever tell you you’re a cold-blooded, heartless bastard?’ she demanded.

‘Everyone,’ he replied with a faint smile. ‘It’s not news.’ He turned to his aide. ‘Get through to Craddock,’ he ordered. ‘Tell him that Haldoran and Downs are both dead, and I’ve assumed command here. Tell him to press home the attack on New London – and that if there are any overtures for surrender to accept them. There’s no need for any further killing.’ The aide saluted and left.

‘How noble of you,’ Donna sneered.

‘We don’t need to be fighting on more than two fronts,’ Barlow explained. He turned to another man. ‘Get the runabouts ready for departure. Ten men, plus the four of us here.’ He glanced at Donna. ‘Unless you’d rather stay behind?’ he suggested.

‘I’m coming,’ she said, daring him to deny her.

‘I thought you might.’ Barlow glanced around as people started moving out of the castle and into the courtyard. ‘Get them together,’ he ordered one of his men. ‘I’ll talk to them when they’re ready.’ His eyes narrowed as he caught sight of someone he recognised. ‘Except *her*. Have her brought to me right now.’

Donna stiffened as she saw who it was he’d indicated. It was her cousin, Brittany, looking pale and panicky as ever. Anger and hurt began to bubble up inside of her again. It might have been several years since she’d been betrayed by Brittany, but Donna knew that none of her anger had died down.

A soldier hurried her over. Brittany was distracted, and this allowed Donna to slip behind the Doctor and David without being seen. Both of them must have seen the pain in her eyes because they closed ranks without comment.

‘Barlow!’ Brittany said, her dark hair dishevelled. She’d obviously been sleeping not too long before. She had only a robe on over a long nightdress. ‘What’s happened? I heard this terrible explosion, and I was coming out to see what was going on when your men hurried me out.’

‘If you’ll let me get a word in edgeways,’ Barlow said drily, ‘I’ll be happy to explain. First of all, allow me to offer you my condolences. Your husband, sadly, is dead.’

Brittany paled, and then gave a brittle laugh. ‘What is this, a coup?’

‘Of sorts,’ Barlow admitted. ‘But I didn’t begin it. Your husband was dead by the time I arrived. One of his old girlfriends, I believe.’

‘The stupid bastard deserved it,’ Brittany spat. Then she blinked rapidly, realising what this meant. ‘Then *you’ve* taken his place as the new Lord Haldoran?’

‘Something like that,’ Barlow agreed. ‘Though I’m none too fond of the title. I’m not quite as egotistical as your late, and apparently very unlamented,

husband.'

Brittany snorted. 'As if I'd mourn his passing! All I was to him was a breeding cow.' Her eyes narrowed. 'Does that mean you aim to... remove his sons?'

'It might be politically wise,' Barlow said practically.

Donna felt bile rising up inside her.

'I can show you where they are,' Brittany offered. 'I heard that you're a widower now, and if I'm a widow... Well, marrying the niece of Lord London *would* improve your political standing.'

Donna was even more disgusted than she had been before. She started to move around the Doctor's back, but Barlow waved her to stop.

'Your motherly devotion is as well developed as your love for your husband,' he said drily 'Fortunately for your... offspring, I'm not an overly bloodthirsty man.' He stared into her eyes. 'They deserve pity for having two such parents, not murdering. As for your other kind offer, of marriage for political gains... Well, you're right: my claim to power would be strengthened by marrying into the London family.' Brittany had looked worried at first, but now brightened. 'However, you're not the only prospect. I believe you know your cousin?' He gestured at Donna.

Brittany whirled around, her eyes wide and panic-stricken. She tried to pull her tattered dignity together, but that was beyond her right now.

Another payback. 'Hello, Brittany,' Donna said cheerfully. 'Remember me? It's so good to see you again.' She whipped her fist out, punching her cousin hard on the jaw. With a scream, Brittany collapsed backward, arms and legs flailing. Donna rubbed her hurting fist, but it had been worth the pain. She glared down at where Brittany lay in the mud of the courtyard, sobbing.

Barlow actually looked amused as he gestured to the soldier. 'Find somewhere to lock her away,' he instructed. 'And keep her away from her children. I'd really like them to survive the night.' He turned to Donna. 'Unless you'd like a punching bag?' he suggested.

Donna's face was flushed. 'I'm finished.'

'Good,' the Doctor interrupted, irritation in his voice. 'I'm glad that at least one person has come to their senses.' Donna could see the disappointment in his face as he regarded her for a moment. Then he turned back to Barlow. 'Now can we get on with the important matters? The Daleks could be planning to overrun Earth while the two of you enjoy yourselves.'

'Patience, Doctor,' Barlow answered. 'As soon as everyone's here, I'll speak to them. They can either agree to join my side or be imprisoned. Then we can be on our way.'

'About time,' the Doctor muttered impatiently. 'Just keep the speeches short, *please!*'

\* \* \*

Susan smiled to herself as she finished working on the lock. It really hadn't been as difficult as she'd feared. Dalek logic was simple once you got the hang of it. She tapped in the code, and hesitated before she made the final entry. She'd been assuming that the Daleks had better things to do with themselves than to guard one weak, unarmed prisoner, but what if she was wrong? There might be a Dalek on the other side of the door. . .

In which case, it would either try to kill her for attempting to escape, or simply relock the door. If it chose the latter, it wouldn't hurt to have a plan. . .

She went back into the circuit boards, and set up a power drain. To relock the door, the Dalek would have to interface with the lock. If it attempted that after her little act of sabotage, it would get a power surge down its probe that would short out its internal computers. *That* would fix it.

If it tried to kill her, of course. . .

Ignoring that possibility, because there was nothing she could do about it, she finished the code to unseal her prison door. It hissed upward, and Susan winced as she saw that there was indeed something waiting for her. But it wasn't a Dalek. Instead, it was a humanoid form, and one she recognised with surprise.

It was the guard captain who had captured her. Yet he stared at her without recognition. He started to bring up the machine gun he still held.

'You are a prisoner of the Daleks,' he intoned, in a flat voice. 'You will remain in your cell or die.'

Susan's throat went dry as she stared at the helmet encasing his head.

A Roboman. . .



## Countdown to World's End

Susan had never expected to see Robomen again. They were the living dead – people whose minds had been wiped of all personality and independent action, completely unrecoverable. The only thing that kept their bodies functioning was a small radio receiver in the helmets that they wore. This was a tiny computer that issued Dalek orders to them, and updated directives. Robomen were grotesque creatures, shambling, and totally loyal to the Daleks because they had no other option.

Luckily, this lack of independent thought made them marginally slower than a healthy human being.

Swiftly, Susan punched out with her right hand at the Roboman's stomach. They weren't allowed to feel pain, but even they had to breathe. The blow forced the air from its lungs, as Susan's left hand grabbed the Roboman's weapon and pushed it aside. The creature wheezed for breath. Wincing at the necessity, Susan grabbed at the Roboman's conditioning-helmet, and pulled it free, severing his connection to the Daleks. His eyes glazed over and he collapsed, spasming, to the floor. Susan couldn't help feeling slightly guilty, even though she knew the Daleks had already killed the human being this pitiful shell had once been.

Jerking the gun from the dead man's grasp, Susan moved out into the corridor. Typically, the Daleks had assumed that a single guard was sufficient for a human prisoner. Though there were Daleks constantly being produced, she had seen that this was a fairly large complex. With luck and care, she could avoid running into further trouble.

While she had been held captive in the control room, she had seen and memorised a schematic of the place. It was essentially two parallel corridors, cross-connected several times, with a nest of short side corridors. The control room was centrally located, but she had no intention of heading for it. Her target had to be the weapon the Daleks had developed. The most important thing right now was to prevent them from activating it. And that was located in a short corridor near the entrance to the complex.

Susan hauled the body of the dead Roboman back into her cell, and closed the door from the outside, careful not to trip her own trap. If a Dalek came

along to investigate, it was going to get a nasty shock. . .

Reaching the weapon chamber wouldn't be easy, but she set off determined that nothing would stop her. Cradling the machine gun made her feel better, even though the chances of damaging a Dalek with it were slight. It was some form of reassurance, at the very least.

Craddock halted at the walls of New London, surveying them as the sun began to rise. It had been a long night, and a tiring one, but ultimately a very successful one. London's troops had been chased back to their lair, and they were skulking miserably behind these walls, waiting for the inevitable. Their spirit had been broken, their leaders panicked, and their hopes shattered. Craddock felt good.

He had never learnt to enjoy combat as such, but he did love the aftereffects. The glow of victory was intoxicating, even though it might be a trifle premature. London hadn't fallen yet, and could hold out for a while. But the battle had already really been won. The important thing now was to seize the prize before one of the other Domains scented the carcass and tried to claim some booty of its own.

One of his aides hurried up to him and saluted. 'Sir, there's a delegation from the city to see you. They wish to discuss surrender terms.'

Craddock raised an eyebrow. 'Do they indeed? That's a lot more sensible than I expected Lord London to be.'

The aide cracked a smile. 'I gather he isn't exactly behind this as such. One of the men is carrying his head.'

'Ah. . . ' Craddock understood now. London's men had been even more demoralised than he had expected. While it would be possible to lay siege to London and take it, it would be wasteful of lives and probably destroy a lot of useful buildings and industries. A negotiated surrender was far to be preferred. 'Well,' he said cheerfully, let's not keep them waiting. I don't imagine London's head will smell any better for a delay.' He strode briskly off towards his victory.

Donna glanced at the Doctor, who had been fretting the whole way back to DA-17. It wasn't hard to understand why, if he was correct about the Daleks somehow having been reborn. She'd heard so many stories from so many people about the days Earth was ruled by the Daleks, and every one of them had made her shudder.

The only emotions they knew were rage and hatred, and they despised human beings. Donna could remember Haldoran being gentle with his children, so there was some spark of decency left in the worst of human beings. But the Daleks possessed no such thing – nor did they desire it.

If the Daleks had been resurrected, it would mean unimaginable horror.

She hugged herself as the runabouts sped towards their target. She and the Doctor were with two of Barlow's men. She supposed that they were guards, even though they paid very little attention to either her or the Doctor. Donna tried to sort out her feelings about Barlow. At first he'd seemed little more than another professional killer. Certainly he spoke and acted about life as if it was of little importance to him. Yet, at the same time, he was clearly not the kind of man Haldoran or Downs had been. There was a coldness and a calculated air about the man, but he didn't seem to *enjoy* killing. To him it was simply a necessity, a means to an end. He'd spared Haldoran's children even when Brittany had been willing to sacrifice their lives to further her own ends. Why? They could only end up being trouble for him. Or was he simply trying to give the appearance of mercy, and aimed to murder them later anyway?

What was she to do now? According to Barlow, New London was poised to fall to his and Craddock's combined troops, and the attack was still being pressed despite Haldoran's death. Barlow was the heir presumptive, and Donna didn't know how to take this. Would he be any better than Haldoran had been? He could hardly be worse, but that wasn't a recommendation. What irritated her the most was that there was a small part of her that perversely seemed to like the man, even though he was partially responsible for the raid on London and attempting to overthrow and kill her father. It had all the air of a Greek tragedy about it. And here she was, working with him and the Doctor. It felt... odd. And, once more perversely, almost enjoyable.

The runabout came to a silent halt, and Donna could see that dawn had broken. Faint pink light illuminated the fresh landscape outside. It looked like being a glorious day, the storm having vanished overnight. It didn't seem right. If the Daleks were rising from their graves, there ought to be lightning flashing and thunder rolling, not birds singing and a soft breeze playing.

The Doctor hopped out of the vehicle without a word and started forward. Donna and the two soldiers hurried to fall in behind him. The other runabouts drew up and disgorged their passengers. David and Barlow moved to join them.

'There's some kind of detection system,' the Doctor informed them all. 'The Master – the man you know as Estro – stole it from the Draconians a short time ago. In which case, it'll use infrasonics.' He had his sonic screwdriver in his hand, and made a slight adjustment to it. 'This should set up a counterpulse that will create a null area in the shield for us to walk through.' Then he grinned at last. 'Theoretically!' He marched on without stopping.

'Let's hope you're right, Doctor,' Barlow said. He was carrying what looked like an antique grenade launcher. Donna eyed it with envy, feeling naked without a weapon.

‘Where did you get that?’ she asked. ‘And how much ammo do you have for it?’

‘Museum,’ he answered briefly ‘And ten shells. It’ll blow the hell out of even a Dalek. Ten times if my aim is good. I’ve been told small-arms fire isn’t much use against them.’

‘It doesn’t even irritate them,’ the Doctor informed them. ‘So you’re better off without a gun if you meet them. They may save you for last to kill. This way.’ He moved towards the rise looking down on DA-17. ‘Odd that there’s no sign of guards up here, isn’t it?’

‘You’re neutralising their alarm,’ David pointed out. ‘Why would they be checking?’

‘They had better be,’ Barlow answered gruffly. ‘My men aren’t trained to rely entirely on electronics. There should be foot patrols as well. The Doctor’s right, we should have heard or seen one by now.’

‘Maybe they’ve been taken out,’ Donna suggested, wishing she didn’t have to be the one to voice what they all clearly felt.

‘We’ll soon find out,’ the Doctor announced. ‘Everybody down.’ They all crawled to finish the journey to the edge of the cutting, and they cautiously looked out at DA-17.

Donna shuddered as the Doctor uttered the name they had lived in fear of all their lives: ‘Daleks’.

There were a dozen Daleks moving slowly around the opening to the pit. With them were armed men, all wearing bulky helmets of a style she didn’t recognise.

‘What’s going on here?’ Barlow demanded softly. ‘Those men with the Daleks are ours.’

‘Not any longer,’ the Doctor replied grimly. ‘They’ve undergone robotisation. The Daleks have drained their will and personality and replaced them with mental implants that have turned them into robotic slaves. They’re not your men or anyone’s any longer. They’re no longer human, They’re just machines that walk around and do exactly what the Daleks order, without hesitation or question.’

Donna shuddered at the thought. It was too much like the tales of zombies she’d heard as a teenager, and the idea of being an animated corpse with no knowledge of self, or of needs, scared her. It would be a mercy to kill them.

‘What are the Daleks doing, Doctor?’ David asked, trying to make sense of what they were all seeing.

‘Expanding their perimeter,’ the Doctor explained. ‘See those devices on their backs? These Daleks can’t get too far from a source of broadcast power or they die. We’re lucky that this means the vicinity of the Artefact. But they’ve seized Haldoran’s communications equipment, and they’re converting

it to their own use. If they can get that to mesh with their own equipment, they'll be able to travel as far as the horizon – and, if there are any working satellites still left in orbit, probably further. We've got to stop them now, before they get that operational. If they're stuck down a hole, we might be able to contain them, but if they're on the loose, it could be impossible.'

Barlow nodded his understanding. 'Then our immediate target is that transmitter,' he decided. 'We have to take it out. My job, I think.'

'Good man,' the Doctor said approvingly, his grim expression softening a little. 'But let's get a little more planning done before you do that.' He studied the Daleks below, his face tense. 'It's obvious that this super-weapon of theirs was a trap to lure the Master into providing them with the power they needed to restore their systems. There's obviously some sort of Dalek hatchery in there producing nasty little embryos. And there must be some sort of assembly line producing the casings and computers. Now the organic part is easy enough to obtain, but it's got to be a lot harder for them to build their shells. Where would they be getting the metal from?'

'Stockpiled, maybe?' David suggested. 'DA-17 was one of their early constructions when they came to Earth, so they could have built up quite a reserve down there.'

'I'm not so sure of that,' the Doctor answered. 'They really didn't have the time or the resources during the invasion to mine and stock enough metals.'

Barlow had been examining his map, and he grunted, and pointed to the drawing. 'The pit was built close to an abandoned mine, Doctor,' he said. 'It was shut down because raw ore wasn't yielding much metal – using human technology.'

The Doctor grinned. 'But Dalek technology is much more sophisticated and efficient. That could be it exactly.' He studied the map, and gestured to a spot close to where they were. 'Is this old entrance still accessible, do you think?'

Barlow shrugged. 'I couldn't say. But it *might* be a back door to that installation.'

'Which is precisely what we need right now,' the Doctor agreed. 'We'll have to work on the assumption that it is, and check it out. If we can get behind the Daleks, I'm sure there's something I'll be able to do to mess up their plans.'

'All right, Doctor,' Barlow agreed. 'I presume you'd like us to wait before we strike the Daleks here.'

'I'd appreciate that,' the Doctor agreed. 'The ones below in the complex are bound to try to strike back when you attack. It might give us the chance we need.'

Barlow nodded, but gestured at the work in progress. 'Very well, Doctor. But we can't wait too long. If the Daleks get that power broadcaster up and running, they'll be free, and I can't chance that.'

'Understood.' The Doctor favoured him with a smile. 'Good luck, Barlow.' He looked at David and Donna. 'I can't ask either of you to accompany me.'

'My wife's down there,' David said simply. 'I'm not deserting her.'

'And I was planning on taking a stroll that way anyway,' Donna answered. Then she held her hand out to Barlow.

He glanced at it, and then at her. 'Am I supposed to kiss it, or what?'

'There's another portion of my anatomy you can kiss,' she snapped. 'You promised me weapons if there turned out to be Daleks. And there are.'

Barlow grinned. 'I'd gladly give you a gun, but, as the Doctor pointed out, they're not much use against Daleks.'

'That grenade launcher would be.'

He looked surprised. 'Sorry, but I need it here.' Then his face softened. He unfastened a thin belt he wore, which had a pouch attached to it. 'The best I can do,' he told her. 'Hand grenades. Only three, but... ' He shrugged.

Donna nodded, and took the pouch. 'Better than none,' she agreed. 'Thanks, Barlow. If we survive this, I owe you one.'

He smiled again. 'If we don't, you'll still owe me one. Only it'll be a bit harder to collect. Get out of here before I have to attack those Daleks.'

Donna fell in behind the Doctor and David as they moved back down the hill. They'd have to skirt around to find the entrance to the old mine. After that, who could guess how long it would take to find their way through the workings to where the Daleks had their shaft. *If* the Doctor's guess was correct. For all they knew, the Daleks might be doing something entirely different.

'Is this a hopeless quest?' she demanded.

'There's always hope,' the Doctor assured her. 'After all, haven't you just found another man who kept his promise to you?'

Donna glanced down at the pouch she wore. 'Yes, I suppose I did.' For some reason, that made her feel better. 'Wow. The two men in the universe who keep their promises, and I've met both of them. Lucky me.'

'Three,' the Doctor said, indicating David. 'He promised to stick with my granddaughter for better or worse, and he's doing it.' David looked slightly uncomfortable at this, but said nothing.

'Three,' Donna said. 'My cup runneth over. Where were any of you when I had to get married?'

'Oh, I was out saving the universe,' the Doctor answered with a grin. 'Probably.'

David just smiled faintly.

'The last time I saw Susan,' he began, 'she suggested getting a divorce to resolve our age problem, and I got angry with her. What if I never get the chance to say I'm over it, that I'm not mad any more?'

The Doctor laid a hand on his arm. 'I'm sure she knows that.'

'Probably,' David answered. 'But I'd like her to hear it from me anyway.'

Smiling, the Doctor nodded his understanding, and continued to lead the way through the trees. His sonic screwdriver kept up a tinny hum, in case the Daleks were using the perimeter alarms.

What are our chances? Donna wondered. Then she decided she really didn't want to know. The odds had to be in favour of their all dying in this insane attempt. But what else could they do? The Daleks couldn't be allowed to live. This was their only chance of stopping them. The Doctor was right – compared with this menace, the feuding between the Domains was pointless and petty. Right now, they were all humans – and two aliens – against the Daleks.

They could only pray it would be enough.

It had taken her longer than she'd hoped, but Susan finally reached the corridor where the Daleks' weapon was stored. She'd managed to duck and hide from every passing Dalek or Roboman, though she'd had a couple of narrow escapes. And, as far as she could tell, the Daleks weren't yet aware that she'd escaped from her makeshift cell.

The question was – now what? There was bound to be at least one Dalek, and most likely more, with the weapon – to operate it, if not to guard it – and all she was armed with was a machine gun and her wits. Would that be sufficient to stop them?

She reached the lock outside the laboratory and checked its readout carefully. Thank goodness computers were all basically binary! She couldn't read the Dalek language as such, but she could decipher that there were two Daleks inside the room. And that was a definite problem. *Maybe* she could defeat one Dalek, but she didn't have a chance of finishing off two before one of them managed to kill her. What she needed was a better weapon.

Or a distraction. . .

She moved to the next door in the corridor. This led simply to a storage area of some kind, and there were no Daleks inside it now. Opening the door, she checked out the room. It was filled with electronic and chemical supplies. If only she had the time, she could try to build a bomb or something. But the Daleks had claimed the weapon would be operational in five units of time. She wasn't sure how long that would be, which meant that she couldn't take the time for anything elaborate. Opposite this room was a second storage area. She keyed that door open and left it while she went back to the first storage room. Instead of anything complicated, she simply mixed up a flammable bunch of chemicals, spread them about the room and then fired a single shot into them.

Flames whooshed about the room so fast she was almost caught in the blast. She dived backward, dosing the door to contain the fire. Alarms started whooping as she dived through the door opposite that she had left open. Then she waited.

The door to the laboratory opened, and one of the Daleks within emerged. It glided around to survey the problem in the storage room, hesitating in the doorway. Susan rushed forward, and slammed as hard as she could into the unsuspecting Dalek. Unable to stop itself, it shot forward, into the blaze. Susan hit the control to close the door before it could turn around, and then shattered the lock with her rifle butt.

She had no idea whether or not that would finish the Dalek, but that wasn't what was important right now. She dived through the doorway of the laboratory, her weapon ready. 'Dalek!' she yelled.

The remaining Dalek spun around, its eyestalk fractionally faster than the rest of its body. Susan fired a short burst, and shattered the lens of its eye. She dived to one side as the Dalek opened fire.

'Cannot see!' the Dalek howled, its gun blazing in all directions. 'Intruder alert! Exterminate!'

Susan managed to get close enough to the Dalek to grapple with it. Blinded, it could do nothing but struggle and continue firing randomly. With luck, Susan thought, it might even damage its own equipment and save her the bother. But she couldn't work with it firing constantly. Gritting her teeth, she rolled the Dalek towards the door, picking up speed, and then hurled it against the far wall. It crashed with a metallic splintering sound, and Susan hoped it had broken some vital systems. Then she keyed the door closed and shattered the lock. That wouldn't keep the Daleks out for ever, but it might be long enough for her to disarm and destroy the device. After that, of course, they would undoubtedly kill her. But she'd worry about that when the time came. If she could save New London, dying might well be worth it.

It wasn't hard to locate the weapon, since it was the only operational machine in the laboratory. It was smaller than she had expected, a tube about eighteen inches tall and six across. It was wired into a timing device that was counting down. It was shaped like a human clock, and marked off in increments. If she assumed that each mark represented one time unit, then there was about one quarter unit left.

How much time could she have?

The weapon was semi-transparent, and she could see small lights pulsing within the device. It was connected to the timer through about a dozen links. Should she simply disconnect each of them? Or had the Daleks planned for that? The weapon was, after all, basically a trap for the unwary. On the other hand, the Daleks couldn't have anticipated that any human would get quite

this far into their complex.

After agonising for a few moments, she saw that the timer was crawling its way to zero rather too quickly. Perhaps the best thing would be to simply destroy the device. She considered the idea. But would gunfire do it any damage? Or would bullets simply ricochet off and injure her?

Finally, she simply acted on instinct. With the butt of the machine gun, she shattered the connections that held the device to the timer. Then she held her breath, waiting to see what would happen.

The timer continued to tick its way down, uninterrupted. But the lights in the weapon itself died out. Susan jerked the device free of the framework, and clutched it to her chest. All she had to do now was to destroy it. . .

There was a sound at the door as it hissed open. Susan was astonished that the Daleks had managed to break through so quickly. Her weapon wouldn't be of much use against a Dalek if she couldn't hit its lens, but she brought the gun up just in case. Maybe the Daleks would fire at her and destroy the device. . .

But it wasn't a Dalek that stepped through the doorway, nor was it a Roboman. Instead, smiling cheerfully, it was the bearded man who had started all this. He held a gun of his own, and before Susan could pull the trigger, he fired first.

Pain lanced through her body as the bullet tore across her hand. She dropped the gun, unable to clench her fist any longer, and cried out in pain. Blood welled up, following the fire of agony.

'My apologies,' the man said politely, 'but I do believe you were attempting to destroy the Daleks' matter transmuter, and I simply can't allow that.' As Susan collapsed to the floor, he strode across the room and tore the Dalek device from her faltering fingers. 'I am the Master. Thank you, my dear, you've been such a help.'



# 13

## Zero Hour

Susan stared at the Master in pain and shock. 'Do you have any idea what you're doing?' she asked him.

'I have every idea of what I'm doing,' he replied cheerfully. He raised the transmuter slightly. 'With this device, I'm going to rule as many worlds as I care to.'

It was almost impossible to believe his self-centredness. 'You've set the Daleks loose on Earth again, all to steal *that*?'

The Master shrugged. '*That*, as you put it, is the key to my forthcoming control over the universe,' he smiled.

'How? What will you make it *do*?' asked Susan, helplessly.

'As you know, the Dalek war efforts extend over thousands of parsecs. And they need for their expansion more than anything...?' He was acting as though this was school, and Susan some backward pupil.

'Raw materials,' Susan guessed. 'Their efforts must use up so many metals, they need greater and greater sources. That's the reason they came to Earth in the first place – they wanted the metal present at its molten core.'

'Quite right,' the Master agreed. 'Well, at the same time, I have discovered they were working on a different approach to the problem.'

The Master's earlier words sank in. 'A matter transmuter... of course,' breathed Susan.

'Alter molecular structure on a very basic level,' agreed the Master. 'With such a device, they could simply continue to mine worlds that they owned and transmute whatever they had into whatever they needed.'

'And that's the device?'

'It is.' The Master chuckled to himself. 'Couple their device with the power of a TARDIS and the navigational control systems I possess... ' He shrugged. '*Then*... whatever I wish will be mine.'

'Or?' Susan braced herself.

'Well... I could change all of the hydrogen in a star's core to iron, for example. If that happened, the star would go nova, taking with it any planets in its system.'

'And you've unleashed the Daleks on Earth again just for that?'

Just for that, my dear?’ laughed the Master, heartily ‘Come now. What is the Earth to me? As far as I’m concerned the Daleks are welcome to it.’

Susan glared at him. She managed to stagger back to her feet, despite the pain. ‘Earth is my home,’ she said coldly. ‘The people the Daleks will kill are my friends.’

He shook his head slightly. ‘Then if I were you, I’d cultivate some new acquaintances elsewhere.’ Something clearly occurred to him. ‘But in the meantime, I think you’d better come along with me,’ the Master decided. ‘A hostage might well turn out to be helpful, especially if the Doctor manages to poke his nose in, as usual.’

‘The Doctor?’ Susan was stunned. ‘He’s *here*? On Earth?’

‘You *know* him?’ The Master’s eyes narrowed.

He didn’t suspect how much, then. Good. ‘I was with him in the TARDIS for a while,’ she said. ‘He always promised to come back and see me one day. I was starting to think he wouldn’t keep his word.’

The Master snorted. ‘He *always* keeps his promises, my dear. It’s one of his least likable traits.’

Susan grimaced. ‘And you, I take it, don’t?’

‘No.’ He gestured with the hand that held the gun. ‘So I won’t bother telling you that the only way for you to stay alive is to precede me. I wouldn’t want to give you false hope.’

The burning in her hand was starting to die down now. Susan realised she’d been very lucky. The bullet had only grazed her, and the wound was thickened with hardening blood. She concentrated on ignoring the pain and walked stiffly ahead of her captor. The Master slipped the gun into one of his pockets and took out a small rod instead.

‘That’s better,’ he said. ‘Now that we’re a little closer, I prefer to use this. It’s a Tissue Compression Eliminator.’

Susan glared into his face, and there was no fear in her eyes now. ‘The Doctor will get you,’ she promised.

‘He’ll *try* to, certainly,’ the Master agreed cheerfully. ‘And, you know, I’m rather counting on it. It will make taking the transmuter a lot more satisfying if he knows I’ve got it – and you.’ He gestured down the empty corridor. ‘Now, let’s go back to my TARDIS, shall we? Then we can go for a little journey. . .’

The Black Dalek glided about the control room, watching the displays and the technicians at work. ‘Report,’ he ordered the duty officer.

‘Transmuter countdown is at point four units,’ it reported. ‘Targeting is complete. Work on the human communications device is proceeding well, and should be completed in less than one time unit.’

'Acceptable,' the Black Dalek decided. 'As soon as the work is finished, send more Daleks to the surface. More humans must be located and robotised to aid us in our work.'

'The power flow from the humans has been cut,' the Dalek reported. 'We are now relying on stored power.'

'It is of no importance,' the Black Dalek stated. 'We have sufficient for our current needs. Shortly, we shall re-establish the link.' It moved on to one of the technicians. 'Prepare to send a signal to Skaro,' it ordered. 'Inform them that we have been activated and are moving to reactivate further sites. Once this is done, Skaro is to send reinforcements, so that Earth can be retaken. Send the signal as soon as the communications array is converted.'

'I obey.'

The Black Dalek moved on to study a map of the surrounding area. The humans had begun to regain their world, but this would not last. There were other hidden Dalek factories scattered about the globe. As soon as the human communications array was working, a signal could be transmitted to each factory, preparing them for reawakening. All they would need would be power input, and that could be transferred using the broadcast power from this site.

If the device worked within parameters, then every human on Earth would be eradicated. The centres of habitation were already targeted. All carbon atoms within the target area would be transmuted into uranium. All life within human habitations would be exterminated. The units that resisted transmutation would be killed by the radioactivity. Only the Daleks would survive.

The final end of human rule over Earth would soon be brought about.

'This must be it,' the Doctor said, examining the tunnel into the small hillside. 'Deep and dark. A wonderful combination.'

David took a small but powerful torch from his pocket. 'I was a boy scout once,' he said with a grin. 'This should help.'

Donna looked from one to the other. They were both acting as though this was a jaunt in the park, and not potentially the end of the human race. Still, it was one way of coping with the stress. The thought that if they failed they might be dooming humanity to extinction did nothing to steady her own nerves. She could only pray that the Doctor's hunch was correct.

The mine was still in surprisingly good shape, considering. It had been abandoned at the turn of the century. There was a door across the entrance that was locked. Barlow had given David a gun, and he simply shot the lock clean off. Inside, Donna could see that the tunnel was still passable. Most of the equipment had been pulled out when the place had been abandoned, but

there was still some debris littering the place. Light fixtures hung at regular intervals down the walls, but there was nothing to power them with.

The entrance shaft led to two descending shafts, both of which had been boarded over. The tunnel then split into two a short distance further on. Donna stood at the top of the shafts and sighed. 'Four possible ways,' she said. 'And there are no lifts left installed. We'd never get down there, Doctor.'

'Don't be such a defeatist,' he cautioned. 'Where there's a will, and all that.' He cupped a hand to one ear. 'In any case, there's no need for us to go down.' He gestured at the tunnel leading left. 'That's our way.'

'How can you be so sure?' asked David.

The Doctor smiled, and whispered, 'I have extremely acute hearing. There's machinery being operated down that way, and since there are no humans here, that leaves only Daleks as the possible culprits, wouldn't you say?'

'I don't hear a thing,' Donna protested.

'You won't for a few minutes,' the Doctor informed her. 'But it's there, take my word for it. Come on.' He led the way.

This was not Donna's idea of fun. The tunnels were dank and claustrophobic, and, despite David's torch, pretty dark. She was also starting to worry about tunnel collapse, and realised she'd be more than glad to get out of this place – even if it was into a Dalek Artefact.

As the Doctor had promised, she began to hear the faint sound of machinery ahead of them. It was pounding and pulsing, some kind of excavator, no doubt. Once again, the Doctor had been proven correct in his guesses. He was either the luckiest person she'd ever met or else the smartest. Most likely, she decided, a combination of the two.

The Doctor gestured for silence, even though none of them had been talking for a while. No doubt the importance of their mission was occupying their minds, too. They moved on more cautiously, finally coming to a new tunnel. That this had to be a Dalek one was obvious – it was rounded, with a flattened path along the floor, and it cut through the human-made tunnel at an angle. The Doctor turned and entered the Dalek tunnel without hesitation.

It was as dark as ever in here. 'Don't the Daleks believe in lights?' she whispered.

'They can see using infrared,' the Doctor replied as quietly. 'This place is well lit, as far as they're concerned.'

Wonderful. Just another minor detail – *she* was blind, but the Daleks would be able to see her... She moved closer to David and the comforting circle of light he cast.

The sound of working machinery grew louder, and after a few minutes, Donna could see a light ahead. 'Hallelujah,' she muttered.

They emerged cautiously into some kind of factory. Huge machines were taking ore and crushing it, feeding it into what looked like an induction furnace. This was where the raw materials were being processed, but luckily it was all automated machinery, and there were no Daleks supervising the process. Beyond this room lay others, where the raw materials were no doubt cast and processed, until Dalek casings emerged at the far end. It was too noisy in here to hear voices, so the Doctor was forced to tug at her arm to get her attention. David turned off his torch and replaced it in his pocket, and the three of them headed for the door. On the way, the Doctor stopped at a control panel and worked there for a couple of noisy minutes. Donna wanted to yell at him to hurry up before she went deaf, but there wasn't a lot of point in even trying to make herself heard. Finally he was done and they made their way to the door. There was a small pad beside it, and somehow the Doctor used this to get them out of the furnace room and into the corridor. The door slid to a close behind them, shutting out most of the noise.

'Good insulation,' the Doctor said approvingly. 'Whatever else you say about the Daleks, you have to admit that they're efficient.'

'I can think of other words for them,' Donna said drily.

'So can I,' the Doctor agreed. There was controlled anger in his voice. 'Time after time I defeat them, and yet they *still* come back for more, spreading death and chaos everywhere. I thought *these* Daleks at least were finished. . . but I was wrong. Again.' He looked haunted. 'Won't they *ever* let me rest?' He glanced around, and then started down the deserted corridor. 'This way.'

'Where are we going?' Donna demanded, falling into step.

'The hatchery,' he answered briefly.

'Why aren't there any Daleks around?' David wanted to know.

'Not needed here,' the Doctor explained. 'They didn't think about the back door being open. They can't have that many available yet, and they'll all be on the really important jobs and guarding the front door. But we might run into a few strays.'

They rounded a corner after checking the way was safe, and started off down the corridor again. The Doctor ignored several doors as he approached the one that he had singled out. 'Hatchery,' he decided.

'How can you be so sure?' Donna asked.

He gestured to a shoulder-high window. 'Viewport,' he explained. 'Dalek embryos are grown, and they can be pretty vicious. They're highly unsociable, and will attack anything on sight – even Daleks. It can get messy for them to haul their babies off their domes, so they like to be able to check that the little ones are still inside their vats before they go in.' Donna started to take a look, but he was already tapping some sort of code into the lock. 'Don't worry, its nap time.'

The door hissed open, and they all slipped inside. Donna stared around in disgust.

The room was like one huge, raised tank filled with a seething flood. Nutrients bubbled away, flowing into pipes leading to metallic storage vats in the corners. The viscous liquid was greenish in colour.

'The embryos are in there?' she asked.

'Yes,' the Doctor answered. 'They're cloned material, grown for the first stage of life in small jars. When they're ready, they're transferred to this nutrient bath, where they mature.' There was a flurry of splashes in the centre of the tank. 'Here they grow to full term – and fight with one another. They're intelligent creatures,' he added, 'but their instincts are horribly powerful. They're not complete until they're taken from these breeding tanks and mated with the travel unit shell. The baby Daleks are by then fully grown. They interface with their internal computers, which gives them all the information and conditioning they need. They can be up and running in a matter of minutes, ready to go out and kill on command.'

Donna looked at the slime distastefully 'A big job,' she muttered.

'They like long-term planning.' The Doctor glared at the vats. 'But it's the end of the road for this lot. This isn't their world, and they can't have it.' He moved to the machinery, and started to fiddle with the computer controls.

'What are you doing?' she asked him. 'Scientific abortion?'

'Actually, the exact opposite,' he replied. 'I'm increasing production of the embryos.'

Donna gave him a puzzled look. 'That doesn't sound like it's going to help us. You want *more* Daleks produced?'

'Not produced,' he replied. 'Begun. I've increased the production rate by a thousand per cent. The power drain on their reserves will be enormous.'

She caught on at last. 'And with no more power coming in from Haldoran,' she realised, 'that's going to really hurt.'

'Exactly.' The Doctor gave her a bitter smile. 'The Daleks are utterly dependent on electrical power. It keeps their shells going, and their life-support systems working. If we can drain their power, it will kill them – this time permanently.'

'Won't they detect this drain and try to stop it?' David objected.

'Try, yes,' the Doctor agreed. 'But I've set up a logic loop in the controls here. The only way they'll be able to stop the drain is to bypass it, and it won't be easy. Add that to the tiny adjustment I made in the furnace, and they're going to have a severe energy shortage in the not-too-distant future.'

'So what do we do now?' Donna asked. 'Hide until their little batteries run down?'

'No,' David said. 'Now we look for Susan.'

'My thoughts exactly,' the Doctor agreed. 'I'll see if I can find any mention of a prisoner in their computer records. Failing that. I'll check for their most sensitive area. That's where she's bound to be. She never could resist tinkering with things.'

'I wonder where she gets that from,' Donna commented drily.

The Doctor was suddenly lost in contemplation. 'I wonder how long we've got before all hell breaks loose.'

Did he *have* to ask that question? Donna had been trying to avoid thinking about it, but he'd made it impossible. The Daleks were bound to discover the power drain pretty quickly, and they would then head down here to try to stop it. Unless she, David and the Doctor were gone before that happened, she didn't give much for their chances of surviving this. . .

Barlow stared down at the communications array with growing dismay. Several of the Daleks had moved away now, leaving only four of them working. That had to mean that they were almost ready to utilise the device. 'Sorry, Doctor, Donna,' he muttered to himself. 'We just can't wait any longer.' He could only hope they'd had enough time to do whatever the Doctor had planned, because time had just run out. He couldn't take any more chances. He grimly gestured to his men to move out, knowing full well how high the casualty rate of this assault would be.

And would he number among them? It could be that he'd have one of the shortest reigns on record at this rate, but there was no choke. He made sure the grenade launcher was operational, and then he moved to the left, heading for the pathway down to the cutting. They were bound to be spotted soon, but nothing could be done to prevent it.

He and his men moved swiftly, since surprise was hardly possible, without worrying about noise. They were on the pathway down, going as fast as they could while retaining their footing, when Barlow saw that they had been spotted. Three of the Daleks whirled to study them, and they clearly gave some kind of orders. He couldn't make out what had been said, but the Robomen suddenly spun about in unison and began marching towards the cliff.

Bullets couldn't hurt Daleks, but against humans they were very effective. Reaching the end of the path, Barlow led the charge towards the marching Robomen. They had no expressions on their faces, mirroring the blankness of their minds, but they had their guns up and aimed.

The first burst of gunfire tore at the ground just ahead of them. Barlow ignored it, leaving this to his men. Several returned fire as they ran and weaved. Barlow concentrated on just being a hard target to hit. His grenades weren't for the Robomen.

One of his soldiers gave a cry and collapsed, blood streaming down his leg. But he didn't stop firing. Good man. Two of the Robomen went down, without a sound, their chests stitched red by bullets. Then Barlow ignored them. He was just about in range now, and had his weapon at the ready.

Unfortunately, that also meant that he was in range of the Daleks. One fired a blast of lethal energy that barely missed him.

'Bastard,' he growled, and fired the first of his grenades. A moment later, the top of the Dalek exploded, fire and metallic debris spraying all over. Ignoring its loss, the other two Daleks also opened fire.

Barlow threw himself to one side, rolled and then fired from the ground. The skirt of a second Dalek exploded, throwing the metallic monster backward, electronic guts and slime spewing from the wrecked casing. The third Dalek moved away, still trying to catch him in its death ray. He blew it apart with his third shot. But more Daleks were rising from the pit, and advancing to join the growing firefight. He chanced a glance around, and saw that all of the Robomen were now dead but that only three of his men remained on their feet. The rest were either wounded or dead.

They didn't stand a chance of holding back the Daleks.

Which left him exactly one option. He levered the next grenade into position and fired, targeting the communications equipment. He was at extreme range, but it was a bloody huge target, so surely he couldn't miss. To be sure, he sent a second grenade after the first.

The machinery erupted under the double assault. A gout of flame caught three of the Daleks working on it, enveloping them and exploding them too. The communications array started to collapse in on itself, and Barlow felt a huge sense of relief. It lasted until a blast from one of the advancing Daleks torched a tree beside him. They were in range. . .

'Pull back!' he ordered his men. 'They won't be able to follow!' He himself spun around, sending another grenade back as a parting gift. He weaved his way back, pausing only to grab hold of the wounded soldier he'd left earlier. Another man grabbed his arm, and together they hurried him away. Apparently he was the only other survivor.

The Daleks didn't follow. They moved to try to assess the damage to the array. Barlow grinned nastily.

'I'd like to see you repair *that*,' he said happily. There was no way the Daleks were moving out of this area. But that meant only that they were delayed – not stopped. Unless he could get some serious weapons into this area as fast as possible, the problem could only get worse. 'Back to the runabouts,' he ordered his men. 'We need reinforcements badly.' He nodded to one man. 'Hurry. I want every trooper we can spare in this area as soon as possible.'

'But what about the assault on London?' the man asked.

‘Sod London,’ Barlow snapped. ‘If we don’t stop the Daleks now, it’ll be the whole human race that dies. Move!’

The man moved.

The Black Dalek saw the warning lights flicker on and stay on. ‘Report!’ it demanded.

‘Human forces have destroyed the communications equipment,’ the technician answered. ‘it is nonfunctional.’

The Black Dalek considered. It would be impossible to revive the other units or to raise Skaro to request reinforcements, but that could be taken care of later. ‘Begin assembly of a new unit,’ it ordered. ‘We have only been delayed.’

‘I obey!’

The Black Dalek turned to study the panel, with the warning lights burning. There hadn’t been time yet to establish a video link to the surface. ‘Have the humans been destroyed?’ it demanded.

Another technician spun around. ‘Most have been killed,’ it grated. ‘Several have retreated and are non-hostile. All surface Robomen are dead.’

The humans would be back. They would not concede that the Daleks were superior, and would try again. ‘Order all remaining Robomen to the surface,’ it decided. ‘Priority is to guard the new communications device. It must be functional as soon as possible.’ It turned to the duty officer. ‘Is the transmuter ready?’

The Dalek studied its instruments. ‘Countdown has reached zero,’ it reported.

‘Has target been destroyed?’ the Black Dalek demanded.

‘Negative,’ the officer replied. ‘There has been a malfunction.’

‘Malfunction?’ The Black Dalek spun about. ‘Order the technicians to report.’

A moment later, the duty officer replied, ‘Unable to contact laboratory technicians. Their life signs do not register.’

‘There are intruders in the complex,’ the Black Dalek announced ‘All available Daleks, seek and destroy.’

The other Dalek relayed the order, and the Black Dalek whirled around as several more warning lights started to flash. ‘What is happening?’ it demanded.

The officer studied the panel. ‘There is another malfunction. This one is in the hatching area,’ it reported. ‘Power drain is rising.’

‘Stabilise,’ the Black Dalek commanded.

‘Impossible,’ the officer answered. ‘I am dispatching a repair crew immediately.’

The Black Dalek studied the panels once again. This was clearly sabotage, and must be corrected immediately. The Daleks' plans would continue once this was settled.

Susan moved out of hiding, and continued slowly down the corridor. The Master stayed close beside her, the transmuter clutched in one hand, his TCE in the other. He was almost seething with frustration.

'My TARDIS is just up ahead,' he informed her. 'We'll be out of here in a few minutes.'

Their journey had taken them longer than he'd expected. Several times they had been forced to hide from either Robomen or passing Daleks. Something was clearly bothering the inhabitants of the complex, and she suspected that some of it, at least, was her doing. The rest... Well, she could only hope!

Fumbling the transmuter into the same arm as held his TCE, the Master fished out his TARDIS key. 'Here,' he said, 'you no doubt know how to use one of these. You'll open the door for me.' Susan took the key with only slight reluctance. It had been thirty years since she'd held one, her own key long lost in the rubble of old London. She felt a faint thrill at having one in her possession again, even if only for a short while. She considered it highly unlikely that the Master would allow her to live for very long once they had left Earth. Her only hope was that he would decide to try to kill her wherever he stopped next. That way, she at least had a chance of regenerating...

Just when Susan could have done with another delay, there was none. They reached the Master's TARDIS quickly. Its chameleon circuit was obviously functioning perfectly, because it was disguised as a computer station, but her eyes could see the TT capsule for what it was.

'Hurry!' the Master snarled. 'Try to delay me, and I'll use this on you here and now.'

The key slid into the lock, and Susan reluctantly pushed the door open.

'That's far enough!'

Susan and the Master both spun round, and Susan felt a giddy relief. Though the face and body were completely different, there was no mistaking the person. She almost cried '*Grandfather*', but bit her tongue just in time.

'Doctor!' The Master sounded almost pleased. 'And you've brought along your little band of disciples. How charming.' He held the TCE to Susan's head. 'And I believe you know this human, too? Don't take another step if you want her to remain alive.'

David was with the Doctor, along with some girl whom Susan found vaguely familiar. For a ludicrous moment she felt her heart lurch as she realised this girl was seeing her without her disguise in place, seeing her as a girl barely

out of her teens. She looked apologetically at David in spite of everything. Both he and the girl tried to move forward, but the Doctor held them back.

‘Don’t,’ he said quietly ‘That’s a very lethal weapon he’s got there.’ Then he blinked. ‘And something else...’

‘It’s a matter transmuter!’ blurted Susan.

The Doctor’s voice dropped to a whisper. ‘Of course...’

The Master smiled, agreeably. ‘My key to achieving all I desire.’

The Doctor’s face hardened. ‘I can’t allow you to take that,’ he said quietly ‘David, your gun.’ David clearly didn’t want to obey, but, as usual, the Doctor’s will won out, and David handed it over. ‘You know how much I dislike using weapons,’ the Doctor said. ‘But I won’t hesitate here. I can’t. Drop that device, or I shoot.’

‘I’ll kill the girl,’ the Master promised.

The Doctor hesitated, the gun half raised.

The Master dropped the TCE, and instead brought up his own pistol, firing before the Doctor could bring himself to do so. Susan screamed as the bullet tore into the Doctor’s shoulder, sending him crashing back to the floor, a stunned and pained expression on his face. Blood began pooling on his coat.

Susan struggled to move towards her grandfather. The Master slammed the barrel of the pistol across the back of her neck, and she fell, half inside the door to his TARDIS.

‘Enough games,’ the Master decided. He raised the gun again and fired the rest of the clip at the Doctor.



## 14

### The Gates of Hell

Susan's blurred vision caught what happened next in shock. David flung himself to cover the Doctor. The bullets tore into him, throwing him back against the Doctor, blood flowing Susan whimpered, trying to get to her feet to run to the aid of her husband and her grandfather. Her fingers clutched the TCE that the Master had dropped.

Cursing, the Master flung the useless gun away, and again grabbed Susan, shoving her further into his TARDIS. Susan saw the girl with the Doctor snatch up the fallen revolver, and she heard shots as the Master's TARDIS doors slid closed. Susan crumpled to the floor, her world a mass of pain and shock as she tried to focus her thoughts. The Master strode to his console, and started to slam home switches.

'You haven't won, Doctor,' he sneered. 'I have the transmuter – and you have nothing!' He shot home the last controls, and Susan looked up in despair as the time rotor began to rise and fall. . .

Donna stared in shock as what looked like a computer console simply sighed and vanished. She let the gun fall and then remembered her companions. She turned back to them.

She could see immediately that there was no chance that David would make it. He'd taken four shots to the chest, and the dark, arterial blood was gushing down him. More blood trickled from his mouth as she knelt to try to give him some sort of comfort.

'No use,' he told her, gasping with the strain. 'Too late.' He looked at the Doctor. 'Better this way, perhaps. Now Susan won't have to wait for me to die.'

Controlling the pain he had to be feeling, the Doctor had a hand to his own wound, using his cravat to staunch the flow of blood. 'She would have looked forward to the rest of your life,' he assured David. 'You didn't have to do this.'

'Yes, I did,' David insisted. 'Get her back, Doctor,' he begged.

'He won't keep her,' the Doctor swore.

David looked back at Donna, a faint smile on his lips. 'He always keeps his promises.'

'Eventually,' she couldn't help adding.

David nodded slowly, his face wreathed in pain. Then he simply stopped breathing. Donna felt the tears welling inside of her.

'He was a good man,' the Doctor murmured.

'One of the two in the universe,' Donna muttered. His head was still in her lap, and she was smeared with his blood. That would wash off, but the memory of David Campbell would not.

There was a noise from the corridor, and the Doctor looked back and then frowned. 'Daleks...'

Donna looked at him, then glanced at the far door that led to the pit. 'That's our only way out now.'

'And there are more Daleks at the top of it,' he pointed out. 'But we've no other choice. Come on.' He pulled her free of David. She winced as the dead head hit the floor. The Doctor jumped for the door-lock controls, obviously hoping to buy them a few extra seconds.

Then Donna remembered the grenades Barlow had given her. She fumbled them from her bag as the door started to slide closed. Pulling their pins, she rolled them under the descending door. 'Die,' she muttered, as she hared after the Doctor.

The door slid shut and then shook from the explosions.

'They won't be getting out of there very quickly,' Donna told the Doctor. They had reached the base of the pit now, and he stood at the foot of the ladder. Forcing herself not to think about what was happening, she moved to him. 'How's your shoulder?'

'I'll live,' he answered. His cravat was wet with blood.

'You can't climb like that,' she objected. 'Here.' She helped him out of his coat, and then tore a strip from its lining to tie the cravat about the wound. 'Lousy field dressing, but it should hold for a while.'

'I liked that coat,' he objected.

'I'll buy you a new one later,' she promised him. 'If there is a later.'

'There's always a later,' he answered. 'The question is, will there be an us in that later?' He shrugged and then winced with pain. 'That's as good as it will get,' he said, struggling to get hack into the tatters of the coat. She helped him.

'Can you manage?' she asked.

'Is there an option?' he replied, a broad grin on his face. 'There's climbing and maybe dying to be done this day.' With his good hand, he gripped a rung, and started up. 'Heads up,' he murmured.

'Are you sure you can manage this?' Donna asked anxiously.

'We don't have any choice,' he stated, exasperation starting to show in his words. 'Our little bit of sabotage won't stop the Daleks for long, and all they

have to do is to communicate with the ones at the top of this climb anyway. I'm at the top of their shoot-on-sight list.'

Somehow that didn't surprise her.

The first reinforcements had started to trickle in now. Barlow felt a little better about this, but the troops were the lightly armed ones, none with anything that could really take out Daleks. And his observations of the pit area showed that they were still working on something, having hauled equipment up. He strongly suspected it was a replacement transmitter. All he'd managed to do so far was to delay the Daleks a little. Perhaps the Doctor was having better luck. It was time that somebody did.

'Let's start moving in,' he decided. He still had a few of his grenades left, and two of the fresh batch had the more conventional kind. The others would be able to deal with the handful of Robomen still alive, at least. He looked around at the dismal grey sky, wondering if he'd live to see the night fall.

Moving restlessly the Black Dalek demanded a fresh report. The duty officer turned to answer.

'Repair units have just reached the gestation pool,' it said. 'They report that the controls will not respond. Power drain is increasing.'

The Black Dalek considered the matter. 'They are to destroy the equipment,' it decided. 'Immediately!'

'Destruction of the embryos will leave us without extra units,' the officer objected.

'Their destruction will allow us to survive,' the Black Dalek grated. 'Other factories exist that can be wakened by our signal. Priority now is communications. Destroy the embryo unit.'

'I obey!'

The Doctor poked his head over the lip of the pit, and then hastily withdrew it. 'Barlow seems to have done his job,' he called down to Donna softly. 'But, as usual, the Daleks have a backup plan, and they're building a new transmitter.'

'Maybe he can destroy this one, too,' Donna said hopefully, clinging on, several rungs below him.

'I think he used up most of his ammunition on the first attack,' the Doctor answered. 'Unless he can get reinforcements in, he doesn't stand much of a chance with a second attack.'

Donna didn't like the way that this conversation was going. 'And the Daleks are bound to have traced your sabotage of the hatchery by now,' she pointed out. 'Is *anything* going right?'

'Oh yes,' the Doctor assured her. 'Because they won't discover my real sabotage until after the gestation pool is history.'

Feeling a sudden surge of hope, Donna asked, 'And what sabotage is that?'

'The factory,' he replied, a faint smile on his pale face. 'I set the controls there to overload, to continually increase the temperature. It's an electron-induction furnace, so we're talking several thousand degrees.'

Donna winced. 'We're talking several thousand degrees as in: if we don't get out of here we'll get badly sunburned?'

'Something like that, yes,' he admitted.

'And how long do we have before that happens?' she demanded.

'Hard to say. But I wouldn't make any long-term plans to stay on this ladder.'

'Thanks for telling me,' she growled, glancing back down the pit – knowing that there was a possible end in sight was almost impossible to comprehend. Knowing it might mean her own end as well made it less reassuring. 'If it's all the same to you, I think I'd prefer to take my chances up there making a run for it rather than waiting here to become a well-done chunk of steak.'

'My thoughts exactly,' he agreed. 'Shall we?'

'Why not?' Taking a deep breath and trying to steady her shattered nerves, Donna followed him up the last few rungs and over the rim of the pit.

As the explosion from the hatchery shook the complex, the Red Dalek in charge of the squad looked towards the computer technician, still scanning the energy readings. 'Report.'

'Gestation pool destruction complete,' it grated. 'Power levels. . . still falling rapidly.'

'Further sabotage,' the Red Dalek announced. 'Location?'

The technician worked feverishly. Power levels were dropping dangerously low. 'The furnace,' it finally replied.

'Follow me,' the Red Dalek ordered its crew, starting down the corridor towards that area. As it moved, it transmitted its report to the Black Dalek.

In the control centre, the Black Dalek considered further. The human sabotage had led to the destruction of the embryos, and *still* power levels were dropping. 'Close down all side tunnels,' it ordered. 'All mobile units to return to the main area. All other sections are to be shut down to conserve power.' Then came the message from the repair crew of further sabotage at the furnace. Whoever had done this was clearly more intelligent than most humans. Power levels were falling drastically.

'Estimate time to completion of communications,' it demanded.

'Two time units,' the technician answered.

That was unacceptable. The power loss would be terminal before then. There had to be another solution to the problem. But one was not obvious. It was not possible that the Daleks had failed again.

It could not be.

Donna jumped to her feet, following the Doctor as he started to move from the head of the shaft. There were about ten Daleks working on their new equipment, close to the still burning wreckage of the destroyed transmitter. Six Robomen were staring outward, probably guarding against another attack from Barlow. The Doctor was trying to get to cover behind the wrecked unit when one of the Dalek technicians spotted them moving.

It whirled around. 'Intruders!' it intoned. 'Exterminate!' Its gun fired as Donna forced herself to move faster. The bolt singed her hair, and felt like an electrified hand slamming into her back. She was thrown off balance, into the mud.

The Doctor saw her fall, and felt a cold fury seize his battered body. Daleks. Somehow it always came down to this. Good... well, *him*, against evil. Cold, pitiless evil. How many lives had the Daleks taken? How many worlds lay in ruins in their wake, throughout time and space?

And he knew with a terrible certainty that whatever he did to try to stop them would never, ever be enough.

For a second he wished he could see the bigger picture again, the grand design, as he dreamed he once could. But there was only darkness and pain crowding his head, now.

And fear.

'Return to work!' another Dalek ordered the first. 'Communications is a priority. Robomen will eliminate all intruders.'

Donna stared up from the ground. The Dalek turned back to its equipment, but all six Robomen turned their blank faces towards her and the Doctor. She saw the Doctor's bloody figure start staggering towards the helmeted figures.

'Daleks!' roared the Doctor, ignoring the Robomen as they raised their guns, looking for all the world as if he was going to try and push his way past them to get to the Daleks himself.

Donna staggered to her feet. 'Doctor! No!' she screamed, running towards him. She'd be damned if she'd die grovelling in the mud.

Gunshots hammered all around, and she involuntarily closed her eyes. But none of the bullets hit her, and as she looked again, she saw that it was the Robomen who were being cut apart by small-arms fire.

The Doctor stopped his advance, staring round bewilderedly as if waking from a trance, and slumped to his knees in the squelching mud.

The Daleks at the device all spun around, bringing up their guns. 'Exterminate all humans!' She couldn't tell which had spoken, but it wasn't necessary to know: each of them had simply that one thought in mind.

Then Donna saw him – Barlow! He was hunched over a rock past the entrance, leading some twenty troopers who were firing at the dying Robomen. A grim smile forced itself on her lips. Maybe they would survive this, after all. Barlow fired first, taking out one of the Daleks. Then the Daleks opened fire. They had targeted the soldiers first, since they were the most dangerous. Four of five were caught in the ravaging fire, and screamed as they died. Others fired futilely at the Daleks. Bullets simply bounced off their armoured casings. Then Barlow fired two more grenades. The man was a wicked shot, striking home with both. Then he flung his weapon away in disgust, clearly out of ammunition.

Donna felt sick. The grenade launcher had been the only weapon effective against the Daleks so far, and the Daleks knew it. They moved forward, firing continually. Donna managed to dash over to the Doctor, still on his knees in the mud. He looked horribly pale. She glanced at the field dressing and winced. It was soaked in blood. The strain was dearly killing him.

'You can't keep this up,' she said, shocked.

'And I won't just die,' he retorted weakly. 'We have to try to get out of here. Barlow, too. He doesn't stand a chance.'

Donna glanced at the attacking soldiers. The Doctor was right: two more were dying, screaming in agony. Not many were left.

And then came another Dalek ray blast – but from the human side. The shot caught the foremost Dalek in motion, exploding its dome. Donna couldn't understand it until she saw there were fresh human troops carrying what had to be Dalek guns. The cavalry had arrived with fresh supplies – weapons that were as effective against Daleks as they were against humans.

The remaining Daleks clustered to fire at the fresh troops. One of the soldiers armed with a Dalek gun was caught and died shaking in agony. The others scattered, firing at will.

And then the ground shook. Donna barely kept her footing, and the Doctor slid to the mud. The earth quaked, as if raging against all of the violence. Donna glanced back and understood immediately what had happened. The Doctor's sabotage had paid off.

The Black Dalek studied the readouts available to it. The complex was in serious danger of being destroyed. The power levels were dropping, and the damage to the crèche and foundry were escalating.

The unthinkable was happening: the Daleks were being defeated.

The Black Dalek spun about and moved from the control room. The transmuter was not responding to commands, malfunctioning, but it might still be possible to activate it manually. All the codes needed to destroy the surrounding area were inside its own inboard computer. The Black Dalek could plug its circuits directly into the transmuter and utilize it to destroy the enemy target. At least the failure then would not be so total and ignominious.

The door to the laboratory refused to open. The Black Dalek fired at it until the lock was reduced to slag, and then pushed the door aside. It took a single glance to show that the transmuter had somehow been torn from its position.

The humans. . .

The Black Dalek stared in outrage at the final evidence of the Dalek defeat.

Huge flames licked from the pit of DA-17, rising twenty feet or more into the air. The ground beyond was ruptured, crashing apart. Flames and molten rocks oozed from the devastated ground. Fire was everywhere. It was as if the gates of Hell had been opened, and the internal fires loosed.

The Daleks that were left all seemed to go into slow motion as their power source was destroyed. Their guns died, their limbs faltered, and finally they stopped moving. The ground cracked and seethed about them, swallowing them up, returning them to the ground from which they had been forged.

A blast of heat washed over Donna, and she gasped from the pain. 'Come on, Doctor,' she grumbled. 'We've got to move.' There was no response, and she saw that he was now completely unconscious. 'Oh, Christ,' she muttered. Grabbing his good arm, she managed to lever him up, and started to drag him away from the increasing zone of destruction. Trees and shrubs close by had caught fire and were burning like huge torches. The grass was spreading the flames, and Donna had serious doubts about being able to make it out.

Then Barlow was with her, and he lifted the Doctor's feet without comment. Together, sweating and aching, they carried their insensate burden beyond the immediate danger zone. When she was sure they were far enough away, Donna called for a halt. Her fingers were almost nerveless when she allowed the Doctor to flop gently to the ground.

'I've got medics coming in,' Barlow assured her. 'I knew there would be casualties.' He peered at the Doctor. 'Will he be OK?'

'I don't have a clue,' Donna growled, fighting not to cry. 'He's an alien. God knows what sort of body chemistry he's got.'

'Jesus,' Barlow looked back at the seething mass of lava and the burning grounds. 'Well, you two obviously know how to throw a parry.' Then he looked concerned. 'What happened to your friend?'

'Dead,' Donna answered. 'He saved the Doctor's life.'

Barlow nodded, at least not making any inane comment about how sorry he was when it simply wasn't true. 'I lost too many myself,' he said finally. 'I think I'm burned out of fighting.'

'Well, there's hope for us yet, then,' Donna said with a sigh. 'Where the hell are those medics?'

'They're coming,' he promised her.

'They'd better be,' said Donna.

Darkness had flooded Susan's hearts, and she simply sat on the floor of the Master's TARDIS as bitterness and loss filled her soul. The Master had shot her grandfather – perhaps killed him – and he had certainly killed David. Tears fell from her eyes unheeded as she thought about the loss. David had been her whole life for over thirty years, everything she had given up her freedom and heritage for. The recent troubled times were an unfair testament to their many happy years together. She knew they'd have got over their problems somehow. But now, there was no chance.

She'd known that David would die before she did – a long time before. But being gunned down by a homicidal maniac, after all they'd survived through. . . The same maniac who had uncaringly unleashed the Daleks back on Earth again. It meant nothing to the Master that the Daleks would create havoc and deal out death or enslavement to anyone who crossed their paths. To him, humans were insignificant beings, to be used and discarded as he wished.

Grief was rising within her, but not as swiftly as the rage. This *monster* had casually destroyed, or attempted to destroy, everyone that she held dear, all to gain a device by which he intended to blackmail other worlds into submitting to his twisted will. Rage filled her body, bringing back life out of her lethargy. She still held, unnoticed, the Master's TCE, clutched in her frozen grip. The Master was paying her no attention at all as he laboured over his TARDIS's controls. To him she was simply a minor inconvenience to be disposed of at his earliest opportunity, no doubt.

But he was wrong.

The fury was starting to consume her, giving her back her strength. She had almost forgotten the pain in her hand now as she focused only on her need for action.

There was the sighing again as the TARDIS landed somewhere, the time rotor switching from rising and falling to the spinning scanning mode. 'Tersurus,' the Master murmured. His TARDIS was obviously fully functional, unlike the Doctor's.

Susan rose to her feet, glaring at him, and slowly moved towards the console. It was quite different in many ways from the one she'd been used to,

thirty years earlier, but there were some similarities. Good.

The Master glanced up at her. He was still clutching the transmuter to his chest protectively. 'Stay away, child,' he warned her. 'There are forces you cannot possibly comprehend being harnessed by these controls.'

'Forces?' Susan felt like spitting in his face.' And what about all the things that *you* don't seem to understand? Like love, compassion and decency?'

He laughed briefly. 'Weaknesses,' he jibed. 'Excuses for the powerless. There is only one true reality in this universe – that of power! And that is my destiny.'

'Power?' Susan stared at him scornfully. 'You used your power to kill my husband.'

He simply shrugged. 'Humans have such short lives anyway,' he commented. 'I promise to be merciful and allow you to join him soon. When I can be bothered.'

'Merciful!' Susan was still moving slowly forward, drawing closer to the controls now. 'You're a shallow, vicious, self-centred, evil little troll, with less decency than any of the people you've killed. You really think you *deserve* power?'

'Power belongs to those who can claim it and hold it the Master responded, seemingly amused by her argument.

'Then *I'll* show you power,' Susan snarled. She moved forward, touching both hands to the contacts for the telepathic circuits. 'And I'm not a human – God help me, I'm one of *you*.'

The Master's eyes widened slightly at this revelation, and he gave a sharp cry as he moved forward to knock her hands from the console.

But he was far, far too late.

Susan had known for a long time that she had greater latent telepathic powers even than most of her people. It was raw talent and normally unfocused. But working telepathic circuits could do what her own mind could not. The TARDIS caught up her will, and shaped it, like a weapon – aimed directly at the mind of the TARDIS's controller.

The Master screamed and collapsed as the mental wave slammed into him. Susan had harnessed all of her rage, all of her grief, all of her loss, into one, rock-hard emotion of hatred. She sent this seething mass of fury deeply into the Master's mind, burning at his exposed thoughts, slicing through his own desires, devastating every last thought in his mind. She fed her fury over David's murder, her anguish about her grandfather, her sense of loss, promises broken, the horror of Daleks resurrected – every last agonising emotion was fed from her mind, amplified by the telepathic circuits and directed like a laser into his brain.

He rolled on the floor, howling in agony as his mind slowly fried. Susan glowered down at him, refusing to feel the slightest twinge of pity or remorse for what she was doing. She wouldn't even allow herself the luxury of satisfaction, in case that weakened her rage. But she did feel some of the feedback from the Master's mind, and she stared into the pit of his inhumanity. She saw a creature who never doubted that it was his right to do precisely what he wished, who spared no concern for any other living creature. His own will was all that mattered to him in the entire universe. He was self-consumed to the exclusion of any kind of gentleness or kindness.

Whispers of his knowledge, his thoughts and his deeds crossed Susan's awareness. They sickened her, and fed her despair and fury. The Master writhed under the bombardment his mind being ravaged and consumed.

Until, finally, she could keep going no longer. Weakened and shaking, she jerked her trembling hands from the contacts and stared down at the trembling creature at her feet. She knew what she had done to him, and didn't have a single regret or doubt. And yet, even after all he had been through, such was his own strength of will that he managed to open his eyes and focus on her.

'You're... the Doctor's whelp,' he gasped. It was a terrible strain on him, but he was focusing solely on this one fact. 'I shall... destroy you... have my revenge on *him*.'

'You'll destroy nobody ever again,' Susan vowed. She showed him the TCE. 'This time, *I'm* the one with the weapon, Master of nothing. Get to your feet, or I swear I'll kill you where you grovel.' She knew he could read the grim assurance that she meant what she said. She wasn't even sure he could move after what he'd been through, but he amazed her again.

He staggered to his knees, and then to his feet. The transmuter was still locked in his arms, like a precious child in the embrace of a doting mother. His eyes showed madness, but his will was surmounting even that. He was incredible – and demonic.

'Outside,' Susan ordered, triggering the door control. She also shut down the defence systems totally. It wasn't beyond his imagining to have sabotaged them in the event of necessity. She had no desire for the TARDIS to incapacitate her now because of some cunning scheme of his. 'Outside,' she repeated.

Trembling from his inner struggle, the Master obeyed.

Tersurus was a nothing planet – bare rock, a few struggling lichens Little greenery, and nothing animal at all in sight. Maybe she wasn't seeing it at its best, but Susan hardly cared about that. She hadn't been a tourist since she'd left Grandfather.

‘That’s far enough,’ she decided. The Master staggered to a halt. ‘Now, put that thing down and step away from it.’

‘What are you going to do?’ the Master demanded. He seemed to be recovering slowly but incrementally from the mental assault.

‘I’m going to destroy it so that neither you nor any other maniac can use it,’ she replied grimly.

‘No!’ he yelled. ‘It’s my tool to power! You can’t have it! You can’t!’ His mind was starting to crumble again from the stress.

Susan glared at him coldly ‘I’m destroying it in five seconds,’ she stated. ‘If you’re still holding it then – so be it.’

‘It’s mine!’ he screamed, and he tried to run. But he’d overestimated his own strength, and instead crashed to the ground. Whimpering and snarling, he clutched the transmuter to his chest.

‘Five,’ Susan said, and aimed the TCE. There was neither pity nor mercy left in her. She triggered the device, knowing she was killing the Master, too – and discovered that she was glad of it. If any being deserved death, it was him.

The energies of the TCE ravaged through the transmuter, and on into the Master’s body. There was no respite for him now, no way to regenerate from such a death. The transmuter exploded, energies flaring forth. Susan staggered back, shielding her eyes, and reentered the Master’s TARDIS. She closed the doors swiftly and hurried to the console. There she switched on the screen. She could see the energy wave licking futilely at the shell of the TARDIS.

It was over. The transmuter was destroyed, the Master dead.

Now what? What did she have left to her? She stared down at the console, lost and confused. She was free again, in all senses of the word. David’s death had severed her ties to Earth, and, now she had a TARDIS, everywhere was open to her.

She gradually realised that a warning light was flashing. Susan dredged through her memories – her own, as well as some she’d taken from the Master – and recognised it as a signal lock.

*That* brought her crashing back to the here and now with a shock. When she’d switched off the TARDIS’s defence systems, she’d left it vulnerable to a search from Gallifrey! The Time Lords were tracking her down... And she knew what would happen to her if they found her. She’d fled her home-world with her grandfather for very good reasons, which were unlikely to have changed. She moved quickly, drawing on the Master’s knowledge of his ship to reset the defence grid to shield her signal. Then she set the controls to a random destination and engaged the drive units.

With a whisper, the ship left the ruins of Tersurus behind. Since she didn’t have any idea where she was going, neither would the Time Lords. She was still free of them. And she now had a TARDIS once again... One that was con-

trollable... She stared at the console in wonder. She was no longer confined to Earth. She could go anywhere, do anything.

But *David*... *Grandfather*...

She was free, but her two great loves were no longer with her.

## Happy Endings?

Donna sat glumly by the bed that held the Doctor, hating everything. Especially, she hated hospitals. They always stank of things she knew she didn't want to identify. She hated doctors, because, when it came down to it, they didn't know what they were doing. In the case of the Doctor, it was triply so. All they'd done was stitch up what they could and left him to live or die. Their excuse was that, given his alien metabolism, anything humans considered medicine might well be lethal to him. She hated them for that, but what Donna hated most was the fact that they were right.

The Doctor had been unconscious for two days. The ECG had held pretty steady, though the readings indicated a human being should be dead. The Doctor wasn't dead but it was hard to tell whether he was becoming more alive. Things were happening all around her, but Donna had no will to find out what they were. All she could do was to stand vigil over the Doctor. Well, sit vigil, really – she didn't have the strength to stand.

The door to the room opened, and Barlow ambled in, carrying a tray. On it were two mugs of tea and a plate of biscuits. 'Thought you'd need this,' he said, setting the tray down and handing her a mug. 'That's the way you like it, right?'

She sipped the tea, and discovered it was with a little milk, one sugar. 'Lucky guess?' she asked.

'Spies,' he answered with a grin, putting the biscuits down beside her. 'Comes in handy being boss sometimes.'

She gave him a tired look. 'Don't you have anything better to do than to make me a pot of tea?' she asked.

He pretended to consider the question seriously, and then shook his head. 'Nope, not a thing.'

Donna snorted. 'You've taken over effective power in this whole damned area,' she said. 'You're merging London and Haldoran Domains, cleaning up after the Daleks, and you've nothing better to do than make me tea? Excuse my disbelief.'

'I'm getting used to it,' he replied. 'I notice you disbelieve everything out of habit, But, I swear, it's true – I've nothing more important to do.'

'You must rate making tea really high on the scale of things,' she jibed.

'Not the tea.' He took the other seat in the room, and nodded at the bed. 'How is he?'

'God knows.' Donna sighed. 'There's been no change for two days.'

'Well, at least he's not getting worse.' Barlow leaned forward. 'He saved us all, didn't he?'

'Yes, he bloody well did,' Donna agreed. She sipped at her tea, refusing to let her emotions overwhelm her as they had so often these past two days. It was time to change the subject. 'How's it feel to be the new Lord London?'

'Strange,' he admitted. 'But right.' His face softened. 'Though I'm sorry your father was killed. That wasn't my intention.'

That made her snort tea out of her nose. 'You led the bloody war against him!'

'Politics, not preference,' Barlow said. 'I wouldn't have killed him.'

'More fool you, then,' Donna replied, still not really believing him. 'He never gave in to anything in his life with grace.'

'No,' Barlow agreed. 'Well, I've had enough of killing. Seeing how close the Daleks came to wiping us out made me realise what an idiot I've been.'

Donna raised a cynical eyebrow. 'So you're giving up power and heading off to be a monk,' she jeered.

'Hardly,' he responded with a grin. 'Like I said, I'm the best man to bring everything together now. Only I want to do it peacefully – or at least, try to. It ought to be possible for us to reason this out. Besides, I'd make a lousy monk – my mind's *far* too filthy.'

Donna looked as if she was about to smile. 'I see. Well, I'm pleased to hear you talk of peace, anyway.'

He shrugged, and looked slightly uncomfortable. 'Which really brings me to why I'm here,' he said.

She glanced down at the mug of tea. 'You're not really the kitchen help?'

'I want you to marry me,' he said.

Donna looked at him sharply. 'You've got a bloody nerve!'

That made him grin. 'Yeah, haven't I? I've cheek enough for ten people. Don't worry, I'm not talking a love match here or anything. It's purely political. It will stabilise things if I marry the old Lord London's daughter, won't it?'

Trying not to think too hard about it, Donna nodded. 'Or one of his other relatives,' she added.

Barlow scowled. 'It's you or that cow Brittany,' he said. 'And I know you don't care for me much, but would you saddle *anyone* with that bitch?'

Donna paused for a moment, as if she were considering the question. 'I'm seriously tempted,' she replied. 'You two do sort of deserve one another.'

'God forbid!' he said, fervently. 'She *could* tempt me into monkdom.'

Donna didn't even smile at the joke. 'I don't want to get married,' she answered. 'And you don't really want to marry me, anyway.'

He leaned forward. 'Is it because of *him*?' he asked, gesturing to the bed.

Donna did have to think about that for a moment before shaking her head. 'No. I'm not in love with him. I owe him a lot – but he's not the reason.'

'Well –' Barlow began.

Donna almost felt like punching him. 'Can't you get it through your head that I don't want *anyone*?' she demanded. 'Not him, not you, not *anyone*. I want to be left alone.'

He was silent for a moment. 'And that's it?' he asked. 'You want to retreat into a shell for the rest of your life? Where nobody can reach you?'

Donna said nothing.

For a moment, Barlow looked annoyed. 'Look, I know I'm a miserable sod,' he complained, 'but I'm not a liar. I'm very proud of that. I won't *ever* lie to you. Hell, I could have come in here and pretended I was so smitten with you that I *had* to marry you. I could have just sat here and lied. Would that have been what you wanted?'

'No.'

'That's what I thought. You're too smart to fall for that crap.' He glared at her again. 'What I need now is someone who is strong, who can stay with me and fight beside me. And there isn't anyone else other than you.'

Donna sighed. 'I'm sterile, remember?' she stated, feeling her cheeks heat up.

'So?' Barlow shrugged. 'The three I've got already fight enough as it is. Wait till they have to figure out who's going to succeed me.'

'Donna,' came a voice, 'you're a knight. Put him on your charger and take him away, would you? It's probably the only way I'm ever going to get some rest.'

Donna stared down at him and found herself grinning foolishly. 'Doctor! You're all right!'

'No, I'm not,' he argued, with a slight smile on his lips. 'I'm getting a terrible headache from all of this arguing. I don't believe in marriage for the sake of expediency. But if you truly think you'll be happy...'

She tried to glare at Barlow for bringing all this up, but couldn't quite manage it.

'I'll not take no for an answer,' Barlow said softly.

'We'll see, then,' Donna replied, her voice equally low.

'Thank you at least for turning the volume down,' said the Doctor, wryly. 'Now kindly go off somewhere and let me get some rest. I'm a sick man, you know.' He closed his eyes.

Donna looked at Barlow, smiling, and wondered about the future.

\* \* \*

Once Donna and Barlow had gone, the Doctor jumped out of bed. His recovery was almost complete – his healing trance had done the trick, of course. Thankfully, *this* time no over-helpful medical technician had tried to help him recover.

It took him a couple of minutes to find his clothes and get dressed. He surveyed his ripped coat with a sigh. Well, he had others like it back in the TARDIS, but it wasn't really the same thing. It was a shame to see it torn up like this. He slipped it on anyway, wincing only slightly from the pain in his shoulder.

He hopped out of the door, and marched down the corridor towards the exit. Thankfully, neither Donna nor Barlow was around. He didn't want any more fuss, and he knew they'd insist. As it was, he'd spent far too long doing nothing while there was so much still to be done.

As he'd suspected, he was in the Tower. The Queen's House, he realised. It amused him to be back here again but it was also helpful. He hurried out of the building and back to the Peace Officers' rooms. The duty officer was that chap Spencer again. He looked surprised to see the Doctor.

'Hello,' the Doctor said cheerfully. 'I'll be off, soon. But I wondered if you'd managed to find that information I was after. A young girl named Samantha Jones?'

'Oh, yes, right.' Spencer started hunting on his desk. 'I checked all the data banks.' His face was grim. The Doctor wondered how many times he must have assumed that sorry face for the benefit of the broken-hearted. 'No positive match,' he sighed. 'Not when we cross-reffed against all the information you gave us on her. There's no one here on our files. I'm sorry.' He paused. 'I really do think it unlikely she's alive.'

The Doctor started at the thought, then smiled weakly. 'Oh, she's alive... she must be. She's just not here. She must be somewhere else.' He said the words with a child's certainty. 'Thank you anyway,' he added politely. 'Well, I'm sure you're a busy man. Good day.' He strode out, deep in thought.

His standing enhanced no end through his involvement with Barlow, the Doctor was able to commandeer a runabout and a driver without a problem. The cheerful young man gladly drove the Doctor back to where he'd left the TARDIS. The Doctor let him prattle on about all the changes that were happening, and about how great times were coming. The enthusiasm of the young was matched only by their naivety...

Finally, though, the trip was over, and the Doctor could say goodbye. Then he hurried to the TARDIS, and entered it.

'Hello, old girl,' he murmured, as he crossed to the console and powered it up again. Time now to rescue Susan and recover that transmuter. Everything else was secondary. He bent to his work, and did what he knew he should've

done in the first place – he instructed the TARDIS to begin analysing properly.

At least now he had some explanations for it. Susan must have used the Master's TARDIS to send the signal, distraught at the Master's actions. All he needed to do now was to narrow down the point of transmission and then go to her rescue. Provided the TARDIS behaved herself and did as she was told.

Long hours passed. The information started to come through, and as he read it, the Doctor paused.

*Tersurus...*

And then the track of an unshielded TARDIS, which then reshielded itself and left the dismal planet...

His fingers hovered over the controls, and didn't descend.

*Tersurus...*

He aborted the sequence, with a mixture of relief and reluctance. Of course... He already knew that the Master had hidden on Tersurus when his final regeneration had been used up. Some devastating force had ravaged his body and left him a crippled wreck.

But his TARDIS had left the world.

That could only mean that Susan had been the one to trigger the Master's grotesque change. And that she had taken his TARDIS and gone on alone. There was no need for him to go to her aid, then. She had acted swiftly and certainly, and solved the last remaining problem.

She had her freedom back.

Something twinged at the Doctor. Freedom. He tried to place himself in Susan's shoes. He remembered his exile to Earth, the frustration, the desperation to escape. Then release.

But wherever he went, there were the companions. He seemed to collect people like badges, the good, the brave, the plucky and bold.

The hopeless innocents.

He could leave Sam now. Give up the search. What did it matter? With the evil of the Daleks to contend with, with Susan in danger, Sam had left his thoughts for a while... He'd soon be distracted again, caught up somewhere else, in another age. Look how long he'd left Susan. How soon before he forgot all about Sam, a grain of sand on time's beach?

He could go now. There'd be only himself to look out for, just as when he'd gone off before, soon after they'd first met – he'd been testing out his new body but got caught up, diverted, held in time's thrall once again. If he got really bored this time he could always find someone else. Anyone else, really.

TARDIS-fodder...

He saw his eyes reflected back at him in the glass screen of the monitor. They were dark, cold. He closed them, imagined Susan travelling through the vortex in her stolen TARDIS, free of all responsibility now.

He snapped his eyes back open and looked down at the backs of his hands. No, that was something he would never be free of.

He started to reset the controls. It was almost time to go looking for Sam again. . .

## First Epilogue

'I'm picking up a TT capsule lock,' the technician reported from his control seat.

'Acknowledged,' Rodan responded from her own control station. She hated monitor duty, but as a very junior Time Lord, she was stuck with it. 'Somebody's probably just gone on a joyride,' she added, 'but check it out anyway.'

The technician nodded, bending to his task. Rodan examined her own controls. Yes, there was the signal. Some insignificant little planet in the Mutter's Spiral. If she wanted, she could call up all the data the Matrix had on the place, but it was hardly worth it. As she'd said, this was undoubtedly of no importance.

Then the technician gave a low whistle. 'It's an Umber Priority,' he announced, slightly awed. 'According to the computers, it's a stolen capsule piloted by a renegade.'

That made Rodan pay attention. It also meant it was out of her realm of authority. She had to refer this up, and soon. 'Get a positive lock,' she ordered, moving for the communications chair. 'I'll call the Castellan immediately.'

This was the most exciting thing that had ever happened on her duty shift. She wasn't going to mess it up. If she did, she'd be sent to some mindless, menial job like watching the transduction barriers, or timing paint drying. . .

Damn the arrogant old fool! Chancellor Goth strode through the Citadel, furious and humiliated. The meeting with the Lord President he had been anticipating with relish for the past week had turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. The senile old fool was due to resign shortly, and the matter of his successor had naturally been broached. Goth knew that *he* was the perfect candidate for the post, the one deserving person to become the next Lord President of High Gallifrey.

Only to have his ambitions dashed when the President had informed him that there was no way Goth would be nominated. Goth had stared at him in disbelief as the President muttered something about Goth being too greedy for power, but it had been impossible to listen. To be so close, and have the cup of success dashed from his lips like this!

He had to get away from here. He needed time to think, to plan. There were days yet before the official resignation and the nomination of a successor. Perhaps there was something he could do, some way to change the old

President's mind... But he needed breathing space, a place to think, somewhere to vent his anger and resentment...

Goth suddenly realised that he was being hailed by the Castellan. 'What is it?' he snapped. Couldn't anybody around here act without detailed instructions?

'A renegade TT capsule has been detected, Chancellor,' the Castellan said smoothly. 'I simply need your permission to go after it and arrest the operator.'

'Don't bother me with such trifles,' Goth snapped. 'Just go and do it.' Then, as the Castellan started to move away, a sudden decision came to him. 'No, wait! I need to get out of this place for a while. *I'll* do it. Prepare a capsule for me, and I'll be along in a moment.' The Castellan nodded and hurried off. Goth moved after him, a little more slowly.

This was what he needed – action. To get out of the Citadel for a while, on to some world that probably had never heard of the Time Lords. His anger and frustration mounting, Goth found that he was hoping that the renegade – whoever it was – would put up a fight.

Goth glared distastefully around the bleak landscape of Tersurus. He clutched his staser and went in search of the spot where the trace had been registered. It had vanished a short while ago, he had been informed. That probably meant the renegade was gone, but he still had to check. At least it gave him something to do.

He caught sight of a slight movement in a nest of rocks. It looked as if some terrible force had twisted and melted the rocks recently. But what had moved? He walked forward cautiously, the staser at the ready. Then he stopped, appalled.

There was some sort of living creature there, but horrendously mutilated. The skin was burnt and blackened, parts of the skeleton exposed. The face was blistered and warped, the eyes large and studying him unblinkingly. Goth shied back in revulsion as he realised that this *thing* was somehow alive, despite the horrendous damage it had suffered, and the pain it must be going through. Was *this* the renegade? Perhaps he should kill it, to put it out of its misery...

'Are you... are you in pain?' he asked the creature.

'Pain,' it agreed, a rasping, dying voice. 'Can't remember... everything.' It looked up at him, and it seemed to gather itself. 'I need... newness. And you need... power.'

'What?' Goth stared at the creature, repelled and confused. How could it know what he was desiring.

'I can help you,' the thing promised. 'I can get you the power you desire. And you can help me get what I need.'

‘You need death,’ Goth said with revulsion.

‘No,’ the creature whispered. ‘I need *life*. And you will help me to get it. We can help one another. . .’ It managed to sit up, grinning like a skull. ‘Do you agree?’

Goth stared at it. How could a burnt, dying thing like this possibly help him? And yet. . . If it *was* a renegade, it might have some skills that could prove useful. And if it needed him, then it meant that he could control it.

‘Yes,’ he said softly. ‘Yes, I think I do. . .’



## Second Epilogue

Becca looked up from the floor of the barn where she was teasing the kittens. Two of them were swiping happily at the straw she dangled. Serenity was watching from one of the rafters, still none too happy being so close to people. But she'd become a lot more sociable since Becca had rescued her litter a year ago. And now Serenity had grand-kittens old enough to be weaned.

There was a movement at the door, and Becca looked up to see a face she'd been hoping would come. It was that pretty knight who had saved her life. She wasn't dressed in her knights outfit now, however, but in a regular – if rather pretty – dress. She still had that mass of golden hair, though, and a peaceful sort of look on her face.

'Hello, Becca,' she said in greeting. 'How are you doing? You've grown several inches, I see,' She smiled, 'I was promised a kitten, if you remember.'

'Of course I remember,' Becca protested. 'I haven't given any away yet. You get to have first pick.' She giggled as one of the kittens tried to grab the straw from her forgers. 'They're very playful.'

'Then that means they're healthy,' Donna walked over and flopped down into the straw beside Becca. 'They're all very pretty,' she said, surveying the eight tiny bundles. 'It's going to be hard to decide.'

'No rush,' Becca said cheerfully. She looked up at Donna suspiciously. 'Aren't you somebody famous now?'

'She's almost queen,' said a friendly voice from beside the door.

Donna looked around, her face lighting up. 'Doctor!'

The stranger came in. There was something about him that made Becca like and trust him. He flopped down into the straw beside Donna, grinning. 'Hello. I thought I'd just pop by and see how things worked out.' He had a yo-yo he'd removed from a pocket, and was teasing the kittens with it. 'How is life with Barlow?'

Donna rolled her eyes. 'He lied to me, like every other man in my life.'

'Really?' The Doctor didn't sound surprised. 'And how did he do that?'

'He told me our marriage was to be purely political,' Donna growled. 'And it isn't.'

'No!' the Doctor said in mock protest.

'No,' she admitted, with a shy smile.

The Doctor grinned widely. 'It's nice to see that there can be happy endings after all,' he said. 'And no story with a mistreated girl who gets to be queen, marries for love and ends up with the pick of the litter can possibly be bad. Which one have you chosen?'

'I'm still deciding,' Donna admitted. 'I like the smoky-grey one. She's got spirit. Did your story have a happy ending?'

'She's cute,' the Doctor agreed. 'But I'd choose the tabby myself. I've a weakness for tabbies. And my story hasn't ended yet. Great happiness mixed with great sadness. The transmuter's destroyed, the Master's paid for his crimes with his life – well, one of them at least – and I think Susan's all right now.'

'And what's the downside?' asked Donna.

'I still haven't found Sam,' the Doctor said. 'A lot of very good people died.' He sighed. 'And my coat was ruined. But every progress has its price.'

Donna turned to Becca: 'I'm going to take the grey one, and I shall name her after you,' she announced.

'All right,' Becca agreed, thrilled as Donna picked up her chosen kitten.

'Will it work, Doctor?' Donna asked, turning her attention back to him. 'You've seen the future, haven't you? Will the reunification plan work?'

'Tomorrow?' The Doctor nodded. 'Yes. The day after?' He shook his head. 'You don't need to know. You'll find out as it happens.' He brushed the straw off his trousers and stood up. 'Well, I have to be off again. I just stopped by to check on things and to reassure you that you didn't have to worry about the Master or the transmuter.'

'Or the Daleks?' Donna asked.

The Doctor shook his head. 'As I said, the Daleks are like cockroaches – no matter how many you kill, there always seem to be more. But they won't be your problem.' He gazed into the distance. 'I wish I could say that they won't be mine, but I know better.'

Becca scooped up the tabby the Doctor had been admiring. 'For you,' she offered.

The Doctor looked down at the tiny bundle and smiled. 'I don't know that I could give him a good home,' he apologised. 'But thank you for offering.' He smiled at Donna. 'That generosity of spirit is one reason why I like you humans so much.'

Becca didn't understand what he was talking about, but she couldn't help liking him. 'You can give him love, can't you?' she asked.

'Yes,' agreed the Doctor gently. 'I think I could do that.'

## Author's Note

Many thanks to Jason C. Penny for his invaluable comments on matters Gal-  
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sure the *real* reason is a computer virus. . .

And thanks to Becky and Luann for tea, and Kate Nation for gracious hos-  
pitality and lots of amusing stories.

The Doctor continues his search for Sam in the following novels:

**Dreamstone Moon**

by Paul Leonard  
(May 1998)

**Seeing I**

by Jonathan Blum and Kate Orman  
(June 1998)





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