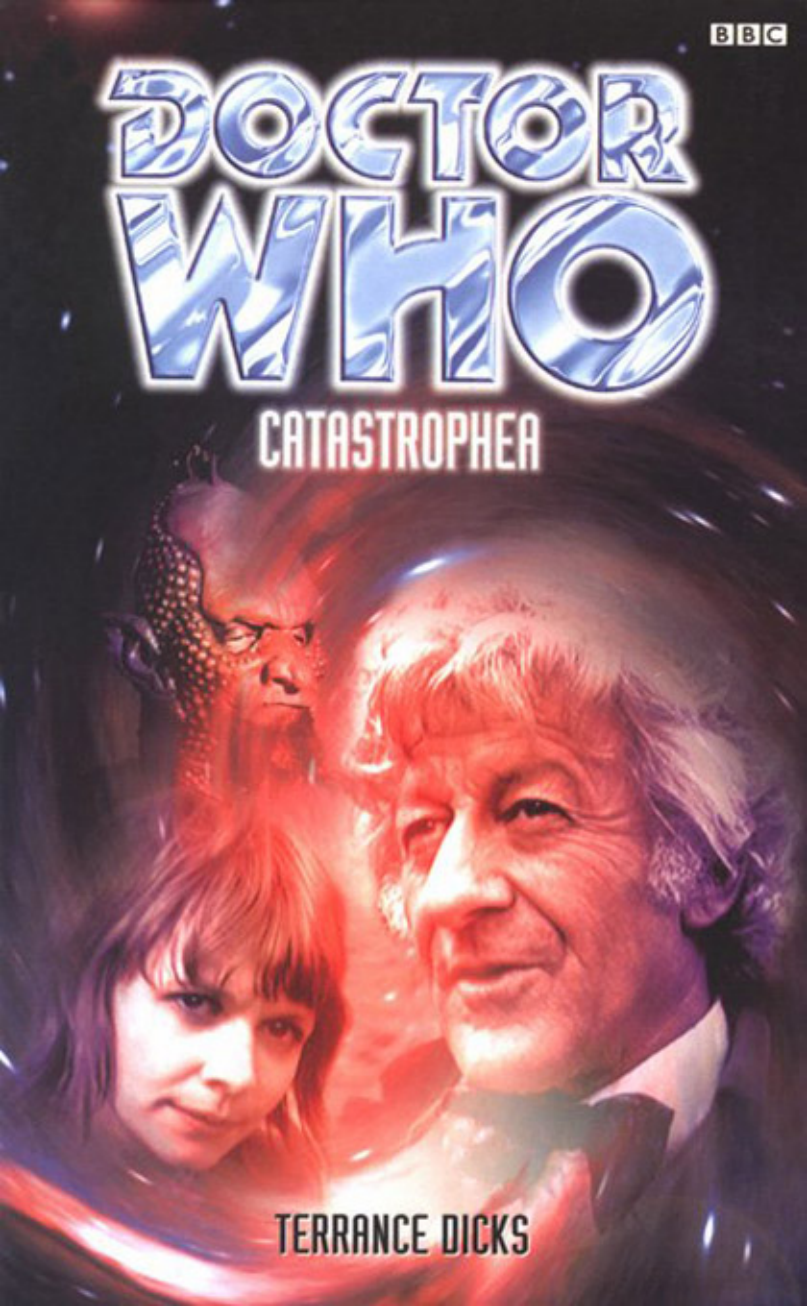
BBC

DOCTOR WHO

CATASTROPHEA



TERRANCE DICKS

'Look at the way they just call themselves the People,' said Jo.
'They're too humble to give themselves a name!'
'Or too arrogant to think they need one,' said the Doctor.

The planet's real name is Kastopheria, but generally it's been rechristened *Catastrophea* – it's a catastrophe waiting to happen. Supposedly civilised races are exploiting the world, squabbling over its wealth and resources, while the indigenous population – golden-skinned giants – seem not to care what their own fate might be. The Doctor and Jo soon become embroiled in a plan to keep peace between different parties vying for control over the planet.

But what is the strange glowing crystal lying hidden in impenetrable jungle? How will the arrival of the proud, warlike Draconians affect the fragile peace? In his quest to find the truth behind the secret history of the People, the Doctor risks unleashing a force more terrible than the galaxy has known for aeons...

Featuring the Third Doctor and Jo, this adventure takes place between the TV stories PLANET OF THE DALEKS *and* THE GREEN DEATH.

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CHAPTER ONE
IN TRANSIT

'What's the point?' said Jo Grant explosively. The Doctor looked up from the TARDIS console.

'I'm sorry?'

'The point of Daleks. Invading planets, oppressing other races...'

The Doctor's greatest enemies were much on Jo Grant's mind at the moment. She and the Doctor had just survived a terrifying encounter with them on the jungle planet Spiridon.

'Mind you,' Jo went on, 'the Daleks are welcome to Spiridon as far as I'm concerned. I just wish they'd stay there.'

'Quite a few of them will.'

There was grim satisfaction in the Doctor's voice. With the help of a Thal expedition, some of whom had sacrificed their lives in the struggle, the Doctor and Jo had defeated yet another Dalek plan to conquer the galaxy, leaving behind them a Dalek army, buried inside one of Spiridon's unique icecanoes.

The Doctor looked thoughtfully down at Jo. They made an incongruous pair. A very tall iron-haired man, his face lined with age and experience yet filled with youth and enthusiasm. And a very small, very pretty fair-haired girl. A wandering Time Lord and a trainee secret agent.

Jo was growing up, the Doctor decided. The passage of time, the dangerous adventures they had shared, had matured her. Although she still resembled the eager child who'd insisted on becoming his assistant, she was brighter and tougher than she looked.

She would leave him before very long, thought the Doctor resignedly. One way or another, his human companions always did. Already there had been the young Thal back on Spiridon who'd wanted to take her back with him. One day there would be someone else, someone from her own world and time, perhaps...The Doctor always regretted losing his human

companions, but he was going to miss Jo more than most.

Still, it was better than watching her grow old and die. Sometimes humans, with their single, all-too-brief lifetime, reminded the Doctor of speeded-up flower photography. In a matter of minutes they sprang up, flourished, withered and perished.

'Hey!' said Jo, and the Doctor realised he had been staring silently at her for some time. 'What's the matter?' she asked. 'Why have you gone all broody on me?'

Not wanting to reveal his rather gloomy reflections, the Doctor said, 'I was thinking about your question, about the Daleks.'

'Don't worry about it, Doctor, I was just being silly.'

'Far from it. As a matter of fact, you've touched on one of the most important philosophical questions of all.'

'I have?'

'The problem of evil, and why it exists in the Universe. Why it's permitted to exist.'

'And what's the answer?'

Jo looked expectantly at the Doctor, convinced that no question could possibly be too difficult for him.

'It isn't that simple, Jo. One answer, and I don't pretend that it's entirely satisfactory, is that without evil there could be no good. You need one to balance the other...'

Jo considered this proposition for a moment. 'You're right, it's not satisfactory,' she said at last. 'For one thing, there seems to be much more evil about than good.'

'That often *seems* to be the case,' admitted the Doctor. 'But remember, we're seeing only a limited part of the picture. Over the entire Universe the balance might be quite different.'

Jo was still far from convinced. 'Well, there must be an awful lot of good floating about somewhere to make up for the Daleks! And why do we never seem to run into it? All this sweetness and light, I mean. All we ever manage to find is trouble.'

The Doctor smiled. 'There are peaceful spots in the Universe, believe it or not. There's a place called the Eye of Orion I must take you to one day. And of course there's Metebelis Three, famous blue planet of the Acteon galaxy.'

Jo snorted. 'Huh! If we ever get there. The scatterbrained

way you seem to steer this contraption...'

The Doctor looked hurt. 'Really, Jo, these aspersions yo keep casting on my navigational abilities are quite unwarranted. The TARDIS may be a little temperamental, but as a rule I kno exactly where –'

The Doctor's face suddenly twisted in agony. He put a hand to his forehead, clutching at the TARDIS console with his other hand.

Jo jumped to her feet. 'What is it, Doctor?'

'Pain,' he whispered. 'Unimaginable pain.'

'What's the matter? Are you ill?'

The Doctor drew a deep shuddering breath. 'Not my pain Jo, the pain of an entire world.' His hands began moving over the controls.

'What are you doing?'

'Taking us out of the space/time continuum.'

'But why?'

'I've got to investigate.'

'Why?' asked Jo again. 'We're supposed to be going home.

'You don't understand, Jo. I felt a sudden, immensely powerful telepathic impulse, a burst of pure pain. It was as if – as if an entire planet was calling out for my help.' He touched control and a planet appeared on the monitor screen. 'And the it is!'

Adjusting another control, the Doctor brought the image into focus. He studied instrument readings in silence for some time, then announced, 'Quite a small planet, breathable atmosphere...very close to a small sun. Seems to be mostly tropical.'

The picture on the monitor zoomed closer to the planetary surface and Jo saw a tangle lush green vegetation. She shuddered, thinking of Spiridon and its poison-spitting plants. 'Do we have to go there? I've had quite enough jungles for while.'

'It probably won't be as hostile as Spiridon. And besides, it isn't all jungle. Look!'

The picture changed and an aerial view of a city appeared on the screen. A city of tightly packed, rambling wooden building huddled around a small hill, with a wide, sluggish river flowing past. The city was surrounded with a massive stockade, as if

hold back the dense jungle which pressed in around three of its sides.

'They've even got a spaceport,' said the Doctor, pointing to a flat plain just outside the city's main gate, where a handful of ships stood close to some long wooden huts.

'Big deal!'

'It might be quite an interesting place,' continued the Doctor. 'There'll be fascinating native markets, colourful local temples...'

'Colourful local assassins and, I shouldn't wonder,' said Jo. 'Not to mention muggers, thieves and cutthroats. And a wide variety of man-eating nasties and ghastly tropical diseases if past experience is anything to go by.'

'Don't be so parochial, Jo,' said the Doctor reprovingly. 'Every planet has its dangers but it also has its own particular attractions, its own culture. We'll just take a quick look around and see what the trouble is. If there's nothing I can do, if it's none of my business, we'll simply leave and go home.'

'When did you ever find any trouble that wasn't your business?' grumbled Jo.

But the Doctor wasn't listening. As his hands moved over the controls, the rise and fall of the time rotor began slowing.

On the jungle planet Kastopheria, generally called for excellent reasons, Catastrophea, there were troubles wall to wall. The two men responsible for dealing with most of them were having their daily conference.

General Walton, commanding officer of the United Planetary Association's peace-keeping force, fired his usual opening shot: 'I tell you, Administrator, the situation isn't tenable.'

'It never was,' said Administrator Charteris wearily.

Walton snorted, wheeled round, marched over to the veranda and stood gazing out over the city. He was a small, spare man, bouncing with energy, lean and fit despite his fifty-odd years. There was a kind of terrier-like eagerness about him, a constant desire to get on with the job in hand. It was a desire frequently frustrated by conditions on Catastrophea and this perhaps accounted for his permanent state of irritation.

Administrator Charteris, by contrast, was tall and plump,

with the sleek, polished look of a lifelong diplomat. But his usually cheerful round face was lined with weariness and there were dark shadows under the bright blue eyes.

Despite their differences, the two men had become good friends, united by the impossible task that faced them both. But their priorities were different and clashes were inevitable.

Walton wheeled round to face the man behind the big desk. 'If United Planetary wants me to keep the lid on this...this bubbling melting-pot, they must give me the proper resources to do it. I need more men, more modern equipment. My laser rifles are antiquated, my hovertrucks keep breaking down and our communications equipment is a joke. By the way, how long is it since we had contact with Earth?'

'Several days. But there's a reason for that.'

'You're sure?' Walton asked.

'Fairly sure. It's gone on too long to be freak planetary conditions. My technical people say it's deliberate jamming.'

'And we know who's behind it. Well, interplanetary affairs are your problem, I have to deal with conditions here on the ground.'

'I know,' said Charteris wearily. 'And you know how many times I've requested UPA to send you what you need. With the threat of war with the Draconians, garrisons are screaming for men and equipment all along the galactic frontier. Our turn will come.'

'It had better come soon!'

'All right, Charlie. You've made your formal protest, and I've acknowledged and endorsed it. Now, for God's sake stop marching around my office as if it was your bloody parade ground. Sit down and have a drink. At least the whisky hasn't run out yet.'

Walton returned to the veranda and dropped into a cane chair. 'Yours hasn't – you've collared the entire supply. We've been drinking the local rum in the mess for weeks.'

Charteris clapped his hands and a giant golden figure appeared, carrying a loaded tray. Placing the tray on a nearby table, the giant bowed and withdrew. Neither man took any notice of him.

Charteris got up and poured two long drinks, passed one to Walton and then joined him on the veranda. After a moment he

said, ‘Is it really that bad?’

Walton drained his glass. ‘Worse. Your City Police hate the Company guards, and the smugglers hate them both. Everybo hates my troops! Want the daily situation report?’

Charteris finished his drink, poured another and gestured to Walton to do the same. Walton shook his head. He seldom ha more than one drink during their daily conferences. Probabl thinks two drinks on duty would be wild debauchery, though Charteris.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘Let’s have it!’

‘There was another brawl in the main square last night, tw shootings and a stabbing. My troops broke it up.’

‘Did you get the people responsible?’

‘Company guards, some of Dove’s boys. We handed them over to your City Police. They’ll be up before you tomorrow.’

‘I’ll give them sentences that will make their eyes water,’ said Charteris. ‘I will not have this public brawling. Anything else?’

‘I’m pretty sure the Company is still flogging natives on the outlying plantations – despite all your new regulations.’

Charteris nodded. ‘They won’t always get away with it. I’ve got a bad case this afternoon. I intend to make an example him. Anything else?’

‘I’ve had a report of another village raided and burnt by skar smugglers. I suspect this was Dove and his boys.’

‘Bring them in. I’d love to give Dove ninety-nine years on a labour farm.’

Walton shrugged, ‘Can’t.’

‘Why not?’

‘You’re the one who insists on evidence – innocent until proved guilty, all that nonsense.’

‘Can’t you get evidence?’

‘Against Dove? Not a chance. Everyone’s scared to tall Besides, Dove’s always got an alibi. Fifty witnesses will swe they were boozing with him in Kisi at the time and place the night it happened. Now, if you’d suspend due process and let me bring in martial law, I could shoot him for you on general principles.’

Charteris shook his head. ‘You know I can’t do that. Is that the lot?’

‘On top of everything else I’ve got young Garon and Makos and various other juvenile revolutionaries busily stirring things

up. Not to mention assorted missionaries and do-gooders from all over the galaxy.'

Charteris smiled, shook his head and drank more whisky. 'Cheer up, Charlie, it may never happen.'

'Oh yes it will,' said Walton. 'Everyone's hot, tired, irritable and spoiling for a fight. This place is the proverbial powder keg Administrator. All it needs is one spark, just one, and everything could blow up!'

At that particular moment, unknown to the General, two particularly bright sparks were just about to arrive...

CHAPTER TWO
ARRIVAL

On the overgrown outskirts of the town, at a place where the jungle was already starting to creep back, there was a small forest of large and luxuriant thorn bushes. At the edge of the forest some of the bushes began shaking their broad, flat leaves. After a moment two figures, one tall, one small, started struggling out of the entangling shrubbery.

'Of all the places to land!' said Jo indignantly.

The Doctor turned and hauled her out of the last spiky bush.

'I thought it was rather neat. The TARDIS can stay parked in there while we take a quick look around without drawing too much attention to ourselves.'

'In these *King Solomon's Mines* outfits?'

The Doctor and Jo were both wearing safari suits in light, tough khaki material. High boots and broad-brimmed hats completed the ensemble.

'Standard wear for jungle planets,' said the Doctor. 'Climate dictates clothing. It's either something like this or a sarong.'

'What's wrong with a sarong?'

'You'd be all right, but I'd feel extremely silly. Come on, let's get moving.'

'Where to?'

The Doctor pointed behind them. 'Well, that way there's only jungle, so presumably the centre of town must be – this way!' He pointed ahead.

They set off along a grassy lane, lined with luxuriant palms. The air was hot and moist, filled with exotic, spicy scents, and walking soon became incredibly tiring. They passed a scattering of low-lying wooden buildings, each with its railed veranda and surrounding garden of colourful tropical plants.

In the distance they could see a figure kneeling in the front garden of one of the houses, digging the thick, moist earth with

wooden trowel.

'Look,' said Jo. 'There's someone. We can ask the wa
Maybe they'll offer us a cup of tea.'

As they came closer they saw that the gardener was a gi
humanoid figure in a simple one-piece garment that left arms
and legs bare. The deeply bronzed skin had an almost golden
tinge. The massive head was covered in thick dark curls and the
long bony face reminded Jo of something she couldn't quite
remember...Suddenly it came to her – the faces of the gia
statues on Easter Island.

The kneeling figure had an air of infinite sadness.

As they came closer Jo called, 'Excuse me...'

The giant ignored her and went on working.

'Excuse me,' said Jo again. 'Can you tell us if this is the right
way to town?'

The giant looked up, staring at Jo for a moment with deep-
set yellow eyes. He turned his attention to the Doctor, studying
him with apparent fascination. Equally fascinated, the Doctor
returned the giant's gaze.

A voice shouted, 'You there! What do you think you're
doing? Why are you talking to my boy? What were you saying?'

They looked past the giant and saw a dark-haired elder
woman in a white dress, standing on the veranda of the hous
She was covering them with some kind of rifle.

'We were just asking the way to town,' called Jo.

The woman raised the rifle. 'Be off with you, before I call
the City Police. We don't want your kind round here, stirring up
trouble.'

'What's the matter with you?' yelled Jo indignantly. 'We wer
only asking him –'

'Trying to recruit him for one of your damned revolutionary
trade unions more like it. Well, my boys aren't interested.
They're perfectly happy as they are. Now clear off!'

'Come along, Jo,' said the Doctor firmly. 'Time we were on
our way.' Raising his hat politely to the angry woman, the Docto
spoke to the kneeling giant. 'Cheerio, old fellow. Thanks for th
help.' Then, taking Jo's arm, he led her away.

As they moved off they heard the woman shouting at the
still silent gardener. 'You, boy! Get on with that weeding, and
mind you get every last one. If I'm not rooted up now they'll

be all over my garden...'

'Well!' said Jo, as the ranting voice faded away behind them. 'That was a waste of time!'

'Not at all,' said the Doctor. 'I thought it was quite an informative little encounter.'

'But we didn't find out anything.'

'On the contrary, we learned a great deal.'

'About what?'

'Well, about the social structure of this planet for a start. I imagine that big chap was part of the native population. The lad with the gun is presumably some kind of colonist. I recognise the type.'

'What else?'

'The native population don't seem to be held in very much respect here. It's a bad sign when a grown man can be addressed as "boy". Especially someone as big as that chap!'

'Why was that woman so hostile?'

'Things seem to be pretty tense around here. Maybe they're expecting some kind of uprising.'

'What makes you think so?'

'That woman. She keeps a rifle handy and she doesn't like strangers talking to her servant.'

'This is all pure speculation, Doctor.'

'I prefer to call it deduction,' said the Doctor with dignity.

'We still don't know if we're going the right way.'

'Oh yes we do. If we carry along this road a bit further it turns into Main Street.'

'How do you know that?'

'The gardener told me. He said to be careful, Cat City's a dangerous place.'

'Cat City?'

'Short for Catastrophea City. Catastrophea seems to be the name of the planet and this is its main city.'

Jo stared at him. 'Doctor, he didn't tell you anything. He didn't say a single word.'

'He – communicated all the same.'

Jo looked hard at him. 'You mean telepathy? You read his mind?'

'Nothing quite as precise as that. It was more like – thought impulses. "Cat City...that way...danger..."'

‘I didn’t pick up anything,’ said Jo rather disappointedly. ‘I suppose I’m just not telepathic.’

‘Nearly everybody is, at least to some extent. The ability exists in almost every intelligent species, but it isn’t always active.’

However the Doctor had obtained his information, it seemed to be accurate. As they moved along, the scattered villas turned into rows of low wooden houses, more and more until they were walking along city streets. There were more and more people too as they neared the city centre. Most of them were male and human, or humanoid, though with wide variations in size and shape. They were dressed not like the Doctor and Jo, in boots, breeches and safari jackets, but in many different styles and materials.

Some were lavishly dressed and prosperous-looking, others ragged and grimy, but they had one thing in common. They were all heavily armed. The Doctor saw blasters, laser rifles, old-fashioned projectile weapons and even older-fashioned blunderbusses. There were knives, machetes, spears and axes in sight.

Most people were on foot, although the occasional rickshaw rattled by, pulled by golden-skinned giants like the one they had seen in the garden. The people in the rickshaws were sleek and prosperous-looking, dressed in colonial-style whites. The ones on foot were a more mixed lot. Most of them looked tough, experienced fighting men.

There were occasional black-uniformed guards as well, big hard-faced men shoving their way contemptuously through the crowd. From time to time a heavy car zoomed past, scattering those in its path, and once they saw a hovertruck filled with blue-helmeted troops in combat gear.

Golden giants were everywhere, pulling rickshaws, carrying burdens, sweeping the streets. No one took any notice of them except to shove them casually aside if they got in the way.

By now the road had widened into a broad high street. It led them to a big square with beds of colourful tropical plants, a central fountain and a vaguely inspirational statue of a bewhiskered explorer. The square was surrounded with shops, bars, hotels and crowded open-fronted cafes.

The Doctor looked round. 'Well, this is it, Jo. Downtown!'

Jo sniffed. 'Not exactly Times Square, is it? Or even Piccadilly Circus.'

The Doctor smiled. 'Perhaps not. But it's an interesting spot all the same. A small colonial city in a state of extreme tension. Oppressed native population, arrogant colonists, uniformed guards – probably some kind of private security force, attached to some big corporation. A military presence as well. Plus a lot of very hard-bitten visitors from off-planet. Something here must be very valuable indeed.'

'What makes you say that?'

'Take a look at this crowd. Not the natives and colonists – the others.'

Jo looked around. 'I see what you mean. What do you make of them?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'Off-planet entrepreneurs. In other words, mercenaries, smugglers, space-pirates... The sort of people who turn up where there's big money to be made.' Pausing, he looked around. 'How about some refreshment, Jo? That big café on the corner looks quite promising. We might pick up some local news.'

Just as the Doctor spoke, a hovercar zoomed into the square. It brushed the side of a rickshaw coming the other way, overturning the flimsy wooden contraption and tipping its occupant into the gutter. Ignoring the accident, the hovercar disappeared around the corner.

The occupant of the rickshaw was a big, heavily built man in colonial whites, clutching a silver-topped cane. The Doctor and Jo watched as he scrambled furiously out of the gutter, his white safari suit stained with the mud and filth of the street.

The golden-skinned giant who had been pulling the rickshaw tried to help him to his feet but the big man thrust him away.

'Dolt!' he screamed. 'Clumsy fool! Imbecile!' He began lashing the rickshaw-puller across the bare shoulders with the cane.

The giant stood motionless, placidly accepting the blows. Long weals appeared on the golden skin.

All the passers-by thronging the square ignored the incident completely. All but one, that is. Jo Grant was already running across the muddy square.

‘Stop that,’ she shouted. ‘Leave him alone.’

The big man swung round and stared at Jo in amazement, if astonished that anyone should dare to question his actions.

‘Clear off and mind your own business, you silly little bitch!’ he snarled, then turned back towards the rickshaw driver, cane raised high.

Jo kicked him hard on the back of the knee with a booted foot.

The man gave a yelp of pain and his free hand flailed round in a backhanded blow, knocking her to the ground. He raised the cane, aiming a blow at her prostrate form.

By now the Doctor’s long legs had taken him across the square. Before the cane could come down, a large and bony fist took the big man under the chin, sending him crashing into the gutter once again.

The Doctor helped Jo to her feet. ‘Are you all right?’

‘More or less...’ Jo’s eyes widened, staring over the Doctor’s shoulder. ‘Doctor, look out!’

The Doctor whirled round.

The big man in the muddy white suit was back on his feet. He twisted the top of his silver cane and pulled, revealing a long, gleaming blade. Tossing the wooden sheath aside, he rushed murderously at the Doctor.

CHAPTER THREE
IN TROUBLE

As the big man rushed forwards, the Doctor's arm flashed out i
a scything blow. The edge of his hand struck his opponent
wrist, sending the sword-cane flying through the air. Then, usin
the power of the big man's rush, the Doctor gripped wrist and
arm, twisted, heaved...

Venusian Aikido is highly effective in a defensive situation.

Arms and legs windmilling, the big man sailed through the
air and on to the raised terrace of the nearby café. He landed on
a table occupied by a group of soldiers, shattering the table a
spilling their drinks.

Indignantly, the soldiers leapt to their feet. They grabbed the
man's arms and legs between them, swung him to and fro a few
times and then let go at the top of the swing, sending him flying
back over the café terrace.

The big man landed in a muddy puddle just in front of the
Doctor and Jo. Battered and mud-covered, he scrambled to h
feet gibbering with rage. He began screaming angrily at th
Doctor.

'You'll pay for this, damn you! Don't you know who I am?'

'I'm glad to say I don't, sir,' said the Doctor. 'But I've got a
pretty good idea *what* you are.'

The big man rushed at him in blind rage.

The Doctor stepped aside, sticking out a foot, and his
attacker crashed to the ground yet again.

By now a crowd was gathering, jeering and laughing.

A battered hovertruck came round the corner and two very
large men jumped out. They wore shabby white uniforms an
round helmets with faded golden badges on. They both clutche
neuro-truncheons.

In the immortal words of policemen everywhere, one of
them said, 'All right, all right, what's going on here then?'

‘This off-planet scum assaulted me,’ screamed the big man as he got up. ‘Don’t you recognise me? I’m Councillor Rekar!’

The policeman didn’t seem greatly impressed. ‘Well, I’m Constable Sanders,’ he said. ‘This is my colleague, Constable Sidney.’ He looked at the Doctor. ‘Well? What’s your story? Did you assault the Councillor here?’

‘It’s the Councillor who’s been doing all the assaulting,’ said the Doctor. ‘First he attacked the gentleman who was pulling his rickshaw. He’ll tell you...’

‘I doubt it,’ said Constable Sanders drily.

The Doctor looked round and saw that the giant and his rickshaw had disappeared. ‘Well, anyway...then he knocked down my companion here, and finally assaulted me with a deadly weapon.’

Constable Sidney gave him a sceptical look. ‘Oh yes? And where is this deadly weapon?’

Jo looked around and saw the sword-cane lying where it had fallen, a few yards away.

‘Right here,’ she said.

She ran over, snatched up the sword-cane and handed it to the Doctor.

The Doctor turned round to the policemen, sword-cane in hand, and they jumped back, raising their neuro-truncheons.

‘No cause for alarm, gentlemen,’ he said cheerfully. He then stooped down and picked up the wooden scabbard, still lying where Rekar had thrown it. ‘And here’s the rest of it.’

He slipped the sword-blade back into the cane and handed the weapon to Constable Sidney, the nearer of the two policemen.

Constable Sanders looked at Rekar. ‘Well, Councillor?’

‘I was simply using it to defend myself,’ blustered Rekar.

‘Liar!’ shouted Jo. ‘You tried to kill the Doctor.’

‘You shut your mouth, you off-world slut.’

‘What was that, sir?’ thundered the Doctor.

Raising his fists in the classic defensive stance he had learnt from the great John L. Sullivan, he took a step towards Rekar, who jumped hastily back.

‘Sock him again, Doc,’ yelled a hopeful member of the crowd.

The two policemen looked at each other.

‘What do you reckon?’ said Constable Sidney.

Constable Sanders looked grave. ‘We appear to have tw conflicting accounts of events. Something of a dilemma for th conscientious police officer.’

‘How about we nick the lot?’ suggested Constable Sidney.

Constable Sanders nodded. ‘Nick the lot!’

With that, the Doctor, Jo and Councillor Rekar were hustled into the hovertruck.

‘Well, at least they put us in a separate cell,’ said Jo.

Councillor Rekar had spent the entire journey, fortunately short one, shouting about his own importance and threatening Jo and the Doctor and the two policemen with his dire vengeance.

Constable Sanders had finally shut him up by threatening to put him in the same cell as the Doctor and Jo and let them sor out their differences that way.

‘They didn’t dare do anything else,’ said the Doctor. ‘I expec they were afraid of what you might do to the poor man.’

‘Me? You were the one chucking him about like a beac ball!’

‘But it was you who kicked him!’ said the Doctor virtuously. ‘How many times must I tell you, Jo, violence isn’t the answer.’

‘He deserved kicking. Did you see the way he was beatin that poor native? And no one took a blind bit of notice.’

‘Not even the native,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully.

‘What do you mean?’

‘You saw the way he just stood there, letting himself be beaten. He could have swatted that fellow Rekar like a fly. But he made no attempt to defend himself, or even to run away.’

‘He probably didn’t dare,’ said Jo. ‘I expect his spirit ha been broken by years of colonial oppression.’

‘That gardener chap was just the same in a way,’ mused t Doctor. ‘He didn’t react to all the woman’s bullying at all.’

‘I expect he was too frightened as well. She had a gu remember.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘There’s more to it than that. I’ve encountered oppressed populations before, Jo. There always a spark of rebellion somewhere inside. Here there’s well, nothing...’

Jo looked around their cell. It was a simple enough room furnished only with a wooden bunk covered in a rough blanket. There was a tiny window high in the wall, giving a glimpse of green jungle, and Jo found it hard to imagine the huge, heavy wooden door ever opening again.

'Well, come on, Doctor,' said Jo.

'Come on what?'

'Isn't it time you started getting us out of here? Do something brilliant with your sonic screwdriver!'

'I'm afraid I can't.'

'Why not?'

'It doesn't work on wood. This place is just too low-tech.' The Doctor rubbed his chin. 'Mind you, I could convert it into a laser-torch and try cutting a hole in the door.'

'Go on, then.'

'Hmm...' The Doctor scratched his nose. 'On second thoughts, I can't do that either. This building seems to be made of dry wood, Jo. I'd probably set the whole place on fire. Someone might notice.'

Jo looked despondently at the tiny window. 'Well, that window's too small even for me.' She brightened. 'Tell you what, Doctor, I'll pretend to be ill and you can clobber the guard when he comes in. It's an old trick, but it might just work. It always does in Westerns.'

She threw herself back on the bunk, clutched her stomach and started groaning horribly.

'Do stop that, Jo,' the Doctor snapped. 'I have no intention of clobbering anyone.'

Jo sat up. 'Why not?'

'I prefer to let justice take its course. We have an excellent case, and I shall conduct my own defence. It will be a very interesting opportunity to study this planet's legal system.'

'Followed by an even better one to study their penal system,' snapped Jo. 'Suppose they won't listen to you, Doctor? Suppose they sentence us to life on the equivalent of Devil's Island?'

The Doctor considered. 'I suppose it's a possibility. Still, if that happens, Jo, we'll know exactly what to do!'

'We will?'

'I'll pretend to be ill, you clobber the guard and we'll escape,' said the Doctor solemnly. 'After all, it always works in Westerns!'

Before Jo could reply, there was a rattle of heavy wooden bolts and the door swung open. Sanders and Sidney, the two policemen who had arrested them, stood in the corridor.

'Come on, you two,' said Sanders. 'You'll be late!'

'What for?' asked Jo. 'The next boat to Devil's Island?'

'For your trial, of course.'

The Doctor jumped to his feet. 'Excellent! You see, Jo? Come along!' As they were marched along the jailhouse corridor, he said, 'The wheels of justice seem to turn commendably quickly here, gentlemen.'

'You're in luck,' said Constable Sidney. 'Administrator Charteris is sitting today and we tagged you on the end of the docket. Gets us a bit of overtime as well as the arrest bonus.'

'What's this Administrator like?' asked Jo.

'Cruel but fair,' said Sanders.

Sidney saw Jo's worried look and said, 'He's not so bad. Gets a bit tetchy, but then he's got reason to be. And I warn you, he doesn't mess about.'

'Just tell him your side of what happened,' said Sanders. 'Stick to the truth and don't try anything fancy, or you'll be on your way to a labour farm before you can blink.'

'You hear that, Doctor?' Jo warned. 'Don't try anything fancy!'

The Doctor gave her an indignant look. 'Me?'

They were marched along a series of corridors and finally into a simple waiting room.

Councillor Rekar, now somewhat cleaned up, was already standing there, guarded by a constable. He glanced contemptuously at the Doctor and Jo.

'Well, you're for it now, you two!' he snarled.

'Not if there's anything like justice in this town,' said the Doctor calmly.

Rekar laughed. 'You can forget about justice. What matters is power. I'm a powerful man on this little planet and I'm going to make you pay! You two are going to a labour farm for the rest of your lives!'

'All right, all right, that's enough of that,' said Constable Sanders. 'You'll be up in front of the Administrator in a minute and he won't stand for brawling in court. Come on!'

He ushered them into the courtroom.

CHAPTER FOUR
ON TRIAL

The Doctor, no stranger to trials and courtrooms, studied his surroundings with keen interest. They were in a large bare hall fitted up to do duty as a simple courtroom. Several rows of wooden chairs faced the judge's bench, uniformed constables lined the walls and a small group of spectators sat in a railed-off section at the back of the court.

On the wall behind the bench was a blue and white flag bearing the letters UPA, superimposed on the symbolic shapes of a laurel wreath and a dove. The United Planetary Association consisted of Earth, the most important and influential member, and a number of its colony planets. As the Doctor remembered, it had grown out of the old United Nations on Earth, inheriting the same noble traditions and many of the same insoluble problems.

In a high-backed chair on the bench there sat a large, plump man. He wore a crumpled white uniform decorated with epaulettes of tarnished gold braid and he was studying a sheaf of notes. He looked hot, cross and exhausted.

A big ceiling-fan turned slowly overhead, stirring the humid air of the courtroom. Standing before the bench was a thuggish-looking man in a black uniform.

'We're a bit early,' whispered Sanders. 'Stand at the back here and keep quiet.'

Looking up from his notes, the Administrator began to speak.

'I find you guilty of cruel and abusive treatment of the native labourers in your charge.'

The man shrugged. 'Gotta keep them in line. It's my job.'

'It's your job to control them without cruelty,' snapped the Administrator. 'Heaven knows, they're docile enough. The evidence clearly shows that you carried out a number of cru

and savage floggings over a considerable period of time. normal circumstances I should have you deported, but with th current Draconian blockade that option is closed to me.'

Jo looked up at the Doctor. 'Draconians?' she whispered.

The Doctor shrugged.

'Shh!' hissed Constable Sanders reprovingly. 'Silence court!'

The Administrator went on, 'I therefore sentence you to three months on a labour farm.'

The thug looked outraged. 'Three months for flogging a few natives? That's ridiculous.'

The Administrator studied the man for a moment. 'Quite right,' he said levelly. 'The sentence is ridiculous. Six months! Take him away.'

A constable marched the prisoner out and the Administrator snapped, 'Next!'

The Doctor and Jo were brought forward to stand before the bench.

Administrator Charteris looked at his notes and frowned. 'I don't seem to have your papers on this case.'

'Late addition, sir,' said Constable Sanders.

'What's the charge?'

'Making an affray, conduct likely to disturb the peace. There's a third defendant...'

'I protest,' shouted Rekar. 'I am not a defendant, I am a victim. These two off-planet hooligans assaulted me...'

'All in good time, Councillor,' said Charteris. He looked at the Doctor and Jo. 'Names?'

'I am the Doctor and this is –'

'Full name.'

'Smith. Doctor John Smith.'

'A large family, the Smiths,' said Charteris. 'Especially amongst visitors to this planet.' He looked at Jo. 'Are you a Smith as well?'

'No, I'm a Grant,' said Jo. 'Josephine Grant, sir.'

Administrator Charteris wrote down the names. 'I am, of course, already well acquainted with Councillor Rekar.' He turned to Constable Sanders. 'Did you witness this affray Constable?'

'Not as such, sir. But by the time we arrived some kind o

altercation had clearly taken place.'

'How could you tell?'

'By the state of the Councillor, sir. He was a bit bashed uplooking and covered in mud. The defendants were still arguing and a crowd was gathering. Seemed best to bring them all in.'

'I tell you, they assaulted me,' said Rekar. 'Attacked me f no reason at all.'

'That's not true,' cried Jo. She looked up at the Administrator. 'You just gave someone six months for ill-treating natives, didn't you? I'll give him six months as well. He was beating a native with his cane in the middle of the street. Beating him savagely...'

'I see,' said Charteris. 'Well, Doctor? Do you confirm this story?'

'Most certainly,' said the Doctor. 'Miss Grant saw this man beating a native. She tried to stop him and he knocked he down.'

'Did he, indeed? And what did you do?'

'I – reproved him,' said the Doctor.

'What form did this reproof take?'

'Well, to be honest, I knocked him down,' admitted the Doctor. 'I disapprove of violence on principal, Administrator, but in the heat of the moment...'

'Quite so,' said Charteris gravely. 'Go on, Doctor. What happened next?'

'Councillor Rekar attacked me with a sword-cane and –'

'One moment,' interrupted Charteris. 'Is this weapon being presented in evidence?'

A constable came forward with the silver-topped cane an handed it to Sanders.

'Yes, sir,' said Sanders. 'This is the weapon in question.' He drew the sword from its wooden sheath and the blade gleame evilly. Pushing back the blade, he handed the cane to th Administrator. Charteris examined it for a moment and then handed it back.

'This is your cane, is it not, Councillor? I have often seen you carrying it.'

'I was simply using it to defend myself,' muttered Rekar.

'I see,' said Charteris. 'I see. Tell me, Doctor, were you armed?'

'No, sir. I never carry weapons.'

‘So what did you do when, as you claim, Councillor Reka attacked you with his sword-stick?’

‘I disarmed him with a nerve-strike to the wrist and threw him on to the terrace of a nearby café. Unfortunately, he landed on a table occupied by some military gentlemen. They appeared to resent his arrival, and, erm, threw him back. He became abusive, a crowd gathered and your constables arrived.’

Charteris said nothing for a moment, but there was a gleam of amusement in his bright blue eyes. Jo suddenly realised that he was enjoying himself enormously. Which seemed to be, s thought hopefully, a good sign for their side.

In the moment’s silence that followed they could hear distant sounds of chanting and yelling coming from outside the courtroom.

‘What’s all that racket?’ demanded Charteris irritably.

A constable said, ‘Some nd’ki of demonstration, Administrator.’

‘Is it peaceful?’

‘At the moment, sir.’

‘See that it stays that way. If there’s any trouble, disperse t crowd.’

The constable hurried out and the Administrator turned his attention to Constable Sanders.

‘Our problem, Constable, is that you arrived when most of the action was over. Did anyone actually witness the alleg attacks – on the native, on the Doctor and on Councillor Rekar’

A young man stood up at the back of the court.

‘I did, Administrator.’

Charteris sighed. ‘Mr Makos! I might have known you’d be involved in this!’

The young man had fair skin, blue eyes and a mop of curl blond hair. He wore native-style sarong.

‘I was sitting with a group of my friends on the café terrace. We saw the whole thing, and the Doctor here is telling the exa truth. I can give you all the witness statements you need.’

‘You always can. Tell me, is the gentleman, Doctor Smith, a member of one of the many political groups with which you are associated?’

‘Not as far as I am aware, sir. I have never seen him before

Charteris turned to the Doctor. ‘Doctor Smith?’

‘I am grateful for this young man’s supporting testimony,’ said the Doctor. ‘But we have never met before.’

‘Are you engaged in any form of political activity?’

‘No, sir.’

‘What do you do, exactly, Doctor? Why are you here?’

‘I am a peripatetic scholar, engaged in the study of native cultures. My interests are strictly non-political.’

‘I am glad to hear it. This planet has far too many politicians already. I don’t think we need trouble you, Mr Makos. Is that your demonstration outside?’

‘Simply a spontaneous expression of popular feeling, Administrator!’

‘I’m sure it is. Very well, I think this is a case for summary judgement. Councillor Rekar! I find it necessary to remind you that this planet is now under AUP rule and the native inhabitants may no longer be ill-treated with impunity. Nor is it fitting for a councillor to be seen brawling in the streets. I am tempted to take the young lady’s advice and send you to a labour farm. However, in view of the fact that you seem to have suffered considerable pain and humiliation already, I will content myself with fining you two thousand credits. Take him to the fines office, Constable. Once he has paid the fine he is free to go.’

‘I’ll pay it right now,’ growled Rekar. Ostentatiously pulling a thick wad of notes from his pocket, he gave Jo and the Doctor one last glare and swaggered from the courtroom.

The Administrator turned to the Doctor and Jo.

‘I shall deal with the case of the female prisoner first,’ he said solemnly. ‘Miss Grant, your sympathetic feelings for our native population do you great credit. Putting an end to the mistreatment of the People is one of the main aims of this administration. If more people took your attitude, our task would be easier. I will overlook the assault on Councillor Rekar, in view of the counter-assault you yourself suffered. You are discharged without a stain on your character and are free to go.’

‘Thank you sir.’

‘As for you, Doctor, your case is more serious, since the assault seems to have been rather more vigorous, although I recognise the extent to which you were provoked. However, we cannot have brawling in the public streets and an attack on a City Councillor is a serious matter. I have no option but to sentence

you to six weeks on a labour farm...'

Jo looked round, wondering whether to collapse groaning and clutching her stomach. On the way out, maybe...

The Doctor opened his mouth to protest, but before he could speak Charteris continued, 'Sentence will be suspended on condition of future good behaviour. You are free to go.'

The Doctor bowed. 'Thank you, Administrator.'

Charteris nodded back, studying the Doctor thoughtfully for a moment. He got up and disappeared through a door at the back of the court.

'You'd better go out the front way and calm your friends down,' said Sanders.

The Doctor looked puzzled. 'What friends?'

'We don't know anyone on this planet,' said Jo.

'No?' said Sidney.

They were taken to the main entrance and out on to the front steps of the courthouse. A small but noisy crowd was gathered in the little square. Some of them were carrying home-made banners. 'JUSTICE FOR THE PEOPLE!' they read. 'FREE THE CAT CITY TWO!'

A cheer went up when the Doctor and Jo appeared.

Makos, the young man who'd spoken up for them in court, appeared and shook them both warmly by the hand.

The Doctor looked at the banners and the cheering crowd. 'What's all this fuss about? Who are the Cat City Two?'

'You are, Doctor. You and the young lady. You're heroes of the revolution now. Welcome to Catastrophea!'

CHAPTER FIVE
IN POLITICS

To Jo's delight – and the Doctor's vast embarrassment – the were escorted back to the café in the main square by a sm loudly cheering crowd.

Outside the café the crowd halted and Makos addresse them.

'Thank you for all your support, my friends. We have scored another magnificent victory in the cause of freedom. Now we must plan the next stage in our struggle!'

The crowd dispersed and Makos ushered the Doctor and Jo inside the café – the very same café into which the Doctor ha thrown Rekar. The shattered terrace table had already be replaced.

The interior of the café consisted of a vast main room broken up by supporting pillars, filled with scattered tables and chairs. A long bar ran along the left-hand wall and there was small stage at the back of the room.

A big fan swung round sluggishly on the ceiling, stirring the hot and smoky air. Nearly all the tables were occupied and giant golden-skinned figures moved silently between them, bearin trays of food and drink.

Jo studied them with interest. There were females serving as well as males. The females were only slightly smaller than the males, with the same sad brown eyes and soft dark curls th clung tightly to their heads. Males and females alike wore th same unisex sarong and went about their duties with the sam quiet meekness. Except when being served, or when giving order, nobody took any notice of them.

The Doctor looked round the big crowded room. In one part of the café the tables were occupied by black-uniformed guards, much like the one they'd seen sentenced in court.

Another area held soldiers in uniforms of khaki drill, with

blue berets and UPA flashes on their shoulders.

Yet a third section was filled by a motley collection of tough looking men in a variety of tropical gear. One of them, a squat bald man in an elaborately barbaric costume, stared hard at the Doctor, seeming to resent his scrutiny.

'Paranoid type, worried about strangers,' thought the Doctor as he looked away.

Tables between were occupied by a more varied collection of civilian types – farmers, traders, shopkeepers, civil servants, guessed the Doctor, the usual population of a frontier town.

'Quite a mixed crowd!' he said.

'Oh, everyone comes to Rik's,' said Makos. 'Come and meet him.'

He led them to the end of the room, where a dark-haired medium-sized man was leaning against the bar and keeping a keen eye on the room. He had a weathered, sardonic face and the cynical expression of a man who's seen it all and doesn't much care for any of it.

'Rik, this is Miss Grant,' he said. 'And this is the Doctor. He threw an extra customer your way earlier this afternoon.'

Rik raised a hand in greeting. 'Of all the cafés in all the planets in the galaxy, you had to throw him into mine!'

'I do apologise,' said the Doctor, with a dry smile. 'It wasn't deliberate, I assure you. I can pay for the damage...'

'Forget it, Doc. Nobody likes City Councillors anyway, and that guy Rekar has tried to close me down a coupla times. Just throw him some other direction next time.'

'I'll try,' the Doctor assured him solemnly. He glanced round the room. 'I see your customers all keep to their own particular territories.'

Rik shrugged. 'Just seems to work that way. As long as there's no trouble...'

'Rik's strictly neutral,' said Makos. 'Everyone welcome as long as they can pay their way, right Rik? We've tried to recruit him to the cause, but he says he's not interested in politics.'

'Wise man,' said the Doctor. 'It can get you into a lot of trouble.'

Rik said, 'That's right. I stick my neck out for nobody.'

Makos led Jo and the Doctor to an alcove in the far corner of the room, where three people sat round a table. One was

handsome, intense-looking young man with bristly black hair an
a stubbly chin, the other a small, balding and inconspicuous typ
and the third a tall, strikingly beautiful blonde woman. Like
Makos, they all wore native-style sarongs.

The dark-haired young man jumped up to greet them. ‘So
you made it? Well done! Mind you, I had a guerrilla squad
standing by to attack the courtroom just in case. I stood them
down when I got the news.’ He sounded almost disappointed.

‘I told you there was no need for any violence, Garon,’ said
Makos. ‘Peaceful, legal means are always the best. Isn’t that so,
Doctor?’

‘Oh, undoubtedly,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘Whenever possible.’

Garon seized the Doctor’s hand and shook it
enthusiastically. ‘Welcome on behalf of the Revolutionary
Freedom Alliance! We’ve been waiting so long for you to arrive.
How did you manage to get here? I thought maybe with the
blockade...Still, I daresay you have your methods, an old hand
like you. This is Alanna.’

The blonde girl rose and shook the Doctor’s hand, gripping
it with frantic enthusiasm.

‘Welcome, Doctor. I’ve heard a lot about you.’

The Doctor looked curiously at her. Her eyes were shining
brightly, and she seemed in a state of almost feverish excitement.

‘How do you do, Madam?’ he said formally.

‘Alanna’s not exactly with the Alliance,’ explained Makos.
‘She works with one of the relief agencies. She’s with Cosmic
Soul, one of the groups that make up the Interdenominational
Missionary Foundation. But she’s very sympathetic to our aims,
aren’t you, Alanna?’

‘As long as they’re achieved by non-violent methods, yes,’
said Alanna. She looked meaningfully at Garon. ‘Non-violence is
the only possible way, don’t you agree, Doctor?’

‘Yes. Well, as I said, it’s the best way, certainly,’ said the
Doctor. ‘In ideal circumstances, of course...’

‘In any possible circumstances,’ said Alanna, with the
confident superiority of someone who always knows she’s right.

‘Sit down, sit down,’ said Makos eagerly. ‘You’ll both have
something to drink, some food? Only native fare and wine I’m
afraid, all that’s available since the blockade.’

‘The Administrator mentioned that in court,’ said Jo. ‘He

said it was the Draconian.'

'That's right,' said Makos. 'No ships in or out, no communication with Earth. And we're so out of the way here, it'll probably be weeks before anyone notices. Still, the native food's quite palatable when you get used to it...Oh, this is Rob, by the way, one of Garon's people.'

He nodded to the little balding man, who nodded back shyly.

The Doctor and Jo sat down, and Makos went off to speak to a passing waiter.

When he returned he said, 'I can't tell you how glad I am that you've finally arrived. We've all agreed that something must be done here – but we can't agree what!'

'Direct action!' said Garon fiercely. 'Sabotage! Civil disruption! Anarchy! It's the only way. We must strike now, show them we mean business.'

Rob nodded enthusiastically.

'All that will do is make things worse,' said Alanna. 'We must pray for spiritual enlightenment.'

Makos shook his head. 'Political pressure,' he said firmly. 'Continuous unrelenting political pressure, out here and back at UPA headquarters on Earth. It's beginning to work already.'

'Is it?' asked Garon sceptically. 'What makes you think so?'

'Look at the way Charteris acted over our two friends here. He didn't dare hold them once he knew the Freedom Alliance was behind them.'

'More likely he knew about my commando squad,' said Garon. 'He knew if he didn't turn them loose, I'd come and take them.'

'I think it was the result of our prayers,' said Alanna. 'I organised a pray-in as soon as we heard they'd been arrested.'

'You're all very keen to claim the credit for our release,' said Jo. 'Does it occur to you that the Administrator is a fair man who listened to us and believed our story?'

Garon said scornfully, 'I'm afraid you're being rather naive, my dear. Oh, old Charteris isn't a bad chap, but he is a member of the Establishment after all. In fact, here on Catastrophea, he is the establishment, along with General Walton. He would never have released El Llama without political pressure.'

'El who?' said Jo.

'The Flame!' said Alanna.

‘The Flame of Liberty,’ said Garon. ‘The greatest revolutionary of them all. The guerrilla fighter feared by tyrannical rulers all over the galaxy.’

‘The hero sent by Alliance HQ on Earth to lead us to victory,’ said Makos. ‘You, Doctor!’

Administrator Charteris and General Walton were enjoying the afternoon drink, this time in the club bar at government HQ. They were stretched out in cane chairs on the veranda, a tray of drinks on the table between them.

‘Interesting case in court this afternoon,’ said Charteris. ‘Fellow calling himself the Doctor – Doctor John Smith, believe it or not.’

‘Never heard of him.’

‘Nor had I,’ said Charteris. ‘Which is odd, considering... I thought I knew everyone in Cat City.’

‘New arrival?’

‘Hardly, in the circumstances.’

‘Perhaps he’s been lying low.’

‘Perhaps.’

‘What’s he supposed to have done?’ asked Walton, without much interest.

‘He threw Councillor Rekar on to the terrace at Rik’s café.’

Walton sat up. ‘Did he? Splendid fellow! Why?’

‘This Doctor had a girl with him, nice little thing.’

‘Was she called Smith as well?’

‘Said her name was Josephine Grant. Seems she saw Rekar beating a rickshaw driver and told him off. Rekar knocked her down, then the Doctor knocked *him* down. Rekar pulled a sword from his cane.’

‘What happened next?’

‘Apparently this Doctor took it away and tossed Rekar over the terrace and into Rik’s place.’

‘Good for him,’ said Walton. ‘Rekar’s a first-class four-letter man. Suppose you had to lock the Doctor up, though?’

Charteris shook his head. ‘Let him go. Suspended sentence.’

‘What for?’

‘I rather took to him,’ said Charteris. ‘And I believed his story.’

‘Bit rash, surely? If the fellow’s a troublemaker...’

‘You may be right. Been wondering ever since if I made a mistake.’

‘Why?’

‘For a start, young Makos popped up in court. Had a pack of his fellow revolutionaries, all ready to swear the Doctor was innocent – and the usual rent-a-mob outside waving banners.’

Walton shook his head. ‘If there’s one thing I love, it’s political it’s a great pity you *didn’t* lock him up. We’ve got too damn many politicians here already. Where is he now?’

‘He and the girl went off with Makos and his crowd. I received a report that they went to Rik’s place with Garon and that girl Alanna.’

‘Sounds as if they’re political all right.’

‘That’s what worries me,’ said Charteris ruefully. ‘When I got back to my office after court, I found a security report from Earth Intelligence on my desk. Must have come in just before the blockade, but I’d been too busy to read it before.’

‘What did it say?’

‘Apparently some revolutionary bigwig called El Llama is on his way here.’

‘Description fit this Doctor fellow?’

‘It could do, what there was of it. Supposed to be tall and thin. Apparently he’s a master of disguise.’

‘Anything on the girl?’

Charteris shook his head.

Walton chuckled. ‘Looks as if the civil power has dropped another major clanger, old chap. Don’t worry, I’ll get young Avery’s Intelligence Unit to pick them up.’

‘No,’ said Charteris. ‘Not yet.’

‘Why not?’

‘Well, apart from the fact that Military Intelligence is a contradiction in terms, there’s still an outside chance that this Doctor may be innocent. Your lads tend to be a shade overenthusiastic. Their last suspect was killed resisting arrest – *and* he was a perfectly innocent little melon-farmer.’

‘Still might be better to take this Doctor out,’ persisted Walton. ‘I’ll put a Special Squad on it for you like. They’ll pick him up one dark night, he’ll never be seen again.’

‘And the girl? Pretty little thing with fair hair. Do we kill her too?’

‘Probably a trained terrorist with a dozen assassinations to her credit. What do you say?’

‘No,’ said Charteris again. ‘Not yet. I’ll use those methods if I must – but only if I must.’

Walton frowned. ‘Remember what I was saying earlier, about this place being a powder keg?’

‘Well?’

‘Are you sure you want a couple of unknown politicals on the loose?’

‘I take your point. But I still need to be sure. We’ll just keep an eye on this Doctor for a while.’

General Walton nodded. ‘Care to let me have a copy of the Earth Security report, just for the files?’

‘Certainly. I’ll send one over. Another drink?’

General Walton thought for a moment and then nodded. After all, he was off-duty – as far as one was ever off-duty on Catastrophea. Charteris raised a hand to summon the hovering native servant.

‘Decent chap, old Charteris,’ thought Walton. ‘Sometimes a bit too soft-hearted for his own good.’

General Walton liked to think that he himself was a pretty decent chap too. But soft-hearted he wasn’t – in fact, in pursuit of what he saw as his duty, he was utterly ruthless.

At the moment, he saw it as his duty to deal with the Doctor.

CHAPTER SIX
HISTORY OF BLOC

The meal, a variety of delicious spicy native dishes accompanied by native beer, fruit juice and sparkling green wi had been largely consumed.

The Doctor was desperately trying to shake off his new an unexpected status as a class revolutionary.

'How many times must I tell you? I *am* El Llama! Miss Grant and I are simply travellers. We arrived here by chance, saw that oaf Rekar beating a native and became...involved. Whoever you are expecting, it isn't me!'

The three looked at him with a mixture of disappointment and suspicion. 'If you're not – not the one we were expecting what the hell are you doing here?' demanded Garon.

'That's right,' said Makos. 'No one in his right mind would come to Catastrophea without some good reason, not at a time like this.'

'And come to that, how did you get here?' asked Alanna. 'With the Dragons' blockade, there have been no ships in or o for weeks.'

'My spacecraft is rather small and very advanced,' said t Doctor. 'Somehow we must have slipped through the ne without even realising.'

'The Doctor's navigational ability has always been rather erratic,' said Jo sweetly. 'Sometimes we end up *in the Stratosphere* places.'

The Doctor shot her a reproachful glance and said, 'Yes, quite so. We arrived here purely by accident.'

The three young people looked dubiously at each other. Fo a moment the Doctor thought he had convinced them. Then a cunning smile spread over Makos's face.

'Yes, of course, Doctor, we understand.' He looked knowingly at his friends. 'You hear that, you lot? The Doctor is

simply a casual visitor. He knows nothing about politics and he is definitely not El Llama. That's right out.'

'No, no, of course not,' chorused the others.

'We quite understand, Doctor,' said Makos again. 'Now what are your orders?'

'I haven't got any orders for you, you young idiot,' snapped the Doctor. 'Haven't you been listening?'

Garon said, 'Don't be a fool, Makos. Since the Doctor isn't El Llama, how can he have any orders for us?'

'Exactly!' said the Doctor, relieved to have got through to them at last

But he hadn't. With a knowing smile, Garon said, 'Play it your way, Doctor. When you've made your plans, we'll be ready and waiting. It's a pleasure to work with a real professional.'

The Doctor sighed and gave up. He remembered why he had come to this planet: that strange cry of pain he had heard – no, felt – in the TARDIS. He was beginning to understand the reason for it. Surely nobody could be sadder than the natives of this planet.

He was also beginning to regret his sudden impulse. It seemed all too likely that there was nothing he could do – not without spending years here. This wasn't one simple evil like the Daleks; it was a complicated and toxic mixture of extraterrestrial and human interaction that he had seen repeated on many worlds. Perhaps he would just have to let this planet play out its own sad history. Besides, the atmosphere was volatile and dangerous, and there was Jo's safety to be considered.

All the same, though, he might as well learn as much as he could while he was here. He looked around the group of expectant young faces.

'There is something you can do for me, if you will be so kind.'

'Anything, Doctor,' said Garon alertly.

'I am, if you like, a wandering scholar,' continued the Doctor. 'My particular field is the study of differing planetary cultures.'

'Wonderful cover story,' whispered Makos to Alanna. 'Go where you like, ask all kinds of questions...'

The Doctor glared at him and he fell silent.

'I should be grateful,' the Doctor went on, 'if you could tell

me something about the current situation on this planet.'

Garon frowned. 'Surely they told you before you set out?'

Sensing that the Doctor was about to explode, Jo said quickly, 'Look, why don't you just do as the Doctor asks? Pretend we know nothing at all about the place.'

Makos looked at Alanna. 'Test out our local knowledge!' he whispered. 'Double-checking whatever he's been told at the same time. A real pro never takes anything on trust.'

Making a supreme effort to keep calm, the Doctor said, 'Just pretend I'm actually telling the truth and give me an idea of what's going on here.'

'Very well,' said Alanna. 'What do you want to know?'

'For a start, the name – surely somebody gave a planet a name like Catastrophea?'

Alanna laughed. 'Of course not. The planet was discovered by Elias Kastopherious, the explorer, oh, hundreds of years ago. That's his statue out in the square.'

'He was an eccentric old boy who roamed the galaxy in a battered spaceship,' said Makos. 'He named the planet Kastopheria, after himself. It was the only worthwhile planet he ever discovered.'

The Doctor nodded. 'So how did the name get changed?'

'It didn't take very long,' said Garon grimly. 'The planet is in one of the remoter parts of the galaxy on the border between the UPA's sphere of influence and Dragon territory.'

The Doctor looked up. 'When you say Dragon...'

'Dragons – Draconians,' said Garon impatiently. 'Surely you've heard of them?'

The Doctor nodded. 'As it happens, I do know a little about the Draconian. Please go on.'

'Slowly the planet became colonised,' Garon continued. 'They didn't find any valuable minerals, so at least it didn't get gutted by the big mining corporations. But there's a temperate subtropical climate and the land is incredibly fertile.'

Makos took up the story. 'Exotic fruits and medicinal plants of the kind rare everywhere else grow here in profusion. Above all there was an amazingly docile and non-aggressive native population. As far as the colonists were concerned, they made the perfect field-hands. Plantations and farms were set up growing all kinds of exotic fruit and vegetables, which were exported all

over the galaxy. Eventually the biggest traders, the Kastophe
Company, bought up all the fruit farms and herbal plantations.
The Company virtually ran the planet. The colonists all worke
for the Company and they became rich and prosperous.'

'Sounds like an earthly paradise,' said Jo.

'It became a living hell,' said Garon fiercely. 'As the colonists
grew richer, they got greedier. They became cruel and corru
Natives were starved and beaten, tortured, worked to death,
murdered even, all in the cause of higher productivity. The
there was the drug traffic.'

'What drugs?' asked Jo.

'You can grow pretty well anything on this planet,' said
Makos. 'Not all the herbs are strictly medicinal.'

'There's a huge crop of jekkarta leaf for a start,' said Garon.
'Some early colonists introduced it, and it did really well.'

Jo looked baffled. 'Jekkarta?'

'You dry it and smoke it. It's a mild non-addictive euphoric.
Jekkarta is legal, or semi-legal, over most of the galaxy.' He
waved a hand indicating the smoke-filled air. 'Half the people in
here are smoking it, growing it, dealing in it, or all three. It grows
like a weed here, there's a steady demand and the colonists g
even richer.'

'You said drugs, plural,' said the Doctor. 'What else?'

'Skar,' said Garon. 'Also known as skoob, sting, slash... That's
the one that causes all the real trouble. It's a green crystalline salt
and it seems to be found only on this planet.'

The Doctor nodded. 'I've heard of skar. Isn't it banned
almost everywhere?'

'Absolutely everywhere,' said Makos.

'It provides an incredible instant spiritual high,' said Alanna.
'The natives – they call themselves the People – use it in th
religious ceremonies. I think it gives them their wonderfully calm
and placid temperament. Properly used, skar can be a path
enlightenment.'

Noticing the Doctor's face clouding over, Jo hurriedly
interjected, 'Sounds like a cross between LSD and cocaine.'

Makos said, 'Whatever it does for the People, the effect o
humans is devastating. The high is followed by the most terrible
crash. Addicts become paranoid, even psychotic. They'll kill
get credits to buy the drug – do anything at all. Skar is banned on

every civilised planet in the galaxy.'

'And this planet is the only source of supply?' asked the Doctor. 'The demand must be huge.'

'It is,' said Garon. 'Skar smugglers flocked to the planet looking for supplies. They soon found they couldn't buy it – the natives weren't interested in selling. So now they send expeditions into the jungles, destroying native villages and temples.' He glanced briefly towards the squat bald man the Doctor had noticed earlier. 'That's one of the worst of them over there. His name's Dove. – No, don't look at him, he might not like your face. Dove's a skar addict himself as well as a smuggler of the stuff. He'll kill you just for the fun of it.'

Jo shivered. 'And why do the smugglers attack temples?' she asked.

'As Alanna said, the People use skar in their religious ceremonies. Most of their supply is in the hands of their priests. The smugglers will do anything to get their hands on it – they oppress the People even more than the Company. And, of course, lots of the Company officials are into skar smuggling as well – the profits are enormous.'

Jo shuddered. 'I see what you mean about a living hell. So what happened?'

'Things got so bad that word eventually filtered back to Earth,' said Makos. 'All sorts of people – people like us – felt so angry that they just had to do something about it. Missionaries, sentient rights organisations, relief organisations, the Freedom Alliance itself... they all sent expeditions to Catastrophea.'

'What exactly is this Freedom Alliance?'

'It's an association of associations,' said Makos. 'Every pressure group and political party concerned with freedom, sentient rights, conserving planetary ecologies... When the Centre Party got so big that it took over ruling the whole of Earth, all the militant, extremist, idealistic organisations were forced to band together. We've got members from every part of the political spectrum.'

'*Everybody* sent missions and commissions and fact-finding delegates to Catastrophea,' said Alanna. 'And they all submitted absolutely horrifying reports back to Earth. There was a huge scandal. The President of Earth said the situation here was a catastrophe waiting to happen. That's when people started

calling the place Catastrophea – and the name stuck.'

Makos nodded towards a group of cheerfully noisy soldiers, drinking beer at a nearby table. 'Eventually the United Planetary Association took over. They sent in troops and took the planet away from the Company. They gave the People basic rights a they're trying to stamp out all smuggling. Supplies were running out anyway, which helped.'

'So things are getting better?' asked Jo hopefully.

Garon shook his head. 'Far from it. Things improved for a while, but now they're starting to slip back. With the threat o war with the Dragons, the UPA had to cut down on its troops.'

The Doctor raised an eyebrow. 'War? Are things as bad that?'

'We're right on the borderline between the two Empires, explained Alanna. 'There have been rumours for ages that the Dragons were planning to claim the planet.'

'They suddenly blockaded us,' said Garon. 'No ships allowed in or out. And they're jamming all communications with Earth.'

'And on top of all that,' said Alanna indignantly, 'the Company is trying to make a comeback.'

'How?' asked Jo.

'The man you had trouble with, Rekar,' said Alanna. 'He' one of their top men. For some time now he's been building u the Company's force of private security guards.'

'They've been recruiting scum from all over the galaxy,' sa Makos. 'They're the ones in black.'

He indicated a table of grim-faced guards in another part of the room. Unlike the soldiers, they were drinking spirits, not beer. Presumably they were much better paid. Also, unlike t young soldiers, they didn't seem to be having a very good time.

'The Company is still stinking rich,' said Garon. 'They've built up their security guards till they're starting to rival the UPA troops. There's a rumour that the UPA's going to pull out altogether. If that happens, the Company will take over again.'

'Provided the Dragons don't come,' said Alanna. 'We mus all pray for peace.'

'Suppose the Draconians do invade?' asked Jo.

Garon said, 'The word is that the Company will offer to run the planet for them, provided it keeps some of its privileges. If the Dragons don't come, and the troops keep on being whittle

down, the Company will eventually become strong enough t drive the UPA out.'

The Doctor looked round the table. 'And what do you all intend to do about it?'

Makos grinned. 'We all want to help the People but we a want different things. Alanna's Cosmic Soul lot want to feed them, cure them, clothe them and convert them.'

'And to learn from them,' protested Alanna. 'Unlike some other religious groups, we Cosmic Soul claim no monopoly on truth. The People have great spiritual strength. They use skar a path to enlightenment.'

'Garon and I both want only one thing,' Makos went on. 'Though, mind you, Alanna wants it too.'

'And what's that?'

'Freedom for the People,' said Garon fiercely. 'We want everyone – Company, UPA, sphers, everyone – to go and leave them alone to work out their own destiny.'

'When you say everyone,' said the Doctor. 'does that includ visiting politicians, revolutionaries and missionaries as well?'

'We're here to help, not to exploit,' said Alanna indignantly. 'We're different!'

'Yes, I thought you might be,' murmured the Doctor.

'Still, you're all basically in agreement?' asked Jo. 'Tha something, anyway.'

She liked and sympathised with all three young people, a found their idealism appealing. It would be a pity if they finished up on different sides.

Garon smiled wolfishly. 'We agree on ends, but not on means,' he said. 'Makos thinks it can be done by talking, by meetings and protests. Alanna believes it can be done by praying.'

'And you?' asked the Doctor.

'I *know* it's going to need direct action.'

'Like a bloody revolution?'

'If necessary, yes,' said Garon cheerfully. He seemed to be looking forward to the prospect.

The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. 'I take it you're not the only outsiders interested in the fate of this planet? Besides t obvious exploiters, I mean...'

'We're just the tip of the iceberg,' said Makos. 'Every kind o

social, religious and political interest in the galaxy has representatives on Catastrophea. It's a big fashionable cause, these days. We do-gooders are starting to outnumber the natives!'

'There's one important factor missing in everything you've been telling me,' said the Doctor. 'The People themselves. Do they even want this freedom you're so keen to give them?'

'Of course they do, Doctor,' said Jo.

'By all accounts, they show precious little sign of wanting anything,' said the Doctor. 'That's what's so strange.'

'Perhaps they've been oppressed for too long to know how. Look at the way they just call themselves the People,' said Jo. 'They're too humble to give themselves a name.'

'Or too arrogant to think they need one,' said the Doctor.

Jo pointed to a silent giant padding by with a tray of dirty glasses. 'Arrogant? Them?'

The Doctor didn't reply. He seemed lost in thought.

'Anyway, we're going to give them their freedom, whether they want it or not,' said Grant. 'When they're free, they'll change.'

'Nobody knows what the People want,' said Makos. 'They don't speak. Not can't, just don't. As Miss Grant says, they've been oppressed too long.'

Suddenly, a scream rang out close by and a door slammed open somewhere in the room. In a second the place became totally silent.

The Doctor slipped a protective arm around Jo as she gasped in fear.

One of the People was standing in an open doorway at the far end of the bar. The upper part of his sarong had been torn away, leaving him in a kind of loincloth. His eyes were glazed, the long face twisted in a rictus of hate. The muscular golden arms and chest were shiny with sweat and stained with blood.

More blood dripped from an enormous cleaver in the giant's hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN
BERSERKER

Instinctively the Doctor started to rise, but Makos's hand clasped his arm.

'Don't move, Doctor,' the young man said softly. 'If you move you'll die – and so will the rest of us.'

The Doctor froze in his chair.

'There's one thing about the people we didn't get round to telling you,' whispered Garon. 'They've recently developed a tendency to go berserk...'

The giant stalked towards the door.

'With any luck he'll leave,' breathed Makos. 'They seem to be drawn to the open air.'

'What will happen then?'

'He'll head for the jungle – and kill anyone in his path.'

'And we just let that happen?'

'We can't stop it. Would you sooner one ran amok here – in a crowded room?'

Makos was right, thought the Doctor. If anything was to be done, it had better be done outside. He kept absolutely still.

Jo, however, found the tension too much for her. Jumping to her feet, she cried, 'Doctor, can't we get out of here?'

'Keep still, Jo – and keep quiet!'

The sound of their voices and the sudden movement attracted the giant's attention. He stopped and wheeled round.

Immediately the Doctor stood up. He thrust Jo back into her seat and stepped in front of her.

The room was absolutely silent, except for the slow creaking of the ceiling fans.

The giant took a step towards the Doctor. Then another...

A voice said, 'Mylor!'

The giant swung round.

Rik was coming out from behind the bar, hands in the

pockets of his safari jacket.

Still holding the cleaver, the bloodstained giant stalke towards him. Rik stood his ground. When the giant was almost upon him, he took his right hand out of his pocket. In it was a squat, stubby device like some kind of electronic handgun.

As the giant raised the cleaver, Rik stepped forward an touched the device to the giant's bare chest, just over the hea There was a massive blue spark and the giant arched his ba staggered and fell like a tree.

Jo screamed and the Doctor patted her on the back. 'It's a right, Jo, it's all over.' He went over to Rik, who stood looking sadly down at the dead giant's body. 'Did you have to do that?'

'Yes, Doc, I did. Otherwise he'd have chopped up half the people in this room.'

'There are enough of us here to have subdued him.'

'You can't subdue a berserker. The only thing to do is kil them – and it's hard enough to do that.'

'You seem to have managed.'

Rik hefted the pistol. 'Delivers a massive electric shock stops the heart. Only thing that stops a berserker – and it does always work. Trouble is, you only get one shot.'

'At least you were well prepared.'

'I had a berserker in here once before, Doc, about five years ago. Killed most of my kitchen staff and a lot of my customers. Thing like that's bad for business. Since then I took to keepin one of these gadgets under the bar.'

'Does this sort of thing happen often?'

'Used to be pretty rare – but these days it seems to b happening all the time – been half a dozen this month already.'

'And they usually head for the jungle?'

'Usually.'

'And what happens to them there?'

'Nobody knows. Maybe their own people have some way of dealing with them, maybe they burn themselves out, maybe th just die in the jungle. There's lots of things that'll kill you out there. It's better than having them trapped in town. Then the UPA boys have to shoot them to pieces.'

'How do the People react when this sort of thing happens?'

'They don't. I've seen them just stand there and le themselves be killed. Looks like I've lost some of my kitchen

staff. I'll have to go and check the damage.'

The Doctor looked down at the body on the floor and sighed. 'I suppose you only did what you had to do.'

Rik shrugged. 'My customers are my responsibility. Guy buys a drink, he's entitled to live to finish it!'

He raised his voice. 'Sorry about the trouble, folks. We'll take care of everything. Free drinks all round.'

Rik disappeared and the Doctor headed back to his table. Already more golden-skinned giants were appearing from behind the scenes. Some of them wrapped the dead berserker in plastic sheet and carried the body out; others began circulating with trays of drinks. The giants themselves appeared quite unmoved by what had happened. The customers seemed to be making a rapid recovery with the help of their free alcohol.

There was a buzz of excited chatter for a few minutes and then the noise of conversation, and even laughter, resumed its normal level.

When he reached the table the Doctor didn't sit down. He took Jo's hand and pulled her to her feet. Nodding towards the others, he said, 'Young lady, gentlemen, if you'll excuse us.'

He led Jo towards the exit.

'Where are you going, Doctor?' called Makos.

The Doctor didn't reply.

'Where *are* we going, Doctor?' asked Jo as he led her out of the door, across the terrace and into the street.

'Back to the TARDIS, Jo – and right away from this planet. You were quite right, we should never have come here.'

The Doctor was marching along at a great rate and Jo had to break into a trot to keep up with his long strides.

'*You* were the one who *wanted* to come here!'

'Well, I've changed my mind.'

'You're not just going to leave them to it, Doctor?'

'Leave who to what?'

'Alanna and Makos and Garon. At least they're trying to sort out all the problems.'

'And probably making matters worse all the time,' muttered the Doctor. 'Ridiculous incompetent children! El Llama indeed!'

'Well, at least they're trying. They need you, Doctor. They'll never solve the problems of this planet without your help.'

The Doctor came to a sudden stop and glared down at her

‘They’ll never solve the problems of this planet, full stop! With or without my help. And do you know why, Jo? Because the problems of this planet are *insoluble*!’

‘That’s not like you, Doctor,’ said Jo reproachfully. ‘You’ve always been ready to have a go.’ She smiled encouragingly at him. ‘Look how well you did on Spiridon, and on Peladon, and on that weird planet where they had the Scope. And before that you tackled the Autons and Axons and Azal, not to mention the Master popping up all the time.’ She broke off, but only because she was out of breath.

The Doctor gave a sigh of exasperation. ‘My dear Jo, I may have managed to clear up one or two little local difficulties in the past, but there was always some gleam of hope. But this planet...well, I’ve never seen such a mess. You’ve got –’ He began counting off the different aspects of the problem on his fingers – ‘repressive colonists, brutal Company guards, freelance mercenaries, drug smugglers and assorted intergalactic cutthroats. And to control them, you’ve got only overworked and exhausted police and an inadequately resourced military force.’

‘Well, I suppose things do look a bit sticky, Doctor, but –’

The Doctor was getting into his stride. ‘Stirring the whole thing up with well-meant interference, you’ve got do-gooders, eco-warriors, a variety of eccentric missionaries and social activists, and a whole ragbag of juvenile revolutionaries. All of them struggling over a planet whose people don’t seem to take the slightest interest in their own fate, can’t be bothered to defend themselves, and occasionally run amok and kill everyone in sight. Oh, and just in case all this wasn’t enough – an imminent Draconian invasion!’

‘So you’re just going to leave them all to it!’

‘I am simply following official Time Lord policy,’ said the Doctor with dignity. ‘Strict non-interference in the affairs of other planets.’

‘Only because it happens to suit you – for some reason you’re not telling me,’ accused Jo. ‘You’ve never let it cramp your style before.’

The Doctor looked a little abashed, but he refused to back down. Instead he went on with his tirade.

‘I’m tired of solving everyone’s problems. I’m going to take

you back to Earth. Good grief, I'm even looking forward to seeing the Brigadier. Come along, Jo, you're going home!'

Jo looked hard at him. Somehow, the Doctor's protestation just didn't ring true. All th pessimism wasn't like him.

'There *is* something else, isn't there, Doctor?'

The Doctor rubbed the back of his neck. 'Well...as a matter of fact, yes, there is.'

'Well, what is it?'

The Doctor hesitated for a moment. 'I'm starting to feel there's something a little suspicious about the way I've becom involved in events on this planet. It's as if I were being used in some way to –'

Suddenly a voice said, 'Don't move, Doctor! Stay right wher you are.'

Immersed in their discussion, the Doctor and Jo had failed t notice the approach of a group of black-clad security guards, led by none other than Councillor Rekar. He was freshly washed and groomed, though a few cuts and bruises were still visible, and he wore an immaculately white safari suit. This time he clutched not a sword-cane but a blaster, and it was aimed at the Doctor.

Ignoring the blaster, the Doctor said coldly, 'I've nothing to say to you, sir. The dispute between us has been settled by legal process. I advise you to leave it at that.'

'Oh no,' said Rekar. 'Our little dispute hasn't been settled a all, at least not to my satisfaction. It's time you discovered who's really in charge of this planet.'

'I assume it's under the authority of the UPA.'

'Only in name – and not even that for much longer. The Company rules Catastrophea, always has and always will. So I'm going to give you a taste of Company justice.'

'Really?' The Doctor seemed indifferent. 'What did you hav in mind?'

Rekar spoke with gloating anticipation. 'You're going on a little holiday, Doctor – a cruise boat trip upriver.'

The Doctor yawned. 'I am? Where to?'

'I own a plantation, deep in the jungle. It's not a very healthy spot and we're always a bit short-handed. The UPA doesn trouble us much out there, we do things the old-fashioned way. Work in the fields from dawn till dusk, simple food, the lash if

you give any trouble. And I have the strangest feeling that you'
going to be a lot of trouble, Doct Rekar smiled. 'A native can
take five hundred lashes before dies. It will be an interesting
comparison.'

Jo grimaced, but the Doctor was unimpressed.

'I'm afraid I'll have to decline your invitation. I'm just about
to leave your charming planet.'

Rekar shook his head. 'Oh, no. You'll be spending the rest
of your life here, Doctor. What's left of it.'

Despite his air of boredom, the Doctor was sizing up the
opposition. Three guards, plus Rekar. The guards were armed,
but they hadn't yet drawn their blasters.

The Doctor looked round, studying the terrain. They were in
the open street, quite a way from Rek's cafe. He'd have to throw
Rekar somewhere else this time. But first he must get Jo out of
the way.

'All right, you win,' he said. 'I'll come with you. But at least
let my companion go. She's only a child.'

Rekar licked his lips. 'A very pretty child too. Oh, no, I've
got plans for her as well, Doctor. Very different plans.'

He gestured to the guards. 'All right, take him. Try not to
damage him too much, I want to get some work out of him. I'll
look after the girl.'

The three guards closed in on the Doctor and Rekar grabbed
Jo's shoulder with his free hand.

The resulting struggle was violent but brief. Jo twisted her
head round and bit Rekar on the hand. He yelled and released
her, and she kicked him hard on the knee. Cursing, Rekar shoved
his blaster in his pocket and grabbed Jo with both hands.

The Doctor, meanwhile, threw the first guard into the
second and knocked the third down. He was turning to help Jo
when the first two guards disentangled themselves and hurled
themselves upon him. Staggering to his feet, the third guard
joined in.

It was an unequal contest which could end only one way.
Rekar was flabby and unfit, but he was many times Jo's size.
Although she could hurt him, she couldn't do enough damage to
disable him or knock him out.

While Jo was tussling with Rekar, the Doctor was grappling
with three big men. Unlike Rekar, all three were strong and fit,

and they had all had some combat training. The mêlée end with the Doctor flat on his back, one guard kneeling on eac arm and the third sitting on his feet.

Rekar was now holding Jo by the collar of her jacket witl one hand and twisting her arm up behind her back with th other.

'All right,' he gasped. 'Take him down to the boat. Knock him out if you have to. I'll bring the girl.' He shook Jo savagely and gave her arm an extra twist. 'Your friend will be stowed in the hold, but you'll be travelling in style, in my cabin. We can wrestle all you like in there, it's a long trip.'

He loosened his hold on her collar and stroked her cheek.

CHAPTER EIGHT
RAGE

The Doctor went limp and allowed his captors to haul him to his feet, slumping against them as if too weak to move. He was in a state of cold fury. If he could get them to relax their guard, for just a moment...

One of the guards laughed. 'He's had enough.'

Suddenly the Doctor uncoiled like a spring. He hurled the guards aside, bounded across to Rekar, slipped behind him and gripped him by the back of the neck with long steely fingers.

Suddenly Rekar found he could barely move.

'*Let her go*,' hissed the Doctor.

Rekar released his grip on Jo and she staggered free.

The Doctor loosened his hold a little and Rekar drew a long sobbing breath. Instantly the fingers clamped down again, digging deep into Rekar's fat neck.

He heard the Doctor's cold voice in his ear.

'You're going to do exactly as I say. Do you understand?'

'All right,' gasped Rekar. 'Anything. Just let me breathe...'

'Tell the guards to draw their blasters, slowly, and give them to the girl. Then send them away.'

'You heard him,' croaked Rekar. 'Give the blasters to the girl and then clear off. Do it!'

Sullenly, the guards obeyed, leaving Jo loaded down with weaponry. She stuck one of the blasters in her pocket and stood there with a blaster in each hand, feeling like Calamity Jane.

'What now, Doctor?'

'Find a friendly passer-by and inquire how you call the police in this town – either that or where the nearest police post is. If it's not too far, I'll take him in myself.'

Jo looked round for someone to ask. There were quite a few passers-by, but they all seemed to be giving her a wide berth. For some reason, a girl with a blaster in each hand and one muc

and dishevelled man busily throttling another didn't seem to b
regarded as desirable acquaintances, even in Cat City. T
passers-by went on doing exactly that – passing by, determined
not to get involved.

A battered UPA hovertruck zoomed up the street and
plopped down close by in a cloud of dust. A slim young officer
jumped out, followed by a couple of UPA soldiers.

The officer came over to Jo and saluted. 'Is there a problem
miss?'

'Some Company guards tried to kidnap us. My friend ove
there's got their leader.'

'He certainly has,' said the young officer admiringly, an
went over to the Doctor, who was still gripping the now purple-
faced Rekar by the neck. He saluted again.

'Lieutenant Avery, sir, UPA Intelligence. Can I be of any
assistance?'

'You certainly can, Lieutenant. I want this man charged with
aggravated assault and attempted kidnapping. Three Company
guards were involved, but they've cleared off. My friend ther
has their weapons.'

'Don't worry, sir, we'll take care of it.' He summoned two of
his men. 'You and you!'

The men hurried over. 'Take this man to the civil authorities
and tell them to hold him for questioning.' He turned to the
Doctor. 'I should let him breathe a bit, sir, or there'll be no point
in taking him anywhere!'

The Doctor released Rekar, thrust him towards the two
soldiers and wiped his hands together, like someone who has
been handling rubbish.

Free of the Doctor's grip, Rekar recovered a little courag
and began to bluster. 'Do you know who I am, young man?'

'All too well, Councillor,' said the Lieutenant wearily. 'Take
him away.' He looked at Jo. 'We could have those blasters,
miss? Evidence, you know.'

Jo handed them over to another soldier, who stowed them
away inside the hovertruck.

'Many thanks for your help, Lieutenant,' said the Doctor.
'We'll be on our way.'

'I'm afraid it's not that simple, sir,' said Lieutenant Avery. 'I
must ask you to come with us.'

‘What? Oh, I suppose you need some kind of deposition o
something. Tell you what, ask the police to stick him in a cell for
a few hours and then let him go. I won’t press charges, not if it
means delay. My friend and I are in rather a hurry. Come alon
Jo.’

‘I’m afraid I must insist, Doctor,’ said Avery. ‘It is the
Doctor, isn’t it? Doctor John Smith and Miss Josephine Grant?’

‘That’s right.’

‘I’ve got orders to pick you up. You’re both under arrest.’

‘Us!’ cried Jo indignantly. ‘We’re the victims, not the
criminals. What are we supposed to have done?’

‘I think the charges are terrorism and high treason,’ sai
Avery apologetically. ‘Will you get in the hovertruck, please?’

‘I’ll do no such thing!’ snapped the Doctor.

‘Squad, ready, aim!’ snapped Avery.

The soldiers covered the Doctor and Jo with their lase
rifles.

‘Here we go again,’ said the Doctor wearily. He helped J
into the hovertruck.

It wasn’t a very long journey. The Doctor and Jo sat on a steel
bench in the main passenger section of the truck. Facing them
on another bench sat the tough-looking UPA soldiers, covering
them with rifles.

Jo realised that the Doctor was sitting beside her with hi
head buried in his hands. She put a hand on his shoulder.
‘What’s the matter, Doctor?’

The Doctor raised his head; his face haggard. ‘I could’ve
killed him, Jo. I *wanted* to kill him.’ He straightened up, spreading
out his long, powerful hands. ‘I wanted to throttle the life out of
him.’

Jo wasn’t in a forgiving mood. ‘I can’t say I blame you a
that much. You realise what he was planning to do to us? Ra
me and flog you to death.’ She looked at the ground. ‘I wanted
to kill him myself.’

‘You too, Jo?’ said the Doctor wearily. ‘It’s this planet. It’s
sending us blood simple. There’s so much violence in the air it’s
getting to us.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘How long have we been here, Jo?’

Jo shrugged. ‘Not long. Barely a day.’

‘Exactly! And in that time we’ve witnessed a brutal beating, been involved in two brawls, seen a bloodstained berserker shot dead and got ourselves arrested – twice!’

‘What you might call a full day,’ agreed Jo. ‘Do you think they’ll let us go this time as well?’

‘They certainly ought to. This time we really are the innocent parties. We didn’t start the brawl, we were just protecting ourselves from an abduction attempt. The only trouble is...’

‘What?’

The Doctor looked across at the three soldiers and lowered his voice. ‘This time we’ll be dealing with the military mind.’ The hovertruck dropped to a halt, and Jo and the Doctor were escorted out. They found themselves on a big, dusty parade ground with wooden buildings on three sides. The whole area was surrounded by a wooden stockade, with a massive gate in the fourth side of the square.

A wooden rampart, rather like a giant shelf, ran all the way around the stockade on the inside, presumably so that patrolling sentries could keep an eye on the surrounding countryside.

Jo looked about her. Somehow all it felt strangely familiar. Suddenly she grinned. She’d seen this dusty parade ground with its wooden stockade in a hundred Westerns. Any minute now they’d open the big gate and John Wayne would come galloping in at the head of a line of weary blue-clad cavalrymen, arrows whistling around their heads.

‘Fort Apache,’ she murmured.

The Doctor looked baffled. ‘Sorry?’

‘Like in a Western.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Very similar situation, Jo. A distant frontier, a beleaguered garrison far from home. Notice how everything seems to be made of wood. There must be a real shortage of minerals on this planet.’

Lieutenant Avery jumped down from the front of the hovertruck and started snapping orders to his men.

‘You two, come with me, escort duty. The rest of you put the truck away, and get it refuelled and charged up. Check the drive. We don’t want any more breakdowns.’ He turned to the Doctor and Jo. ‘If you’ll come with me, please.’

They were marched across the parade ground and into the

largest of the buildings. A sergeant sat at a desk in a kind anteroom. He jumped to his feet as Avery and his party came i

'At ease, Sergeant,' said Avery. 'General Walton wanted see these two as soon as they arrived.'

The sergeant disappeared through an inner door an reappeared almost immediately, holding open the door.

Lieutenant Avery marched in, followed by the Doctor, Jo and their escort.

They found themselves in a large bare room holding littl more than a desk and a few wooden chairs. Behind the desk sat a small, thin man in a plain uniform of sun-faded khaki drill with the stars of a general on the shoulders. He had a weather bony face, close-cropped grey hair and an air of brisk efficiency.

He rose as Lieutenant Avery entered, and Avery snapped attention and saluted.

'Doctor John Smith and Miss Josephine Grant, sir, apprehended according to orders.'

General Walton surveyed the prisoners. 'They look a littl the worse for wear, Avery. I won't have prisoners ill-treated. Did they put up much of a struggle?'

'No sir. According to them, the struggle was with Councillor Rekar's security guards. Apparently Rekar attempted to kidn them.'

'Attempted? Report properly, man!'

Quite unflustered by General Walton's manner – he wa obviously used to it – Avery began again.

'I spotted the Doctor subduing Councillor Rekar, sir, and recognised the description from your bulletin. The Doctor alleges that Rekar and three of his thugs tried to kidnap him a the young lady. We handed Rekar over to the civil power, but thought I'd better bring the Doctor in.'

'What about the three Company guards?'

'They'd cleared off by the time we arrived, sir, but the youn lady had their blasters.'

'All three of them?'

'Yes, sir, all three of them – which seems to support th Doctor's story.'

Walton nodded briskly. 'Good work. Well, Doctor, you and your young lady friend seem to be quite a formidable pair...'

'Do you think my companion might have a chair?'

interrupted the Doctor. ‘We’ve had rather a tiring day.’

‘Chairs!’ snapped Walton, and two soldiers scurried to fetch them.

The Doctor and Jo sat down, and Walton resumed his place behind his desk.

‘Now, Doctor,’ said General Walton, ‘perhaps you’ll explain how you came to be brawling with Councillor Rekar for the second time today.’

The Doctor gave a brief account of the attempted kidnapping.

‘Thrown on to a café terrace and then half strangled,’ said General Walton, when the Doctor had finished. ‘It really isn’t Councillor Rekar’s day. Or yours either, what with two arrests. Still, Doctor, as a professional revolutionary, you must be used to the animosity of the local establishment.’

‘I am not a professional revolutionary, sir,’ said the Doctor indignantly. ‘I am a travelling scholar, and my interests are strictly non-political.’

‘No? Yet a known troublemaker called Makos organised a demonstration in your support and was prepared to give testimony on your behalf. Later, you accompanied him to a notorious den of revolutionaries –’

‘Forgive the interruption, sir,’ said Lieutenant Avery. ‘Not really fair to call the place a den of revolutionaries. Everybody goes to Rik’s.’

‘Be that as it may,’ said General Walton coldly, ‘you and your companion, Doctor, sat at a table with Makos and his associate Garon, an even more dangerous political extremist. You ate with them, drank with them, had long, earnest conversation about local politics...’

‘They were just being friendly, that’s all,’ said Jo. ‘We’re strangers here, and Garon and Makos wanted to help us.’

‘They wanted to help you because you are a dangerous agitator known as El Llama, whose arrival they had been eagerly awaiting!’ snapped General Walton. ‘Isn’t that the truth?’

Fatally, the Doctor hesitated, betrayed by his habitual streak of honesty.

‘Well?’ thundered Walton.

‘They appeared to think I was someone of the sort,’ admitted the Doctor. ‘I tried to disabuse them, but they refused to listen.

to me.'

'It's true,' said Jo. 'It was all a mistake.'

General Walton sat back behind his desk. 'There's no point in our wrangling, Doctor. You are a trained professional and I'm sure you will stick to your story under any pressure. No doubt you are doing what you conceive to be your duty, and now I must do mine. You will be shot at dawn.'

CHAPTER NINE
RAIDERS

So calmly did General Walton make the announcement that it was a moment before the Doctor and Jo could take it in.

It was Jo who reacted first. 'You can't do that!'

The Doctor sat back in his chair, studying General Walton's face. Was he serious? Or was he simply trying to frighten them into a confession? Regretfully, the Doctor decided that Walton was quite serious.

The Doctor decided his best line of defence would be an appeal to the rules and regulations.

'Are you sure you have the authority to do that, General?'

'Oh, yes,' said General Walton.

'Is this planet under martial law?'

'Not as such, no. But these are dangerous times. The Draconian blockade has increased the existing political tension, and the situation is extremely volatile. And in times of crisis I have full authority to use such extreme measures as I feel are justified if UPA security is endangered.'

'Including summary execution?'

'If I feel it's justified.'

'But it isn't justified,' protested Jo. 'The Doctor hasn't done anything.'

The Doctor remained calm. 'Might I ask for a summary of the evidence, General? The grounds for your decision.'

General Walton tapped the sheaf of flimsies in front of him. 'First, a report from Earth Security warning us of the imminent arrival of a notorious revolutionary called El Llama.'

'But that isn't me – and you've no evidence that it is.'

'You fit the general description, Doctor. Tall and thin, a certain shabby elegance, capable of passing for a gentleman.'

'Well, thank you very much,' said the Doctor drily.

'Second, as you have just admitted, you have been

consorting with revolutionary elements ever since your arrival on this planet – elements who warmly welcomed your arrival, and demonstrated for you at your trial.'

'That was their idea, not mine.'

'We're strangers here,' said Jo. 'They sort of adopted us. We didn't know who they were, or who we were mixing with.'

General Walton ignored her. 'Third, you have twice been involved in violent conflict with Councillor Rekar, a leader of the old-guard colonialists – exactly the type of person to whom a dedicated revolutionary such as El Llama would be most hostile and most opposed.'

'It's all rather thin, isn't it?' said the Doctor with a judicial air. 'As evidence in a capital case, it wouldn't stand up in a civil court. Incidentally, what about the civil authorities? When we were up before Administrator Charteris after the first incident he decided to release us.'

'I am required to co-operate with the civil power, Doctor,' said General Walton stiffly. 'But I am not subordinate to it. In emergencies I have full authority to use my own initiative.'

'You can't really call us an emergency, can you?' asked the Doctor. 'One man and one young lady?'

'You're a potential emergency, Doctor,' said General Walton. 'This planet is seething with all kinds of dissident elements. At the moment they're divided amongst themselves, which makes them relatively easy to control. If they united behind one man, they might become really dangerous. And El Llama is just such a man. According to his record, he's stirred up revolutionary unrest on a hundred planets.'

'But I'm not El Llama!'

'Perhaps not, Doctor, but you might be. It's a risk I just can't afford to take, not with the lives of my soldiers and the people under my protection at stake.'

'Nothing more dangerous than a man of principle,' thought the Doctor. It was going to be very hard to deflect General Walton from what he saw as his duty.

'What about my companion?' he asked.

Walton considered. 'I have no information about the young lady. She is guilty only by association with you and I don't feel equipped to deal with her. I shall hand her over to the Civil Power for further investigation.'

Jo opened her mouth to protest again but the Doctor waved her to silence.

'Do I get a trial? A court-martial?'

General Walton shook his head. 'This is your trial, Doctor.' He cleared his throat. 'By the authority vested in me by the United Planetary Authority, I condemn you to death by firing squad, sentence to be carried out at dawn tomorrow.'

'Have I the right to appeal?'

'I'm afraid not.'

'Then may I address the court?'

'Briefly, Doctor.'

'Then with all due respect, General, I submit that your decision is hasty and ill-considered, and that you are exceeding your authority. Furthermore, I submit that my mere presence here does not in itself constitute an emergency, either *de facto* or *de jure*, and that it is therefore your clear duty to consult with Administrator Charteris before taking any, er, irrevocable action in my regard.'

Did a shadow of doubt cross Walton's face?

'I shall consider what you have said, Doctor, and let you know my final decision in due course.'

'Thank you, sir,' said the Doctor gravely. 'In that case it remains for me only to thank the court for its consideration in allowing me to put my case.'

The little general rose with the air of someone who has put an unpleasant task behind him.

'Meanwhile, Doctor, I propose to give you the benefit of the doubt in at least one area. You have argued your case in a cool and civilised fashion, and you have the manners of a gentleman. Would you, and the young lady of course, care to be my guests for dinner in the mess?'

The Doctor bowed. 'We should be charmed – shouldn't we, Jo?'

Jo wasn't quite sure whether they were going to be wined and dined or shot, but she thought it best to follow the Doctor's lead. She gave General Walton her most flirtatious smile.

'Oh, yes,' she said faintly. 'Charmed!'

'They took them off in a UPA covertruck,' said Garon. 'Rob here saw the whole thing.'

‘That’s right,’ said Rob excitedly. One of Garon’s most devoted followers, he was delighted to be conspiring with his hero. ‘After the fight with Rekar’s thugs, a UPA patrol turned up and carted them off. They were heading for the barracks.’

‘They won’t get away from Walton so easily,’ said Makos. ‘He’ll lock them up for sure. He might even shoot them.’

Garon nodded. ‘So the question is, what do we do about it?’

They were at their usual table in Rik’s place, all except for Alanna who had gone back to her mission-station compound just outside town.

Garon’s question took Makos by surprise. ‘What can we do about it?’ He thought hard for a moment. ‘I know, I could organise a protest demonstration outside the barracks tomorrow.’

‘You might just as well go and join Alanna and pray for their release,’ said Garon scornfully. ‘It’d do them about as much good.’

‘It worked with Charteris, didn’t it?’

‘Perhaps it did. Though as the old said, maybe Charteris just gave them the benefit of the doubt. But it certainly won’t work with Walton. You can chant slogans outside the barracks till you’re blue in the face.’

‘So what do you suggest?’

‘We break them out,’ said Garon.

‘From an army barracks?’

‘Why not?’

Makos looked at him in horror. ‘You’re crazy!’

‘Am I? How will it look to the Freedom Alliance if we do nothing? They send us El Llanero, and we sit by and let the army take him away without a fight. But if we free him, we’ll be heroes! He’ll have to believe in us then. Believe in us and lead us! It could be the start of the revolution on Catastrophea!’

For a moment Makos felt himself swept up by Garon’s enthusiasm. Then his natural caution reasserted itself and he shook his head.

‘It’s not the way, Garon. Peaceful protest, demonstrations...We can present a petition to the Administrator demanding that he control the army. It was an illegal arrest. Charteris hates it when Walton oversteps the mark. Look at the fuss he made when they shot that melon-farmer by mistake. It

will drive a wedge between the two of them.'

'You can organise all the protests, petitions and peace marches you want to,' said Grar. 'They might even do some good and at the very least they'll serve as a diversion. Meanwhi I'll take care of the real action.' He turned to Rob. 'Go and contact everyone in the guerrilla group.'

Considering that this might have been the Doctor's last dinner party, thought Jo, it was going astonishingly well. The Doctor was exerting all of his considerable charm, and he and Walton seemed to be getting on excellently.

The mess hall was a bare wooden-walled room with a long central table. The walls were draped with flags and battle standards and the dinner was a formal one, served with great ceremony by smartly uniformed mess waiters. The soldiers were keeping up appearances even in the jungle, guessed Jo.

She herself was sitting next to Lieutenant Avery, a handsome figure in his white and gold service uniform. A handful of other officers were present, most of them solid-looking middle-aged men. They got on quietly with the food and wine, leaving most of the conversation to the Doctor and the General. The food was plentiful if plain. Soup, a fish course, some kind of game bird and what looked like an entire roast boar, all accompanied by a variety of vegetables.

Jo scarcely noticed what she was eating.

Avery did his best to make polite conversation, but since Jo couldn't tell him who she really was and where she came from she found things a bit tricky. Avery was eager for news from home, but since Jo had no idea what was happening on the Earth in Avery's time, that was even trickier.

The Doctor finished yet another anecdote and General Walton exploded with laughter. Since the General was laughing all the other officers laughed as well.

'Your friend's making a real hit with the General,' whispered Avery. 'Never heard the old man laugh like that before. He's not really a revolutionary bigwig, is he?'

'The Doctor? No, of course not.' She remembered what the Doctor had told the eager young revolutionaries in the cafe. 'He's a wandering scholar, a student of planetary cultures.'

At the other end of the table the conversation had turned to

natural history, in which General Walton took a particular interest. He was telling the Doctor about some particularly savage local life form, a dinosaur-like creature which roamed the slopes of a nearby volcano.

The Doctor responded by telling him about omnivorous monsters called drashigs which he and Jo had encountered long ago.

'I have it on good authority that drashigs once ate a space freighter,' said the Doctor solemnly. 'All but the port ventricle. Took a whole herd of them, of course.'

'Spinning some pretty tall tales, isn't he?' said Avery. 'Ate a space freighter? I don't believe it.'

'You would if you'd ever seen a drashig,' said Jo.

The meal ended with platters of exotic fruit, some kind of spicy black coffee and the pungent local brandy. The air was soon blue with the smoke of native cheroots.

Eventually General Walton stood up. The other officers rose as well and the dinner was over. As Jo got up, the Doctor gave her a reassuring smile.

Two armed soldiers who had been standing inconspicuously by the door came over and stood flanking them. With a shock Jo realised that they were still prisoners – and that, not very long ago, the Doctor had been condemned to death.

General Walton came over to them and Lieutenant Avery stiffened to attention.

'Find some suitable accommodation for our guests, Avery.'

'Yes sir. Er – where sir? Cells or –' Avery broke off, unsure as to the Doctor and Jo's current status.

'Put them in my guest quarters.'

'Yes, sir.'

General Walton stood surveying them for a moment with a worried expression. 'What am I going to do with you two?'

'I'm afraid that's your decision, General,' said the Doctor.

Walton considered for a moment and Jo held her breath.

'About tomorrow morning –' he began. 'The, er, shot at dawn business...'

'I'd been meaning to ask you,' murmured the Doctor. 'What time is dawn on this part of the planet?'

Walton laughed. 'I probably ought to have you shot, Doctor, but I just haven't got the heart. Whatever else you are, you're

scholar and a gentleman. I can't believe that you're really this El Llama fellow.'

'I give you my word that I'm not,' said the Doctor quietly.

'Good enough,' said Walton.

'So you're letting us go, then?' asked Jo.

'Not exactly, Miss Grant. I'll hand you both over to the civil power first thing tomorrow. Old Charteris can sort things out.' With that General Walton gave them a brief nod and strode out.

'This way, Doctor, Miss Grant,' said Lieutenant Avery. 'The guest block is on the other side of the square, near the main gate. Basic but comfortable accommodation.'

They went out of the mess hall and into the warm, scented darkness of the barrack square. Avery dismissed their armed escort and began leading the way towards the main gate.

'Well done, Doctor,' whispered Jo as they walked across the square. 'Talk about singing for your supper. You were talking for your life!'

'Walton's a decent fellow basically,' said the Doctor. 'As soon as we were asked to dinner, I thought there was a chance he might not go through with it. Shooting an impersonal enemy is one thing, executing someone you actually know is quite another.'

'Well, now you've persuaded Walton not to shoot you, all you've got to do is convince Charteris not to lock us both up.'

'That shouldn't be too difficult,' said the Doctor. 'Especially when I tell him we're leaving immediately.'

'But Doctor –'

'But nothing, Jo. The situation on this planet is far too complex and too dangerous. All I want is to get us away from here as soon as possible.'

They were nearing the big gates now and suddenly a sentry called out to Lieutenant Avery, 'Patrol hover approaching, sir.'

'Then let them in.'

'Nothing scheduled back at this time, sir.'

'Well, obviously it's an emergency. Maybe someone's been hurt. Open the gates!'

The big gates swung open and a dusty UPA hovertruck swept in, dropping to a halt close to the Doctor and Jo. Two armed soldiers jumped out and ran over to them. To her astonishment, Jo recognised the one in the lead.

It was Garon.

CHAPTER TEN
UNWANTED RESCU

The second soldier ran up. There was a tangle of curly ha sticking out from under his helm Jo was even more amazed. 'What are you doing here?'

Makos shrugged, 'He talked me into it!'

While Makos thoroughly disapproved of Garon's reckless methods, this sort of thing was a lot more exciting than gettin up yet another protest petition.

Lieutenant Avery stared at the two men.

'Who are you two? What subpods do you come from?' He suddenly noticed Makos's mop of curly fair hair.

'You're not UPA troops at all!'

Garon sighed. 'It's no good, we didn't fool him. I told you to get your hair cut.'

'What's the meaning of this?' demanded Avery.

Suddenly serious, Garon covered him with his laser rifle.

'It means we're taking away your prisoner, Lieutenant. We're rescuing El Llama!'

'I don't need rescuing you young fool,' said the Doctor. 'I'd just got things sorted out, now you're ruining everything.'

Since he was in mess dress, Lieutenant Avery wasn't arm but he didn't let that stop him. He gave a bellow of 'Prisoners escaping!' and launched himself at Garon.

Garon fired – just as the Doctor knocked the rifle barrel upwards. Avery closed with Garon, there was a moment o confused struggle and then Garon reversed the rifle and clubb Avery down with the butt.

By now Avery's shout and Garon's shot had aroused th fort. Soldiers were running from the gate house and from the barracks around the square.

'Prisoners escaping – stop them!' shouted someone.

'Halt or we fire!' shouted someone else.

Then somebody did fire, the laser bolt crackling over thei
heads.

'Get in, Doctor,' yelled Garon. 'Do you want to get us all
killed?'

Still the Doctor hesitated. 'There's no need for all this!'

More laser bolts crackled around them.

'We'd better go, Doctor,' shouted Jo. 'If the soldiers don't
shoot us, General Walton will!'

She jumped into the truck and the Doctor followed.

Some of the UPA soldiers had started to close the gate
Before they quite managed it, the fleeing hovertruck smash
them open again and disappeared into the darkness.

The hovertruck stopped at a desert turn-off and an excited
Garon ushered them all out. Hurriedly, he and Makos and Ro
started stripping off the stolen uniforms. They wore their own
clothes underneath. When they had finished Garon said, 'Ta
the hover back somewhere near where we got it and dump
Rob. Doctor, Miss Grant, come with me. We've got a safe place
for you to hide.'

General Walton came dashing from his sleeping quarters, blas
in hand. He saw Avery unconscious on the ground, one side
the post's main gates hanging by the hinges and a lot of ve
confused soldiers running about shouting.

'Get those gates closed and barred!' he ordered. 'When that's
done, shut up and return to your duties. Corporal, put on a
double guard. Gate sentry, what the devil's going on?'

The sentry who had been on gate didn't seem too sure.

'One of our trucks came up to the post, sir, just as
Lieutenant Avery was taking the two prisoners to the gues
quarters. The Lieutenant said to open the gates and let it insi
Truck drove in and a couple of blokes got out.'

'Soldiers? Were they in uniform?'

'They were in uniform, sir, but I don't think they were
soldiers. The Lieutenant went over to speak to them and, well..

'Well what, man?'

'That's when it all got confused, sir. I could hear them al
arguing and then the Lieutenant yelled something abou
prisoners escaping and someone fired in the air...Then th

Lieutenant got coshed with a rifle butt. We fired warning shots sir, and tried to get the gates closed, but the hovertruck ju smashed through.'

'And the prisoners are gone, of course?'

'Yes, sir. I saw them getting into the truck just before it drove off.'

'All right, dismissed. I may want to talk to you again.'

The sentry doubled away and Walton went over to wher Avery was being tended by a medic.

'How is he?'

'Not too bad, sir. He's had a nasty knock, there'll probably be some concussion, but he'll be OK.'

Avery opened his eyes. 'Sorry, sir, all my fault...' he said painfully. 'I dismissed armed guards...I ordered gates open for truck...Believed them, thought they were all right.'

'You're not the only one,' said General Walton gruffly. 'I believed them myself.'

He turned and walked back to the anteroom, where his sergeant was waiting.

'I want patrols out at first light, Sergeant, all round the outskirts of the city. They've got a ship somewhere, probably small scout craft. They didn't land it in the main square, but won't be too far from the city. Every man we can spare. I want those two found before they get off-planet.' He scowled, and slammed a fist into the wall. 'And this time I really shoot them!'

'For the last time,' said the Doctor furiously, 'I tell you I didn't want to be rescued!'

'I don't think that's very grateful of you, Doctor,' said Jo. Garon, Makos and Alanna looked as if they agreed, though th didn't actually say so.

They were all sitting at one of the tables in a big, plainl furnished community hall, just outside of town. It was the headquarters of Alanna's civic Soul movement. Somehow Garon had persuaded her to provide the fugitives with a hiding place.

'You're less connected with revolutionary activities than th rest of us,' he'd said. 'Just give them a few nights' shelter un the hunt dies down a bit, then I'll move them to a safe house

The army doesn't like to interfere with the religious groups, so they're not likely to search Cosmic Soul.'

It had been against all Alanna's principles, but somehow Garon had persuaded her. Only Alanna was in on the secret of the fugitives' true identity. To the rest of the commune they were just two travelling truth-seekers being given a night's hospitality.

White-robed figures sat at the other tables, drinking tea and eating bowls of rice. Whenever one of them happened to catch the newcomers' eyes, he or she would give them a broad, benevolent smile.

Jo did her best to smile back, but the Doctor would only scowl. A tubby, bearded white-robed figure stopped by their table and beamed at the Doctor. 'You look tense, brother. Come with me and I will give you a massage with soothing oils!'

'You'll do no such thing, sir!' snapped the Doctor.

A little taken aback, the man turned to Jo. 'You then, sister? I have healing hands.'

Before Jo could reply Alanna said firmly, 'Our guests are tired, Brother Eric. All they need tonight is rest.'

'Perhaps tomorrow, then. Peace and love.'

'Peace and love,' said Alanna.

Disappointed, the little man moved away.

Garon resumed their low-voiced conversation. 'When we heard you'd been picked up by the army, we naturally assumed you were in danger,' he said decisively. 'Walton's a far tougher proposition than Charteris.'

'We weren't in any danger,' said the Doctor dismissively.

'Oh come on,' protested Jo. 'As soon as old Walton got his hands on you, he sentenced you to be shot at dawn!'

'You see?' said Garon, and Makos and Alanna nodded.

'That was just his first impulse,' said the Doctor. 'Soldiers always want to shoot anything they don't understand. I persuaded him to change his mind. He was going to hand us over to Charteris, and I'm pretty sure Charteris would have let us go.'

'Suppose Walton had had a night and changed his mind back again?' said Jo. 'You'd have been glad of a rescue party then!'

The Doctor looked wearily at his rescuers. 'Don't you realise what you've done? You've removed any element of doubt.'

‘How do you mean?’ asked Makos.

‘Up till now General Walton and Administrator Charteris thought I might be this El Llama character, but they weren’ quite sure. Since you staged your dramatic rescue, they’ll positive. If I were this El Llama – which I’m not, mind you – I’d be far from pleased with you. You’ve taken away my freedom of action.’

All three looked crestfallen, and the Doctor went on, ‘I know you young people mean well, but you must stop interfering in my affairs, and I certainly don’t intend to become further involved in yours. Since we’re here we’d better stay th night – I don’t want to travel in a strange jungle after dark.’ Fixing Jo with a stern look, he announced, ‘But tomorrow we are definitely going home!’

CHAPTER ELEVEN
HUNTED

'They raided one of my outlying posts late last night,' said General Walton disgustedly. 'About half a dozen of them apparently, all hooded and masked. They overran the garrison – it was only a three-man unit.'

'Any casualties?' asked Charteris.

Walton shook his head. 'Knocked them out and tied them up. Stole uniforms and the unit hovertruck, drove in here and well, you know the rest. We found the hovertruck early this morning, dumped close to the same subpost. He laughed bitterly. 'The funny thing is, this Doctor had pretty well convinced me he *wasn't* El Llama... Damn it, I liked the fellow.'

'I liked him too,' said Charteris wryly. 'He fooled me as well remember. Still, there's one consolation.'

'Glad to hear it.'

'At least we know the Doctor or El Llama now. For the dissidents to go to such lengths...'

It was the following morning and they were in Walton's office. The General was busy organising the hunt for El Llama and Charteris had come to visit the scene of the crime.

The General nodded. 'I suppose that's something. I've had patrols out hunting for him since dawn, no luck so far.'

'What about the other end of the problem?' asked Charteris.

'How do you mean?'

'The rebel end. Any idea who actually carried out the attack?'

'The only one who got a proper look at them was young Avery, and he's in the sickbay with mild concussion. Funny thing...'

'What?'

'According to the men on the gate, one of the rebels was going to shoot Avery but the Doctor stopped him. So the rebel coshed Avery with his rifle-butt and away they all went.'

Charteris nodded thoughtfully. 'It is strange. You'd think a dedicated revolutionary would care about someone shooting the odd soldier...Maybe the man has a streak of decency after a

The sergeant came rushing in from the anteroom and Walton looked up in irritation.

'Dammit, Sergeant, I said no interruption.'

The sergeant came to attention. 'Sorry, sir. One of the patrol trucks has reported back. I thought you'd want to see them.'

Walton jumped to his feet. 'Have they found him?'

'No, sir. But they've found something.'

'Found what, man?'

'Don't know, sir.'

'Well, what do they say they've found?'

'They don't know either, sir,' said the sergeant woodenly.

General Walton gave an exasperated sigh. 'All right, let's take a look. Coming, Administrator?'

They followed the sergeant out to the parade ground and across to a hovertruck standing just inside the main gate. The back of the truck was open and two soldiers stood staring inside.

Charteris noticed that the gate had already been repaired and was now closed and barred again, with armed sentries standing on either side and another in the wooden lookout tower.

'I see the stable door is firmly locked,' he murmured.

General Walton gave him a look. 'We're on full security alert, if that's what you mean.' He strode up to the truck. 'All right, what have you got, Corporal?'

The corporal snapped to attention. 'Not really sure, sir!'

General Walton and Charteris went round to the back of the truck and looked inside. Standing in the back of the hovertruck was a blue box, an upright oblong a little taller than a man.

Walton wasn't impressed. 'Looks like something out of a museum.'

Charteris peered up at the strange object. 'There's writing, there over the door.' He read it out. 'Police box...'

General Walton glared reproachfully at the harassed corporal.

'You were sent out to bring back a dangerous fugitive, not to pick up any old piece of junk littering the countryside.'

'Beg pardon, sir, I don't think it is junk, sir.'

'It's certainly not junk,' said Charteris, who was something of

an antiquarian. 'It appears to be an old police call box – must be about five or six hundred years old.'

General Walton gave a snort of disgust. 'Some wealth colonial probably brought it from Earth as a curio and chucked it out when he got fed up with it. Get rid of it!'

'But, sir –'

'Why don't we hear the rest of the corporal's report before you decide?' said Charteris. He spoke quietly, but it was an ord not a suggestion.

'Very well,' growled Walton. 'Go on with it, Corporal.'

The corporal shot Charteris a grateful glance. 'Yes, sir!' He cleared his throat. 'We were out searching for the two fugitive according to orders. Our assigned patrol area was the southern perimeter of the city. From time to time we called at outlying residences to make inquiries.'

'Hoping the owners would take pity on you and offer you a beer, no doubt,' growled Walton.

Pretending not to hear him, the corporal went on, 'We gav the inhabitants descriptions of the fugitives and asked if they'd been seen at all. Finally we struck lucky. Lady said she'd seen fugitives – not today but yesterday morning. They'd stopped and spoken to her native gardener. She'd thought they looked suspicious and sent them packing. It was a Mrs Marrek, s Quite a formidable lady.'

Charteris shuddered. 'I know her. Widow of a Company official, stayed on after he died. Formidable is the word.'

'Reliable witness?' asked General Walton.

'Absolutely, I should think. Doesn't miss a thing.'

Walton nodded. 'All right, Corporal, go on.'

'Lady said the two strangers had headed off towards town But they'd been coming from the opposite direction – outside town.'

'Naturally,' snapped Walton. 'Do get on with it, Corporal.'

'Well, all there is in that direction is a little forest of them wait-a-bit-bushes.'

'Wait-a-bit?' asked Charteris.

'Local thorn, sir, big spiky leaves. So, just on the off chance got the lads to search it. They found this.' He pointed to the blue box.

'Could be coincidence,' said General Walton. 'No proof it's

got anything to do with them. Did you try to open the box?'

'Yes sir. Couldn't do it. Tools just seem to slide off. Thought of trying explosives, but I didn't want to risk damaging it.' He hesitated. 'Something else, sir. It feels – alive. Kind of throbs and hums when you touch it. And it's heavy, sir, really heavy for its size. We had to rig up a block and tackle to get it into the truck.'

Charteris climbed up into the truck. He put his hand flat against the blue box and waited for a moment, then jumped down.

'Well done, Corporal. You've made a valuable find.' He turned to General Walton. 'I think this box may be important.'

'Why? You said yourself, it's just an antique police box.'

'I said it *appeared* to be an antique police box,' corrected Charteris. 'In fact I think it's something else – some piece of equipment that's been carefully disguised – camouflaged if you like.'

Camouflage was a concept that Walton could understand. 'Pretty eccentric sort of camouflage.'

Charteris shrugged. 'The Doctor's an eccentric man. Besides, it worked, didn't it?'

'How do you mean?'

'You were all ready to throw it away,' said Charteris simply.

'Sergeant!' snapped Walton.

The sergeant snapped to attention. 'Sir?'

'Put this thing in our strongest storeroom, under permanent armed guard.'

'Yes, sir. Corporal, let's get that truck over to Bunker Seven. I'll find you a squad to unload the – the object.'

As the hovertruck roared away, Walton turned to Charteris. 'Satisfied?'

'Not quite. I suggest you send a patrol to keep an eye on the thorn forest. The Doctor may not know yet that this thing is gone. He may come back for it.'

'Right!' said Walton. 'And if he does come back, we'll be waiting. This time I'll give orders he's to be shot on sight!'

CHAPTER TWELVE
THE TRAP

The Doctor and his two companions were trudging along a narrow jungle path. Garon was in the lead, acting as guide, with first the Doctor and then Jo following.

The jungle canopy overhead gave some shelter from the blazing sun, but the air was hot and humid, the path was rutted and uneven underfoot, and vines and tendrils stretched across the path, as if to hold them back. From time to time, Garon slashed away the thickest of them with a machete.

Hot, tired and sticky, Jo was beginning to think that the Doctor was right: the sooner they left this planet the better.

Garon, Makos and Alanna had spent most of the previous evening trying to persuade him to change his mind, but the Doctor couldn't be swayed.

'I sympathise with what you're trying to do,' he said. 'I even admire your idealism. But there are just too many random factors – and how can you help people who won't even help themselves?'

His words seemed to strike a particular chord with Alanna. 'I know how you feel, Doctor,' she said. 'I came here full of hope, full of ideals. But nothing I do seems to get through to the People. It doesn't even seem to interest them. I've tried everything, literally everything, to reach some kind of understanding with them, taken all kinds of risks, but nothing works. I just can't reach them. Sometimes I despair.'

Alanna sighed theatrically. She was in a very different mood this evening, thought Jo. Instead of being full of energy she was slumped, lethargic, as if everything was just too much for her. Even the Doctor's rescue and the news of his imminent departure had failed to rouse her.

'Maybe we're not meant to reach them or understand them,' Garon suggested. 'We just need to free them, to make them

ghastly paternalistic UPA administration leave them alone an
go.'

'This ghastly administration is doing its best to protect the
People from the Company and the smugglers,' said the Docto
Jo decided it was typical of him to be defending people wh
would shoot them both if they only had the chance.

'Don't you see?' said Garon. 'That's part of the problem
The People don't need to be oppressed or protected, they just
need to be left alone. If the UPA go, they'll have to learn to dea
with the Company and the smugglers themselves.'

'They've shown singularly little sign of doing that in the pas
from what you tell me,' said the Doctor.

'Then maybe they need to be oppressed to the point where
they have to revolt,' said Garon. 'The UPA is just a sticking
plaster where what's really needed is radical surgery.'

'Oh, poppycock,' said the Doctor. 'You're saying it's better
for the People to be exploited by the Company and ravaged b
the smugglers because that will make them so miserable that they
have to revolt!'

'Well, maybe it is!'

'Balderdash!'

The argument had raged late into the night and Jo herself
had tried to persuade the Doctor to relent when the others had
gone.

'Are you sure you can't help them, Doctor?'

'I really don't see how. I've a nasty feeling that, one way or
another, events on this planet are bound to end in a bloodbat
The Draconians could decide to end their blockade with an
invasion, and then there'll be war. I just don't want you to be
part of it.'

They'd spent the night in a dormitory, sleeping on straw
mattresses on the wooden floor. Next morning they'd returned
to the communal dining-hall for a breakfast of thin gruel and
weak herb tea. It hadn't improved the Doctor's temper.

Now they had reached a small clearing in the jungle, an
Garon came to a halt.

'We're almost there, Doctor.'

The Doctor mopped his brow. 'And about time. I didn't
think it was this far.'

'It isn't. I took you a roundabout way to avoid the army

patrols. They've been searching for you since dawn.'

'Yes, of course,' said the Doctor. 'Thanks for all your help, Garon. I didn't mean to sound ungrateful.'

Garon pointed to a small path leading out of the clearing. 'That path will take you to the far side of the thorn forest, the side away from town. From there you should be able to reach your ship.'

'Thank you,' said the Doctor simply. 'Goodbye.'

He held out his hand and Garon shook it. He shook hands with Jo as well, holding her hand, the Doctor noticed, rather longer than was strictly necessary.

'Goodbye, Garon,' said Jo. 'And good luck.' On a sudden impulse she kissed his stubbly cheek.

Garon stood motionless, watching, as the Doctor and Jo disappeared down the narrow trail.

It was a difficult journey along the narrow path, and it became harder still when they reached the thorn forest itself. The big spiky bushes were set very close together and edging your way between them was far from easy. Inevitably, you got snagged every now and then, and it was no use struggling to pull free – the big hooked thorns just clung harder. What you had to do was stand still, patiently unhook yourself and then move on – until the next time. All this made progress agonisingly slow, and in the damp, stifling heat, the necessary patience was hard to come by.

'Are you sure this is the right forest, Doctor?' gasped Jo, unhooking herself for what felt like the hundredth time.

'No idea,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'Garon seemed pretty sure, though.'

'I don't remember the forest being as thick as this.'

'We landed somewhere near the outer edge, remember, nearest the town. Now we're coming in from the other side, which means we have to cross the whole forest.'

After a while the bushes thinned out a little and progress became easier.

'Can't be long now, Jo,' said the Doctor, who was some way in the lead. 'In fact the TARDIS should be just about – oh, no!'

'What is it?'

'Come and see!'

The Doctor was standing in a sort of mini-clearing, a space

where the bushes were a little smaller and a little further apa
He waited for Jo to catch up with him.

'Look familiar, Jo?'

'It looks like the place where we left the TARDIS.'

'It *is* where we left the TARDIS!' The Doctor pointed to the ground. In the thick undergrowth that covered the thorn-forest floor you could just see a square outline. 'And look there!' He indicated the area just ahead.

Jo looked. 'The undergrowth is all trampled.'

'Boots!' said the Doctor bitterly. 'Big army boots. And there – you see? Drag marks. One of Walton's patrols must have found the TARDIS and made off with it!'

Jo nodded. 'I expect they had a truck at the edge of the forest. It'll be back at Fort Apache now – under heavy guard.'

'Oh, well, it's happened before,' said the Doctor philosophically.

'What has?'

'Well, getting separated from the TARDIS. I remember once at Gatwick...We'll just have to get it back, that's all.'

'How?'

'Yes, well, that is the tricky bit,' admitted the Doctor. He stood gazing into the distance, lost in thought.

'Doctor?'

'Not now, Jo, I'm trying to think!'

'Doctor, the thorn bushes are closing in on us.'

'What!'

'Some of the smaller ones. They're sort of edging nearer.'

'Nonsense, Jo. Don't panic!'

'I am not panicking!'

'That's exactly what you are doing. It's what the word panic means, you know. Fear of the pagan god Pan, usually experienced in woods and open places.'

'This is no time for a linguistic lecture, Doctor. Just stop talking for a moment and look!'

With a tolerant smile the Doctor looked around the little clearing, peering through the dim greenish light. He strolled towards the nearest of the smaller bushes.

'You see, there's nothing to worry about, Jo. It's just a bush.'

'That's far enough,' said the thorn bush, raising its laser rifle. 'Hands up!'

The Doctor peered at the bush more closely and saw a UP soldier, heavily disguised by layers of spiky leaves.

'That outfit must be very uncomfortable,' he said mildly.

'It is!' said the soldier. 'But it was worth it. We got you, didn't we?'

'That's a matter of opinion,' said the Doctor, measuring the distance between them. If he could grab the barrel of the rifle...

'Don't try anything silly,' said a voice from behind him.

Two more thorn bushes moved in closer, covering the Doctor and Jo with laser rifles.

'Our original orders were to shoot you on sight,' said one of the bushes. 'Then they were changed, by order of Administrator Charteris. We're to offer you a chance to surrender. Just one. Any trouble and we carry out our original orders.'

'All right, all right,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'As it happens I'm quite willing to go back with you. Some of your chaps have made off with a piece of my property and I want it back. Haven't seen it, have you – largish blue box, about so high?' He held his hand up above his head. 'Purely sentimental value of course, but I should rather like to have it back. Been in the family for ages. Isn't that right, Jo?'

'Oh, absolutely,' said Jo, wondering if the Doctor had finally flipped. What was he babbling on like this for?

The Doctor had spotted a ripple of movement in the undergrowth behind the first soldier and he was talking to distract the young man's attention.

Suddenly Garon jumped up from the undergrowth and pulled the soldier down, an arm crooked around his neck. The soldier struggled wildly and then the Doctor heard a thud and a groan.

The two other soldiers rushed forward to help their comrade and the Doctor stepped back, letting them rush past him. As they made to throw themselves upon Garon, he reached out and grabbed them by the back of the neck, one with each hand. His fingers tightened, found pressure points and the two soldiers slumped forward, unconscious.

Lowering them carefully to the ground, the Doctor helped Garon to rise from the limp body of the first soldier.

'You didn't kill him, I hope?'

Garon grinned. 'Don't worry, I used the hilt.' He held up the machete. Its heavy brass handle curved round to form a sort

knuckleduster. ‘If I’d used the blade his head would be on the other side of the clearing.’ He looked around. ‘Do I gather there’s been a slight hitch in your plans to leave us?’

‘You might say that,’ admitted the Doctor. ‘General Walton’s men seem to have purloined my transport.’

‘They took your spaceship?’

The Doctor nodded.

‘It must have been a very small one.’

‘Only on the outside,’ said Jo.

Garon gave her a baffled look and then turned back to the Doctor. ‘Whatever they took, it will be back at their base by now.’

‘Miss Grant has already pointed that out.’

‘They know it’s important to you, so it will be locked away somewhere, under heavy guard. They probably use one of the security bunkers – Six or Seven, I imagine. I know that base, I’ve made a special study of it – and we’ve got a source on the inside. You’ll need help to get your property back, Doctor, lots of help. You’ll need food, a place to hide, weapons, disguises...’ He paused. ‘We’d be happy to do all we could – for El Llama.’

There was no need for Garon to spell things out any further. His terms were quite clear.

‘Thank you, Garon,’ said the Doctor resignedly. ‘I’ll be grateful for your help.’

‘My pleasure, Doctor. Welcome to the revolution!’

CHAPTER THIRTEE
BAIT

‘Well, we nearly had them,’ said General Walton.

He had just finished interrogating the three shameface soldiers, who had recovered consciousness in the jungle to find Jo and the Doctor long gone.

‘Nearly isn’t quite good enough, is it?’ said Charteris. ‘I don’t want to rub salt in the wound and all that, old chap, but this fellow El Llama, or the Doctor, or whatever we’re going to call him, seems to be several steps ahead of you all the way.’

Walton grunted. ‘Let’s call him the Doctor – easier to pronounce. And may I remind you, my dear Charteris, that although he may have escaped from my custody –’

‘Twice!’

‘All right, twice, if you want to count this morning, and I see that you do. You, however, had him safely in your hands and simply chose to let him go!’

‘Touché,’ said Charteris, grinning. He hadn’t been able to resist teasing Walton, but he could see that the General was genuinely upset. The old boy had been beaten, and things were no doubt made more galling by the fact that he felt betrayed by someone to whom he had taken one of his rare likings.

Lieutenant Avery too was smarting with defeat, convinced that the Doctor’s first escape had been largely his fault. His bandaged head acted as a constant reminder.

‘If you’ll permit me, gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I believe I’ve come up with a plan which may solve our problem.’

Walton gave him a sceptical look. Still, at this point anything was worth trying.

‘Carry on.’

Avery cleared his throat. ‘My plan is based on the fact that while we don’t have the Doctor, we do have his blue box. And although we don’t quite know what it is, I think it’s a reasonable

assumption that it's very important to him. He was clearly making for it when he, er, encountered our patrol. He must have known we'd be out looking for him and he even took some sort of escort – but he still went.'

'What's your point?' growled Walton.

'We have the box, safely locked up and under guard in the very post.'

'And you can bet that the Doctor knows it,' said Charteris. 'Those rebels have remarkably good intelligence sources. They may even have contacts on your base.'

'They do, sir,' said Avery calmly. 'I've known that for some time – and I know who at least one of them is. In fact, he forms a vital part of my plan...'

'The answer lies with the People!' said the Doctor.

They were back in the Cosmic Soul compound, not in the main hall this time but in Alanna's hut.

As well as the communal hall and dormitory buildings, the compound contained a scattering of separate dwellings, the residences of the more important members of the cult. Theoretically members of Cosmic Soul were all equal but, as is always the way of things, some were more equal than others. Alanna regularly made considerable financial contributions to the running expenses of the society.

All the huts followed native design, round wooden structures with conical roofs. The huts were held together with wooden pegs, their walls and floors covered with woven matting.

Alanna's was simply furnished with low tables, rugs and sleeping pallet. There were no chairs; you sat cross-legged on colourful cushions on the floor.

Alanna, Makos, Garon, the Doctor and Jo were having a planning meeting over herb tea and rice cakes. The Doctor was insisting that any plan to liberate the planet from the UPA and colonial and criminal influences currently struggling for control must take into account the desires of the People themselves. It was an attitude that seemed to baffle his new allies.

'But we don't know what the People want,' protested Makos.

Garon backed him up. 'That's so, Doctor. We don't know and they won't say.'

'What about their past, their history?' asked the Doctor.

‘They don’t seem to have one,’ said Alanna, triumphantly. ‘Not in the normal sense. When the first colonists arrived the People were just as they are today, completely non-aggressive and leading a simple, natural life. It’s because of the skar, I’m sure it is. Somehow they use it to find peace and enlightenment.’

She seemed to have recovered from her former lethargy a was bright and excited once more, taking a keen interest in t discussion.

‘What do they live on?’ asked the Doctor.

‘More or less what we’re eating here. Fruit, herbs and some sort of rice-flour or meal they use to make bread and cakes and kind of porridge. Things grow so easily here.’

‘Do they hunt?’

Alanna shook her head. ‘They seem to be natural vegetarians.’

‘Do they have any organisational structure, any concept o nationhood?’

‘Not as far as we can see,’ said Makos. ‘They live communal life in small scattered villages. There doesn’t seem to be any particular link between them.’

‘What about the women?’ asked Jo. ‘How are they treated?’

‘As far as we can tell, everyone’s equal,’ said Alanna. ‘M and women do the same kind of work, farming, building huts, gathering food, looking after children.’

The Doctor frowned. ‘No quarrels, disputes between the villages over food or territory?’

‘No,’ said Garon. ‘There’s very little contact between the villages, but what there is seems to be friendly enough.’

‘Religion?’

Makos shrugged. ‘They have priests, though you don’t ofte see them. They have temples too, there’s a big one down by the river. But the temples are empty, disused. If they do have a organised religion it’s in decline.’

‘I believe it’s just gone underground,’ said Alanna. ‘Presumably because of colonial oppression. I know their religion was linked with the drug skar in some way. They used it as a means of spiritual enlightenment. Now the drug’s banne and supplies are almost exhausted. Maybe that accounts for decline in religion.’

‘There’s supposed to be a secret skar deposit somewhere

deep in the jungle,' said Garon. 'That's why the mercenaries a
smugglers keep hanging on. But if it is there, no one's manag
to fmd it – and it's not for want of trying.'

The Doctor sat considering the flood of new information.

'They don't hunt and they don't fight, not even each other...
take it there was no resistance when the colonists started
arrive?'

'Complete and utter passivity,' said Garon. 'The colonists set
up plantations, took the People from their villages and turne
them into labourers and servants – and the People just did wh
they were told. Later the Company took over and things go
even worse.'

'That's right, said Alanna. 'Instead of a peaceful, pastoral life
there was a system of organised cruelty and oppression...'

Jo found herself sharing Alanna's indignation. 'That's
terrible. This place must have been a kind of Paradise, a Garden
of Eden. No bloodshed, no wars, no politics...'

'It was until outsiders from Earth turned up and ruined it,'
said Makos. 'The Company, the smugglers, the UPA troops.'

'And people like you,' said the Doctor gently. 'You're
outsiders too, you know.'

'That's not fair,' protested Makos. 'All we want is to undo
some of the harm done by others.'

'Now there's a political dimension,' said Garon. 'Earth and
Draconia are locked in a dispute over this planet, and neither of
them will give it up.'

Jo tried to put a brave face on things. 'Well, I suppose you've got to
do is get rid of the Company and chuck out the smugglers. Th
UPA troops will have no reason to stay, and if you can convince
the Draconians to leave the planet in peace too then the Peop
can get on with their lives.'

'Oh, is that all?' said Garon.

'No, it isn't!' said the Doctor. 'It isn't as simple as that!' He
looked round the group, trying to make them understand. 'Oh, I
agree with what you've been saying. When the outsiders turn
up they made things very much worse. But they didn't start th
trouble.'

'Life must have been wonderful here before the colonists
came,' protested Alanna. 'As Jo said, it was a paradise.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'There was something badl

wrong about this planet before a single colonist or smuggler set foot on it!'

Everyone stared at him in amazement.

'But why, Doctor?' asked Jo. 'It all sounds so perfect.'

'It was nothing of the sort, Jo. It was all too good to be true. Societies just don't evolve like that. Not in my considerable experience they don't.'

'How do you mean?'

'The basic story is always the same,' said the Doctor. 'Evolution from the animal level, the setting up of primitive, savage societies, conflict and struggle and a slow, very slow march towards civilisation. All this sweetness and light, as my old friend Matthew Arnold put it, just isn't natural!'

Alanna glared indignantly at him. 'Why don't you listen, Doctor? I tell you, the People have evolved to a higher spiritual plane. They use skar to enhance their spiritual faculties. Practical matters just don't concern them any more. They're above such things now. We should try to learn from them, to follow –'

Makos put a soothing hand on her arm. 'It's all right, Alanna, the Doctor's only trying to work out what's going on.'

'Oh, you're all the same!' stormed Alanna. 'Nobody understands!'

'The People may have evolved to some higher spiritual state,' said the Doctor sceptically. 'Or they may just be going around in a drug-sodden stupor, with increasingly frequent outbreaks of frenzied rage. Typical addictive behaviour.'

Alanna jumped to her feet. 'How dare you say that! Of all the patronising, elitist –'

The Doctor interrupted her. 'In any case, their will is so enfeebled that they can be oppressed and enslaved by anyone who comes along. Their higher development isn't doing them very much good, is it?'

Ignoring Alanna's angry glare, the Doctor stood up as well. 'Exactly where is it, this native temple?'

Later that same day, Lieutenant Avery sent for a man called Pelor, a low-grade civilian worker on the base. He had him brought to the guardhouse by two large and intimidating military policemen.

By the time he entered the interrogation room, Pelor, who

was small, bald and pe[illegible]ng, was already terrified.

Time was short and Avery ca[illegible] straight to the point. 'You, Pelor, have been selling milita[illegible] y se to the rebels. Very small secrets because you are only a very small-time spy. However, is still a treasonable offence and I could have you shot at daw In fact, why wait for dawn? I could have you shot right now.'

Pelor went white and nearly fainted.

'However,' Avery continued, 'I have decided not to have yo shot, not yet anyway, because there is a chance, just a s chance, that you might be useful to me.'

'Anything you want, Lieutenant, anything at all. I can tell yo a lot about those rebels, Garon and Makos and all of them – a filthy, treasonable lot...'

Avery held up his hand. 'Never mind, I don't want to know.'

Pelor was baffled. If he could not betray anyone... 'Er, what do you want me to do, Lieutenant?'

'I want you to go and hang around with your rebel friends in Rik's and drop a few tantalising bits of information – hints that you're on to something really big. When you've got them interested, I wa you to tell them – Avery corrected himself. 'No, I want you to sell them a little story...'

CHAPTER FOURTE
FIRST CONTACT

Some time later the Doctor was poling a flat-bottomed punt along a broad, shallow river. He wore a long, hooded robe and hoped to pass, if not for a native, at least for a long-time reside who had adopted native ways.

It had taken all the Doctor's powers of persuasion to get J to stay behind. His final argument, the one that had worked, was that together they were just too recognisable.

'The patrols will be looking for a tall man and a small girl, he said. 'However we disguise ourselves, those basic shapes will be there to give us away. Believe me, I stand a much bet chance on my own.'

Looking around him, the Doctor hoped he was right. There was quite a bit of traffic on the river. There were flat-bottomed fishing boats, junk-like crafts with triangular sails, and massive paddle-wheel cargo vessels. Many had obviously been built with imported engines, decided the Doctor. Most of the boatmen were human or humanoid. Occasionally rafts piled high with fruit and vegetation were poled past by crews of silent golden giants.

No one seemed to be taking any particular interest in him. As the sluggish current took him steadily onwards, the river traffic started to thin out and the buildings on the river banks became fewer. He sped along the broad greenish-brown river, steering with the pole, dense green jungle on either side. At last, just when the Doctor was beginning to imagine he was headi out to sea, he rounded a bend in the river and there was t temple before him.

It was a massive half-ruined building constructed from gleaming black stone, decorated with ornate carving. In the blazing sunlight the black stone gave off gleams of iridesce colour.

Along the front was a row of huge statues, some fallen but

many still upright. The statues each depicted the People. Their expressions showed not sadness but arrogance and pride.

Even in ruins, the place had a kind of terrifying grandeur. The standing statues seemed to look down angrily at the intruder. It was not, thought the Doctor with some satisfaction, the kind of place built by a society of simple pacifist fruit farmers.

A long line of broken steps led down to the water's edge and the Doctor poled his craft towards them. Mooring the punt to an iron ring in a shattered pillar, he began climbing up to the temple.

He wasn't quite sure what he was looking for, but his instinct told him that the temple was at least a starting point. He'd already learned that the People had once been considerably more organised, more powerful than they were today. The great temple reeked of confidence, of arrogance even. Why had the People declined? Were they living in the shadow of some great catastrophe? Had they, like so many species, discovered atomic power before they were ready for it and wiped themselves out? Were the oppressed People of today the survivors of some once great, highly technological civilisation, like the one he'd met on Exarius years back? There didn't seem to be any remains to support this theory – but perhaps somewhere, deep in the jungle...

These reflections brought the Doctor to the top of the steps and to the cathedral-sized building that lay beyond. He found himself in an enormous, shadowy chamber, lit by shafts of sunlight from the many gaps where the roof had fallen away. There were shattered altars, broken statues, empty plinths. The place looked gutted, as if ravaged by some barbarian horde.

The colonists, decided the Doctor. They must have looted the temple pretty thoroughly in the years following their arrival, taking away anything of value for their own use, or to sell back on Earth. There had always been a thriving trade in off-planet antiquities and no one inquired too closely about how they had been come by.

There were faded murals on the walls and the Doctor walked across to look at one, his footsteps echoing on the stone floor. It was a massive, panoramic picture, showing hundreds of figures on a rocky plain. There was jungle in the background and

beyond the jungle a smoking volcano. The Doctor studied th
mural more closely. The figures in the picture were warriors, tw
opposing armies locked in conflict. Their weapons were
primitive, swords and shields and bows and sling-shots.

He was looking at a battle. A strange thing to see depicted
a temple of the People – because the People didn't fight. No
any more they didn't, thought the Doctor. Nor did they build
massive stone temples.

What *had* happened to change them?

He went across to a broken pillar and examined the stone
from which it was made. Like the temple itself, it was black, a
deep shining black with rainbow-coloured iridescent highlights.

The Doctor became aware that he was being watched. H
turned and saw a tall, saffron-robed figure standing in the centre
of the gleaming black floor.

It was one of the People. But there was something differen
Here there was none of the human resignation the Doctor had
seen so far. The long golden face had an air of calm author
and the yellow eyes blazed with a fierce intelligence.

'Why have you come here?'

The words were not spoken but simply thought. Somehow
they reverberated in the Doctor's mind.

'I hope you will forgive my intrusion. I mean no disrespect.'

'Who are you?'

'Simply a wandering scholar. I wish to learn more of the
history of the People. This seemed a good place to start and –'

'You have hearing! Do you also have voice?'

It took the Doctor a moment to understand the question.
Then, instead of speaking, he simply formed his answer in his
mind

'I hear and understand your thoughts. Do you hear mine?'

'I hear and understand!'

Not only did the Doctor hear the unspoken thought, he
could actually feel the strength of the other's astonishment.

The Doctor himself was not unused to telepathic
communication. Usually he employed it only with fellow Time
Lords, and then just as an emergency measure to convey v
information. It felt strange, and rather uncomfortable, to have
the thoughts of one who was not a Time Lord inside his head.

More questions flooded urgently into his mind. *Who are you?*

Where do you come from?'

For his reply the Doctor reverted to normal speech.

'I come from another world. I am called the Doctor.'

The tall figure stood staring intently at him for a moment. Then he strode forward and knelt at the Doctor's feet, taking his hand and touching it reverently to his lips.

'At last!'

Vastly embarrassed, the Doctor withdrew his hand. 'I'm sorry I don't understand. Exactly who do you think I am?'

'You are the Fulfiller of the Prophecy.'

'Me?' said the Doctor in astonishment. He realised that the other was still kneeling before him. 'Please, do get up. I hate all this bowing and scraping.'

The tall figure rose.

'Will you tell me who you are?' asked the Doctor.

'I am Zylor, High Priest of the People.'

'And what is this prophecy, exactly? What does it say?'

'When the time of suffering is fulfilled, one will come from beyond the stars. He will not be of the People, yet he will have both hearing and voice. He will deliver the People.'

'It's the El Llama syndrome all over again,' thought the Doctor. 'Why does everyone on this planet keep mistaking me for someone else?'

He looked at Zylor to see if he'd picked up the thought. Somewhat to his relief, there was no sign that he had. Although Zylor heard and understood normal speech, he received the Doctor's thoughts only when he was consciously transmitting them.

The Doctor decided to test the theory. 'I'm afraid there must be some mistake. I am not the one you've been waiting for.'

'There is no mistake. You are the one.'

There was utter certainty in Zylor's thought.

'How can you be so sure?' said the Doctor irritably. 'There's more than one telepathic species in the cosmos, you know!'

'The one for whom we wait will cure the ills of the People.'

'Even so –'

'He will be known as the Healer. Or to use your own word – the Doctor!'

When Makos and Garon set off with the Doctor on his mission

Jo found herself left behind with Alanna. They started clearing up the remains of the simple meal.

'There are no native servants here at Cosmic Soul,' explain Alanna. 'We refuse to exploit people, even though everybody else does. Everyone looks after themselves.'

Jo didn't mind the work, but she was far from happy abou being left behind.

'Typical,' she grumbled. 'The Doctor goes off to see the sights and I get stuck with the washing-up!'

'Well, at least we're safe here,' said Alanna, apathetically, picking at bits of snagged skin on her fingertips.

'I don't want to be safe. I want to be where the action is!'

Alanna put away the last of the tea bowls and threw herse wearily on to a pile of cushions.

'Do you really? Oh well...I suppose I used to feel like that once.'

Jo looked curiously at her. 'So what's changed things?'

'Time...This planet. Years of trying to help people who won't make the slightest effort to help themselves. Years of searchi for some kind of peace.'

Jo found herself a cushion and settled down to listen. 'How did you end up here anyway?'

Alanna, it appeared, had been born very, very rich. It ha brought her little happiness and an inordinate amount of guilt. After the death of both her parents in a solar yachting accident, she had begun what she called her wild-child period. It was a time of drink, drugs, sex and unending travel. Eventually however, pleasure had palled, guilt had taken over and Alanna had decided to reinvent herself.

She had devoted herself to an amazing variety of causes, first on Earth and then on other planets. Listening to her rambling account, Jo couldn't help the feeling that Alanna tired easily, plunging eagerly into the latest fad and soon afterwards dropping it for another.

Equally disillusioned with good works, Alanna had turned to alternative forms of religion, embarking on an endless quest for spiritual satisfaction. She had tried through almost as many cult religions as good causes, finally ending up with Cosmic Soul, whose impressively vague and eclectic beliefs seemed to encompass pretty well everything. Planetary ecology, astrolo

aromatherapy, acupuncture, feng shui – whatever it was, Cosmic Soul believed in it wholeheartedly and practised it enthusiastically.

'The Cosmic Soul mission to Catarophea seemed to offer everything I wanted,' said Alanna wearily. 'I'd heard about the People and I wanted to help them and learn from them – to discover the real meaning of life and do something useful at the same time. I've even tried –' She broke off. 'Well, anyway, things haven't really worked out, mentally. The climate's oppressive, the People reject all our attempts to help them and this is such a brutal, hopeless place that it drags you down. Then I met Garos and Makos. Now I believe that they're right, that some kind of revolution is the only answer.'

It seemed obvious to Jo that Alanna had simply become bored with religion and turned to politics instead. What would she take up next?

'The Doctor always says that life doesn't have a meaning, life is a meaning,' said Jo. 'Whatever that means!'

'I don't know how you stand that man!' said Alanna with sudden irritation. 'So smug and pompous, so sure he knows everything. So bloody self-assured – I hate people like that!'

'Now just a minute,' said Jo, indignantly. 'All right, the Doctor may be a bit of a know-it-all – but that's because he does know it all – well, most of it, anyway. At the moment he happens to be risking his life to help you and your friends!'

Alanna's anger subsided as quickly as it had flared up. She smiled a little tightly. 'All right, forget it. I suppose you know him a lot better than I do.' She gave Jo a knowing look.

Jo found herself blushing. 'Not – it's not like that – I mean –'

Alanna cut across her, a sudden bleakness in her voice. 'Look, do you mind if I lie down for a while?' She indicated the bed. 'Why don't you try to get some rest yourself? You've had a long day already and you need to take a siesta in this climate.'

Alanna went over to the bed and put up a small screen in front of it. She disappeared behind the screen and Jo curled up on her cushions. She thought she would be too restless to sleep but soon found herself drifting away. After all, she'd been tramping through jungles for miles with the Doctor, looking for the TARDIS.

Where was the TARDIS anyway?

And where was the Doctor...

Jo Grant was soon fast asleep.

After launching the Doctor on his mission – it had been a simple enough matter to buy an old hooded cloak and hire a boat at the riverside market – Garon and Makos drifted inconspicuously back towards the Cosmic Soul compound. No one seemed to be taking any special interest in them, not even the occasional army patrols they encountered.

Makos, unused to being a fugitive, kept looking round nervously. 'Aren't we taking a little risk, walking around the streets like this? Suppose one of the soldiers from the army post sees and recognises us?'

'It's a lot safer to act naturally than to skulk about everywhere,' said Garon. 'Besides, that young officer was the only one who got a good look at us. And he may not remember much when he wakes up – if he wakes up. That was quite a crack I gave him.'

'I hope you're right,' said Makos. He'd found the raid on the fort both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time.

'Which leaves us free to plan our next operation,' said Garon.

'What operation? We rescued El Hamma, didn't we?'

'I'm not too happy about El Hamma's attitude,' said Garon. 'He seems more concerned with studying the history of the People than planning an uprising.'

Makos shrugged. After all the recent excitement, a period of quiet scholarly research was finding by. 'Well, he seems to think that's what's important. And he's the boss now.'

'He is not the boss,' snapped Garon. 'He's a political adviser. An important one maybe, but I'm still in charge of operations.'

It occurred to Makos that Garon, who had been so keen to secure the Doctor's help, was already finding him a little overpowering.

'You were the one who wanted him to stay and run things,' he pointed out.

'I still do. But under my control.'

'And just how do you propose to control the Doctor? He seems like a pretty independent type to me.'

'You know that he's lost this TARDIS of his? I promised to

help him get it back from the army if he stayed and helped us.'

'So?'

'The TARDIS is obviously very important to the Doctor,' said Garon. 'Whoever has possession of it can use it to put pressure on him.'

Makos said, 'But if it's in army hands...'

'Exactly. They could use it to turn him against us. But if we have the TARDIS, we can use it to make sure the Doctor does things our way.'

'But we don't have it! The army does!'

'Not for long,' said Garon confidently. 'We're going to take it away from them.'

'We are? When?'

'Right now,' said Garon. 'Before the Doctor gets back...'

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE PLAN

‘It’s an astonishing story,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m still not sure that I understand it all. I’m even less sure how I can help you. It seems to me that any action I might take could provoke disaster – and yet doing nothing makes disaster certain!’

‘You will help us. You are the One Awaited – the Fulfiller of the Prophecy.’

The Doctor sighed. It was clear that nothing would shake Zylor’s firm conviction.

‘But for goodness’ sake, man, I don’t even know where to start.’

‘You must come to the Place of Flame and see the Anima.’

‘Yes, I think I must,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘That’s the centre of everything, after all.’

The Doctor and Zylor were sitting on the highest terrace of the overgrown garden behind the temple. Terrace after terrace fell away below them, merging at last into the jungle’s edge.

The sun was setting, touching temple, gardens and jungle with a golden glow.

They had been talking – or, in Zylor’s case, thinking – for what seemed like hours, as Zylor explained the fantastic history of the People and told of the self-inflicted catastrophe that had come upon them.

‘How long will it take us to reach the sacred mountain?’ asked the Doctor.

‘A day, a night, and another day. We start at dawn tomorrow.’

‘Very well. I’ll spend the night at the Cosmic Soul compound and return at dawn. I’d like to get word to my friends. They’ll be concerned about me.’ The Doctor hesitated. ‘There’s a great deal more I want to ask you before I go back to Cosmic Soul. I daren’t even think about tampering until I’m sure I understand

the process fully...'

Zylor did not move or speak, but after a few minutes a slender robed figure came out of the temple and moved toward them.

The Doctor looked inquiringly at Zylor, and the High Priest's words echoed in his mind.

'He is an acolyte, a servant of the temple. He will bear your message.'

'I still think we ought to wait until the Doctor gets back,' said Jo.

She had awoken from a long refreshing sleep to find that it was getting dark. Garon was already back and Makos was expected later. Alanna prepared a simple meal of rice cakes, fruit and goat's cheese, and they sat down to eat.

Over the meal, Jo discovered that her two companions were planning yet another raid on the army post, this time in order to retrieve the TARDIS.

Jo was urging caution, but she wasn't having much success. Garon was his usual gung-ho self and Alanna wasn't being any help either. She seemed to have shaken off her previous weeks' languor and was bright-eyed, energetic and full of reckless enthusiasm. Her afternoon nap had made an incredible difference to her mood.

Jo continued her efforts. 'Remember what the Doctor said before he left. The situation here is extremely delicate and we're to do nothing until he gets back.'

'We're not doing anything about the *situation*,' said Garon. 'We're leaving that to the Doctor. He's investigating things at the temple now.'

Privately, Garon was convinced that the Doctor was wasting his time. He wasn't planning to tell Jo that, though – any more than he intended to tell her his real reasons for wanting to gain possession of the TARDIS.

'All I want to do is free the Doctor's hands,' said Garon persuasively. 'As long as the army have the TARDIS, he's working under a handicap. And after all, the TARDIS may be a vital part of whatever the Doctor plans to do.'

Which was true enough, though Jo. She was still hesitating when a silent robed figure came into the hut. It was one of the People, Jo realised, smaller and slighter than the others she'd seen. A child, or at least a young boy.

Standing in the doorway, the newcomer looked around the little group, seeming to fix at last on Jo. He came over to her, bowed and produced a scrap of paper from beneath his robe. He handed her the paper, bowed again and slipped silently from the hut.

Jo took the paper over to the flickering oil lamp.

'It's from the Doctor,' she said. 'Things are going well at the temple and he's made a great discovery. He doesn't say what. He'll be back later tonight, but he'll be going upriver before dawn. He'll explain when he gets back.'

'I don't believe it,' said Makos. 'I've been here years without so much as getting one of the People to give me a friendly smile, and the Doctor's got them carrying his mail.'

Alanna shook her head admiringly. 'If he's got the People really running errands for him, things really must be going well. He seems to have achieved more in one night than we've managed to do in a year.'

'I told you we could leave things to the Doctor,' said Jo.

Garon felt a sudden stab of envy. Could it be that the Doctor was on the right track after all? Was he going to come up with some brilliant solution that would leave him, Garon, obscure and forgotten? Suddenly the TARDIS raid became more important than ever. He had to establish his position, make the Doctor realise who was really in charge.

'Yes, but we must do our share as well,' he said. 'Wouldn't it be nice if the TARDIS was standing here when the Doctor got back from whatever he's doing?'

Or rather, stashed away somewhere safe, whatever it was somewhere only he knew about. But it was essential that Jo came along on the raid. Only she could convince the Doctor that the TARDIS had actually been recaptured and was now in rebel hands.

'We need you to come with us, Jo,' he pleaded. 'You're the only one who can identify the TARDIS, make sure we come away with the right thing.'

Jo was finding it hard to resist Garon's pleading -

'After all the Doctor's doing for us right now, wouldn't it be great to do something like this for him?'

Jo could feel herself starting to waver. 'Well...'

'Oh, come on, Jo,' said Alanna, cheeks flushed and smilin

‘Why should the Doctor have all the fun? Are you coming with us? Or do you want to stay here and do the washing-up?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Jo. ‘But it won’t be easy. How much do you know about the TARDIS?’

‘Not much,’ admitted Garon. ‘I heard the Doctor tell the soldiers it looked like a big blue box.’

‘That’s what it looks like. But it’s incredibly heavy. You’d need a lot of men to move it.’

‘I’ve got a lot of men,’ said Garon simply. ‘We steal a hovertruck, load it on board and away we go!’

Jo shook her head impatiently. ‘And what are the soldiers going to be doing while this is going on?’

‘We’ll provide a distraction,’ said Garon airily. ‘Set fire to the fort or something!’

‘You just don’t realise the difficulty,’ said Jo. ‘We don’t even know whereabouts in the fort the TARDIS is being kept.’

‘We will soon,’ said Garon confidently. ‘We’ve got a contact inside the post, one of the civilian workers. Makos is meeting him at Rik’s place right now. As soon as he gets back here, we’ll have all the information we need.’

Rik’s place was as crowded and noisy and smoky as usual. Makos lounged by the bar trying to look inconspicuous. There was a group of army officers at a nearby table, one of them with a bandage round his head. It was the young officer Garon had struck down when they were rescuing the Doctor.

Makos told himself he’d been an unrecognisable cloaked figure when it happened. Chances were that the man wouldn’t even recognise Garon himself. But he was careful not to look at him too long all the same...

He glanced around the room and saw Dove and his gang of thugs at a table on the other side of the room. To his horror, Dove looked up, saw him and beckoned him over.

Makos didn’t want to go, but Dove wasn’t a good man to offend. He was rumoured to be a controlled skar addict – it was said that Dove’s immense physical strength and long habituation to the drug gave him a precarious stability. But you had only to look into the little red eyes set deep in the hairless skull to know you were in the presence of something very like madness. Dove lived perpetually on the edge of sudden paranoid rage, and

talking to him was like having a chat with an unexploded bomb the slightest tremor could set off an explosion.

Reluctantly Makos went over to Dove's table and stood b his chair. He looked around the motley group. They wore boots and breeches, fur-trimmed skin jerkins over bare hairy ches and lots of gold chains, rings and jewel-encrusted bracelets. They were all heavily armed – blasters and fighting-knives of all shap and sizes, clubs, machetes and metal-spiked gloves.

Dove of course had the brightest jewels, the hairiest jerkin and the biggest array of weapons of them all. 'Smuggler's ch thought Makos.

'Have a seat,' said Dove in his soft, throaty voice. Dove wa very keen on good manners and never shouted or ranted. He would talk to you in the same calm, soothing tones while he w getting ready to slit your throat.

Makos looked round the table. There weren't any seat Dove's thugs stared unblinkingly at him, like wolves eyeing a plump and succulent lamb.

'Offer our guest a seat, someone,' said the husky voic Nobody moved.

'Can't stay long,' said Makos nervously. 'I'm fine standing.'

'Wouldn't hear of it,' said Dove.

His ham-like fist flailed round and Makos winced and jumped back. But the blow wasn't aimed at him. It knocked th nearest thug, a tubby killer called Roki, clean out of his chair. A roar of laughter went round the table.

'You gotta forgive the lads,' said Dove hoarsely. 'I try to teach 'em etiquette, but they're slow learners.'

He nodded towards the empty seat and Makos sat down.

From the corner of his eye he saw Roki pick himself up, sheepish grin on his face. He went over to a group of traders, jerked a chair from under the nearest man and dragged it back the smugglers' table.

'Have a drink,' said Dove. He shoved a thick smeared gla towards Makos and filled it with colourless liquid from one of the many bottles standing the table.

It would have to be vragg, thought Makos bitterly. Raw distilled alcohol of ferocious strength, it was the ultimate macho liquor. What else would smugglers drink?

Makos hated vragg, but he didn't dare refuse. Picking up the

glass he gave the ritual ‘Hey!’ and poured it straight down gasping as the fiery liquid hit his throat.

Dove promptly refilled the glass. Makos stared down at it and let it sit there. He wasn’t going to drink a second glass of vragg, even if Dove killed him for it. He wondered what he was doing here and how he was going to get away. What did Dove want from him?

Makos looked up and felt the little red eyes boring into his own.

‘I just want to ask you a few questions,’ said Dove softly.

‘What about?’

‘About your friend – the Doctor...’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
INQUIRIES

‘So where is he? Where’s your new friend?’ said Dove softly.

‘What friend?’

‘New arrival in town,’ said Dove with unusual patience. ‘Tall fellow with white hair. Had a little blonde kid with him, very tasty. You were all in here with him the other day.’

He gave Makos a sinister gap-toothed smile. ‘Ringing any bells, am I? Or does the old memory need a bit more help?’ He jabbed a thumb at the man he’d knocked off his chair. ‘Little Roki there specialises in making people remember things. Make a stone sing, old Roki can! Shall I get him to ask you a few questions for me?’

Roki grinned evilly and Makos’s blood ran cold.

‘Oh, *that* Doctor,’ said Makos hurriedly. ‘He’s off exploring somewhere.’

‘Exploring what?’

It seemed safer to tell the truth.

‘I think he said he was going to take a look at the old native temple, the one by the river.’

Roki cackled. ‘He won’t find anything worth having there. We sorted that one out years ago.’

‘What does he want to look at some rotten old temple for? Like Roki says, it was all cleared out ages ago. Not that we have any idea who looted it, would we, lads?’

A roar of laughter went around the table. It was always safe to laugh when Dove made a joke.

‘So what does your Doctor friend want with that temple?’ persisted Dove.

‘He’s a scholar,’ said Makos. ‘He’s very interested in native culture.’

‘Is he now?’

For Dove, there was only one possible reason for taking an

interest in the natives. The People were a source of skar. T
only source. Dove had looted temples, burned villages and
tortured and murdered priests to get his hands on skar. He had
wrung out every last glowing grain of skar from the People and still he
needed more, not only to sell now, but to consume. Dove knew
that one day he would die in agony without skar – and supplies
were running low.

'What's he after, this Doctor?' Dove went on. 'What's he
looking for?'

'I told you,' said Makos. 'He's a scholar. All he's after is
knowledge.'

'That right? He's not one of your lot, then? A save-the-world
revolutionary? You were all very thick in here.'

Makos decided it was time to be economical with the truth.
'No. We were trying to persuade him to join us, but the Doctor's
not interested in politics.'

Dove looked thoughtfully at him. Makos was afraid – too
afraid. Something didn't ring true.

'You wouldn't lie to me, would you?'

A shadow fell over the table. It was Rik, immaculate as ever
in his white jacket.

'Someone looking for you, Makos, over by the bar.'

Makos seized his opportunity right. 'Sir. Excuse me, Mr Dove.
Business.'

It was the only acceptable excuse.

'Yeah, all right,' said Dove. 'Maybe we'll talk later.' He
grinned, evilly. 'How's Alanna?'

'She's fine,' said Makos. And yet he was puzzled by how
unconvincing the words sounded as he said them. Frowning, he
rose and hurried away.

Dove watched him go with a snarl of irritation. He still had a
lot of questions to ask, but he couldn't detain Makos by force,
not without crossing Rik. Still, there would be other times.

Rik interrupted his chain of thought. 'I've no objection to
you lot knocking each other about if it amuses you – as long as
there's no damage.' He jabbed a finger at Roki. 'But if I see you
bothering my other customers again, you're barred!' He held
their collective gaze for a moment and then walked back to the
bar.

'Cheeky little bastard,' snarled Roki. 'Someone ought to

teach him some manners.'

Dove smiled. 'You want to try it, Roki? Remember what he did to that berserker.' He looked around the table and fixed on a slender bearded man dressed all in black. 'De Granville?'

'Boss?'

De Granville was the nearest thing to a gentleman in Dove's gang, and as such Dove accorded him a measure of respect. He was brighter than any of the others and so Dove chose him for missions that called for intelligence and cunning. But De Granville had more than brains to recommend him. He was a ruthless, skilled killer, lethal with a stiletto.

'Get on the track of this Doctor fellow for me,' said Dove. 'Get a few of the boys on it, ask around, spread a few credits. And when you find him, stay on his tail. I want to know where he goes, who he sees.'

'If you say so,' drawled De Granville. 'Mind if I ask why?'

'Makos was lying to me,' said Dove slowly. 'I'm not sure what or how much, but he was lying. Lying about the Doctor.'

'Why the interest, Boss?'

'I don't know who this Doctor is, but he's big-time.'

'Takes one to know one, Boss,' said Roki ingratiatingly.

Dove ignored him. 'So why does somebody big-time come to Catastrophea? Why does he go poking around native temples? I think he's after something. I think he's after the Big One.'

The Big One was the smugglers' term for the last legendary skar deposit that was supposed to be there somewhere deep in the jungle. Many expeditions had set out to look for it, but not one had returned. The Big One! A mountain of the stuff, enough to make them all millionaires, to keep Dove in drugged ecstasy for the rest of his days. Every avaricious face around the table was alight with greed.

'We've never found it,' whispered Dove. 'Nobody has. Maybe this Doctor can.'

'So we snatch him and squeeze the location out of him?' asked Roki eagerly.

'No, you fool. He can't have found it, not yet. We follow him and let him lead us there. Until then we don't touch him - and we don't let anyone else touch him either. So find him for me.' Dove's fist slammed down on the table, making bottles and glasses dance. 'Now!'

'I'll get right on it, Boss,' said De Granville soothingly, then rose and slipped away.

Over by the bar, Makos was having a frustrating conversation with a man called Pelor. Small and perspiring heavily, Pelor was on the bottom rung of Catastrophea's immigrant society. Too lazy and incompetent to work for the Company, too cowardly and treacherous to be a smuggler, Pelor served as orderly on the army post.

Native servants were forbidden for security reasons and Pelor and a few other deadbeats looked after sweeping, cleaning, garbage disposal and all other tasks considered too lowly for the military.

He supplemented his meagre wages by selling low-level information, more gossip than intelligence, to anyone willing to buy. Makos and Garon had used him in the past to gain useful titbits about military intentions. As usual, Pelor was being cagey, trying to gauge how much he could charge for such information as he had.

'A blue box, you say? I might have heard something about it.'

'Come off it,' said Makos wearily. 'It was brought in early this morning by a special patrol. The whole base must have been buzzing with it.'

'So what do you want to know?'

'Where it is and how well it's guarded.'

'What's it worth?'

Makos produced a small bundle of credit notes and peeled a few off. 'Fifty.'

'A hundred,' said Pelor automatically.

'Eighty – and not a credit more.'

Pelor took the credits. 'Bunker Seven. Armed guard day and night, two inside, two outside, eight-hour shifts.'

Makos nodded thoughtfully. It was pretty much what they'd expected. Maybe if they struck at guard-changing time... Garon would know, he was good at that sort of thing.

'Mind you,' said Pelor, 'if you were willing to splash out, I could tell you something really interesting about this blue box.'

Makos looked suspiciously at him. 'You've told me where it is. That's all I need to know.'

‘I’ve told you where it is now. Wouldn’t you like to know where it will be in a few hours’ time?’

‘They’re moving it!’ thought Makos excitedly. ‘That would be our best chance.’ He held out the bundle of credit notes.

‘This is all I’ve got.’

Pelor registered his eagerness. ‘Not enough. Come back w some serious credits and maybe we can do business.’ He turn away.

Mild-mannered as he was, Makos was capable of ruthlessness when pushed too far. He grabbed Pelor’s arm a pointed across the room. ‘You saw who I was talking to just now?’

Pelor glanced at Dove’s table and then quickly looked awa as he caught Dove’s red glare.

‘So?’

‘You see how he’s watching us?’

‘What if he is?’

‘Unless you tell me what I want to know, right now, I’m going to tell Dove you’ve been selling information about his smuggling operations.’

‘He’ll never believe you!’

Makos shrugged. ‘Probably not. But he’ll get De Granville or Roki to cut your throat just to be on the safe side.’ He held ou the slim bundle of credit notes. ‘Now, talk!’

Pelor talked.

When he’d finished, Makos made him go over it again an then hurried away.

Pelor turned back to the bar, peeled off one of his newly acquired credit notes and ordered a large vragg. He felt he’d earned it. He tossed back the fiery liquor and ordered another.

After a while, the young officer with the bandaged head came across to the long bar and ordered a couple of bottles of wine. ‘Did he buy it?’ He spoke without looking at Pelor.

‘Oh, yes, he bought it all right.’

‘I was watching. You nearly blew it.’

‘Look, Mr Avery,’ whined Pelor, ‘Makos knows me. If I hadn’t held out for the last credit he wouldn’t have believed me.’

‘You’d better be right.’

Avery collected his bottles of wine and moved off. He put the bottles on the table, said good-bye to his protesting friends

and went out into the night.

CHAPTER SEVENTE
AMBUSH

‘Apparently there was a big row between Administrator Charteris and General Walton,’ said Makos excitedly. ‘Walton said his troops had found this TARDIS thing in the first place and the army ought to hang on to it. Charteris insisted that political subversion and anything connected with it was a civil matter, and he wanted the thing brought to Government House.’

‘Get on with the story,’ said Alanna. ‘How did things turn out?’

‘The Administrator won – of course. He is the boss after all. He’s going to ship it back to Earth for investigation as soon as the blockade’s over.’

Jo was horrified. If the TARDIS was sent back to Earth without them, she and the Doctor could be trapped. Staying for a while to help solve the problems of Catastrophea was one thing; spending the rest of her life there was something else.

‘He’s got no right to do that,’ she said indignantly. ‘The TARDIS belongs to the Doctor. We can’t let him send it away to Earth like that!’

‘Don’t worry, we won’t,’ said Garon. ‘Go on, Makos.’

‘Well, Charteris won in the end, as I say, and Walton had to agree to hand the thing over. It is being shipped to Government House tonight.’

‘What time?’ snapped Garon.

‘It’ll be leaving the army post at midnight.’

‘Why so late?’ asked Alanna.

Makos shrugged. ‘Secrecy, I suppose.’

‘How’s it travelling?’ asked Garon. ‘Some kind of convoy? Is there a big military escort?’

‘No, that’s the beauty of it,’ said Makos. ‘Walton decided that the safest thing to do was to make as little fuss as possible. They’re shipping it out in an ordinary supply truck. There’ll be a

couple of guards in the truck, but that's all.'

Garon jumped up and went to a low table in the corner. He rooted through a pile of rolled-up maps and pulled out the one he wanted. Large-scale, it showed the town and the area round about. He spread it out on the floor, holding the corners down with assorted ornaments, and bent over it, frowning in concentration.

'How did Pelor find out about all this?' asked Alanna. 'I mean, all he usually peddles is a lot of low-grade gossip. This must be the first time he's come up with anything really useful.'

Makos said, 'Apparently the whole camp was buzzing with it. Jo and the Doctor made quite an impression when they escaped, so anything to do with them is big news.'

'Do you trust this informer of yours?' asked Jo.

'I wouldn't trust Pelor an inch – but I trust his greed. He knew he was on to something good for once, and he held out for every last credit. He even turned down my best offer. I had to threaten him to get the information at a price I could afford.'

Oblivious to all this, Garon finished his study of the map. 'Right then! The most direct route from the army post to Government House is through here, and here... ' He jabbed a finger at the map. And the best spot for an ambush is – here!'

Mooring his boat at the wharf where he'd picked it up, the Doctor climbed the steep lane from the riverside and headed back towards the Cosmic Soul compound.

Even at night he had no fear of getting lost. Like all Time Lords his power of topographical recall was highly developed. All he had to do was retrace the route he'd taken with Garon and Makos. 'A path once trodden is never forgotten!' said the Doctor to himself, happily.

As he hurried through the warm tropical night, the Doctor's mind was whirling with the results of his long conversation – if conversation was the word for it – with Zylor. It had presented him with the most appalling set of problems. Temporal engineering was difficult and complicated enough, but in its own way psychophysics was even worse. Dealing with a field of psychogenic energy so massive that it covered an entire planet was beyond even the Doctor's experience. Because of a combination of circumstances – their extraordinary history, the

mental and physical make-up, their cultural rapport with the dru skar and their astonishing relationship with the planet itself – th People had developed psychic technology to an unprecedented extent. Not surprisingly they had gone far out of their depth and were now unable to undo the harm they had done.

'And now Zylor calmly expects me to sort everything out!' mused the Doctor. 'And what was all that nonsense about m being the Chosen One, the Fulfiller of the Prophecy?'

Perhaps every oppressed culture throws up the myth of th hero, the champion who will set everything right. Or perhaps the myth had been cunningly planted to prepare for his coming. The High Council of the Time Lords, perhaps...Or possibly their covert group, the Celestial Intervention Agency. Even when h was still serving his sentence of exile, the Time Lords had been quite willing to use him as their unwilling agent when they didn't want to dirty their non-interventionist hands.

'First they exile me, quite unfairly, to Earth,' muttered the Doctor bitterly. 'Then they use me as an intergalactic errand bo And now, when everything's supposed to be forgiven and forgotten, they're *still* doing it. Well, if they think they're going to send me careering around the cosmos with a mop and a buck cleaning up their messes, they can think again!'

His mind busy with his problems and his grievances, the Doctor strode forward vigorously, finding himself at the Cosmic Soul compound in no time. Pulling the hood of his cloak abou his face, he made his way between the scattered wooden buildings.

The real problem, he thought, was to persuade Garon and his gang of amateur revolutionaries to lie low and keep quiet. H wasn't sure what the answer to Catastrophea's problems mig be – if there was an answer – but it certainly wasn't politica uprising. Barricades in the street just wouldn't help. Even storming the local equivalent of the Bastille wasn't going to be enough.

There was also the problem of persuading Jo to stay behin while he went off into the jungle. Taking her was out of the question; the expedition was far too dangerous.

She'd be safe enough with Alanna in the city. No one wa looking for her very seriously. It was El Llama they were reall after.

The Doctor yawned. He could always do without sleep if he had to, but it would be nice to have a little nap before setting off at dawn.

He reached Alanna's hut and went inside.

It was empty. The oil lamp had been left burning, which suggested they hadn't gone far. Either that or they'd left in a hurry. Maybe they'd had to flee from an army patrol. Or maybe they'd gone for a nice bowl of gruel in the dining hall.

Why the devil hadn't somebody left him a note?

The Doctor looked around and saw a pile of rolled-up maps on a table in the corner. They had been neatly stacked – except for one map, which lay at right angles to the others. He went over and picked it up. There was writing – Jo's writing – on the outside.

Dear Doctor, they don't want me to leave you a note but I'm doing it anyway. Walton is taking the TARDIS to Charteris in an army supply truck, and we're going to snaffle it en route. Come and help if you can – I'm not sure this lot are up to it alone.

Jo.

P.S. Midnight is the time and X marks the spot!

The Doctor turned over the map, traced the route between army base and Government House and saw the X marking the spot. Garon had chosen for an ambush. Judging by the map, it was a point where the road ran through a kind of gulch in an area of rocky terrain.

'Young fools,' muttered the Doctor.

He wondered what they were planning. A simple hijack, presumably. Well, it might work. A sudden surprise attack...Garon had managed the rescue of the Doctor and Jo quite efficiently. But there would be armed and edgy guards, and these things could always go wrong. People could get killed. The Doctor fished in his pocket and pulled out what looked like an old-fashioned pocket watch. Among its many complex digital functions it actually *was* a watch, adjusting automatically to local planetary time.

The Doctor looked at the figures on its face and then at the map. He might still be in time. Shoving watch and map into his

voluminous coat pockets, he ran out of the hut.

Garon looked at his wrist-chronometer. 'Won't be long now. If it left the base at midnight it'll be here any minute.'

Alanna nodded. 'I think I can hear it now.'

Both of them were practically hopping about with excitement. Jo also was excited, but she was worried as well. Garon seemed to have made his preparations very efficiently. They'd arrived at the site of the ambush some time ago, together with a little band of cloaked guerillas. They had all worked very hard under Garon's direction and now everything was ready.

They were lying stretched out flat on the edge of a sort of low cliff, one side of the gully through which the road passed. Beside them were more of Garon's men, anonymous figures in hooded cloaks like their own.

Makos was in charge of a similar party on the other side of the gully.

Raising her head slightly, Jo could see the rocky gully stretching away on either side. It looked bleak and bare in the fitful moonlight. Garon had chosen his spot well. They were also waiting at the gully's narrowest point.

In the distance they heard the throne of a hovertruck. Garon produced a torch and gave two quick flashes. Two flashes came in reply.

'Right, Makos is ready,' whispered Garon. 'Stand by, everybody – and remember the plan!'

CHAPTER EIGHTE
THE BEST-LAID PLA

'Remember, Jo, I want you to stay here,' whispered Garo urgently. 'I'll signal for you when the hovertruck is in our hand – three flashes. We'll need you down there to identify the TARDIS for us.'

Jo nodded and they all crouched down, waiting.

The hovertruck drone grew louder, changing its note slightl as the sound bounced from the walls of the rocky gully. A moment later it came into sight, moving cautiously along the gully like some giant metal beetle. It looked ordinary enough, thought Jo. It was just a giant truck, slightly streamlined, with a driving compartment at the front, double doors at the back and surrounding skirt instead of a set of wheels.

In their hiding places, the guerrillas waited tensely, holding their collective breath and waiting for Garon's signals.

The truck was very near now. Suddenly Garon gave a single flash from his torch. At the same time he leapt to his feet an ran to the heap of rocks that the guerrillas had painstakingly assembled at the edge of the gully.

Garon and the others started hurling the contents of the pil over. On the other side, Makaro and his team were doing the same thing. Rocks and boulders and stones of all shapes a sizes rained down in front of the hovertruck, some of them clanging off its metal hull.

The guerrillas worked furiously, sweating and panting and gasping, tearing at the pile of rocks and ignoring torn hands.

To Jo's amazement, Alanna joined in as well, hurling massi boulders down into the gully with frenzied strength. Very soon the gully was blocked in front of the hovertruck.

Like a baffled beetle confronted with an unexpected obstacle, it paused. Everyone waited to see what would happ next. Slowly, very slowly, the hovertruck started creeping

forwards again, inching its way over the rocks.

'Come on!' yelled Garon, and he and his guerrillas scrambled down the side of the gully.

Alanna was about to go with them, but Jo saw how ill the woman looked. She grabbed her arm.

'You stay here with me. Let the boys enjoy themselves.'

Alanna struggled furiously. 'Let me go!'

Jo held on, startled, and suddenly Alanna went limp, collapsing against Jo. Jo lowered her to the ground. 'What's the matter? Are you all right?'

'Tired,' muttered Alanna. 'So tired.'

'Nervous exhaustion,' thought Jo. 'These highly strung types!'

She turned to see what was happening down in the gully. Swarming all over the hovertruck's driving compartment, the guerrillas yanked open the doors and hauled out the two army drivers, covering them with blasters.

Garon reached inside and turned off the drive. The hovertruck lurched to a halt. He ran to the back and hammered on the door with his blaster.

'Open up! You're surrounded. Open these doors, or we'll use explosives!' They didn't actually have any explosives, but Garon hoped the bluff would work.

Apparently it did. After a moment he heard the rattle of bolts. Quickly he turned and gave the signal for Jo.

As soon as he was sure they'd got what they wanted, he planned to take over the truck, drive it to a safe place, hide the TARDIS and dump the truck as far away as possible. Garon grinned. Or he might drop the empty truck outside the army post, just to wind up old Walton.

The truck doors started to open...

Jo came running up just then. The doors slid back. But they didn't reveal the square blue shape of the TARDIS.

Instead the truck was packed with armed UPA soldiers. Instantly Garon wheeled round and waved his torch in a wide arc. 'Back!' he yelled. 'Get back! It's a trap!'

He turned and ran, and all the others did the same.

Soldiers poured out of the truck and began pursuing the guerrillas.

Jo turned to run and found herself caught up in the crowd.

Someone cannoned into her, knocking her to the ground, whi
the fleeing crowd passed her by. She scrambled to her feet a
started to run on.

A familiar voice yelled, ‘There’s the girl! Get her!’

A crushing weight landed on her back, slamming her to th
ground once more. Her head struck the rocky surface and s
fell into fiery blackness...

The Doctor knew things had gone wrong as soon as he reach
the rocky area. He could hear shouted orders and the crackle
blaster-fire. Cloaked figures rushed past him in the darkness. He
dashed towards the gully and straight into Makos, who was
supporting a white-faced Alanna.

The Doctor grabbed his arm. ‘What’s happening?’

‘We ran into a trap...’

‘Where’s Jo?’

‘I don’t know. I think she was down by the hovertruck.’
Alanna staggered and Makos said, ‘Please, Doctor, I’ve got to get
her away. She’s not well.’

The Doctor let go of Makos and watched them hurry off.
He moved forward cautiously.

Peering over the edge of the gully, he saw armed soldiers
standing around the hovertruck. Lights had been set up. There
was a little group of prisoners under guard. He couldn’t see any
sign of Garon, but he might already have been taken away.

A tall, slim figure in battledress with a bandaged head was
snapping out orders. The Doctor recognised Lieutenant Avery.
He watched as the prisoners were herded into the back of th
hovertruck. Avery then barked another order and a soldier came
forward, carrying a slight, limp figure in his arms.

The Doctor looked on helplessly as Jo was carried into the
truck and the doors were closed.

Avery got into the front, next to the driver, and the
hovertruck started up, backed a little, spun on its axis and roared
away. It left behind a small squad of soldiers, who started
clearing away the roadblock.

The Doctor turned and moved quietly back into the
darkness.

Jo opened her eyes and saw the concerned face of Lieutenant

Avery looking down at her.

'Feeling better?' he asked.

She raised her head and winced at a stab of pain.

'It's true then.'

'What is?'

'You really do see stars!'

She was in an army sickbay lying on a narrow bed. A white-coated medic was bathing her head, dabbing at her bruises and then spraying something on them. Almost immediately the ache died away. Helping her to sit up, the medic gave her a small white pill and a plastic cup filled with water.

Automatically, Jo swallowed the pill and washed it down. 'Some things never change,' she thought. This felt exactly like visiting the school nurse after a fall in the playground.

She looked down the ward and saw other patients, soldiers and guerrillas alike, being treated for cuts, bruises and blaster-burns. The only difference was that the guerrillas were under armed guard.

She saw Garon having a bandage applied to one arm. He raised the other hand in a wave and gave her a rueful grin.

'Sorry you got hurt,' said Avery apologetically. 'I ordered that soldier to grab you, not flatten you. Unfortunately, you got jumped on by the fattest man in the force.'

Jo struggled to sit up. 'It could have been worse. Were there many casualties?'

'Well, nobody was killed,' said Avery. 'My lads got overkeen and shot a harmless melon-farmer a while back, and Charter never let the General hear the last of it. The old man's been a bit sensitive about unnecessary force ever since. We were ordered to take prisoners wherever possible.'

'Well, you got me,' said Jo.

'We'd rather hoped to get the Doctor as well.'

'He wasn't there,' said Jo. 'Honestly. He'd gone off to take a look at a native temple.'

'What for?'

'He's interested in that kind of thing. He's a scholar, not a revolutionary. As he told you when he was here.'

'For a simple scholar he seems to have made some very dubious friends.'

'The Doctor makes friends with everyone,' said Jo. 'It's

sometimes think that's why he gets into so much trouble.' She looked up appealingly at Avery. 'I know how all this must seem to you – the ambush and everything. But things really aren't like that.'

Avery perched on the end of the bed. 'No? Tell me about it.' His voice was warm and sympathetic.

Jo had been trained in interrogation techniques when she first joined UNIT. She was well aware that Avery was just playing good cop. Maybe the bright lights and rubber truncheons would come later. But she didn't think it could do any harm to tell the truth.

'We really did come here by chance,' she said. 'The Doctor got into that fight with Rekar – all that was my fault. Then this lot here turned up and sort of adopted us.' She nodded towards the guerrilla prisoners. 'They think the Doctor is some kind of revolutionary leader – and now you people seem to have the same idea. *But it isn't true*. The Doctor didn't want to get involved. If you hadn't taken the TARDIS we'd have been long gone by now.'

'Are you telling me that blue box is some kind of spaceship?'

'I'm not telling you anything about the TARDIS,' said Jo firmly. 'But everything *I have* told you is the truth.'

'– and I'm inclined to believe her, sir,' said Avery.

Jo had been locked up for the night and he was concluding his report.

General Walton was sitting behind his desk, his face impassive, writing on an old-fashioned notepad as Avery talked.

'If it hadn't been for that intelligence report about El Llama we'd probably never have suspected them anyway,' continued Avery.

Walton spoke without looking up. 'What about the rescue from the post here?'

'According to the girl, the Doctor didn't want to be rescued. He was quite happy to be handed over to the Administrator. She said he was furious with that revolutionary crowd, tore them off a real strip.'

'And the attempt tonight?'

'That was just the revolutionaries, sir. The Doctor didn't know about it. He wasn't even there apparently – which is why

we didn't nab him, of course. Apparently, all the Doctor wants to do is go home.'

'In an antique police box?'

'She was pretty cagey about that, sir,' admitted Avery. 'But is his property, after all.'

Walton put his pen down and looked up. 'She's a pretty little thing of course...'

'That's got nothing to do with it, sir,' protested Avery. 'I've been lied to by agents of all sizes, shapes and sexes.'

'Occupational hazard around here,' said Walton drily.

'I think she's telling the truth.'

'Perhaps,' said Walton. 'Perhaps not. But we can't take chances, not with the situation the way it is now. I've had an unconfirmed report that the Axonians have landed a task force. We can't have mysterious strangers wandering round stirring things up when we may be at war at any moment.' He stood up and stretched wearily. 'We've got two out of three, Avery, this TARDIS thingumajig and the girl. But we must have the Doctor as well.'

'I'll organise a search, sir.'

'No need. He'll come to us.' Walton tore the top sheet off his pad and handed it to Avery. 'Get a few hundred copies of this run off. I want them posted all over town first thing.'

The proclamation read:

UNLESS THE REVOLUTIONARY LEADER KNOWN AS EL LLAMA, ALIAS THE DOCTOR, COMES FORWARD AND SURRENDERS, HIS ASSOCIATE, JOSEPHINE GRANT, WILL BE EXECUTED BY FIRING SQUAD AT DAWN TOMORROW.

CHAPTER NINETEE
HOSTAGE

‘And you fell for it!’

The Doctor looked angrily at the crestfallen Makos. He had made his way back to the Cosmic Soul compound to find Mako tending a prostrate Alanna. She was sleeping now, and Mak was left alone to face the Doctor’s wrath.

‘It seemed the perfect opportunity,’ protested Makos indignantly. ‘We were trying to get your TARDIS back for you.’

‘And how did you happen to hear of this wonderful opportunity?’

‘We’ve got a contact at the base, someone we’ve used befo He started dropping hints and I managed to get the story out o him. It cost me quite a few credits and I had to threaten him t get the information out of him.’

‘So the more you paid for it and the more trouble you had to get it, the more you were committed to believing the story wa true. Classic disinformation technique. He’s no fool, that young Avery – which is more than I can say for the rest of you!’

‘Oh, come on, Doctor,’ protested Makos feebly. ‘That isn’t really fair...’

‘Not fair?’ said the Doctor indignantly. ‘Not fair? Some lowlife informer tells you exactly what you want to hear and yo rush straight into a trap. Have you ever heard the expressio “Too good to be true”? And worst of all, you dragged Jo along with you!’

‘We needed her to identify the TARDIS. If you’d been here yourself...’

‘It’s as well I wasn’t,’ said the Doctor grimly. ‘It was me they were after, of course. Now they’ve got Jo instead. I imagin they’ll try to make use of her to trap me. Where’s Garon?’

Makos gave a racking yawn. ‘Captured as well, I imagine, he’d be back here by now...’

‘Not really the best planned of campaigns, was it?’ said th

Doctor.

Time passed. Makos had fallen into an exhausted sleep and the Doctor sat cross-legged, chin in hands, deep in thought. What should be his next move?

He didn't much fancy trying to enlist the help of the revolutionaries. They'd caused him quite enough trouble already. With their leader and most of their activists captured, the guerrillas were probably a spent force by now. Besides, General Walton would be expecting a rescue attempt – hoping for one, probably.

Which left only negotiation. Himself in exchange for Jo? He was confident of his ability to escape eventually, and if he could get to the TARDIS...But would Walton agree to release Jo?

Then there was the expedition with Zylor, vital to the future of the whole planet. He couldn't just go off, though, leaving Jo a prisoner. He must tell Zylor. But how?

There was one possibility. If there was still any kind of a link...

Hands over his eyes, head bowed, the Doctor concentrated furiously. He wasn't sure how long he sat there in a kind of trance, but eventually he felt the touch of another mind and looked up.

A slim, robed figure stood in the doorway of the hut. It was the acolyte, the young priest he'd met earlier at the temple. The one who'd helped him before.

'I have an urgent message for Zylor,' said the Doctor. He spoke aloud, concentrating hard, forming each word in his mind. Quickly he outlined everything that had happened so far. 'I was due to meet Zylor at the temple at dawn, but I can't do that now. First, I must find some way to free my companion. Tell Zylor I will join him as soon as I can.'

The acolyte bowed and turned away.

There was nothing more the Doctor could do now, not until morning. He lay down and tried to rest.

Jo had been taken to a plain but comfortable room with an adjoining bathroom. There were bars on the window, an armed guard on the door and a pair of oversized military pyjamas on the bed.

She yawned. No doubt the Doctor would have started digging a tunnel or something, but she'd had a long and tiring day. She put on the pyjamas and went to bed.

Next morning she awoke to find a soldier putting a tray beside her bed – tea, coarse bread rolls and honey. The traditional hearty breakfast, no doubt.

The soldier withdrew without speaking.

Jo found her clothes, mysteriously washed, dried and ironed during the night, neatly folded in a pile on the end of her bed. She finished her breakfast, went and grappled with the shower controls, and then got dressed.

Wondering what to do next, she banged on the door. There was no reply.

The Doctor was awakened by Alanna with tea and a dish of the inevitable rice cakes.

'Wake up, Doctor. It's a beautiful day!'

The morning sun was streaming through the doorway of the hut, and the Doctor rose, stretching his long legs. He took a sip of tea and looked around.

'Where's Makos?'

'He woke up early and went out to see what news he could pick up. I'm sure our friends will be all right.' Despite her prostration the night before, Alanna was now almost unnaturally bright and cheerful.

The Doctor nibbled his rice cakes and sipped his tea, while Alanna chattered on brightly.

'I'm glad to see you're feeling better,' he said at length, when he could get a word in. Alanna seemed not to hear him, though.

'Don't worry about your little friend, Doctor. I'm sure she'll be all right. They'd never hurt a sweet thing like her, would they? I met that Lieutenant Avery at Rik's one night and I was quite taken with him...'

The flow was only stemmed when Makos came in, his face grave. He was clutching a handbill.

'What did you find out?' asked Alanna brightly

'Garon's been captured,' said Makos gloomily. 'And quite a few of the ones who were with him. Most of my party were warned in time to get away.' He held out the handbill. 'These are all over town, Doctor.'

The Doctor read the handbill silently, his face impassive
'I'm sorry, Doctor,' said Makos awkwardly.

'It's probably a bluff,' said the Doctor after a while. 'I don't think General Walton is really the bloodthirsty brute he pretends to be. But I daren't take the chance – as he very well know blast him!'

Makos was horrified. 'You're not going to surrender?'

'Certainly not. But I am going to have a little chat with General Walton and Administrator Charteris. Perhaps it's for the best. I ought to at least try and warn them.'

'What do you mean?' asked Alanna.

'Everyone on this planet is in deadly danger,' said the Doctor solemnly. 'Not from the soldiers, the smugglers, the Draconian or the colonists, and certainly not from your band of tin-pot revolutionaries.'

Alanna frowned. 'But that leaves only the People.'

'The People are in the greatest danger of all,' said the Doctor enigmatically. Tossing the handbill aside, he headed for the do

Makos moved to bar his way. 'I can't let you go, Doctor – you're too valuable to the cause. If necessary, Jo must sacrificed.'

'You revolutionaries are great believers in sacrificing other people,' said the Doctor. 'I'm a man of peace, Makos, but please get out of my way.'

Makos didn't move.

'I'm sorry, Doctor, it's my duty to stop you from leaving. It's for your own good.'

The Doctor sighed and stepped forward, Makos made clumsy grab at him, and the Doctor reached out, took hold and heaved. Suddenly Makos found himself flying through the ai landing on the cushions next to Alanna.

The Doctor surveyed him from the doorway. 'All right? Good! Now, for heaven's sake, you two, just lie low and keep out of trouble. And tell all your friends. Don't do anything, anything at all, until you hear from me. Clear?'

With that he turned and strode away.

Jo was brushing her hair when there was a tap on the doo 'Come in!'

Lieutenant Avery entered and looked at her approvingly.

‘Sleep well?’

‘Brilliantly, thanks,’ said Jo briefly. ‘The service here is first class.’

‘We like to look after our guests.’

‘What happens now?’

‘The top brass want to see you.’

With an armed guard following behind, Avery escorted Jo along a corridor, across the parade ground and over to the building that held General Walton’s office.

Jo noted that there were armed soldiers everywhere. ‘Things seem to be busy round here,’ she said.

‘We were rather hoping for a scene,’ said Avery. ‘But your friend the Doctor didn’t oblige.’

‘He’s not that daft,’ said Jo. She looked around at the squads of marching men. ‘You mean all this is for the Doctor’s benefit?’

‘Not entirely. There are rumours of a Dragon landing somewhere in the jungle.’

‘A Dragon?’

‘Dragons, Dracs, Draconians. I presume you’ve heard of them?’

‘Yes, I’ve heard of them,’ said Jo, a wry smile on her face. ‘What are they doing here?’

‘They seem to think they’ve got a claim to this planet. They’ve been blockading us for weeks and now they seem to have arrived in person.’ He paused outside Walton’s HQ. ‘The old man’s got a lot on at the moment, and he’s not in a good mood. I’d try and co-operate if I were you.’

CHAPTER TWENTY
PANIC

As he walked through town, the Doctor became aware of a atmosphere of great tension. People were standing on corners talking agitatedly, and several shops and cafés were closed.

He stopped at a street stall and bought a slice of some mango-like fruit.

'What's everyone so het up about?'

'Haven't you heard? They say the Dragons are coming!'

'Dragons? You mean Draconians?'

'Thousands of them, landed in the jungle last night. They're surrounding the whole town. What are we going to do?'

'Well, you've got nothing to worry about.'

'I haven't?'

'The Draconians are very fond of fresh fruit,' said the Doctor solemnly, before continuing on his way.

He saw a confused jam of pedestrians, hovertrucks and rickshaws attempting to flee in two different directions. Presumably the townspeople thought that the Draconians were coming to town and so the safe place to be was in the jungle. Meanwhile, those who lived out of town thought that the Draconians were already in the jungle, so the safe thing to do was to come to town.

The Doctor walked clear across town, which wasn't all that far, and took the trail that led to the army post. Some way along he felt a sudden mind-touch and turned around. Zylor stood silently at the edge of the jungle, waiting.

The Doctor stood quite still for a moment. Then he went on his way, heading for the fort.

He wondered how Jo was getting on.

Jo and Lieutenant Avery had been waiting in an anteroom for some time. They could hear angry voices coming from the

General's office.

One of the voices rose to a shout. 'This time, Genera Walton, you really have gone too far!'

Avery looked inquiringly at the sergeant, who said, 'It's th Administrator, sir, just arrived. He's seen one of the General posters. Er – he's not too pleased about it, sir.'

Avery drew a deep breath. 'I think I'd better break it up, don't you, Sergeant?'

'Rather you than me, sir!'

Avery knocked and then immediately ushered Jo inside. 'You wanted to see Miss Grant, sir.'

Walton was sitting behind his desk, calm and impassive ever. Standing in front of him was the substantial form of Administrator Charteris, clearly seething with indignation. He was waving a fistful of handbills and, as Jo entered, one of the fluttered from his grasp.

Automatically she stooped to pick it up. She was about t return it when her own name caught her eye. Quickly she read the handbill and then passed it to Charteris.

'So it really was the traditional hearty breakfast?'

Charteris looked puzzled. 'I'm sorry?'

'The one the condemned man always gets. Or girl, as th case may be.'

Charteris put the handbill with the others and slammed the whole pile down on Walton's desk.

'I'm sorry you had to see that, young lady – and in any event you can disregard it. I'm not at all sure what's going to happen to you, but you are certainly not going to be shot out of hand.'

'Thank you,' said Jo politely. 'I'm very glad to hear it.'

'Don't count your chickens, young lady,' said Walton sternly 'You're my prisoner, not his.'

'Dammit, man,' said Charteris furiously. 'You can't possibly shoot her. We've no evidence against her, and apart from her association with the Doctor she hasn't done anything.'

'She escaped from my custody,' said Walton. 'And last night she took part in a raid on a supply truck.'

Charteris turned to Jo. 'Is this true?'

'Well, I was there,' she admitted. 'I didn't actually take muc part.'

'I set a little trap for the Doctor last night,' said Walton.

‘Unfortunately I missed the big fish and caught a tiddler.’

Charteris made an effort to keep calm. ‘I know things are pretty tense at the moment, General, what with this Draconian invasion and all –’

‘Don’t think it’s much of an invasion,’ said Walton calmly. ‘Not yet. According to our space radar people, there was only one craft and that was quite small.’

‘Why would they send a scoutship?’

‘Provocation. Just like the blockade. You notice they didn’t land here. They’ll probably claim engine failure, say they crash-landed. If we attack their scoutship, it gives them an excuse to start the war and still look like they’re in the right.’

‘So what are you going to do?’

‘Nothing. They can blunder around in the jungle all they want.’

Charteris realised he’d been side-tracked. ‘We can discuss that later,’ he said with a worried glance at Jo. ‘Meanwhile, there’s the matter of this young lady.’

‘I questioned her myself last night. Administrator,’ said Lieutenant Avery. ‘Miss Grant insists that the Doctor is just what he says he is – a wandering scholar. Our local activists were expecting some revolutionary big shot and jumped to the conclusion that the Doctor was their man – just as we did. I believe she’s telling the truth.’

Charteris looked at Jo. ‘Didn’t the Doctor tell them he wasn’t who they thought he was?’

‘Over and over. They just wouldn’t listen – any more than the General would later. We didn’t ask to be rescued, you know. And it wasn’t the Doctor’s idea to try and hijack that truck. He wasn’t even there.’

‘You see, General?’ said Charteris appealingly. ‘Suppose she really is telling the truth? You can’t possibly shoot her.’

‘I know.’

‘What?’

‘I know that, Administrator,’ said Walton calmly. ‘You know it, Lieutenant Avery knows it, and now Miss Grant herself knows. But does the Doctor?’

‘He’ll have a pretty strong suspicion,’ said Jo. ‘You didn’t shoot him when you had the chance.’

General Walton smiled. ‘Quite so. The Doctor may hope I’m

only bluffing. But with your life at stake – will he dare to take the chance that I'm not?'

Jo didn't reply.

'I don't think he will, Miss Grant,' said the General. 'Before the day is over I expect one of two things – a rescue attempt or surrender. Either way, I'll have him.'

The duty sergeant appeared in the doorway. 'Message from the main gate, sir. Someone asking to see the General.'

'Did he give his name?' asked Walton.

'Well, not really, sir. Says he's called the Doctor.'

'You see?' said Walton triumphantly. 'Tell them to send him in, Sergeant.'

'Yes, sir!' The sergeant disappeared.

The Administrator shook his head. 'All right, you win.'

Walton raised his voice. 'Sergeant!'

The Sergeant reappeared. 'Sir?'

'When you've shown the Doctor in, put a guard in this building. And put extra men on the gate.'

'Yes, sir.'

They waited a few minutes and then the Doctor strode into the room, contriving to look elegant, even in his worn hooded cloak.

'Jo, are you all right?'

She ran to him. 'Doctor, they're not really going to shoot me,' she said rapidly. 'So if you want to make a run for it –'

The Doctor smiled. 'I think it's a bit late for that, Jo.'

Jo looked around. Lieutenant Avery had drawn his blaster and the anteroom was suddenly full of soldiers.

'Nice to see you again, General Walton,' said the Doctor. 'I knew you were too much of a gentleman to shoot a guest – especially a lady.'

'It's still not too late as far as you're concerned, Doctor,' said Walton.

The Doctor nodded to Avery. 'Lieutenant.' Finally he turned to Charteris. 'I'm very glad you're here, sir. You're just the man I wanted to see.'

'I'm afraid I can't spare you very long, Doctor,' said Charteris drily. 'We've got something of a crisis on our hands.'

'The Draconian invasion, you mean,' said the Doctor airily. 'I shouldn't worry too much. I doubt if they're serious, not at

this stage. Probably just testing your nerve.'

'You think so, do you? Are you an expert on the Draconians Doctor?'

'Well, I am an honorary noble of the court of Draconia,' said the Doctor modestly. 'Tell you what, I'll talk to them for you if you like.'

'I don't think we'll trouble you, Doctor,' said Charteris. 'Now, Lieutenant Avery tells us that Miss Grant has been making an eloquent plea on your behalf. She says that you're really an innocent bystander and that Captain Caron and his friends insisted you were this El Llama fellow in spite of all your denials.'

'That's quite true, actually,' said the Doctor. 'Believe it or not, I was rescued against my will. I would have left the planet at once if the General here hadn't confiscated my – my equipment. And I assure you I had nothing to do with the recent ill-advised attempt to get it back.'

Charteris looked hard at him for a moment. There was something in the Doctor's voice that carried conviction. 'I'm inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt, Doctor.'

'Then you'll let us go?' asked Jo eagerly.

Charteris shook his head. 'Not quite that. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Give me your word, both of you, that you'll behave and you can come to live in Government House, as my guests. Mind you, there'd be certain conditions.'

'Such as?'

'You'd have to promise not to stir up trouble, not to interfere in local politics and not to leave town. Apart from that, you'd be virtually free. When the crisis is over and the blockade is lifted we'll do a proper check on your identities. If everything's in order, you'll be released with my apologies. I'll even back a claim for compensation for false imprisonment. Now, what do you say?'

'It's a generous offer, Administrator,' said the Doctor. 'Astonishingly generous in the circumstances.'

'Then you accept?' Charteris held out his hand.

The Doctor shook his head. 'I'm afraid I can't.'

'Whyever not, man?'

'Because you do have a crisis on this planet, gentlemen – but it's not the one you think it is. And much against my will, I've become involved.'

‘And who’s behind this crisis?’ snapped Walton. ‘The Draconians? The colonists? Or is it your revolutionary friends after all?’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘None of them. This crisis concerns the People. And unless you give me a chance to sort out, there’ll be a bloodbath involving everyone on this planet.’

CHAPTER TWENTY-
OUTBREAK

There was a stunned silence. Then Charteris said, 'What are you talking about? The People are the only inhabitants of this planet who never give any trouble. They're always on the receiving en poor devils.'

'That's right,' said Walton, united for once with his colleague. 'The People are passive victims, always have been.

No,' said the Doctor. 'Not always. Didn't it ever strike you that their passivity was somewhat unnatural? Well, it's beginning to break down. Look at the number of berserkers recently, doesn't that tell you something?'

Lieutenant Avery said, 'The numbers have increase recently, sir. Up by about 15 per cent this month.'

'What exactly are you trying to tell us, Doctor?' said Charteris exasperatedly.

'That a tremendously dangerous crisis is impending and that it involves the People.'

'Are you saying that the People are a danger to us?' ask General Walton sceptically.

'To you and to everyone on this planet – and above all t themselves.'

'Could you possibly be more specific?'

'I'm afraid not,' said the Doctor. 'It's a tremendously complex business and I need to investigate further. At th moment I don't know what the solution is – or even if there is one!' He turned to Charteris. 'I've managed to gain the confidence of the People – some of them anyway. I need to g deep into the jungle to their sacred mountain and investigate the source of the problem.'

'Out of the question,' said Walton.

'I'm afraid he's right,' said Charteris. 'I've already told you can't possibly let you both go.'

‘I’m not asking you to let us both go. Just me.’

Jo was outraged. ‘Doctor!’

The Doctor ignored her protest. ‘I don’t want to take Miss Grant with me anyway, it’s far too dangerous. Look after her for me, put her under house arrest or something. You can go on looking after the TARDIS for me as well. That gives you two hostages against my return. Believe me, I’d never abandon either of them!’ He smiled at Jo, who scowled indignantly back.

‘Why this sudden interest in our troubles, Doctor?’ said Charteris. ‘I thought you didn’t want to become involved in the affairs of this planet.’

‘The purely political problems, no. This goes beyond all that.’

‘Your sudden desire to go into the jungle,’ said Walton. ‘It wouldn’t have anything to do with the arrival of our Draconian friends, would it? You did say you knew them. You wouldn’t be one of their agents, sent here to undermine our defences?’

‘My dear General, you really are becoming totally paranoid,’ said the Doctor dismissively. ‘I suppose you can’t help it, it’s the military mind. Administrator Charteris, will you or will you not let me go into the jungle?’

‘No, Doctor, I will not,’ said Charteris. ‘I repeat my offer, give me your word until the crisis is over. If there is a problem in native affairs, I’ll even listen to your advice. And that’s my final offer.’

‘Then you leave me no alternative.’

‘Is that some kind of threat, Doctor?’ snapped Walton.

The Doctor didn’t reply. He was staring into the middle distance as if in some kind of trance. Jo saw that his lips were moving, although no words could be heard.

‘Doctor, what is it? Are you all right?’

The Doctor stood there for a moment or two longer and then rubbed a hand across his eyes.

‘Don’t worry, Jo, I’m fine. Stay out of trouble while I’m away, won’t you?’

‘Doctor, you’re not going anywhere,’ said Charteris.

‘Poor fellow’s cracked up,’ muttered Walton. ‘Probably escaped from somewhere...’

‘I’m afraid I must be going, Doctor,’ said Charteris. ‘To be frank, you’ve taken up far too much of my time already. I’ll have

to leave you in General Walton's custody for the moment. If yo
change your mind about giving me your word, the General ca
put you in touch with me.'

The orderly sergeant rushed into the room.

'Sir, it's the People.'

'What about them?'

'They're – assembling, sir, at the main gate.'

Walton and Charteris looked at him in utter amazement.

'Don't be ridiculous, man,' barked Walton. 'The People
never assemble anywhere!'

'They have now, sir.'

'Are they violent, threatening?'

'Well, not really, sir; not as such.'

'What are they doing?'

'Just sort of pressing against the main gate.'

'Let 'em get on with it, then.'

'You don't understand, sir, there's a big crowd of them. And
you know how strong they are. I think the gate may give way!'

There was a sudden, shockingly loud sound of splinterin
wood. Charteris and Walton rushed to the anteroom. Throug
the open door they could see the main gate, which was bulgi
inwards.

'They'll be through in a minute, sir,' said the sergeant.

Walton looked at Charteris. 'Have I your authority to open
fire?'

'Is the crowd armed, Sergeant?' asked Charteris. 'Spea
clubs, anything?'

'No sir, nothing at all.'

'Then opening fire is out of the question. Shooting down
unarmed natives? When the news reached Earth we'd b
crucified.'

With another rending crash, the gate burst open. Beyond it
they could see a silent crowd of the People, moving
remorselessly forward, driving back a thin cordon of troops.

'What do you suggest I do, Administrator?' asked Walton.

'I'll come and talk to them, maybe that will help. If that fails,
use your men to force them back.'

Charteris marched determinedly towards the crowd.

'Every available man to the main gate, Sergeant,' ordere
Walton. 'Intruders are to be expelled with minimum necessary

force. I'll come myself.' He started to follow Charteris from the room, pausing for a moment in the doorway to look back at the Doctor. 'If this is your doing, Doctor...'

'Not single-handedly,' said the Doctor modestly. 'I did warn you.'

'Lock these two up, Avery,' snarled Walton. 'I'll deal with them later. I knew I should have had them shot.' He ran from the room.

Lieutenant Avery drew his blaster. 'Come along, Doctor!'

The Doctor didn't move.

Avery slid a lever on the blaster barrel. 'It's set to maximum stun, Doctor. You won't die, but you'll be crippled for quite a while. Some people never fully recover. Now move.'

Jo could see that the Doctor wasn't going to surrender. He was poised, ready to spring at Avery. She could also see that Avery would carry out his threat to shoot the Doctor down.

Reluctantly – she quite liked Avery – she slipped behind Walton's desk, picked up an elaborately patterned native vase and brought it down on Avery's head. To her surprise, it didn't break. As Avery staggered and fell, she placed it carefully back on the desk. 'You'll have to take me with you now, Doctor,' Jo said, 'or General Walton really will shoot me!'

'Come on,' said the Doctor urgently and, grabbing Jo's hand, he pulled her from the office.

They crossed the orderly room and went out on to the parade ground, where an extraordinary sight met their eyes.

A sizeable group of the People was forcing its way through the shattered main gate. Eerily silent, the golden-skinned giants moved determinedly forwards.

A crowd of soldiers was trying to shove them back. Everyone on the post seemed involved – soldiers, cooks, waiters and medics. There were more of the soldiers and their helpers than there were of the People. On the other hand, the People were much bigger and stronger.

The result was a kind of deadlock, a seething silent scrum that swayed to and fro. They could see Charteris appealing to the People and Walton shouting orders at the soldiers. Neither was having the slightest effect.

'Looks like the Cup Final,' said Jo. 'We'll never get through there!'

The Doctor had momentarily gone off into another of his trances. Snapping out of it, he grinned at Jo and said, ‘We don’t have to. This way!’

They ran away from the struggling crowd and between the low wooden buildings, heading for the back of the fort. The few soldiers they saw were all running towards the conflict and took no notice of them.

The Doctor led her to a small gate at the back of the fort. This too had been wrenched open and one of the People, a slender saffron-robed youth, was standing beside it. He looked inquiringly at Jo.

‘This is Miss Grant,’ said the Doctor. ‘I’m afraid she has to come with us.’

The youth led them off into the jungle.

CHAPTER TWENTY-
BETRAYAL

Back at the main gate, the struggle went on. The soldiers we yelling orders and threats as loudly as they could, but the People took no notice, remaining impassive and silent.

Occasionally a soldier lost his temper, a rifle butt rose and fell, and one of the People would slump bleeding to the ground. The rest would simply step over the prone body, continuing to press remorselessly forward.

But suddenly, it was all over. The People stopped, turned and moved off. Gathering up their wounded on the way, the walked out of the main gate and away from the fort, quietly dispersing in different directions.

Some of the soldiers started to pursue them, but Walton roared, 'Pull back. No one is to leave the post till further orders. Sergeant, get a party on repairing the main gate.'

'Yes, sir!'

Walton walked across to Charteris. 'Well, I wonder what that was all about? Let's go and ask the Doctor, shall we?'

'I doubt if we'll have the opportunity.'

'What do you mean?'

'What all that was about, my dear General, was the Doctor's escape. I rather think it was arranged to that end. He'll have gone off into the jungle with his native friends. He did warn us not to try and stop him.'

'Nonsense!' said Walton uneasily. 'I left them under guard with Lieutenant Avery.' He turned towards the orderly room, but stopped as Avery staggered out, clutching a bloody forehead.

'I take it the Doctor was too much for you?' asked Charteris.

'It was the girl,' said Avery wretchedly. 'I'm sorry, General.'

'Told you she was a trained terrorist,' said Walton. 'Should have shot them both when I had the chance. All right, Avery, get off to sickbay.'

‘Sir!’ Avery gave them a shaky salute and marched unstead
away.

‘Think we’ve got a native revolt on our hands?’ asked
Walton.

Charteris shook his head. ‘I very much doubt it. As I said, I
think that was a one-off, for the Doctor’s benefit.’

‘They’ve never done anything like that before,’ said Walton
angrily. ‘Never! How the devil did he gain so much influence
over them in such a short time?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Charteris. ‘But I don’t think he’s just the
political agitator we took him for. The question is, who is he?
And what does he want?’

That evening at Rik’s the café was buzzing with the story o
events at the army base. Any kind of demonstration by the
People was unprecedented, and of, and Rik’s customers
looked at the silent golden-skinned waiters with a certain
caution.

But as far as the People were concerned, here and elsewhe
in the town, the demonstration had never happened. They
simply reverted to their usual unnatural calm.

Dove was particularly troubled and intrigued. He glared
accusingly at De Granville.

‘I thought I told you to keep an eye on this Doctor.’

De Granville shrugged. ‘I tried, but he dropped out of sight.
He was hanging around with Garon and that lot for a time, bu
then he went off somewhere.’

‘He went off with the People,’ said Dove broodingly. ‘He
must be well in with them. They rescued him like that. I reckon
he’s after skar. He’s persuaded them to tell him where they ke
their last big stash.’

‘Maybe,’ said De Granville, who knew that skar was a
obsession with Dove, so it wouldn’t do to argue.

‘What else can it be?’ argued Dove. ‘Everyone knows the
People are sitting on a mountain of the stuff somewhere in th
jungle. Yeah, this Doctor’s managed to get in with them. They’
probably taking him to the skar right now.’

‘Who knows, Boss?’ said Roki.

‘That lot do, if anyone does,’ said Dove. He jerked his hea
towards the table where Alanna and Makos were sitting with

few still unarrested revolutionaries and some sympathisers from the Cosmic Soul.

'Maybe they do,' said Roki, 'but they're not likely to tell us, are they? Want me to grab one and beat some info out of him?'

'No need,' said Dove. 'There are easier ways. Back in a minute.' He stood up, looked round, stretched and wandered off outside the café.

A few minutes later Alanna paid and went outside. Dove was sitting at a table in a dark corner of the terrace and she went over to join him.

'Have you got the stuff?' she whispered.

'It'll cost you.'

'Money's no problem.'

'I want more than just money this time.'

Alanna shuddered. 'Dove, please, I've told you I won't –'

Dove laughed. 'You will when you're desperate enough. But that's not what I meant, not this time. I want information – about the Doctor.'

'There's nothing I can tell you.'

Dove took a glowing green phial out of his pocket and tossed it idly up and down. 'No? Pity.' He started to put the phial away.

'He went off to see the native temple, the one by the river,' said Alanna hurriedly. 'He came back really excited, said he'd made some tremendous discovery. He said he had to leave first thing next day.'

'Where for?'

'I'm not sure. He just said upriver.'

'That's better,' said Dove, holding out the phial.

Alanna reached for it, and Dove drew back his hand.

'I've told you all I can,' she said desperately.

'It's info as well as credits, not instead.'

Alanna took out a roll of credit notes, peeled some off, and thrust them into his hand.

Dove shook his head. 'Price has gone up. Scarcity value.'

Feverishly she thrust more credits at him.

Dove took them and she reached out for the phial.

'Hang on a minute,' said Dove. 'Don't I get a little kiss goodbye?'

Alanna leaned over him, touching her lips to his bald skull,

and Dove handed her the phial.

Stowing it away, Alanna jumped to her feet and hurried off into the darkness.

Dove chuckled to himself. He knew that even this slight contact made Alanna's skin crawl. That's why it was so enjoyable. Well, she'd have to get a lot more than the top of his head when all the skar on Catastrophea was in his hands.

'A mountain of the stuff,' he muttered. 'A mountain!'

And the Doctor knew the way. Well, where one man could go, another could follow...

Alanna crouched shivering in a dark corner of the terrace. Her hands were trembling so much that for a moment she was unable to open the clear plastic phial. With great effort she unscrewed the stopper and took a heap of the glowing green grains on to her hand. Holding one wrist with the other to prevent her hand trembling, she touched the grains with her tongue...

Immediately the skar flamed through her body, burning away fear and guilt and uncertainty. As she licked up the last of the grains she felt strong, confident, happy. Everything that life had denied her was here in a few green grains. Easy.

Alanna paused for a moment, savouring the full effect. A shadow of doubt flickered across her mind. Was the buzz fading already just a fraction? She tipped out a few, just a very few, more grains on to her hand and scooped them up with her tongue...

Dove went back into the café and sat down at his table. 'Listen, you lot, we're all going on a little trip. De Granville, get down to the dockside. I want a boat, big enough for all of us with an experienced river pilot. Roki, I want supplies loaded on board – food, weapons, booze, enough for a nice long trip upriver.'

'When do we leave?' asked De Granville.

'Just as soon as we can. Meet me at the dockside in an hour's time. I want everything ready when I arrive.'

De Granville and Roki got up and hurried away.

Dove filled his glass with vragg and tossed the drink down. His eyes were alight with a vision – a vision of a mountain of skar...

Soon, Alanna came back to her table. She was radiant, bright and more vivacious than ever as she joined in the gossip about the amazing events at the fort.

'Garon's definitely locked up there,' said Makos gloomily. 'Pity he didn't get away when the Doctor did.'

'Never mind,' said Alanna. 'Let's mount another raid and rescue him!'

'Our last raid didn't turn out too well,' Makos reminded her.

'Don't be so feeble, Makos. Garon wouldn't be afraid. He'd rescue you if you were captured. Look how he rescued the Doctor.'

'Oh, we all know how wonderfully heroic Garon is,' said Makos. 'Only he's the one who got locked up and I'm not. I'm only the one who looked after you and got you safely back home.'

Alanna laughed and squeezed his hand faintly. 'Of course you are.'

'Besides,' added Makos. 'The Doctor told us to do nothing until he got back.'

'Oh, the Doctor!' said Alanna carelessly. 'Who knows if he'll ever come back!'

Alanna knew, on some level, she had betrayed the Doctor but it didn't seem to matter. Dove would have found out anyway, he always did. All that mattered to her was the drug coursing through her veins and the supply that remained in the phial.

The Doctor and Jo were gliding smoothly upriver, resting on woven mats inside a little wooden cabin. They were eating a meal of fresh fruit and herb tea served by the acolyte.

Their boat was a larger version of the punt the Doctor had used earlier, big enough to incorporate the cabin and a small storage area for cargo.

There were hundreds of such boats trading up and down the river, and nothing to distinguish theirs from any other.

Two of the People stood at bow and stern, propelling the boat with long poles. Zylor sat cross-legged and silent on the deck.

The Doctor noticed that despite the strength of the current, they were moving along with surprising speed. Somehow he felt that the boat was propelled as much by the force of Zylor's will

as by the two poles.

'Do we go all the way by boat, Doctor?' asked Jo sleepily.

'I don't think so. I gather the river becomes too turbulent at the headwaters. Eventually we'll have to get out and slog throu the jungle.'

'I knew it was too good to last!'

The back of the cabin was open and they could see the da water behind them and the banks of the river sliding by. From somewhere behind them came a faint pop-pop-popping sound.

'What's that?' asked Jo.

'Just another boat, one with some kind of engine.'

'Are they following us?'

'I don't suppose so. There are hundreds of boats going up and down the river. Try to get some rest.'

Danger behind them and worse dangers ahead, the Doct and Jo glided on their way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-
TASK FORCE

Captain-Lord Samzyre looked up eagerly as Lieutenant Var entered the command cabin. Lieutenant Varin came to attentio

'My life at your command!'

Samzyre nodded brusquely in return. 'Do the enemy approach?'

'No, my Lord-Captain.'

'Are they massing for attack?'

'No, my Lord-Captain.'

'Then what are they doing?'

'Nothing, my Lord-Captain. Our scanners report no military reaction.'

Samzyre leapt to his feet. 'This is intolerable!'

He strode out of the cabin, along the main companionway, and went to the top of the ramp. The Draconian scoutship had landed in a jungle clearing. A defensive perimeter had been set up, sentries were on patrol and a handful of soldi were checking equipment and weapons under the vigilant eye their sergeant, an experienced veteran called Korr. They spra to attention when Captain-Lord Samzyre appeared.

Irritably, he gestured to them to carry on. He surveyed th busy scene for a moment and then turned exasperatedly to deferential subordinate.

'We land, openly, within easy march of their base. We are ludicrously small force in a totally indefensible position. Victory for the enemy is certain, so why don't they attack? Ho can we carry out the purpose of our mission if the enemy refus to co-operate?'

The purpose of their mission was to get themselves killed. As Draconian warriors, they not only accepted this, they embraced it with pride. At least, the officers did. Competition amongst them for a place on Task Force Kastophia had been

keen. The other ranks were given no choice.

The group had to be just the right size – large enough to make an impact, yet small enough to pass for the innocent survey party it pretended to be.

In the end a dozen were chosen. The force was commanded by Captain-Lord Samzyre, a minor aristocrat and distant relative of the Draconian Emperor. For this too there was a reason. In order for the provocation to be sufficiently severe, it was necessary for someone of substantial rank to be sacrificed.

He was given one officer, Lieutenant Varin, a young Draconian of good family. Sergeant Korr and nine troopers of the elite Imperial Guard made up the rest of the force.

The plan was simple. A small Draconian force would land in territory claimed and indeed occupied by the Earthmen. When the humans reacted and attacked – as surely they must if they had any sense of honour – the Task Force would naturally fight to the last Draconian. It would then be announced that an innocent Draconian survey party, which had unfortunately crash-landed on disputed territory, had been savagely massacred by ruthless soldiers of the United Planetary Association. Worse still, a dear and valued relative of the Emperor had been killed without mercy.

Provoked beyond endurance, the troops of General-Baron Kryll, conveniently orbiting the planet in a Draconian battlecruiser, would then land and avenge their slaughtered comrades, incidentally securing the planet for the Draconian Empire.

It was a typically Draconian plan, apparently simple, in reality extremely devious. To Draconians war was like three-dimensional chess – and a great deal depended on the correct opening move.

It was obvious to the Draconian task force that such a brilliant opening gambit as this could not possibly fail. Once the enemy moved, he was doomed.

Unfortunately, the enemy was refusing to move. The Earthmen were ignoring them.

Samzyre turned and strode back to his cabin, Varin at his heels. He threw himself into his command chair and ruffled the crest that crowned his long, thin Draconian skull.

'We have underestimated the cunning of the humans,' he

hissed. ‘If we are not to end our days in dishonour, somehow we must contrive to make them kill us! But how?’

‘Why don’t they do something?’ said General Walton irritably. ‘I know it was my idea to leave them alone, but I thought they’d clear off. We can’t have them sitting there for ever.’

Administrator Charteris yawned. ‘Why not?’

He was visiting General Walton at the base for one of their periodic review meetings. The General was in a contrary mood, opposing whatever anyone suggested. As often happened, the two colleagues found that they had changed sides in an argument. Now that Charteris had accepted Walton’s decision to ignore the Draconians, the General was raring for action.

Grumpily he said, ‘It’s deliberate provocation.’

‘Precisely,’ said Charteris blandly. ‘And as you yourself said, why give them the reaction they want?’

The somewhat erratic UPA communications satellite had suddenly started working again and had come up with the size and approximate location of the Draconian craft.

‘We know now that there’s one small Draconian scoutship somewhere out there in the jungle,’ Charteris went on. ‘What possible harm can it do us?’

‘It could be the spearhead of an invasion force.’

‘It will be – if we make it one,’ Charteris paused. ‘And consider this. How do we know about this Draconian ship?’

‘Because the satellite picked it up.’

‘Exactly. Yet the Draconians have been jamming all communications from this planet for weeks. Suddenly the satellite – and just the satellite – starts working again. They want us to know they’re there and they want us to attack them!’

Walton nodded. ‘To provoke a counter-attack.’

‘To *justify* a counter-attack,’ corrected Charteris. ‘Dammit, man, you said the same thing yourself. Unless I’m very much mistaken, there’s a Draconian fleet out there just waiting to maul it.’

‘We’ll have to do something about the Draconians sooner or later,’ grumbled Walton.

‘Perhaps. But for the time being I propose that we pursue a policy of masterly inactivity. Let them all sweat it out for a bit.’

‘I know what you’re doing,’ said Walton suddenly. ‘You’re

following the Doctor's advice. That's just what he said to do when he was here.'

'Perhaps,' said Charteris blandly. 'Good advice is useful whatever the source. Any news of him, by the way? I see you got your main gate repaired.'

For reply General Walton bellowed, 'Avery!'

Lieutenant Avery marched in and saluted, his head freshly bandaged yet again.

'Been in the wars, Avery?' asked Charteris.

'Yes sir. One very small female armed with a deadly vase. I'm sorry about what happened, General.'

'So am I. Fortunately the vase was unharmed. Any news of the Doctor and your assailant?'

'Very little, sir. Mind you, he's got good contacts amongst the People...There's a rumour that someone important left by boat on a journey upriver. It could have been the Doctor.'

'Anything else? What's the general situation?'

'We've spread the word about the small size of the Draconian landing force and the panic's dying down. The local revolutionaries are keeping a very low profile and they're holding a peace chant at Cosmic Soul. Oh, and Rekar is rumoured to be assembling a combined force of Company guards. He's out at that hell-hole plantation of his in the jungle.'

Walton looked at Charteris. 'I thought you had him locked up?'

Charteris shrugged. 'Avery had to hand him over to the police on charges of attempted kidnapping. Case came up yesterday, I had to let him go. No Doctor, no Miss Grant, no witnesses, no evidence.'

'Pity. Anything else, Avery?'

'A smuggler called Dove has disappeared, together with a few of his more unsavoury associates. He's supposed to have gone upriver too.'

'Any connection with the Doctor?' asked Charteris.

'I doubt it, sir. Dove's probably just hunting the mythical skar hoard again. He's obsessional about it.'

'And how about the People?'

'The People are the People, sir,' said Avery helplessly. 'They've gone back to what they were before the – the events here at the post. Or almost...'

‘What do you mean, almost?’ growled Walton.

‘Hard to describe, sir. It’s just an impression.’

‘Try,’ urged Charteris. ‘Impressions can be valuable.’

‘There’s a sort of tension about them,’ said Avery slowly. ‘It’s as if they were – waiting for something...’

‘Waiting for what?’

‘I honestly don’t know, sir.’

‘Do you think there’s going to be some kind of uprising?’

Avery shook his head. ‘They’re not threatening or surly or anything like that. As I said, they’re just waiting.’

‘All that stuff the Doctor was spouting,’ said Walton suddenly. ‘Been trying to puzzle it out. He said there was a cri involving the People...’

Charteris said slowly, ‘He seemed to be implying that the People were a danger – but not that they were somehow a danger.’

‘There’s just one situation that fits that scenario, sir,’ sai Avery. ‘It must be something to do with the berserkers. That’ the only time that the People ever harm anyone – and they’ just as likely to harm themselves, or other members of the People, as anyone else.’

‘The Doctor pointed out that the berserker rate is increasing,’ said Walton. ‘Do you suppose that it could really be spreading – like a kind of plague? Suppose they *all* went berserk?’

They were silent for a moment, contemplating the horrifying picture.

‘They’d kill every human being on the planet,’ said Charteris

‘And then they’d start killing each other,’ added Avery.

‘Well, if that’s what the Doctor was trying to warn us about, said Charteris, ‘that, or anything remotely like it, we’d better pray that whatever he’s trying to do in the jungle is a success...’

CHAPTER TWENTY-
THE JOURNEY

'Are we nearly there, Doctor?' asked Jo for about the hundredth time.

'I sound like a small child on a long car journey,' she thought to herself. She could hear herself whining the question on family trips. And her father's inevitable answer: 'It's just round the corner!'

They had been travelling for what seemed like several days now and Jo was getting bored. The scenery of river and jungle didn't change. There wasn't even any wildlife to watch. Occasionally you heard strange shrieks and cries from the jungle, sometimes there were sinister ripples in the water, but unlike those nature programmes on the television, you never actually *saw* anything.

They ate on the move, always the inevitable fruit and herb tea, and stopped overnight to sleep in the moored boat.

The Doctor had been largely silent, occasionally joining Zylor in the bows for long, unbroken conversations. It wasn't much fun for Jo being the only non-telepath on board.

She pointed this out to the Doctor, asking him what he and Zylor had been talking, or rather thinking, about.

The Doctor would answer in only the vaguest terms.

'He's telling me about the problems of the People, Jo. I need to understand so I can help them.'

'And can you?'

'Frankly, I doubt it. But I have to try.'

'You were the one who didn't want to get involved.'

'That was before I knew how serious the problem was, Jo.'

And for all her questions, he refused to say any more.

'Well, is it, Doctor?' repeated Jo.

'Is what what?'

'Is it far?'

The Doctor looked out at the shrinking river. It was narrower now and moving much faster. The giants with the poles were finding it harder to make progress.

'I think this part of the journey may be nearly over,' said the Doctor. 'We're getting close to the head of the river. There are probably falls not too far away.'

'What do we do then?'

'Get out and walk, I imagine. We may still have a long trek through the jungle ahead of us.' He paused, listening. 'Can you hear it, Jo?'

Jo listened and heard the same faint pop-pop-popping far behind them.

'It could be coincidence,' said the Doctor, 'but there's very little traffic this far up-river. I think we are being followed after all.'

Like the supply of liquor, morale on the smugglers' boat was getting low. The craft was a battered old tub with a small cabin, smaller hold and limited space for cargo. There were six smugglers on board: Dove, De Granville, Roki, Lerrick, Haggerty and Chard.

Lerrick was a guide and part-time smuggler, who owned the boat. A wizened, leathery-skinned old man, he was the only one with any real knowledge of the jungle.

The others were simply there as manpower. Haggerty was a massive brute, all muscle and no brain, while Chard was a morose, thick-set killer, an ex-prison strangler. Neither had been keen to come on the trip. They were there because they didn't dare to disobey Dove.

In fact, only Dove himself seemed to have any real enthusiasm for the project, driving on the others by the force of his will. For him, the prospect, however remote, of finding an unlimited supply of skar was a kind of unholy grail. He was prepared to suffer any hardship, inflict any pain, to obtain it.

Boredom was their biggest enemy, since there was simply nothing to do. With Lerrick at the helm, the boat chugged steadily along, powered by an old workhorse of an atomic motor.

There wasn't even the pleasure of the chase. On Dove's instructions, Lerrick kept the boat's speed to a minimum. He

wanted to trail the Doctor's party, not catch up with it. Not yet, anyway.

Nor was there anything much to look at – river ahead and behind, jungle on either side. It was a monotonous, unchanging view. As the river narrowed, the trees on either side met over their heads, so that they moved through a gloomy green tunnel. Despite the shade, the warm, wet heat was stifling.

Their supplies of dried and tinned food were adequate but unappetising, and most of them had preferred drinking to eating. After so long on the move, eyes were bloodshot, heads splitting, tongues furred and tempers frayed.

It was the silent Chard who cracked first. He had been drinking even more than the others and had taken to staring over the side and muttering to himself. Suddenly he jumped to his feet. 'I say we turn back!'

Dove, who had been standing in the bows staring ahead, glanced over his shoulder. 'And I say we don't,' he said mildly.

'The hell with this,' shouted Chard. 'Look, we'll make better time heading downriver. We can be back in town in a couple of days. I want a cold beer, a good meal and a bad woman, and I don't mean in that order!'

Nobody laughed.

'Tell you what,' said Chard, 'let's take a vote on it, hey? I mean, that's fair. Who's for turning back? Hands up!'

He held up one hand to encourage them. If any other hand felt like moving, it froze immediately as Dove swept round and fixed Chard with a furious glare.

'Let's take a vote?' he said derisively. 'Hands up! What do you think this is, Chard, a pox democracy or something? A festering debating society? We're going on because I say we go on. Sit down and shut up!'

Suddenly Chard seemed to slump, as if the brief outburst had drained his energy.

'Yeah, sorry Dove. You're the boss.'

'So don't forget it again.'

Dove turned and resumed his staring ahead.

Chard lurched down the deck of the boat towards him.

'No, sorry, Dove, really, I was all out of order. It was just the lousy heat, see? No hard feelings, eh?'

Chard was close behind Dove now and his hand reached out

as if to give him a placating pat on the shoulder.

The *rumal*, a long silk handkerchief twisted into a strangler's rope, slipped out of Chard's left sleeve and looped around Dove's neck. The other end, weighted with a tied-in coin, whipped back into Chard's other hand.

Chard raised his knee into Dove's back, preparing for the sudden jerk backwards that would snap his neck...

But then Chard felt a sudden terrible jolt and his strength seemed to ebb away. He looked down and saw the ivory hilt of Dove's knife protruding from his chest.

Dove had struck backwards, without even turning round.

He turned now, still grasping the knife hilt, and shoved Chard away from him with one hand, pulling the blade free with the other. Eyes wide with astonishment, Chard staggered backwards and toppled over the side of the boat, blood seeping from the wound in his chest.

He hit the water, arms and legs flailing, and immediately the water began to seethe and boil. Chard gave one terrible bubbling scream and disappeared in a pool of blood. Moments later the water was still.

Lerrick spat over the side.

'River voles... greedy little buggers... hunt in packs.'

Dove slid the ivory-handled dagger back into his boot. He took the silk handkerchief from around his neck and shoved it in a pocket.

'Like I was going to let a strangler creep up behind me. Anyone else fancy a swim?'

Haggerty giggled. 'Not me, Dove!' he said in his curiously high-pitched voice. 'He was getting on my nerves, anyway.'

De Granville just smiled, and Roki yawned. 'We're well-rid of the miserable sod...'

The Doctor and Jo sat in the shelter of a rocky overhang, huddling close to a small fire. They had been climbing steadily ever since leaving the river, and more and more outcrops of rock were bursting through the green carpet of the jungle. The Doctor said they were climbing the foothills.

'We'll be leaving the jungle behind soon, Jo.'

Beyond the foothills, said the Doctor, was a range of mountains.

'We're making for the biggest one, the black one in the centre of the range. It's a sacred place for the People. They ca the Mountain of Fire.'

Jo looked alarmed. 'A volcano?'

'It was once. It's inactive now – like the People. For the moment at least.'

'Do you think it's going to erupt again?'

'Perhaps. Perhaps they both are.'

Jo looked across to where Ky and his acolyte sat cross-legged on a rocky plateau. Flanking them, like statues, stood two golden giants who had poled the craft, still clutching their long poles.

During the journey they had found cloth across the poles to construct a kind of litter which they bore on their shoulders. This they used to carry bundles of supplies – and occasionally as well, when the climb got too much for her.

The acolyte had brought them a meal of fruit, nuts and vegetables. It was accompanied by a selection of gourds wh gave a cool delicious juice when pierced.

'You know, Doctor,' said Jo thoughtfully, 'I very much approve of vegetarianism.'

The Doctor nodded. 'There is a lot to be said for it.'

'As a matter of fact, I've often thought of becoming one.'

'You could do worse.'

'Only –'

'Only what?'

'Only right now I'd kill for a plateful of sausages and mash down the UNIT canteen,' said Jo. 'And a mug of Sergeant Benton's army tea to wash it all down with.'

The Doctor looked shocked. 'Really, Jo. How can you think of such mundane matters at a time like this? I take you to exo planets, show you the wonders of the galaxy, and all you c think of are sausages and mash!'

Jo hung her head. 'I know...I suppose you never think o things like that?'

'Of course not,' said the Doctor loftily. 'My mind is far above such things as sausages and mash. No, what I've b thinking about is a large charcoal-grilled steak, new potatoes and green peas, with a bottle of really good claret!'

Jo grinned. 'Never mind, Doctor, have another nut.'

They munched in silence for a moment and then Jo said, 'Since I am here...couldn't you tell me a bit more about what's going on? Like where Zylor's taking us, and why?'

The Doctor was silent for a moment. 'It isn't easy to explain,' he said at last.

'Try!' urged Jo.

'I'm not even sure I understand it all myself. And as to what I'm supposed to *do* about it...'

'Just tell me what you can.'

'Well, you know that the People are telepathic?'

Jo nodded, glancing across at the silent figures nearby.

The Doctor smiled. 'Don't worry. They're not reading your thoughts. I can communicate with Zylor, but even I have to try to *concentrate*. Between the People themselves, it's different. Their minds seem to be naturally linked, as if their brains were radio transmitters and receivers all on the same wavelength.'

'Is that what makes them so passive, being telepaths?'

'Not in itself. Did I ever tell you about a species called the Rutans? They're telepathic and they're also extremely aggressive.'

'So what made the People like this? Born victims, I mean.'

'They did it to themselves,' said the Doctor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-
ATTACK

'River's getting narrower and faster,' said Lerrick. 'Falls ahead, I reckon.'

He was right. Not long afterwards they rounded yet another bend in the river and could hear the roaring and tumbling of water cascading over rock.

They had reached the beginning of the foothills and the river was nearing its source, high up in the black mountains. Lerrick steered the boat towards the right bank and moored. 'No way we can get past that.'

Dove nodded. 'What about the ones we're after?'

'Them neither,' said Lerrick. 'Look!'

He pointed to a native craft moored a little further upstream.

'Right,' said Dove. 'Let's get on their trail.'

Nobody moved.

'Well?' screamed Dove. 'You heard me!'

'We can't just go wandering off in the jungle, boss,' said Roki. 'We don't know what's out there. We might never come back.'

'You want to feed the river voles with Chard? I expect they're still hungry!'

'Better think about it for a minute,' said Lerrick quietly.

Dove took an angry step towards him and then checked himself. Lerrick wasn't a blundering fool like Chard. He was tough and shrewd and he'd survived on Catastrophea for a long time. His hands were never far from the old-fashioned dart gun he carried on his belt and he was reputed to be deadly with it.

More important, Lerrick was the only one who knew the river and the jungle. Without him they were dead.

'Well?' growled Dove.

'You can't just take off into the jungle,' said Lerrick. 'Not without some idea where you're going, how long it'll take.'

‘He’s doing it – the Doctor.’

‘He’s got some of the People in his party,’ said Lerrick. ‘The can live off the jungle, get help from native villages. We can’t.’

‘There’s plenty of stuff in the boat – food, water, weapons, booze. We can load whatever we think we’ll need...’

‘There’s a limit to how much a man can carry in this climate. And when supplies start running low, we’ll be killing each other for whatever’s left.’

Dove gazed out at the jungle, impatient that his quarry wa getting away.

‘So what are you saying?’

‘We can carry supplies for two weeks,’ said Lerrick. ‘Mean we can travel for a week before we turn back.’

‘May I make a suggestion?’ said Granville. ‘The trouble is, we don’t know where this Doctor’s heading, right? We don’t even know for sure what he’s after.’

‘So?’

‘Why don’t we grab him, now, and squeeze the truth out of him? Make his natives guide us.’

Dove nodded thoughtfully. ‘It’s a thought.’

‘Might not be too easy, making him talk,’ said Granville. ‘I hear this Doctor’s a pretty tough character.’

‘He’ll talk,’ said Bold. ‘I know ways...’

Dove said, ‘He’s got this girl with him.’

‘Well, there you are, then,’ said Roki eagerly. He licked h lips.

Dove nodded. ‘Right. One of them will talk to save the other.’

Lerrick said, ‘Here –’

‘Shut up,’ said Dove. ‘They can’t be too far ahead of us. Sort out supplies for those two weeks and get the packs loaded. No let’s get moving. We’ve got work to do!’

Jo was still taking in what the Doctor had told her. ‘You mean the People deliberately chose to be the way they are?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Why? Whatever for?’

‘Survival! The People aren’t naturally passive, you see. On long ago, they were so ferocious that they were in danger of wiping themselves out. So they put themselves in chains -men

chains.'

Jo fought hard to understand what the Doctor was telling her. 'And they overdid it? Is that what you mean?'

The Doctor nodded. 'Mind you, it worked well enough for a time. For hundreds of years, in fact. It's a fertile planet, food was plentiful. They didn't revert to barbarism and kill each other, but they didn't develop either.' The Doctor sighed. 'It's a sad truth, Jo, but quite a lot of progress comes through war. Without any kind of dynamic in their lives, no desire to further themselves...they just stayed as they were.'

'That doesn't seem so bad,' said Jo seriously. 'When you think of the history of Earth...'

The Doctor shrugged. 'Perhaps. Things were fine for the People as long as they were left in isolation. But then *you* came.'

'Me?'

'Your lot. Humans. A thoroughly aggressive little species starting to expand across this part of the galaxy. The People had no defence against them. The colonists, the Company, the smugglers – they just took the planet away from them. The others came to try and help, the do-gooders and the UNIT troops, all settling the People's fate for them. Now there are the Draconians.'

'Well, the People can't go on like this,' said Jo. 'Something's got to be done.'

'That's what Zylor and some of the priesthood think. What's more, they seem to have the idea that I can help them.'

'And can't you?'

'Help them to do what?'

Jo shrugged. 'I don't know. Put things back the way they were before.'

'So they can start killing each other again? And possibly all the humans on the planet as well? Do you see my dilemma, Jo? Not only do I not know if I *can* help the People to change things, I don't even know if I should!'

Jo shook her head. 'It's not as simple as blowing up Daleks, is it? How did the People manage to put themselves in these mental chains? Something to do with their being telepathic?'

'That's right. They share a sort of group mind – almost a group soul, you might say. Their priests managed to find a way to control it.'

'How?'

'It's all very complicated, Jo. It's got something to do with this drug called skar.'

'The one all these smugglers are after? Didn't you say it w a deadly poison?'

'To humans, yes. It produces an incredible feeling of euphoria – a high, if you like – followed by irritability, paranoia and a feeling of total exhaustion.'

Jo frowned. 'Reminds me of S–' She broke off. 'Never mind.'

'Alanna?'

'You noticed too?'

'It occured to me, yes.'

Jo sighed. 'Perhaps she's just highly-strung.'

'Perhaps.'

'This drug doesn't seem to affect the People like that,' sa Jo. 'They're anything but high most of the time.'

The Doctor nodded. 'The People seem to be able to use differently – their priests do, anyway. I think they must use homoeopathically, minute quantities over very long periods. Somehow it increases their telepathic powers and enables th to maintain the group mind-lock.'

'But that's what they want you to change, isn't it?'

'Adjust, certainly, if I can.'

'Why can't these priests do it themselves?'

The Doctor sighed. 'I told you it was complicated. Becaus the mind-lock affects them as well. Once they'd set it up the were powerless to change it. They need an outsider.'

'Like sending for a plumber when the sink is blocked?'

'That's not precisely the image I'd have chosen,' said th Doctor a little huffily. 'More like sending for a consultant to deal with a particularly baffling piece of brain surgery.'

'Can you do it? Carry out the brain operation?' Jo grinned. 'Unblock the sink?'

'I can try.' The Doctor frowned. 'I don't know, Jo. If it isn't the Time Lords, it's some other race wanting to use me to so things out. And the trouble is there's not much time.'

Jo looked surprised. 'What's the rush? If things have gone like this for hundreds of years...'

'Well, besides the political crisis, which is quite bad enough, there's the skar crisis as well. So much has been stolen by hun

smugglers over the years that the critical balance has been disturbed. That's why all these berserkers are cropping up. You remember the one we saw in the cafe?'

Jo shuddered and nodded.

'Well, unless something is done there could be a kind of chain reaction, hundreds, maybe thousands of them all over the planet.'

'But the priests have still got supplies of this skar stuff stashed away?'

'Apparently...'

There was a rattle of stones from overhead and the Doctor jumped to his feet, looking upwards. Suddenly a black shape dropped from above, landing cat-like before them. A squat powerful figure in a grey leather jerkin, it held a blaster trained on Jo.

'Keep talking Doctor – about all that skar your native friends have got stashed away.'

CHAPTER TWENTY
DOVE'S TIME

The Doctor studied the massive bald skull and little red eyes a knew he was looking at some truly evil. Evil and mad.

'My name's Dove,' said the monstrous figure. 'Maybe you've heard of me.'

'No, but I remember you. I saw you in Rik's café, didn't I?'

'That's right, Doctor, and I saw you. And now we meet again. I've brought a few friends.'

More figures appeared out of the jungle. A hulking giant, a short, tubby man with a round, leering face, a thin man in blac and an older man with grizzled white hair.

Four of them.

The Doctor glanced across at the little group of the People They stood motionless, passively watching the intruders.

Dove laughed. 'No use looking at them, Doctor, they won't help you. Haggerty, get over here and help me take care of t Doctor. The rest of you, keep an eye on those natives, just case. And don't you move, Doctor, or your little friend here wil suffer.'

Dove kept the blaster trained on Jo as the giant lumbere over to them, moved behind the Doctor and clamped his arms behind him in a vice-like grip.

The Doctor tensed his muscles briefly and then gave up. was like being held by a machine. He could kick backwards, b his captor was probably strong enough to absorb the punishment and still break his arms.

'Don't bother struggling, Doctor,' said Dove. 'Haggerty's not bright, but he's very strong. He doesn't feel pain much, but he enjoys dishing it out.'

Haggerty wrenched the Doctor's arms tighter behind him and chuckled wheezily.

'All right,' said the Doctor calmly. 'What do you want?'

‘I want skar,’ said Dove softly. ‘That’s all. The supply your native friends here have got isn’t spoiled. Tell me where it is, persuade them to take me there and I’ll let you live.’

‘I can’t do that,’ said the Doctor. ‘And I wouldn’t even if I could. You heard what I was saying. Those remaining supplies are vital to the well-being of the People.’

‘I heard a lot of stuff about the People and their problems. That doesn’t concern me. All I want is the skar.’

The Doctor studied Dove’s angry face. It was twisted with rage and passion – and a kind of desperation.

‘You don’t just want it, do you?’ he said. ‘You need it. You’re an addict.’

‘Shut up!’

‘Supplies running low, Mr Dove – even for you? Without it you’ll go mad and die. And your brain will die first. You’ll spend your last few days as a shambling vegetable, not even as bright your friend Haggerty here.’

‘Shut up!’ screamed Dove again, and he lashed the back of his free hand across the Doctor’s face.

The Doctor ignored the blow. ‘Don’t you realise? You’re finished either way. *With* the drug you’ll die even faster!’

‘Oh no, Doctor,’ said Dove hoarsely. ‘Not me. I can handle it. I take it like your friends here, just a little every day...’

‘And every day the dose you need gets just a little bigger?’

Dove didn’t reply.

‘I thought so,’ said the Doctor, with genuine sorrow in his voice.

With an enormous effort Dove controlled himself.

‘Never mind my problems, Doctor, let’s talk about yours. Are you going to take me to that skar?’

‘I can’t.’

‘No matter what I do to you?’

‘No.’

‘What about what I do to her?’

Dove grabbed Jo by the hair with his free hand and yanked her to her feet. He nodded to one of his men. ‘Now, my little fat friend over there has all sorts of complicated things he wants to try on her, but I’m a simple man and I’m in a hurry.’

Shoving the blaster into his belt, he snatched a burning branch from the fire and thrust the blazing end towards Jo’s face

– towards her eyes.

She twisted her head away but the burning brand came ev closer.

The Doctor made a mighty effort to break free. It was useless.

He changed the effort to a mental one, directing it to the still-silent group of the People beyond the fire.

'Well, Doctor?' whispered Dove.

He moved the flame closer to Jo's face.

She closed her eyes and felt the heat beating through h eyelids. She could smell her hair beginning to singe...

Suddenly there came a terrible scream – not from Jo, bu from one of the golden-skinned giant Zylor's side. He sprang towards them swinging the massive pole in an arc, parallel to the ground. It smashed into Haggerty's skull, and to the Doctor's horror the giant rained down more and more blows on the prostrate body.

Releasing Jo, Dove snatched the blaster from his belt.

Tearing his gaze away, the Doctor kicked the blaster fron Dove's hand. Springing forward, he grabbed hold of the smuggler and threw him over his shoulder, sending him crashing through the fire. Dove's head thudded on to the hard ground and he collapsed unconcious.

The Doctor caught a glimpse of the golden-skinned giant' pole crashing down on the tall man's head. Two more...

He looked up to see the little fat man aiming a blaster at h head at point-blank range.

Then the fat man's eyes widened in surprise and he stagge back choking, a heavy metal dart embedded in his throat.

The Doctor looked at the white-haired man and saw the giant raising his pole...

'No!' shouted the Doctor.

Zylor stepped forward and touched a hand to the giant's forehead. The giant froze, and slowly lowered the bloodstained pole. He stood for a moment, eyes glazed, chest heaving.

Then he bowed his head in obedience and went to join hi fellow.

The white-haired man holstered his dart-gun. 'Thanks!'

'Thank you,' said the Doctor politely. 'Mr...?'

'Name's Lerrick.'

The Doctor nodded towards the body of the fat man. 'May I ask why?'

Lerrick shrugged. 'I'll do most things to earn a few credits. Helping to torture little girls isn't one of them.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Well, thank you again.'

Lerrick nodded down towards Dove, who had rolled away from the fire, and touched the hilt of his dart gun.

'Want me to...'

'No thank you. I rather think his addiction will do that for us.'

'Suit yourself. Well...'

'Will you be all right?'

Lerrick nodded. 'Got a boat docked on the river. Be seeing you.' He turned and disappeared into the jungle.

Jo ran to the Doctor and gave her a consoling hug.

'I'm sorry, Jo. Are you all right?'

'Apart from singed eyebrows.' She looked across at the little group of the People. 'What happened, Doctor? I thought you said they couldn't fight?'

'I think Zylor managed to remove the conditioning – a little too well, really. It created a sort of temporary berserker effect. Luckily he was able to restore it.'

Zylor and the others had moved a little way away. They seemed to be waiting.

'I think it's time to move on,' said the Doctor.

Jo nodded. 'I certainly don't want to sit around here.' She looked at the bodies scattered around the camp-fire. 'Oughtn't we to bury them or something?'

The Doctor looked down. 'I don't think it's necessary, Jo.'

He pointed to Haggerty's body. Swarms of fiery red ants were streaming over his outstretched hand. Already you could see the gleam of bone.

Jo shuddered and pointed to Dove. 'What about him?'

'He can take his chances.'

The Doctor picked up Dove's blaster, collected weapons from the other dead smugglers and hurled them far into the jungle.

'Come on, Jo.'

They moved off after Zylor and the others.

Some time after they were gone, Dove opened his eyes a

wiped the blood from his face with the back of his hand.

Ignoring the bodies of the others, he staggered off into the jungle...

CHAPTER TWENTY-
THE BLACK TEMPL

Captain-Lord Samzyre had come to a decision.

If the enemy refused to be honourably and attack him, he must go to them. He would lead his force in a suicide attac on the human forces. It would be a glorious way to die.

He was about to announce his plan when Lieutenant Vari marched into the command cabin.

'Our scanners have located movement in the jungle, Lord-Captain, two separate parties which appear to have combined.'

'Excellent. At last the enemy are sending out patrols. Take small patrol and make contact, Lieutenant. Provoke combat. If we destroy their reconnaissance troops, the enemy must send a force against us.'

Varin bowed. 'My life at your command.'

Dove was stumbling along a jungle trail in the wake, he hoped, of the Doctor and his party. He was no tracker, but there was only one narrow trail leading steeply upwards and there was no sign that the Doctor had left the track.

Dove had no plan, simply a blind, obsessive determination to follow the Doctor and his companions. They would lead him to the skar, and then, somehow, he would find a way to take possession of it – and to kill the Doctor.

Dove staggered on his way.

Lieutenant Varin surveyed the half-consumed bodies around the ashes of the camp-fire with a shudder of distaste. The humans, it seemed, had quarrelled amongst themselves. Much what you might expect from such a barbaric species. It was, he decided, his duty to follow the victorious survivors. He led his two troopers along the trail.

They moved swiftly, and before very long they heard

movement ahead. Varin listened to his troopers.

'It sounds like a human struggling,' he whispered. 'We will capture and interrogate him. I will circle ahead and cut him off. You two will follow and take him by surprise.'

Staggering determinedly onwards, Dove saw a tall green figure step on to the path ahead of him. Through bleary eyes he took in the dark green combat-suit, the narrow scaly crested skull. Dove was neither surprised nor instilled by the presence of the Draconian. It was just another obstacle in his path.

'A dragon!' he muttered. 'Well, you won't stop me either.'

'Halt!' ordered the Dragon. 'You are a prisoner of the Draconian Task Force.'

It was covering him with a blaster.

Dove stumbled forwards. 'Please, I'm wounded, I've been attacked. You must help me.'

Lieutenant Varin raised the blaster. 'Halt or I fire!'

Still the human staggered towards him. Varin was reluctant to fire, not out of compassion but because a dead human would be of no use to him.

He hesitated a moment too long. Dove was upon him now, knocking the blaster aside and slipping the knife from his boot. As Varin tried to shove him away the knife slashed across his throat. He staggered and fell, blood bubbling in his throat as he gasped for breath that would not come...

The two Draconian troopers pounded up the path, halting when they saw a stooped figure bending over the body of the Lieutenant.

'Come quickly,' called the human. 'He's been bitten, a deadly jungle snake.'

The two troopers ran forward. Dove straightened up, Varin's blaster in his hand, and shot them both down.

Snatching their blasters and thrusting them into his belt, Dove hurried on his way, leaving three dead Draconians behind him. After a few moments, streams of red ants swarmed on to the jungle path.

'Can't be much further, Jo,' said the Doctor encouragingly.

Jo gritted her teeth. 'I hope not.'

They had left the jungle now, and for what seemed like a very long time they had been climbing a steep rocky patch

carved out of the side of a black mountain.

Zylor, the two natives and the acolyte strode effortlessly o ahead, as if drawn by a magnet. The Doctor seemed to have difficulty in keeping up, but Jo felt as if her thigh-muscles were on fire.

Up and up they climbed until at last they emerged on to plateau, close to the mountain peak.

And there was the temple.

Carved out of the mountain itself, the temple was a large version of the one the Doctor had visited on the river bank, no neglected and decayed but shining as if newly built. The glossy black towers and peaks and domes gleamed in the clear mountain air, and the rows of guardian statues might have be newly carved.

Zylor led them up a magnificent flight of steps and betwee the massive pillars that flanked the main door.

Looking around her, Jo gave a gasp of sheer awe. Even t Doctor, who'd visited countless temples in his lives, was deeply impressed.

The inside of the temple was in stark contrast to the elaborately decorated exterior. It consisted of one vast circular chamber, carved from gleaming black stone.

At the centre of the chamber was a huge circular altar in th shape of a giant bowl. The altar was surrounded by a low sto wall with a wide coping, and the bowl it enclosed was filled with fire, much as a cup is filled with wine.

Rising from the coping of the wall, a narrow bridge of elaborately carved black stone curved high over the bowl. At the top of the bridge there was a small circular platform. In a shallow depression in the centre of the platform there rested a enormous green crystal.

A vast circle of golden-skinned giants stood around the outer rim of the temple. They wore saffron robes, like Zylor. Around the altar itself stood nine priests, forming an inner circle, their eyes fixed on the giant crystal in silent communio Somehow you could feel the link between the worshipping priests and the glowing crystal.

'What is it?' whispered Jo.

The Doctor locked eyes with Zylor for a moment.

'It's called the Anima, Jo. It's the soul of the People.'

‘No further report?’ said Captain-Lord Samzyre.

‘No, my Lord-Captain,’ said Sergeant Korr. ‘The Lieutenant reported himself on the trail of the human patrol, and then said he was going to pick off a straggler. After that, nothing.’

‘It was obviously a human trap,’ said Captain-Lord Samzyre. ‘He must have run into a superior force. By now he will be dead.’

He considered for a moment. ‘Assemble the troops, Sergeant. It is our duty to avenge him.’

The Doctor and Jo stood on the rim of the altar, flanked by Zylor and his acolyte. They looked up at the huge glowing crystal on top of the stone arch, and found it hard to look away. The crystal was pulsing regularly with an eerie green light.

‘It’s a giant crystal of skar,’ said the Doctor. ‘The largest ever found on the planet. Somehow it resonates with the brainwaves of all the People.’ He indicated the circle of silent priests. ‘Zylor and his fellow-priests use the skar they take in their ceremonies to channel the aggressive instincts of the People through their minds and store them here, in the crystal. They’ve been doing it for generations.’

As they watched, a weary priest stepped back from the inner circle. Immediately another came forward from the outer circle to take his place.

‘They must have kept up an unbroken vigil for generations,’ whispered the Doctor. ‘It’s astonishing. They’ve succeeded in brainwashing an entire species.’

‘So what does Zylor want you to do?’

‘I’m still not entirely sure, Jo. I keep asking him, but all he tells me is that all will be clear when the time comes.’

‘Well, I imagine it’s come now,’ said Jo practically.

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor. ‘I imagine it has.’

Almost reluctantly the Doctor turned to Zylor.

They gazed at each other for some time, engaging in one of those strange periods of mental communion. Finally the Doctor turned back to Jo, dawning horror in his eyes.

‘He wants me to destroy it. He can’t do it himself, but he wants me to do it for him.’

‘Then if that’s what he wants...’

‘But the consequences could be catastrophic.’

‘Things are pretty catastrophic now, for the People,’ said Jo.

‘Destroying the crystal could make them worse. What right do I have to decide the fate of an entire planet?’

Captain-Lord Samzyre looked down at the three skeletons around the dead camp-fire beneath the overhanging rock.

‘Human soldiers,’ he announced. ‘No doubt Lieutenant Varin and his men encountered them and engaged in combat. Naturally our Draconian troopers were gloriously victorious.’

Sergeant Korr wasn’t so sure. He looked at the diverse and tattered scraps of leather and fabric still clothing the bones.

‘They don’t seem to have been wearing much in the way of uniform,’ he pointed out. ‘And if they’re soldiers, where are their weapons?’

Samzyre glared indignantly at him. ‘Are you questioning my tactical judgement, Sergeant?’

Sergeant Korr, who had fought in more major Draconian campaigns than Samzyre had eaten Imperial banquets, said woodenly, ‘Of course not, Lord-Captain.’

‘No doubt they were irregular troops, mercenaries,’ said Samzyre huffily. ‘As for the weapons, Lieutenant Varin will have taken them for study by technical intelligence.’

‘No doubt, Lord-Captain,’ agreed Sergeant Korr, who didn’t believe a word of it.

Samzyre decided a few inspirational words were in order.

‘The point is this, Sergeant. Lieutenant Varin is carrying out our mission – to make contact with Earth forces and engage them in combat.’

‘Only three of them, so far, Lord,’ said Sergeant Korr stubbornly.

‘The number is immaterial, Sergeant. We shall attack every Earth force we encounter. Initially, of course, we shall be victorious. But eventually we shall provoke the Earthmen into sending an overwhelming force against us.’

‘And what then, Lord-Captain?’

‘Then we shall fulfil the purpose of our mission, Sergeant. To die gloriously in the service of Draconia!’

‘So that’s what we’re here for,’ thought Sergeant Korr. ‘We’ll see about that!’ Out loud he said, ‘Yes, Lord-Captain.’

‘Forward!’ ordered Samzyre and led his troopers off along the jungle track.

With a last thoughtful look at the three skeletons, Sergeant Korr followed.

Dove staggered up on to the rocky plateau and saw the black shape of the temple rising before him. His little red eyes gleamed eagerly. He had found the place. Here if anywhere, the People would hide their vast supplies of skar.

Dove studied the steep path leading up to the temple steps. There were no guards, no sentries to be seen. He crept cautiously forward.

Captain-Lord Samzyre looked down at the bodies of Lieutenant Varin and his two troopers. The sand had had less time for their work and the bodies were still clearly recognisable.

'Our comrades!' He looked sternly at Korr. 'It is quite clear what has happened here, Sergeant.'

'It is, Captain-Lord?'

'Lieutenant Varin was in pursuit of a larger Earth force when he fell into an ambush. It is for us to avenge him.'

'Yes, Captain-Lord. Shall we bury the bodies first?'

Samzyre considered. 'No, there is no time. We shall collect them later.'

'Won't be much left to collect,' thought Korr. Out loud he said, 'We still don't know exactly how large this Earth force is, Lord-Captain.'

'The larger the better!' said Samzyre grandiloquently.

Sergeant Korr nodded resignedly and turned to the troopers. 'Move forwards along the track in twos,' he ordered. 'Full battle alert. And don't get careless.' He nodded towards the three bodies. 'You can see what happens if you do!'

With Captain-Lord Samzyre and Sergeant Korr in the lead the Draconians moved on.

In the temple the Doctor, Jo and the silent priest stood before the glowing crystal.

The Doctor was still wrestling with his dilemma.

Jo was doing her best to help.

'Can't they just sort of turn down the volume a bit?' she suggested. 'So the People could be a bit more assertive without going berserk.'

The Doctor shook his head. ‘It doesn’t work like that, Jo. Imagine a man supporting some tremendous weight. As long as he braces himself at full strength he can keep it up. If he starts to lower it, however slowly, he’ll lose control, and it will crush him. If that happens, all the priests will die or go mad.’

‘Won’t the same thing happen if you destroy the crystal?’

‘Apparently not. If they know exactly when it will happen they can prepare for it. That’s what they’re doing now. And Zylor hopes the priests will still be able to exercise some control over the People’s aggression.’

‘Hopes?’

‘He isn’t sure.’

‘What happens if you refuse to help?’

‘To us? Nothing. Zylor will escort us back to the town.’ The Doctor scratched the back of his neck. ‘But you see, Jo, I can’t do that either!’

‘Why not?’

‘Because the skar crystals are running out and the priests are losing their powers. The process is already breaking down, and the giant crystal, the Anima, is already beginning to decay. If that happens, the People will be ripped apart by a chain reaction of violence. That’s why Zylor wants to get it over in one go – a short sharp shock instead of a long-drawn agony.’

‘Like yanking a sticking-plaster off all at once, instead of peeling it off slowly?’

The Doctor smiled reluctantly. ‘Something like that. As I say, he hopes that he and his priests can exercise some control.’

‘But he isn’t sure?’

‘No.’

‘So there’s a risk either way?’

‘A tremendous risk.’

‘How are you supposed to destroy this crystal – if you do?’

The Doctor gestured toward the fiery bowl of the altar.

‘This temple was carved from a largely dormant volcano. The altar is the head of a shaft leading down to the volcano’s core. All I have to do is to take the crystal from the bridge and throw it down.’

Jo looked at the narrow stone bridge, arching high over the fiery bowl.

‘All?’

‘Taking care not to go with it, of course,’ said the Doctor. ‘But it’s not the practicality that worries me, Jo, it’s the morality...’

A hoarse voice called, ‘Nobody move.’

They turned and saw Dove standing in the temple doorway, a blaster in each hand. His eyes were fixed on the great glowing skar crystal over the fiery altar.

Dove had found his unholy grail.

CHAPTER TWENTY-
THE CHANGE

As Dove moved towards the altar, two of the outer ring of priests stepped forward as if to bar his way.

Without taking his eyes from the crystal, Dove fired, both blasters at once. The two priests staggered and fell.

'Nobody move, I said!'

Nobody moved.

Staggering a little, Dove advanced towards the altar. His ey were still fixed on the glowing crystal, but when the Doctor took an instinctive step forward, one of the blasters swung round t cover him.

Shoving one of the blasters back into his belt, Dove grabbed the top of the altar-wall and managed to scramble on top of i He began shuffling slowly towards the bottom of the bridge.

'If you take that crystal you'll cause the most terrible catastrophe,' warned the Doctor.

Dove paused to look down at him.

'I'll have skar to last me for the rest of my life – and enough left over to sell to make me rich.'

'You won't live to enjoy it. The drug will kill you!'

'Not me, Doctor! Skar and me are old friends. I've built up an immunity, just like the People.' Dove reached the bottom of the arch and paused again. 'All I want is that crystal. Leave m alone and I'll leave you alone. Try to stop me and I'll kill the girl first – and then the rest of you, if I have to.'

Slowly and carefully, Dove began climbing the bridge, mounting the narrow flight of steps that led to the crown. Soon he would reach the platform – and the crystal.

The Doctor watched in agonised indecision. His first two choices, destroying the crystal or leaving it to decay, had be bad enough. Now there was an even more dreadful thir possibility – leaving the crystal in the hands of a madman lik

Dove. When he started to break it up it, the crystal's destructio
would trigger a wave of violence and madness all over the planet.

Yet what could he do? To go after Dove now would simply get both Jo and himself killed. But Dove had a long way to go yet, and he was badly outnumbered. Even if he got the crys out of the temple, he still had to reach somewhere safe where he could break it up...

The Doctor waited, watching Dove's every move.

Dove had reached the platform on the crown of the arch, and was climbing up on to it...

Captain-Lord Samzyre and his troops had reached the edge the plateau. They stood for a moment looking at the blac edifice towering above them.

'Looks like some kind of native temple, Lord-Captain,' said Sergeant Korr.

'I can see that, Sergeant. What of it?'

'Best left alone in my experience, places like that. Native can be very touchy.'

'It may be a native temple, Sergeant,' said Samzyre. 'It is a the headquarters of the Earth forces.'

'We don't know that, Lord-Captain.'

'I think we do. There was only one track, we followed it and it led us here. They are probably using the temple in an attempt to fool us. Well, it won't work with me! Forward!'

He led his men towards the temple.

Dove was standing on the platform now. He reached out wit his free left arm and hugged the crystal to him. As he turned t descend the steps, the Doctor was surprised to see a spot of white light on the front of Dove's greasy leather jerkin.

The Doctor turned and saw a group of tall green figures a the temple door...

No one else noticed the Dracon troops when they appeared in the doorway. Everyone was turned inwards, focused on th figure standing on the bridge over the altar, a glowing crystal under its arm.

The only thing about the human on the bridge that interested Captain-Lord Samzyre was the weapons he carried.

Three blasters, one in the hand, two thrust into the belt.

Samzyre produced a jewelled spy-glass from his tunic and studied the wild-eyed grimy figure.

'Those are Draconian weapons, taken from our dead comrades. Kill him! That will rouse the Earth troops to attack!'

'Sniper!' ordered Sergeant Korr.

A trooper with a long-barrelled laser rifle stepped forward.

Dove stood savouring his moment of triumph. He could feel the radiance of the skar crystal pulsing through his veins.

It was the ultimate high.

Suddenly he noticed a white spot of light on his leather jerkin, just over the heart. He looked down at it, puzzled, for a moment.

There was a crackle of blaster-fire and the white spot blossomed into a rose of flame.

Still clutching the crystal, Dove toppled into the fiery heart of the volcano. The altar flames soared up high for a moment and then died down.

Everything changed.

Afterwards Jo found it almost impossible to describe. It was, she said, almost like a silent thunderclap.

Even the Doctor found the sensation difficult to pin down. A strange sense of disorientation and readjustment...

On the outskirts of Cat City, Mrs Marrek came out on to her veranda and was outraged to see that her gardener had stopped working. He was simply standing there, gazing up at the sky, his face rapt.

Seizing her cane, Mrs Marrek ran out into the garden.

'You, boy, what do you think you're doing? Get on with that weeding if you know what's good for you!'

The giant ignored her.

Mrs Marrek lashed the cane across his bare shoulders, raising a weal in the golden flesh.

The giant stiffened. Then he turned towards her and smiled.

Mrs Marrek had never seen one of the People smile before.

He reached out and plucked the cane from her grasp, snapping it in two and tossing it aside. He reached out again,

gripping Mrs Marrek by the belt of her jacket with one enormous hand. Lifting her clear of the ground he swung her forward, back, forward again and then let go.

She found herself hurtling through the air until she landed half-dazed on something hard – was the flat roof of her villa. The gardener was striding away towards the jungle.

A few minutes later, shivering with shock, it occurred to Mrs Marrek to start screaming...

In the centre of Cat City, a young company official jumped out of a rickshaw and walked away, making no attempt to pay the agreed fare laid down by the City Police. An enormous hand clamped down on his shoulder.

Outraged, the official swung round to face the rickshaw driver, wrenching himself free.

'What the hell do you think you're doing? Touch me again and I'll have you flogged.' He smiled. 'Or shot.'

As the official turned and strode away, he was aware for a split second of something huge sweeping down on him from above before it smashed him to the ground.

The driver looked down at the broken body of his customer as it writhed beneath the shattered remnants of his rickshaw, a smile slowly spreading over his face.

The Company guard on the door of the main Company office stared in amazement as one of the People, busily mopping the plasti-marble floor, straightened up, threw down her mop and marched out of the front door.

'Here! You, girl!' the guard called. 'Where the hell do you think you're going? Finishing time's hours away for you!'

The cleaner ignored him.

The guard drew his blaster and fired a warning shot over the giant's head. The cleaner ignored that, too, and so the guard shot her in the back with a snarl of annoyance.

The giant hands of another cleaner clamped round the guard's throat, bending his head backwards until the neck snapped with an audible crack.

The giant dropped the guard to the floor and lifted the corpse of his fellow-worker from the bloodied floor. In silence, he carried it away.

As similar outbreaks of violence began all over the planet, the Doctor stood in the great temple, locked in silent communion with Zylor.

'Well, its happened. Not as you planned, perhaps, but the crystal has been destroyed.'

Zylor's thoughts were strangely calm.

'All has happened as it was ordained. You and I, Doctor, the one who killed and the one who died, have all played our appointed parts.'

'Have we, indeed. Well, that's one way of looking at things,' said the Doctor out loud. 'It's rather consoling really, isn't it?'

Jo gave him a dazed look. 'What is?'

'Zylor seems to think things were destined to happen like this.' The Doctor too felt rather lightheaded. 'The comfort of faith. If everything that happens is meant to happen, then there's really nothing to worry about, is there?'

'Well, I suppose it must be like that really,' said Jo. 'I mean, anything that happens must be meant to happen, because if it wasn't meant to happen it wouldn't happen, would it?'

The Doctor rubbed a hand across his eyes. 'Perhaps we'd better go into this later.'

'Anyway,' said Jo, 'he's solved all our problems, hasn't he?'

'Who has?'

Jo nodded towards the still-smoking altar. 'The smuggler. Dove. You wanted the crystal destroyed, and now it is!'

'Solved our problems?' said the Doctor in disbelief . 'My dear Jo, he's done nothing of the kind. The danger is greater now than ever.'

'But I thought –'

'Zylor may have wanted me to destroy that crystal, but I've always had my doubts. I could've studied it, analysed its composition, the way it operated. But now...Well, now it's been destroyed in that brutal fashion, there's no telling what will happen...'

He broke off as a shout came from the temple doorway. 'No one is to move!'

Captain-Lord Samzyre had got tired of waiting for someone to attack him.

In actual fact, nobody was moving at all. The Doctor, Jo and Zylor still stood by the altar and the two rings of priests, both inner and outer, stood as if in a trance.

A Draconian strode forwards, another at his heels, their boots ringing loudly on the dark stone floor. They were followed by seven Draconian soldiers. The soldiers spread out in a loose semi-circle, covering the inhabitants of the temple with their blasters.

'I am the Commander of the Draconian Task Force,' said the leading Draconian. 'Where are the Earth soldiers who are using this temple as their base?'

Jo looked at him in amazed recognition, taking in the long thin skull, the scaly cheeks and high crested forehead, the wisp greying beard. The newcomer's green battle armour with its decorative epaulettes and short cloak was a simplified version of the elaborate robes she had seen at the Emperor's court.

'It's a Draconian, Doctor!'

'Right first time, Jo,' said the Doctor resignedly. 'That's all we need!'

'Answer me!' hissed the Draconian. 'Where are the soldiers?'

CHAPTER TWENTY-
SKIRMISH

‘What soldiers?’ said Jo. ‘There aren’t any soldiers here – exc
yours!’

‘Silence, female! How dare you speak in the presence of
Draconian nobleman?’ Samzyre flourished his blaster menacingly
at the Doctor. ‘Answer me, or it will be the worse for you.’

‘For heaven’s sake, use some common sense,’ said t
Doctor. ‘Does this look like a barracks? Do we look like
soldiers? And what the devil are you doing on this planet?’

(‘Three very good questions,’ thought Sergeant Korr,
standing alertly at his Captain’s elbow.)

‘Things are not always what they seem,’ said Samzy
pompously. ‘For all I know you may be irregular troops,
mercenaries, like the man we just executed.’

‘What the devil are you talking about?’ demanded the
Doctor.

Samzyre nodded towards the altar. ‘He slaughtered three
my soldiers, one of them of noble rank. He was carrying the
weapons.’

‘The man you shot down was a smuggler and a thief,’ sa
the Doctor sharply. ‘It doesn’t surprise me to learn that he was
murderer as well. But he was no kind of soldier – and neither a
the rest of us.’

‘Then who are you?’

‘I am usually called the Doctor. The young lady is my
companion, Miss Josephine Grant. This is Tsi Zylor, High Priest of
the People, and these other gentlemen are his – colleagues. Now,
sir, who are you and what are you doing here?’

‘I am Commander of a Draconian Task Force –’

‘So you said,’ snapped the Doctor. ‘Name and rank, si
name and rank!’

To his horror, Samzyre found himself stiffening to attention.

Furiously he shouted, ‘I am not answerable to you, Earthman! I answer only to the Emperor, and my fellow nobles of the Draconian Empire.’

‘As it happens, I am a noble of the Draconian Empire,’ said the Doctor coldly. ‘The honour was conferred upon me by a previous Emperor, many years ago.’

‘You lie! No human has ever been given Draconian rank.’

‘Except one,’ said the Doctor, deciding to let the term human pass. ‘I was able to assist your people...’

‘At the time of the Great Space Plague!’ burst out Sergeant Korr. He came to attention. ‘Sergeant Korr.’

‘I’m pleased to meet you, Sergeant.’

Korr turned to his Captain. ‘Beg pardon for interrupting, Lord-Captain, but my father used to tell us the story. And the one who saved us was called the Doctor!’ He looked puzzled. ‘But according to him, that was hundreds of years ago.’

‘I come from a long-lived race,’ said the Doctor. He looked hard at Samzyre. ‘Well?’

‘I am far from convinced...’ muttered Samzyre.

‘How else would I know such details of your past history, unless I’d lived through them?’ said the Doctor, looking sternly at Samzyre.

Reluctantly, the Draconian addressed him. ‘I am Captain Lord Samzyre, Commander...’

‘Yes, yes,’ said the Doctor impatiently. ‘House?’

‘House Kryll.’

‘I see,’ said the Doctor. Thoughtfully he added, ‘I myself was given the rank of High Earl – of the Imperial House.’

‘Nobleman present, General Salute!’ snapped Sergeant Korr. The Draconian soldiers snapped to attention, blasters across their chests.

The Doctor glared haughtily at Captain-Lord Samzyre. Samzyre came reluctantly to attention, and bowed his head. ‘My life at your command.’

Jo suppressed a grin. The Doctor had done it again.

Having successfully seized the initiative, the Doctor did his best to take advantage of it.

‘I have to tell you, Samzyre,’ said the Doctor severely, ‘that your expedition is extremely ill-advised. The affairs of this planet are in crisis. All you can do is add the problems of an already

difficult time. Why are you here anyway?'

Samzyre temporised. 'I am simply following the orders of my commanding general.'

'Who is?'

'General-Baron Kryll.' Hoping to impress this insolent stranger with Draconian might, Samzyre added, 'Currently orbiting this planet in a battlecruiser.'

The Doctor rubbed his chin. 'Indeed? And why does the General despatch a task-force to a Earth-controlled planet -at a time when the policy of the Draconian Empire is to maintain peace with Earth and the United Planetary Association?'

Samzyre did not reply.

'Such a gesture might be seen as deliberate provocation,' said the Doctor. 'Is the Emperor aware of your task-force, Captain Lord Samzyre? Or is it a piece of private enterprise on the part of House Kryll?'

Samzyre gaped at him as if bewitched.

The Doctor put a friendly hand on his shoulder. 'Now, I'll tell you what you must do, old chap. Go back to your scoutship – I assume it's nearby? Blast off, return to your mother ship and tell the General-Baron that this is the worst possible time to interfere in the affairs of Kastoria. If he thinks Draconia has some claim to this planet, he must persuade the Emperor to negotiate through normal diplomatic channels.' The Doctor smiled grimly. 'Before very long, the Earthmen might be glad to be rid of it. Now, allow me to escort you to the door.'

With the crystal destroyed and the mind-lock gone, though the Doctor, the situation was potentially explosive. How would the priests react now to this intrusion? The only hope was to persuade the Draconians to leave the temple, quickly and peacefully.

It almost worked. Indeed, had it not been for Samzyre's unique combination of vanity and stupidity, it would have worked.

Suddenly he flung off the Doctor's hand and screamed, 'No! We are being deceived. Troopers, cover these so-called priests!'

As the troopers covered the priests with their blasters, Samzyre marched up to the nearest priest and glared belligerently at him.

'Let us see what kind of uniforms these robes conceal!'

The priest ignored him.

As Samzyre reached out for the priest the Doctor shouted, 'Leave him alone, you fool!'

But it was too late. Captain-Lord Samzyre was about to learn that things had changed on Catastrophea.

When he tried to rip open the priest's robe, the golden giant smashed him to the ground with a careless backhand blow. Without getting up, Samzyre drew his blaster and shot him down.

Immediately the next priest threw himself on Samzyre, smashing his head on the black stone floor of the temple.

Instinctively the Draconian troopers opened fire. The temple rang with the crackle of blasters and the sizzle of laser rifles.

Several of the priests fell, dead or dying. The rest of them hurled themselves furiously upon the astonished troopers.

'Down, Jo,' shouted the Doctor. 'Get behind the altar wall!'

As Jo ran for cover, the Doctor turned to Zylor. 'Stop this! You said you could exercise control – stop them!'

The extraordinary struggle went on.

It did not seem to concern the priests that they were unarmed. As one of the golden giants fell, another sprang over his body, lashing out with clumsy, smashing blows.

The terrified troopers fell back towards the door. They were well-trained, experienced soldiers, but they were up against enemies who didn't care whether they lived or died.

Zylor and a few of the priests stood in a semi-circle, their eyes fixed on the struggle, their wills united as one.

Slowly, one by one, the priests stopped their attack.

'Draconians, cease fire!' roared the Doctor. 'Stop shooting if you want to get out of here alive!'

Blasters still trained on the priests, the soldiers stood waiting for orders.

The priests too stood silent, waiting. But it was not the passive stillness the Doctor and Jo had seen so often before. This was the stillness of a tiger poised to attack.

Zylor's voice sounded clearly in the Doctor's mind.

'Send the intruders from the temple. I cannot hold the priests for long, not yet.'

As Jo came from her place of shelter behind the altar wall the Doctor's voice broke the terrible silence.

‘Sergeant Korr!’

Korr’s voice was steady. ‘Here, High Earl.’

‘Gather up your wounded and leave the temple. Don’t go near the priests, don’t even look at them. Just go, as quickly as you can. Get back to your scoutship and leave the planet.’

Of Korr’s seven troopers, three were dead and two badly hurt, though they could still walk.

Sergeant Korr said, ‘We must take Captain-Lord Samzyre home for burial, High Earl.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Of course. I understand.’

The two able-bodied troopers picked up Samzyre’s body and carried it away, and the two wounded troopers limped after them.

Jo and the Doctor stood by the temple door and watched them set off down the long flight of steps.

Sergeant Korr was the last to leave. He turned to the Doctor and came to attention.

‘My life at your command!’

The Doctor held out his hand. ‘Good luck, Sergeant. I hope you get home safely. I’m sorry this had to happen.’

Briefly, the Doctor’s hand clasped the Draconian’s green claw, then Sergeant Korr turned and followed his troopers down the steps.

The Doctor said thoughtfully, ‘It looks as if things are going to change pretty drastically on this planet.’

Jo nodded. ‘I only hope it’s a change for the better...’

‘I hope so too,’ said the Doctor sombrely.

They went back into the temple. Jo was surprised to see that although the great crystal had gone, the circle of priests still stood round the altar, their faces tense, locked in silent concentration.

‘What are they doing, Doctor?’ she whispered.

‘Coming to terms with what has happened. They’re probably trying to stabilise things as much as they can.’

‘Can they do that? Even without the crystal?’

‘I hope so. I imagine they can still exercise influence on the group mind of the People. But that will be from now on – influence, not control.’

The Doctor felt Zylor’s voice force its way into his thoughts.

‘We tried to save the People from barbarism, Doctor. Instead, we plunged

them into slavery. Now they are free again, the pendulum of the spirit of the people may swing back to savagery.'

'Permanently?' asked the Doctor, and the anguish and uncertainty of Zylor's presence in his mind gave him his answer.

'The years of suffering have been long, and the time of recovery may be longer still...'

The future of Catastrophe, he thought the Doctor, still looked bleak – bleak, and very possibly bloody as well. He sighed.

'In my experience, Jo, you can usually rely on two things about change. It nearly always happens – and it's nearly always painful...'

CHAPTER THIRTY
THE FRENZY

'All of them?' said General Walton incredulously.

Charteris nodded. 'Every last one. Every cleaner, sweeper, rickshaw man, dustman, gardener, waiter, house servant...'

Charteris paused, appalled at the realisation of how much the town depended on the labour of the People.

'They just walked off,' he said. 'Downed tools, brooms or whatever and walked out into the jungle.'

Walton nodded sagely. Heretofore the army post native labour was forbidden. So far the crisis had failed to register with him.

'Always said native labour was unreliable. Far better off with a good soldier-servant.'

'Unfortunately we don't all have that option,' said Charteris acidly. He'd been forced to cook his own breakfast that morning and hadn't enjoyed the experience. 'Look, we're not just talking about the servant problem, you know – though Heaven knows that's serious enough. This town will collapse without the People to do the dirty work. We're talking about some basic change in the nature of the People.'

'Sure you're not exaggerating? Maybe they just got fed up with fetching and carrying for us.'

Charteris shook his head. 'It's more important than that. It all started here, when they rescued the Doctor. The first time the People have fought back in hundreds of years. We should have realised how significant it was.'

'They didn't exactly fight,' objected Walton. 'It was more, what d'you call it, passive resistance, like that little fellow Randy, or Bandy, back in India, hundreds of years ago.'

'Gandhi,' said Charteris testily. His name was Gandhi. And that "little fellow" did more than most to end British rule in India. In any case – the People have given up on the passive approach.'

General Walton's military instincts were aroused. If the People became aggressive they would be formidable enem
'Have they attacked anyone?'

Fair-minded as ever, Charteris said, 'Not exactly attacked It's more a case of "*Cet animal est très méchant. Quand on l'attaque il se défend!*"'

Walton gave him an indignant look.

Charteris hurried to translate. '"This animal is extremely vicious. If you attack it, it defends itself!"'

'Not sure what you mean.'

'You remember the formidable Mrs Marrek, the Company widow?'

'The one who first spotted the Doctor? I remember.'

'Well, she spotted her gardener walking off the job, som time yesterday afternoon, and gave him what for, hit him with her cane.' In spite of himself, Charteris smiled. 'He took the ca away from her and snapped it in two. Then he picked up Mrs Marrek and threw her up on to the roof. The old bat was stuck up ther half the night before someone heard her screaming and got h down.'

Walton chuckled. 'Should have left her there.' He looked quizzically at Charteris. 'Hardly a major crime wave, is it?'

'There's more,' said Charteris grimly, and outlined the mar incidents of violence that had flared up in the last few hours.

'...the fellow hit him with the entire rickshaw. Broke every bone in his body, he'll be lucky if he lives.'

'That all?'

'*All?*' Charteris shook his head in angry disbelief. 'It's all so far. I think there's going to be more, much more.'

Walton nodded, finally accepting the gravity of the situation. 'All right. What do you want me to do?'

'See that all your troops know what's going on. Remind them that so far all the violence has been reactive.'

'If they see citizens being attacked they'll have to help.'

Charteris nodded. 'Yes, of course. But tell them not to caus any trouble, not to provoke the People in any way.' He smile ruefully. 'We came to this planet to protect the rights of the People. I suppose that includes the right to ignore us!'

'Maybe it'll all blow over,' said Walton hopefully.

'I doubt it. I think we'll be the ones who blow over. If the

People are turning on us, how can we justify staying?'

'We've still got a lot of people to protect,' said Walton seriously. 'My troops, your staff, colonists and Company people.'

Charteris groaned. 'Not to mention various assorted do-gooders – and the smugglers too, I suppose!'

'Not too many of them left,' said Walton. 'I've been cracking down on them, recently. Got quite a few locked up, and a few more got killed resisting arrest. I think the traffic's pretty much dried up, anyway – and now even the People are turning on them.'

Charteris nodded. 'Well done,' he said vaguely. At the moment, skar smugglers were the least of his worries. 'If we do go, it won't be easy getting everyone out unharmed. I'm already drawing up contingency evacuation plans – you'd better do the same.'

Walton nodded and made a note. 'Then there are the Dragons to be considered. Don't forget, we're still under their blockade.'

Charteris shuddered. 'Let's leave the Draconians out of it for the moment. One crisis at a time. There is one more thing you could do for me?'

'Yes, of course...'

Charteris looked a little shamefaced. 'Do you think you could give me lunch in the mess? Things at Government House are in a bit of a state...'

When Makos came into the hut, the emaciated figure on the bed struggled to sit up.

'Did you get it, Makos? Did you find some for me?'

Makos crouched by the bed, ashen-faced. 'I'm sorry, Alanna...'

'But you must have...I gave you money, plenty of money...'

'It's not a matter of money. No one's selling. There's – ' He lowered his voice. 'There's addicts all over Cat City screaming for the stuff. It's...' He looked at her and his voice trailed away. 'General Walton's done a good job, it seems. And the People have started killing any smugglers who raid their temples for it, so I don't...I don't know...'

Alanna grabbed hold of his arm. 'Can't you find Dove? Dove's always got some. He'll sell you some if you offer him

enough credits. Give him whatever he wants. Tell him I'll whatever he wants, anything.'

Makos looked down at the floor. 'Dove's disappeared. The word at Rik's is he's gone off with his gang into the jungle on some expedition or other –'

Her nails began to dig into his skin. 'Did you try those other places I told you about?'

'I've tried every scummy dive in Cat City,' said Makos bitterly. 'There's not a grain of skar to be had, not for any price.'

'There must be some...there must be!'

Makos felt his eyes welling up. He'd been so stupid – how could he have missed what was suddenly so obvious? And how could Alanna get so sick from skar so quickly? She looked blotchy, puffy-faced, desperate. He blinked back the tears and spoke urgently to her.

'Listen, Alanna. You've got to give it up. You've got to, now, there's no choice. This is your chance.'

'My chance to die. I'll die without some skar, Makos, I will!'

'I'll help you, Alanna, I'll do anything –'

'Then get me some skar and let me die happy you wet little bastard!' shrieked Alanna, furiously.

Makos recoiled from the apparent hatred in her eyes. Her features were so twisted she was barely recognisable as the woman he had known for so long.

'Let me have another try at finding a doctor,' he said, fighting to keep the tremble out of his voice. 'I'll make one come.'

'It's too late for that,' said Alanna bleakly. Suddenly, her body went limp and she fell back on the bed. 'Poor Makos. What a hard time I give you.'

He shook his head and cautiously took her hand. He squeezed it, but there was no response. She'd drifted into sleep. A few minutes later she began twisting and turning as if tormented by bad dreams. Suddenly she opened her eyes and struggled to sit up again.

'Makos, there's something I have to tell you something. something about the Doctor...'

She began babbling in a low, feverish voice. Makos listened in silence, nodding, trying to keep the horror he felt from showing in his face.

‘Promise you’ll tell him,’ said Alanna. ‘Tell him I’m sorry, tell him I couldn’t help it, make him understand...’

‘I’ll tell him,’ said Makos, softly. ‘Don’t worry, Alanna, he’ll understand.’

Alanna giggled, and a dribble of saliva slithered from the corner of her mouth. ‘Of course he’ll understand. He’ll probably already know. He knows everything, doesn’t he?’

Seemingly eased by her confession, Alanna slumped back on the bed.

‘I’ll make you some herb tea,’ said Makos. ‘Would you like that?’

She nodded, weakly. ‘Please, Makos...’

Makos went over to the corner table and brewed the tea on the little spirit stove. When it was done he carried the bowl over to Alanna. She seemed to be sleeping peacefully, and for a moment he wondered whether not to wake her.

‘Here’s the tea, Alanna,’ he said, trying to sound cheerful. There was no reply, so he sat down by the low bed. ‘Come on, drink it while it’s hot, it’ll do you good.’

Alanna still didn’t speak.

Putting down the bowl, Makos leaned over her, taking her hand once again. He sat there holding it for a long time while the bowl of tea grew cold at his feet.

On his isolated plantation deep in the jungle, the one where he’d wanted to take the Doctor and Jo, Rekar was preparing for the morning floggings. It was the high spot of his day, and he liked to make a little ceremony of it.

The victim (or victims – there was usually more than one) was marched into the main compound by Company guards. The entire plantation staff, domestic servants and field hands, were paraded to watch for the good of their souls, and to encourage them in their day’s labours.

When he was present on the plantation, Rekar liked to carry out the floggings himself. He had a special bull-whip, imported from Earth at great expense, and prided himself upon his skill in its use. Unfortunately the People made disappointing subjects. Their stoical refusal to scream or beg took most of the fun out of it. It made no difference how long you went on. You could flog them until your arm was tired, cut them to ribbons

and they just stood there and bled till they died.

Humans made much more satisfactory subjects, but yo seldom got the opportunity to flog a human.

Standing on the veranda of the long, low plantation house Rekar ran the long plaited lash of the whip through his fingers.

He fingered a fading bruise on his jaw and thought of the tall stranger called the Doctor, who had twice beaten and humiliate him. He thought of the Doctor strapped to the flogging-triangle, while the girl watched, awaiting her turn. Or would it be bette to flog the girl first, and make the Doctor watch?

Rekar's sadistic reverie was interrupted by the clamour of th big plantation gong, summoning everyone to witness punishment.

He surveyed the scene in the compound.

Everything was ready. Stripped to his loincloth, the victim – disappointingly there was only one today – stood waiting to b bound to the triangle. From all over the plantation the Peopl were converging upon the compound.

It was then that Rekar realised that something was bad wrong.

The People were supposed to gather in orderly ranks arou three sides of the compound – but they were continuing to advance.

They were supposed to come empty-handed – but the carried rakes and hoes and brooms and shovels and kitch knives...

Silently the People came on, forcing Rekar and his guards into a smaller and smaller space.

'Get back!' screamed Rekar. He flourished the whip. 'Bac or I swear I'll flog the lot of you!'

Still the People came on.

'Open fire!' Rekar ordered. 'Shoot down the front rank, drive them back!'

The terrified guards obeyed, and the crackle of blaster fi echoed round the packed compound. Many of the People fell, women and even children amongst them, but those behind the stepped over their bodies and came on. Now it was the guards who were being driven back and the hoes and rakes and shov were rising and falling.

The People were eerily silent as ever, but Rekar's ears w

filled with the shouts and screams of the dying guards.

Unarmed except for the whip, he lashed out furiously at the seething crowd.

A tall golden-skinned figure, naked except for a loin-cloth, stepped forward and took the whip from his hand. It was the one who had been due to be flogged.

The muscular golden arm rose and fell and the whip lashed across Rekar's back. Rekar screamed. He turned and fled, running screaming through the house and out into the jungle.

Smoke and flames were rising from the plantation house by now and the People tossed the bodies of the dead guards up the blazing pyre.

When their work was done, they melted away into the jungle.

Scattered about the jungles of the planet, more and more columns of smoke were rising...

As the Doctor and Jo got nearer town they found themselves swallowed up in the stream of refugees from plantations and outlying settlements. Colonists, Company guards, fruit farmers, gardeners and even smugglers were trudging along the roads that led into town. They saw the occasional harassed city policeman and the odd UPA patrol, but they were all too busy keeping order to worry about a couple of weary fugitives.

'When we left town we were a couple of celebrity outlaws,' grumbled Jo. 'Like Bonnie and Clyde. Now nobody seems interested in us any more.'

'Our fame has been overtaken by events,' agreed the Doctor. 'Personally, I'm pleased. I always like to keep a low profile when I can.'

'You're about as low-profile as a lighthouse,' said Jo and the Doctor looked hurt.

Their journey back from the temple had been surprisingly swift. Zylor had provided them with an escort of two silent golden giants to take them back to the river and pole them back downstream. The craft had been safely moored where they'd left it.

Zylor had remained at the temple, leading his fellow priests in their desperate attempt to subdue the mood of the People.

'I wonder how Zylor and the others are getting on,' said Jo as they walked along.

‘Hard to say. They’ll do their best – but it’s a tremendously difficult task.’

‘So we still don’t know if things will get better or worse.’

‘Probably both,’ said the Doctor. ‘Life’s like that, I’m afraid.’

This time their journey had been uninterrupted by either smugglers or Draconians – though they had seen a Draconian scoutcraft rising above the jungle just as they began their return journey.

They had left the river at a point as close to the town as possible. Now they were making for the Cosmic Soul compound, hoping for news of their friends.

The compound was deserted when they finally reached it.

‘Where is everybody?’ asked Jo.

‘This place is just outside the town,’ the Doctor reminded her. ‘It looks as if most of the inhabitants felt that meditation and massage might not be quite enough when it came to a crisis.’

‘The Cosmic Soul lot only want to help the People,’ said Jo.

‘So do quite a few people,’ the Doctor pointed out. ‘Including us! But the People are in an independent mood right now. They may resent outside interference, however well-meant.’ He looked around. ‘We’d better check Alanna’s hut just to make sure. I imagine she and Makos have taken refuge in town.’

But the Doctor was wrong.

When they reached the hut they saw Alanna stretched out on the bed. She looked calm and happy, and more beautiful than ever.

The Doctor stayed in the doorway, his face suddenly grave, but Jo hurried over to her.

‘Alanna? Alanna, we’re back!’

Alanna didn’t stir.

Jo looked back at the doorway. ‘Do you think I ought to wake her?’

‘I don’t think you can, Jo,’ said the Doctor sadly.

A thin figure came from the shadows at the back of the hut.

‘It’s no use trying to wake her up, Jo,’ said Makos. ‘Alanna’s dead.’

CHAPTER THIRTY-C
CRISIS

The Doctor and Jo watched while Makos gathered togethe
Alanna's few possessions – some letters, native jewellery, a
holovid of her dead parents. 'I'll send them back to her family
when I get a chance,' he said. 'Not that they'll care. They'll b
worrying about who inherits the money.'

'What happened?' asked Jo quietly.

'She got ill soon after you two disappeared. It was some local
bug – this isn't the healthiest planet for humans. She was so
weak she hadn't any resistance left. She was a skar addict, she'd
been hooked for some time apparently.' He looked up at the
Doctor and Jo. 'You don't seem very surprised.'

'I realised too late, I'm afraid,' said the Doctor. 'I wish I'd
paid more attention, but there was so much happening...'

Makos looked down at Alanna's things. 'She tried to tak
skar the way the People do, minute doses every day. She thou
it would help her to understand them, find the kind of spiritual
peace they seemed to have. But it got more and more of a g
on her...'

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'It always does.'

'When the supply dried up her immune system collapsed
said Makos. 'That's when she really got ill, that's when she told
me everything. I tried to help her...I even tried to buy the stuf
for her, but...but...' Makos started crying, tears rolling down his
face. 'She died a few hours ago.'

'I'm sorry,' whispered Jo, and the Doctor squeezed her han
and nodded.

Makos wiped his eyes and nose. 'There's something else
concerns you, Doctor.'

'Go on,' said the Doctor quietly.

'Just before the end – she talked about betraying you. S
told her drug supplier about what you were going to do. He

must've used her addiction against her, Doctor, she wouldn normally –'

'I know,' said the Doctor, softly. 'I know.'

'She wanted me to tell you how sorry she was.'

'And who was this supplier?'

'A man called Dove. He's trash.'

'I met him in the jungle,' said the Doctor. 'We saw him die.' He paused. 'If it's any consolation, I think Alanna sending Dove after me had a lot to do with the freeing of the People.'

'Good out of evil?' said Makos. 'That's something, I suppose.'

The Doctor smiled, sadly. 'I have to go and see the Administrator, Makos. What about you?'

'I'll stay with Alanna,' said Makos.

'Are you sending her home?' asked Jo.

Makos shook his head. 'There's nothing she cared about there. There's a little flower garden on the other side of the compound, Alanna was always very fond of it. I think she'd like to be buried there.' He looked up at them and tried to smile. 'I always loved her, you know, but it was Garon she wanted. And he was too busy with his politics.'

'Where is Garon?' asked Jo.

'Still in jail, I think, unless he's broken out by now. Tell him about Alanna, if you see him.'

'Yes, of course,' said the Doctor. 'Goodbye, old chap.'

Jo gave Makos a quick kiss on the cheek. 'I'm sure she cares for you as well, you know. And you're the one who was with her at the end.'

Makos nodded sadly, and Jo followed the Doctor out of the hut.

It took them some time to make their way to Government House through the busy streets. When they reached it, they found it to be the busiest place of all. The anteroom was crowded with worried citizens all asking what was going on and demanding that something be done about the crisis.

Their old friends Constable Sanders and Constable Sidney were on duty in the anteroom, looking hot, harassed and bad-tempered.

'Well, well, Doctor!' said Sanders.

‘Aren’t you supposed to be on the run?’ asked Sidney. ‘I heard you’d gone native and were leading a revolt!’

‘Not exactly,’ said the Doctor.

‘Well, it looks like somebody is!’

‘Ought we to arrest you, Doctor?’ asked Sanders.

‘I suppose I am some sort of fugitive, technically speaking, but I doubt if it’s relevant now. We need to see the Administrator.’

‘You and the rest of this lot,’ said Sidney, waving a hand around the crowded anteroom.

‘He’s in crisis conference with the General,’ said Sanders.

‘Strict orders, no interruptions,’ said Sidney.

‘I tell you I must see him,’ said the Doctor urgently. ‘I’ve been in the jungle with the People, and I understand what going on.’

‘More than anyone else does round here,’ said Sanders. looked at his colleague. ‘What d’you reckon?’

‘Can’t make things much worse,’ said Sidney. ‘All right Doctor, come on!’

With a bellow of ‘Stand back, please, stand back, urge message for the Administrator,’ he escorted the Doctor and J through the crowd and into the Administrator’s office.

It was a large plain room with a long conference table, filing cabinets, rickety wooden tables and chairs and a large wall m showing the town and its immediate environs.

‘Town’s pretty well bursting at the seams now,’ Charteris was saying. ‘Not a bed to be had. More turn up and you’ll have to put them up on your base.’

‘How am I supposed to run an army post with civilians milling around?’

‘How do you do, gentlemen?’ said the Doctor.

Charteris and Walton both spun round.

‘Good Lord, it’s the Doctor,’ said Charteris. ‘Just when I thought things couldn’t get worse.’

‘I’m too busy to have you shot now, Doctor,’ said Walton. ‘Go away and come back later.’ He caught sight of Jo and added politely, ‘How do you do, Miss Grant?’

‘Very well, thank you,’ said Jo.

The Doctor sat down in a chair, stretched his legs and folde his arms. ‘I have vital information for you both, gentlemen. I’ve spent the last few days in the jungle with the People, and I ca

tell you something about what's going on.' He looked round hopefully. 'Is there any chance of a cup of tea?'

CHAPTER THIRTY-T
KRYLL

'Repeat the casualty list!'

'We lost Lieutenant Varin and two troopers in the jungle, General-Baron,' said Sergeant Korn. 'As far as I can tell the were killed by this smuggler, the one we blasted later in the temple. When the fighting broke out in the temple we lost Captain-Lord Samzyre and three more troopers.'

He was in the command cabin of the Draconian battle-cruiser, reporting to General-Baron Kryll and his intelligence officer, Colonel-Lord Ryell.

He had already gone over his story several times. His superiors appeared to find his account of events hard to believe.

Sergeant Korr wasn't surprised. He found it pretty unbelievable himself, and he'd been there.

'And then?' snapped the General-Baron.

Like many of his House he was rather short for a Draconian. Unkind critics said that this lack of stature accounted for the ruthless ambition so characteristic of House Kryll. Nevertheless, the General-Baron was an imposing figure with a high-domed crested skull, a massive torso and a wiry beard streaked with grey.

He certainly terrified Sergeant Korr, who had never so much as spoken to such a high-ranking officer before. In the Draconian armed forces officers were aristocrats by definition, and their interaction with other ranks was minimal.

Patiently Sergeant Korr went over his story again.

'Then this Doctor, the one I told you about, fixed up a kind of truce and got us out of there.'

'And you allowed this?'

'No choice, sir. We were badly outnumbered – we'd have all been killed.'

'Was it not your duty to die with honour, as Draconian

warriors?'

Sergeant Korr was angry enough to defend himself. 'As I understood it, sir, the purpose of our mission was to probe Earth defences, and to engage Earth forces in combat.'

'Well, what of it?'

'We didn't see a single Earth soldier – and I didn't think it would reflect well on the Draconian Empire to get ourselves wiped out by a collection of armed priests for desecrating their temple.'

Sergeant Korr braced himself for the punishment his indiscretion would no doubt bring.

Before the General-Baron could express his rage, Colonel Lord Ryell said, 'With the greatest respect, sir, I think the sergeant has a point.'

The General-Baron controlled himself. 'He has, and a very good one. One more thing, Sergeant. You say this Doctor actually claimed Draconian rank?'

'Yes, General-Baron. High Earl in the Imperial House.'

'Ridiculous! Very well, Sergeant, dismissed. You'll get a commendation for taking over the expedition, and for bringing back your commanding officer's body.'

'Thank you, General-Baron.' Korr marched away, his relief hidden by his stiff military bearing.

Kryll glared at his intelligence officer. 'Of all the nonsensical stories! Smugglers! Murderous priests – when everyone knows the People are completely passive. And to cap it all, a mysterious Earthman who outranks us both.'

'There's some corroboration for that last bit, General-Baron. I checked the Scrolls of Nobility on the computer. A Patent of Honorary Nobility, conferring the rank of High Earl in the Imperial House, was once issued to an off-worlder.'

'To an Earthman?'

Ryell went to a computer screen. 'I'm not sure, sir, I'll recheck the entry... Ah yes, here we are. No name given, just "The one known as the Doctor", probably some kind of honorific... "For exceptional service to the Draconian Empire at the time of the great Space Plague."'

'That was five hundred years ago!' Kryll gave a harsh laugh. 'I should never have put that fool Samzyre in charge of the expedition. Still at least he got one thing right.'

‘What’s that, sir?’

‘He managed to get himself killed – providing us with the martyr we need.’

‘Are we going ahead, General-Baron?’

‘What do you think?’

‘I think it’s a considerable gamble.’

General-Baron Kryll knew exactly what he meant. Ryell was referring not to the gamble of landing on Kastopheria, but to the far greater gamble of defying the Emperor’s wishes.

The Imperial throne rested on a balance of power between the Great Houses, the noble families and their kinsmen and allies. When one House grew stronger than the others, stronger even than the House Imperial, it was time for a new dynasty.

House Kryll was approaching that critical point.

The acquisition of a desirable new planet for the Empire might tip the balance – and if the cost included war with Earth so much the better. Draconians were militant by nature, and there were many who thought the current Emperor’s ‘Peace with Earth’ policy a mistake.

House Kryll at the head of a ‘War with Earth’ alliance – General-Baron Kryll’s eyes gleamed at the thought. The Imperial Throne would be but a step away.

‘Yes!’ said Kryll explosively. ‘It’s a gamble, but it’s one worth taking.’

‘What about the sergeant’s story?’

‘What about it? These battling priests are probably just some cult that’s got out of hand. And don’t you see? If there is some kind of native revolt, it can work to our advantage. One of our scoutships crashes on the planet, and its noble Commander and half of its crew are killed by mutinous natives. Clear evidence that the Earthmen can’t control the native population. We land in force and restore order – the Earthmen will probably thank us!’

Ryell smiled at his superior’s almost child-like enthusiasm. ‘Well, if you put it like that, General-Baron...’

‘Are you with me then?’

‘My life at your command!’

The People were gathering at the old ruined temple beside the river. Inside, half a dozen of them were heaving away at a huge half-ruined altar. Others stood by with blazing torches. Muscles

bulged and torchlight glinted on sweating golden skin.

Slowly the altar slid aside, revealing a square of darkness. The torches illuminated a flight of steps leading downwards.

Following the torch-bearers, the People started filing down the steps one by one. More and more disappeared into the darkness.

Suddenly the moving line stopped and the People waited.

A few minutes later, weapons began moving along the line, passed from hand to hand. They came up out of the darkness, moved along the line that stretched across the temple, and were passed out to the waiting crowd outside. Swords, spears, knives, maces, axes, clubs, pikes and bows.

Generations ago, at the behest of their priests, the People had stored their weapons in the vaults beneath the temple. Now they were reclaiming them.

'Well, it's an extraordinary story, Doctor,' said Administrator Charteris. 'However, I have no choice but to believe it, since it explains the amazing change in the behaviour of the People.'

'Do you mean to say we owe all this trouble to your interference?' barked Walton. He looked as if he would like to change his mind and have the Doctor shot after all.

'That's not fair,' said Jo. 'It wasn't the Doctor's fault. He was asked to interfere, but he didn't actually do anything!'

They were all drinking tea brewed up by Jo in the deserted Government House kitchen. They'd all said, 'No, no,' and 'Really, you mustn't' when she'd offered, but they'd been quite happy to let her get on with it.

'I must point out,' said the Doctor, 'that all this was bound to happen soon anyway. The crystal was starting to decay.'

'It's no use wrangling about who's to blame for what's happened,' said Charteris. 'What we must do now is decide what we're going to do about it.'

'That rather depends on what the People do, doesn't it?' said Walton.

'I don't think you two realise just how much things have changed,' said the Doctor. 'There's only one thing you can do.'

Charteris raised an eyebrow. 'Which is?'

Before the Doctor could reply, Lieutenant Avery came dashing into the room. He skidded to a halt, and threw Walton

hasty salute, scarcely seeming to notice the Doctor and Jo.

'Report from the outlying patrols sir. The People are advancing on the city.'

'How many?'

'Hundreds of them, sir. Maybe thousands. They assembled the old temple and now they're moving towards us. The thing i sir, they're armed.'

'What with?' snapped Walton. 'Blasters, laser rifles?'

'No, sir, just old-fashioned stuff, swords and spears and pikes, things like that.'

'We can cope with that,' said Walton confidently. 'You'd better pull in more men from the barracks, as many as they c spare. When the extra men arrive, double the guards on the c walls. Tell them to fire warning shots if the mob gets too close.'

'No!' shouted the Doctor. 'You mustn't do any such thing. Do you think the People will run away at the first sound of blaster fire? Remember what I told you about the Priests in th temple. They'll just keep coming, however many you kill.'

'Then what do you suggest I do, Doctor?' growled Walton.

'I keep on telling you,' said the Doctor. 'Sit tight, do nothing. The initiative is no longer in your hands. You'll just have to wait and see what the People want.'

Walton looked across at Charteris who nodded.

'All right, Avery,' said Walton. 'Orders as before, but cut ou the warning shots. Nobody is to fire unless actually attacked.'

'Sir!' said Lieutenant Avery. He looked around. 'Administrator, Doctor, Miss Grant!' He shot out of the room.

'You did say there was one thing we could do, Doctor,' sai Charteris. 'You were about to tell me when Lieutenant Aver burst in.'

'Well, there is one thing,' said the Doctor. 'And only one.'

'And what's that?' spat Walton. 'Surrender?'

'Evacuate,' said the Doctor simply. 'Leave Catastrophea just as quickly as you can!'

CHAPTER THIRTY-T
BESIEGED

The Doctor's suggestion provoked instant outrage. General Walton's reaction was predictable enough.

'If you think I'm going to run away from a mob of savages with spears...'

'I didn't say anything about running away, General,' said the Doctor. 'Think of it as conducting an orderly strategic retreat!'

Administrator Charteris was almost as shocked as the General. 'I can't just pack up and go, Doctor. I have responsibilities here. Not least to the People themselves, after all we came here to protect them. I am *in loco parentis*.'

'My dear Mr Charteris, you'll find it very hard to maintain an attitude of fatherly concern towards people who are hemming you in with a variety of sharpened weapons. Does it occur to you that they're trying to tell you something?'

'Be that as it may, Doctor, this planet is currently a UPA protectorate. Neither the General nor myself can abandon our posts without orders.'

'Then ask for orders! Tell them what's happening here.'

'I can't,' said Charteris. 'We have no communication with Earth. The Draconians are jamming all our communications. They're still up there in orbit. And there is the question of the human population of this planet, colonists, Company people, even smugglers. I can't just abandon them.'

'Evacuate them too – at gunpoint if you must! A job for your troops, General.'

'Even if that were possible, or even if everyone concerned wanted to go, I still couldn't evacuate them.'

'Why ever not?' asked Jo.

Charteris looked down at the floor, more than a little embarrassed. 'Not enough ships, Miss Grant. There are only a handful at the spaceport. If I crammed every one to capacity,

they could only carry a fraction of those who needed to go. We're talking about a whole city, remember. Oh, I could get away safely, and the General could evacuate himself and most of his troops. But I would have to abandon every other human on the planet – and that I cannot do. I will not do. I'm sure General Walton feels the same.'

For once even the Doctor was silent. He sat there, brooding over the problem.

'Of course,' he said at last. 'Forgive me, Administrator, I should have realised. You need a fleet of ships from Earth, and all that will take time...'

'That's even if we decide we have to go,' said Charteris briskly. 'A necessity of which I am still not convinced!'

'As my old friend Winston once remarked,' said the Doctor, '"This is the kind of nonsense up with which I will not put!"'

'It's perfectly possible that this is a temporary situation,' insisted Charteris. 'We may still be able to reach some accommodation with the People, find some way of carrying on our work here.'

'Good grief!' roared the Doctor. 'Will nothing make you see sense? Catastrophea has changed, sir, changed utterly, irrevocably and for ever! There can be no going back!'

What looked like a promising quarrel was broken up by the sudden reappearance of Lieutenant Avery.

'We've got most of the men back from the base, sir, there's just a skeleton staff guarding transport and supplies. The People seem to be ignoring the place at the moment.'

'What are they doing?'

'Encircling the city,' said Avery. 'They're ringing the entire place. Even with the extra men we'll have a job to cover the entire perimeter.'

'Police?'

'Needed internally, sir. And most of them aren't armed anyway.'

'We could co-opt the Company guards...'

'You'll do no such thing,' snapped the Doctor. 'They hate the People anyway, they'd be looking for an excuse to shoot. If that happens, there'll be a massacre – and not just of the People!'

'Well, unless we enlist the smugglers...' said Walton sarcastically. 'There's simply no one else.'

‘Yes there is,’ said Jo suddenly. ‘Garon and his lot. Th revolutionaries you’ve got locked up in your city jail. They’re brave, they’re well organised, and most important, they’re already sympathetic to the People, so they won’t cause unnecess trouble.’

‘An excellent idea, Jo,’ said the Doctor. ‘There you are Administrator, a people’s militia. Give those young hotheads something useful to do and keep them out of mischief!’

‘Of all the nonsensical ideas,’ growled Walton. ‘Turning loose a lot of dangerous radicals. I really *really* have had you two shot!’

Charteris was already writing a note on a piece of headed paper. ‘I think it’s an excellent idea, Miss Grant,’ he said calmly. ‘Hang on a moment, though, will they co-operate? After all, they’re all anti-Establishment – and as far as they’re concern I’m the Establishment in person.’

‘They’ll co-operate if the Doctor asks them,’ said Jo. ‘After all, who could refuse El Llama?’

The Doctor groaned. ‘Don’t start all that again. No, I’m afraid I’m needed here, Jo – whatever these two gentlem think. But I shall send El Llama’s personal representative – L Pasionara – or do I mean La Piccolina? Anyway, you go a convince them, Jo. I’m sure Garon will listen to you.’

‘Constable Sanders, Constable Sidney,’ roared Charteris.

The two policemen burst into the room. ‘Sir!’ they chorused.

Charteris stamped the letter with a Government seal an handed it to Jo. ‘Take Miss Grant to the city jail. She’s to giv this letter to the Governor. Amnesty for all political prisoners on conditions to be examined by Miss Grant.’

Constable Sanders looked puzzled. ‘You don’t want us t lock the young lady up this time, Administrator?’

‘Lock her up?’ Charteris sounded scandalised. ‘Certainly not. Miss Grant is my personal Political Representative with full executive powers and she is to be treated with every respe Consider her your Superintendent.’

‘Very good, sir,’ said Constable Sidney.

Constable Sanders turned to Jo and saluted smartly. ‘Th way, ma’am’

Jo grinned at the Doctor, drew herself up to her diminutive height, and made a dignified exit from the room, followed by the

two large policemen.

Charteris said drily, 'I take it this scheme also has the advantage of keeping Miss Grant out of mischief, Doctor?'

'Well, she can be a bit headstrong. Young Garon will look after her.' The Doctor rose. 'Well, gentlemen, we shall do little good sitting here. I suggest we survey the field.'

Charteris and Walton looked at each other, then they both stood up, accepting the inevitable.

Somehow or other, the Doctor had taken charge.

CHAPTER THIRTY-F
FLASHPOINT

Jo didn't have a very long trip to the city jail – it was actually a annexe of Government House. She showed the Administrator's letter to Governor Ravin, a shmalding bureaucrat, who looked absolutely horrified.

'Is this a joke?'

'No, sir,' said Constable Sanders. 'We watched th Administrator write it.'

'Put his seal on it and everything,' said Constable Sidne 'Miss Grant here is his personal Ptical Representative with full executive powers, rank of Superintendent.'

'Oh, in that case,' said Ravin wearily. 'I take no responsibility, mind you. The lipcal wing is this way, Superintendent Grant.'

'Thank you,' said Jo crisply. 'I particularly want to see prisoner called Garon.'

'A bad lot, that one,' said Ravin. 'We had to put him in a ce by himself, he kept tistng the others up.'

Followed by Sanders and Sidney, he led Jo along a corrid with cells on either side, and dpsted at a smaller cell at the far end. He unlocked the door.

Garon was standing by the window, dressed in a wrinkle off-white prison suit. He movehurriedly away from the window as the cell door opened.

'Jo! Did they get you too?'

'Not exactly,' said Jo. She looked at the three men in th corridor. 'All right, you can close the door. From the outside please. I want to talk the prisoner alone.'

Ravin looked worried. 'Are you sure, ma'am? He's a ver dangerous man.'

'I think I can deal with him. Wait outside, please. I'll call when I want to come out.'

Jo turned to find Garon staring at her in amazement. 'What going on?'

Jo went over to the window. 'What are you up to, Garon? He opened his hand and showed her a sharpened metal spoon.

'Chipping away the concrete around the bars.' He indicated a worn patch of concrete at the base of one bar. 'I reckon I'd have been out of here in, oh...'

'In about five years by the look of it,' said Jo. 'I can get you out of here a lot quicker than that – if you co-operate.'

She gave him a very condensed version of recent events.

Garon was surprised and delighted. 'The People have turned militant? They're politicised at last?' He looked at her with shining eyes. 'It was the Doctor, wasn't it?'

'He certainly had something to do with it.'

'He really is El Llama, isn't he?'

'Well, what do you think?' asked Jo.

She crossed her fingers behind her back.

Garon frowned. 'You say he's co-operating with the authorities?'

'Not really,' said Jo. 'It's more that they're co-operating with him! Will you help us, Garon? I need you to convince the others.'

'Of course I will, Jo.' He took her hand. 'It's wonderful to see you again. Have you seen Makos, and Alanna?'

'Well, yes,' said Jo. 'Garon, I'm afraid there's some very sad news...'

Escorted by Lieutenant Avery, the Doctor, Charteris and Walton were making a tour of the city wall. It wasn't so much a wall as a very large fence, a sturdier version of the one at the army post. There were viewing platforms and observation towers at regular intervals.

They had made a complete circuit of the city, which wasn't really all that large, and were now standing on the big observation platform that overlooked the main gate. There was open ground here, fringed by dust, jungle and a view of the nearby space port.

The crowd seemed a little larger here, but from every vantage point the spectacle was much the same.

The People were surrounding the city. They stood about a

hundred metres from the walls, silently watching. And they carried weapons. The Doctor saw huge curved swords, long pikes, and double-bladed battle axes. Not only males, but women and even young children stood clutching fearsome looking hardware and gazing fixedly, even hungrily, at the city. The weapons looked strangely familiar, and suddenly the Doctor remembered. He'd seen them on the faded frescos in the old temple by the river.

'Where did they get all that cutlery?' growled Walton.

'They must have deposited it somewhere when they renounced fighting,' said the Doctor. 'They were warriors, once. There are probably arms stores all over the planet.'

UPA soldiers, blasters and rifles trained on the crowd, were posted on all the guard towers and viewing platforms and on the observation ramps that ran at intervals along the walls.

General Walton gazed at his motionless troops, filled with the soldier's frustration with inaction.

'That mob's getting bigger all the time. It ought to be dispersed. If we fire a few warning shots, shoot down a few of the ring-leaders even...'

'No!' said the Doctor sharply. 'Believe me, General, if you mow down the front rank of that crowd, the next rank will step over their bodies and move closer. Eventually they'll reach your soldiers – and at close range a sword is just as deadly as a blaster.'

Charteris surveyed the crowd. Its ranks had seemed equally thick from every vantage-point, and more and more of the People were arriving all the time.

'I didn't realise there were so many of them,' said Charteris.

The Doctor said, 'They've been invisible for a very long time.'

Charteris remembered how the golden giants had brought food and drink, carried burdens, pulled rickshaws, worked the fields on plantations – silent, unnoticed and, as the Doctor had said, virtually invisible.

'Quite a sight, isn't it?' said a familiar voice. The Doctor turned and saw Jo coming on to the platform. Garon was at her side. The Doctor went over to them.

'How did the recruiting drive go?'

'Very well, Doctor. Garon soon talked them round.'

‘My friends are manning the walls, reinforcing the soldiers,’ said Garon. ‘They won’t carry energy-weapons, they don’t want to fire on the People, but they’ve got staffs and batons and they’ll do anything they can to help protect the city.’ He turned to the Doctor. ‘I think some of us should go and talk to them. We’re not like the soldiers. The People know we’re on their side, we came here to help them.’

‘Years ago on Old Earth, in America...’ said the Doctor.

(‘Here we go,’ thought Jo, ‘another history lesson!’)

‘Some of the Native Americans – Red Indians they used to call them, although they were neither red nor Indian – some of the Native Americans fought the invading white men, but others were willing to make peace.’

‘I’ve seen the old holovids,’ said Garon. ‘What’s your point?’

‘My point is, young man, that some of the white men didn’t bother to differentiate. They had a saying, “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.”’

‘And you think the People feel that way about us? The only good Earthman...’

‘I’m afraid so.’

‘But what do the People want?’ asked Garon.

‘That’s quite simple,’ said the Doctor. ‘They want you to go, all of you, right now. But Administrator Charteris and General Walton absolutely refuse. They say they couldn’t if they wanted to. Stalemate!’

Garon asked the question everyone seemed to be asking. ‘So what do we do?’

‘Wait,’ said the Doctor. ‘Wait and hope!’

‘Is that all, Doctor?’ asked Jo.

‘Well, not quite. I still need to do two things. Convince Walton and Charteris that they *must* evacuate, and persuade the People to allow them time to do so.’

‘That won’t be easy,’ said Garon. ‘Well, good luck, Doctor, I must see to my men. Some of them are a bit on the nervous side.’

Garon hurried off, clearly enjoying himself enormously.

‘He doesn’t seem too devastated,’ said the Doctor drily.

‘About Alanna? No, he took it surprisingly well. Of course, with all this going on...’

Garon was always going to be more interested in causes than

in people, thought the Doctor. He hoped Jo realised it.

Jo gave him a worried look. 'Are you going out there to talk to the People?'

'I think I must.'

'Hoping they still think you're a good Indian?'

'Something like that. Listen, Jo, if the worst comes to the worst, stay close by me, and I'll try to get you back to the TARDIS and away from here.'

'Oh no,' said Jo firmly. 'You're not tucking me safely away!'

The Doctor smiled wryly. 'I should know better by now, shouldn't I? In any case, the TARDIS is locked up somewhere on the army base, and it's cut off. If a battle breaks out, we may never reach the TARDIS at all.' The Doctor looked around. 'Don't worry, it may not come to that. Provided nobody makes any trouble...'

It was precisely at this moment that the trouble started. Constable Sanders came hurrying up to the viewing platform and went up to Walton and Charteris.

'Trouble in the main square, sir. One of the Company people is stirring up the Company Guards.'

'Arrest him,' snapped Charteris. 'Arrest them all!'

'We've tried sir, but they're all armed and we're not.'

A confused shouting came from down below and Constable Sidney hurried up on to the platform.

'They're heading this way, sir!'

They hurried to the inner edge of the platform and saw a tightly packed mass of black-uniformed men pouring down the road that led from the main square. A ragged figure marched at their head.

'It's Rekar!' said Jo. 'The one who tried to kidnap us!'

They heard Rekar's voice floating up from below. 'They burned my plantation, killed many guards. They'll kill us all unless we fight back. Let's get out there, mow down the lot of these native scum and take back our planet.'

The Doctor shouted, 'General Walton, they mustn't get outside!'

Walton leaned over the edge of the platform. 'Guard Captain, get those men away from that gate. Shoot them if you have to!'

It was already too late. There was a sudden crackle of

blaster-fire as the soldiers by the gate were shot down.

With a triumphant roar the gates were flung open and the black-clad Company guards poured through.

Charteris grabbed Walton's arm. 'General, tell your men to get those gates closed.'

'What about the Company guards?'

'Damn the Company guards! Just close those gates!'

Walton hurried down the stairs. 'Get those gates shut!' he roared. 'Nobody go outside. Just close the gates!'

As the last of the Company guards rushed outside, a squad of UPA soldiers slammed the big wooden gates behind them, lifting the big locking beams into place.

Everyone rushed to the front of the platform to see the next stage. Pouring out of the gates in a confused and noisy mass, the Company guards began sorting themselves into a line of attack. Rekar rushed to and fro shouting, waving his arms.

The People stood silent, watching.

Silence fell as the appalled guards realised the number of their enemies.

Rekar's voice rose in the silence. 'What are you waiting for? They're savages, with spears – mow them down! Fire!'

A ragged crackle of blaster-fire came from the line of guards.

In the front ranks of the People one giant figure after another staggered and fell.

'That's the way!' screamed Rekar. 'Kill them all!'

It happened exactly as the Doctor had foretold.

Stepping over the bodies of their dead, the People flowed forwards and overwhelmed the guards. The guards had time to fire a few more frantic blasts before being slashed with great curved swords, impaled with pikes, or hacked to pieces with battle axes.

Jo turned away, burying her head in the Doctor's chest.

The battle was over almost as soon as it had begun.

Grim-faced, the Doctor stared down at the carnage. He looked at the torn and broken bodies and the blood-soaked ground. This was the horror that the destruction of the Anima had unleashed. And it was only the beginning.

He patted Jo's shoulder. 'It's all right, Jo. It's over, for now.'

As Jo straightened up, something round came hurtling through the air, dropping almost at her feet. She screamed and

jumped back. It was Rekar's head.

The People surged towards the city gate.

CHAPTER THIRTY-F
THE LAST BATTLE

The gate secured, General Walton came back on to the platfo and looked down at the advancing ranks of the People.

'They're attacking at last, it seems.'

'You sound almost relieved,' said Jo accusingly.

'I don't like politics, Miss Gran. Few soldiers do. We find them confusing. When the politicking breaks down, things ar simpler. We just have to do our duty.' He looked at Charteri and said formally, 'I require your authority to engage in hostilities with the native population, Administrator.'

Charteris gave him an agonised look.

'Can you hold them off, General?'

'Oh yes, I can hold them,' said Walton calmly. 'The palisad is strong, my men are well trained, we've got good supplies of food and energy-packs for the weapons. There are a few surviving Company guards we can use, and I daresay even yo Garon's militia will fight if they must. We've still got a few men and vehicles and weapons on the Tor. They're cut off from us at the moment, but they could attack the enemy in the rear an fight their way through to us with extra supplies.'

'How long?' asked Charteris.

Walton surveyed the advancing hordes of the People.

'Oh, at least a day. Very possibly two. Not more than three, shouldn't think.'

'Three days,' thought Jo.

It didn't seem very long for the rest of your life.

'They'll be in range soon. Permission to fire when ready?' said General Walton.

Before Charteris could reply, the Doctor said, 'Wait!'

'Wait for what?' snapped Walton. 'To be cut down like beasts in a slaughterhouse? For a miracle?'

'Just wait,' said the Doctor. 'Listen!'

From somewhere far above there came a distant drone. Th
drone became a hum, and the hum turned into an earthshaking
roar.

High in the heat haze that overhung the city a massive sha
appeared. It was a vast metal column, bulbous at the top,
narrowing towards the middle, flaring out again towards the end.

The top of the column was crowned with a black battle-ram
like the central boss on a shield, rocket-fins fringed the base, a
there were bristling gun-turrets all over.

The roar of retro-rockets shook the ground and made the
entire city tremble, as the towering metal column sunk graceful
down upon a column of fire. It landed on the edge of the plain
not too far from the city and just behind the encircling ring of
the People.

It looked elegant, predatory and dangerous, thought Jo, like
huge metal shark.

'What is it, Doctor?' she whispered.

'It's a spaceship!'

She jabbed him in the ribs with her elbow.

'I know that, but whose? Has help come from Earth?'

'I'm afraid not. That, Jo, is a Draconian battlecruiser,
Emperor class, I think.' He nodded towards General Walton.
'There's your miracle, General!'

'I fail to see how this improves our position, Doctor,' said
Charteris acidly. 'We now have two enemies to cope with instead
of one!'

'Sometimes two wrongs can make a right, Administrator,'
said the Doctor. 'Or to put it another way, my enemy's enemy is
my friend.'

The ship had settled now and for a moment everything was
still. Jo looked to see how the People were taking this new
development and found herself looking not at their faces but at
their backs. Their attention was now concentrated entirely on the
Draconian ship.

'Well, at least the Draconians have created a diversion,' said
Jo. 'How long will it last?'

'Watch!' said the Doctor.

A door opened near the base of the ship and a landing ramp
slid out. A burly thick-set Draconian in battle-armour emerged.

'That will be the General,' said the Doctor. 'It's a matter of

honour that the commanding General is the first to set foot on enemy soil. Draconians always lead from the front.'

'Romantic nonsense,' growled Walton. 'The place for the commanding General is somewhere safe in the rear so he can direct the battle.'

'I'm afraid Draconians tend to be very old-fashioned,' said the Doctor. 'It's important to win, but winning with honour is what really counts.'

As soon as the Draconian General had stepped from the ramp, squad after squad of Draconian soldiers came marching down the ramp after him. Like their leader, they wore green battle armour, and they carried laser rifles and blasters.

The Draconians marched steadily towards the city, ignoring the encircling ring of the People who barred their way.

The People drew back to let them through – until the Draconian General and his advance party were close to the gates of the city.

By then the Draconians were virtually surrounded – and the People fell upon them with savage fury. It was as if the insult of this second invasion was too much to bear.

The Draconian soldiers reacted with professional skill, forming squares, back to back, firing their energy weapons and cutting the People down in swathes. But there were always more of the People surging to the attack, more and more, and one by one the Draconian squares were overwhelmed.

At last only the Draconian General's party was left – the one nearest to the city gates.

The Doctor had been leaning forward, studying the movement of the battle. Suddenly he turned to General Walton. 'Now!'

'What?'

'We've got to rescue the Draconian General. Get him in here, inside the city. Come on, Jo, bring your men! General, tell your men not to fire unless they must. Use rifle butts, fists, anything, but try not to kill. Come on!'

Feeling like a spectator at the Roman games, Jo watched the gates were opened and the Doctor and Garon led a mixed party of soldiers and militia out into the battle. Hitting, kicking, punching, shoving their way through the grim-faced People, they formed a human shield around the Draconian General and

bustled him towards the city.

For a moment it looked as if they themselves might be overwhelmed, but Garon and his men fought valiantly, swinging their staves against swords and spears.

Jo saw the Doctor duck beneath the axe-swing of one of the People and somehow hurl him back into the ranks of his fellows, scattering them like ninepins.

Fighting desperately, the Doctor and his party dragged the Draconian General through the legs. Immediately a party of soldiers and militia slammed and locked the gates behind them.

Gasping, struggling to recover his dignity, the Draconian General looked around him.

He saw a tall plump man, a tall ebony soldier, a tall white-haired man and a small human female walking towards him.

The plump human bowed. 'Welcome to Catastrophea City, General. I am Administrator Charteris, this is General Walton, this is the Doctor, and this is his companion Miss Grant. Allow me to offer you the hospitality of Government House.'

'My entire force,' said General-Baron Kryll. 'Lost! Defeated by spear-carrying savages. I am disgraced.'

'The People are a very special kind of enemy,' said the Doctor. 'You can only kill them. You can never defeat them.'

He had already given the Draconian an account of recent events on the planet. He was not quite how much the Draconian had understood. He was still shaken by the loss of so many of his soldiers.

Lieutenant Avery came into the room. 'Things are pretty quiet outside, sir. The People just sort of milling about. Some are still surrounding the city, but most seem more worried about the spaceship. They seem confused. I don't think they'll attack again, at least for a while.'

'They'll make up their mind soon enough,' said the Doctor. 'They'll attack the city, or the spaceship, or both. We have very little time in which to sort things out' He looked from Charteris to Kryll. 'I beg you both to listen to me.'

'Go on, Doctor,' said Charteris.

General-Baron Kryll said nothing.

'You cannot hold this planet, Mr Charteris,' said the Doctor. 'And you, General-Baron Kryll, cannot take it for Draconia. For

both of you, for both your planets, the price is too high.

'First your respective powers will have to fight each other for the planet – and that is a battle that is not worth the winning. Whoever tries to conquer Catastrophea will face unending war. Oh, I know you both have energy weapons, atomics, neutron bombs – but to conquer the people you will have to destroy them. Does either the Empire of Draconia or the Alliance of Earth and the United Planets wish to be branded with the stigma of genocide?'

CHAPTER THIRTY-S
SOLUTION

'But surely –' began Charteris.

'No more talk! Just go!' said the Doctor simply. 'Both of you must go Administrator Charteris, if you cannot get orders yo must act without them. Present the United Planets with a *fait accompli*. The time for intervention on Catastrophea is over. You have accomplished your mission, it is time to leave.'

Charteris bowed his head, accepting the inevitable.

'I see no choice. If the General-Baron *cooperates*, I will arrange to evacuate this entire colony as soon as possible. After today, nobody here will argue. But it will take time.'

'As for you, General-Baron,' said the Doctor, 'I think we both know that your landing on this planet was a gamble whic has failed. It is time to cut your losses and leave.'

The Draconian said, 'My visit to this miserable planet has been ill-fated. It has cost the lives of many of my soldiers, and see nothing to be gained by sacrificing the lives of any more.'

'There is one other thing,' said the Doctor. 'Perhaps the most important of all. Mr Charteris, General-Baron, you mus draw up and sign a treaty of non-interference, pledging, on behalf of your respective governments, that neither Earth nor Draconia will interfere in the affairs of this planet and will permi no one else to do so.' He held up his hand, anticipating their protests. 'I realise that neither of you has the slightest vestige of authority to do this, but we must gamble that both planets wi ratify the treaty once signed – since neither will wish to be responsible for breaking it.'

'Very well, Doctor,' said Charteris.

'I too agree,' said General-Baron Kryll. 'What is one more gamble after all? However, there is one small obstacle to my returning to Draconia with this treaty. Thanks to your rather troublesome native population, I have little prospect of regaining

my ship alive.'

General Walton said, 'I deeply regret, Baron-General, that you suffered attack on a planet under UPA command. I should be happy to offer you the services of my troops to escort you back to your ship.'

Baron-General Kryll was a cunning and devious politician but he was also a soldier. This was an astonishingly generous offer from a fellow-soldier to a beleaguered and defeated enemy.

Draconian honour demanded that it be matched.

The Draconian turned to Charteris. 'I could not fail to notice, Administrator, that your shipping capacity is limited.'

'We are certainly short of space,' said Charteris. 'We can send to Earth for transports, but that will take time.'

'My battlecruiser has considerable accommodation capacity,' said General-Baron Kryll. 'Rather more, indeed, than it had upon arrival. I should be happy to convey you, and as many of your colonists as possible back to the Earth. I am sure other Draconian vessels in the area would give similar assistance while you are waiting for Earth transports to arrive.'

General Walton said, 'We still have to get to the ships. If we combine our forces we can conduct a fighting retreat...'

The Doctor said, 'I hate to spoil your fun, General, but that may not be necessary. If you can assure me that both humans and Draconians will leave Carabesh as soon as possible, I will try to pass those assurances to the People...'

Charteris, General Walton, Jo, Garon and General-Baron Kryll watched from the viewing platform as the city gates were opened and the Doctor walked out alone to face the People, who were standing there in an eerie silence.

After a moment Zylor stepped out of the crowd to face him.

'I have come to tell you that you have won,' said the Doctor. He spoke out loud, slowly and deliberately, hoping that the People as well as Zylor himself would understand his words. 'All humans and Draconians will leave this planet as soon as they can. They have agreed not to attack you further, and they will not allow anyone else to do so. They ask only that you allow them sufficient time to leave. Let there be no more bloodshed.'

There was a long, long pause. The Doctor guessed that Zylor was submitting his words to the judgement of the People. The

heat prickled his skin, the eyes of the golden giants met his own.

'Surely you can see that too many have died already,' implored the Doctor.

At last he heard Zylor's voice echoing in his mind.

'The strangers may leave – they will not be harmed. The People ask only to determine their own way of life. We... thank you, Doctor, for all you have done.'

'And for all I haven't done?' There was anguish in the Doctor's voice. 'Have I really achieved anything? What will become of the People, Zylor, when we have all left your world. Will they turn to destruction?'

'We of the Priesthood pray that the People will choose a peaceful way of life. We shall strive to restore equilibrium. But whatever they do...' Zylor almost seemed to smile. *'...it must be of their own free will.'*

The Doctor smiled, grimly. 'Isn't that changing your tune a little?'

'The People have their freedom now, Doctor. They will defend it to the death.'

The Doctor turned and walked back into the city.

The People began drifting away into the jungle.

The Doctor and Jo had a farewell drink in Rik's café with Makos and Garon, who had both got jobs working for Charteris, helping to supervise the evacuation.

Rik himself served their wine, imperturbable as ever.

'Thought I'd better look after you myself,' he said. 'Now the People have left, most of my staff are ex-smugglers. Some of them lack polish.'

'What will you do now, Rik?' asked the Doctor.

'Another saloon, on another planet. Perhaps we'll run into each other again some time, Doc.'

Rik went off to calm down an unshaven waiter, who was throttling a customer who'd queried the bill.

Garon raised his glass. 'To you, Doctor!'

The Doctor raised his glass. 'And to all of you!'

'To absent friends,' said Jo.

And Makos said softly, 'To Alanna.'

They said goodbye to a harassed and overworked Charteris who was arranging endless evacuation details with an outraged U

Government.

'Goodbye, Doctor, Miss Grant,' he said. 'Oh, and Doctor... Please, don't come back. Life gets far too interesting with yo around.'

On Jo's insistence, they went to the rapidly emptying army po and said goodbye to General Walton who was happil comparing battle-tactics in the mess with his new friend Baron- General Kryll.

'Goodbye, Miss Grant,' said General Walton. 'Goodbye Doctor. All in all, I'm quite glad I didn't have you shot.'

The Doctor smiled wryly and turned to go.

General-Baron Kryll said, 'One moment, Doctor. You have helped to resolve this difficult matter in a way that preserves th honour of both Earth and Draconia. I understand that you hold the Draconian rank of High Earl?'

'As a matter of fact I do.'

The General-Baron rose, came to attention, and bowed his head.

'My life at your command!'

Silently the Doctor bowed in acknowledgement, and they left the room with Jo.

'Lot of antiquated ceremonial nonsense,' muttered the Doctor as they walked along the corridor. Jo could have swor she saw the gleam of a tear in his eye.

Their last goodbye was to Lieutenant Avery, who conducted them to Bunker Seven, opening the door to reveal the TARDIS safe and sound.

'We've taken very good care of it for you,' he said. 'Whatever it is!'

'We'll just pop inside and check it over,' said the Doctor 'You'll be needing transport to get it to your spaceship,' sai Avery. 'Off in the jungle somewhere, isn't it?'

'Don't worry about that, Lieutenant,' said the Doctor firmly. He held out his hand. 'Goodbye!'

Jo shook hands as well. 'I'm sorry about hitting you over th head,' she said.

'Not half as sorry as I am. That vase shattered into a million pieces the next time the General touched it, and he's docked t

cost of the vase from my pay!'

Lieutenant Avery ushered them inside the bunker and close the door. He turned to leave and then hesitated, wondering if he should have pressed his offer of transport. No way could they shift that weird blue box without help.

He heard a strange noise coming from inside the bunke rushed back and opened the door...

'Let me see if I've got this straight, Avery,' said General Walton. He had just said goodbye to the General-Baron and was enjoying a quiet drink in the mess – and now this!

He drew a deep calming breath.

'You showed the Doctor and Miss Grant their blue box in Bunker Seven. They went inside the bunker and you closed t door.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then you heard a strange noise, went back and opened the door and the box, the Doctor and Miss Grant had disappeared?'

'Yes sir.'

'What kind of a noise?' demanded the General.

'It was sort of a wheezing sound, sir.'

'Wheezing?'

'Yes sir.' Avery frowned. 'Only with sort of a groaning quality to it as well.'

'A wheezing, groaning sound,' said Walton disgustedly 'What sort of description is that? Have you been drinking, Avery?'

'No sir, not yet.'

'Then you'd better have one.' He reached for the decanter, filled Avery's glass and raised his own.

'To the Doctor! Wherever and whoever he is!'

Avery raised his glass. 'To the Doctor!'

'I still say he was really a Llama,' said Garon.

Makos shrugged. 'We'll probably never know.'

They were having a drink in K'Ri's place, after a hard day of organising the last stages of the evacuation.

A stranger came in, looked round and came towards the table. He was tall, thin and dark and he wore a loose cloak and a wide-brimmed black hat pulled down to shade his face.

Looking cautiously around, he came up to them and whispered, 'Senor Garon, Senor Makos?'

Garon nodded. 'That's right.'

The stranger pulled up a chair and sat down.

'I have arrived!'

Makos looked baffled. 'You have?'

'They tried to keep me away, but I was too clever for them. I smuggled myself in on one of the evacuation transports.'

They looked blankly at him.

'I am the one you have been waiting for, sent to aid you in your glorious struggle.' He looked round again, and lowered his voice to a whisper. 'I am El Llama!'

Makos and Garon looked at each other and smiled.

'Sorry, friend,' said Garon, 'I'm afraid you've missed the bus. The revolution's over and we're all going home!'

'So what's the answer, Doctor?' asked Jo. She lay stretched out on the chaise-longue in the TARDIS control room, half hypnotised by the rise and fall of the time rotor.

The Doctor looked up from the controls. 'What's the question?'

'Were we right to interfere on Catastrophea?'

'Who knows?'

'You do. Or you're supposed to. You know everything.'

'It's a question that doesn't have an answer, Jo. The pattern's too big, and we're too small...'

'All that fighting and death,' said Jo. 'So many deaths. The smugglers, the Company guards, the Draconians, the People...'

'The People had hundreds of years with no fighting at all, Jo. All it did was make slaves of them – and encourage others in cruelty and greed.'

'Do you think the People's problems will come back to haunt them?' asked Jo.

'I don't know, Jo. I really don't know.'

Jo yawned. 'Interfere or don't interfere, fight or don't fight... What's the answer?'

'There's no real answer, Jo – it all depends. All we can do is what seems best at the time and hope we're right. We can never be sure.'

The Doctor looked down to see how Jo was receiving these

pearls of wisdom. She was fast asleep.

Which was just as well, he thought. He had no real answers for the questions she'd asked. And there were still so many more. Had he arrived on Catastrophe purely by chance, or had he been the pawn of others? The Time Lords? Or could it have been some kind of manipulation on the part of Zylor and his priests, the architects of the psychic scream that had brought him here?

He wondered what name the People had given to their planet in their own tongue, untold aeons before outside forces thought to interfere.

Would the People achieve peace and stability? Would they tear each other to bloody pieces? Would their contact with alien drive them into space, ready one day to ravage the galaxy? Had his presence there really achieved anything at all?

The Doctor thought for a moment, and punched up a picture on the monitor. It showed a small, tropical planet, a green and peaceful-looking place. No longer was it giving out a telepathic scream of pain.

Surely that was an answer of sorts?

He set a course for Earth.

EPILOGUE

Administrator Charteris was appearing before a Speci Investigatory Committee of the Governing Assembly of the United Planetary Association. The Committee was chaired by the President itself, and its proceedings were held in secret.

Most of the Committee were physically present, although handful attended by hologram.

Charteris was well aware that the findings of the Committe would determine the rest of his career – if he had one.

The President's face was grave.

'On your own admission, Mr Charteris, you evacuated a UPA protectorate with no shadow of authority, and with the involvement of an alien power.'

'That is so. But if you have studied my report, you will see that there was no alternative. The native inhabitants, the People, had become implacably hostile.'

An ancient Senator snapped, 'Why did you not seek t obtain authority for your actions?'

'There was a breakdown in communication,' said Charter impassively.

'Because the Draconians were jamming your transmissions?'

'My report does not specifically draw that conclusion.'

The President said, 'Much of your report is extremely nonspecific, Mr Charteris, not to say evasive. This whole question of Draconian involvement is deeply disturbing. You imply that the Draconians landed by chance and came to yo rescue. Is it not a fact that after jamming your transmissions, th Draconians attempted an invasion?'

'It is a fact that, by landing, the Draconians saved the life of every human being on Kastopheria,' said Charteris. 'At considerable cost to themselves.' He leaned forward earnestly.

'Humanity is finished on Kastopheria, gentlemen. The People will never accept our presence, and they will never surrender. If you attempt to reverse my evacuation, you will find

yourselves involved in a struggle that can only end, as the Doc
said, in defeat or in genocide. The Draconians have accepted that
any occupation of the planet is untenable, and so must we.'

He paused. 'As for the Draconian involvement, if you probe
too deeply you may find yourself at war with the Draconian
Empire. On the other hand, if you accept the interpretation
placed on events by my report, the Kastopheria problem is
solved, and we can enter a new era of good relations with
Draconia. The choice is yours.'

'Thank you, Mr Charteris,' said the President. 'You are
excused.'

Charteris rose. As he was about to leave the ancient senator
asked querulously, 'But who is this Doctor you mentioned just
now?'

'Just a local adviser, sir,' said Charteris. 'Nobody of
importance.' He bowed and withdrew.

The less said about the Doctor, he decided, the better.

When Charteris had gone, the President looked around the
long table. 'Well, gentlemen? Mr Charteris has behaved with
great audacity.'

'He must be broken!' said the ancient senator.

'Or promoted,' said the President. 'Which is it to be?'

If Charteris had been talking for his career, General-Baron Kryll
was talking for his life.

He had been granted a private audience with the Emperor
in the ornate surroundings of the green and gold Imperial
Chamber.

Magnificent in his formal robes, the Emperor listened
impassively to the General-Baron's extremely selective account
of recent events on Kastopheria.

When Kryll finished speaking, the Emperor was silent for an
unnervingly long time.

'Let me see if I have this clear,' he said at last. 'You were
orbiting the planet Kastopheria on a routine patrol when you
became aware of a disturbance in the area of its capital city. You
landed, and were able to rescue the human colonists from a
native uprising, at some cost in Draconian lives. You then
assisted in their evacuation and, quite without authority,
undertook that we would join them in a non-intervention pact.'

Baron-General Kryll bowed his head. 'I am a simple soldier, Your Majesty,' he said. 'Embroiled in a difficult situation, I tried to act in the best interests of Draconia. Knowing Your Majesty's concern for good relations with the Earthmen, I thought it best to aid their colonists. Aware that the Earthmen were prepared to abandon Kastopheria if we did the same, I sought to remove a potential cause of conflict. If I am wrong, I can only submit to Your Majesty's wrath.'

The Emperor regarded him narrowly. He knew all about the ambitions of House Kryll, and of the General-Baron in particular.

The Emperor was about to speak when a very young Draconian in Imperial robes dashed into the chamber.

The Prince was beginning his education in diplomatic affairs.

'Father –' He paused, recollecting himself and bowed. 'My life at your command.'

The Emperor nodded, accepting the formal salutation. He loved his son deeply, but etiquette was etiquette.

'Speak!'

'Forgive me for interrupting, Father, but a despatch has just arrived from the Earthmen.' He held out a scroll. 'They offer their warm and grateful thanks to Draconia and in particular to General-Baron Kryll, and propose formal ratification of the non-intervention agreement.'

The Emperor took the scroll and studied it.

'They also announce that they are raising ex-Administrator Charteris to their nobility, and propose him for the post of Earth's Ambassador to Draconia.'

The Emperor raised his eyes and studied General-Baron Kryll for a moment longer.

At last he spoke. 'You have acted well in a difficult situation, General-Baron. Accept our thanks. We shall confer upon you the order of the Grand Sunburst of Draconia...' The Emperor paused. 'Second Class. You may leave us.'

Baron-General Kryll bowed. 'My life at your command.' He turned and marched away.

'Why do you honour him, Father?' asked the Prince, when Kryll had gone. 'Did you not say that House Kryll are a danger to us?'

The Emperor smiled fondly at him.

‘The Earthmen have a saying, my son. Keep your friends close – and your enemies even closer!’

The UPA telecaster looked earnestly into the lens, patting the coil of her blonde hair.

‘In a rare example of United Planet/Draconian co-operation, evacuation of the troubled planet Kastopheria, more commonly known as Catastrophea, has been concluded. Ex-Administrator Charteris, now Lord Charteris, said today, “Our work on Kastopheria is done and the people must now work out their own destiny. I am proud to have aided their first steps on the road to freedom.”

‘General-Baron Kryll, whose Draconian troops assisted in the evacuation, said in a recent statement, “It has been our privilege and our pleasure to assist friends from Earth in this difficult and delicate operation.”

‘It is believed to be the first time that an entire colony has been evacuated, and the planet returned to its indigenous inhabitants. The Draconian Empire and the United Planetary Association have placed a joint embargo on both settlement and tourism where Kastopheria is concerned. Reasons for this are not entirely clear...Some political commentators believe that the unprecedented degree of co-operation will usher in a new era of good relations between Earth and the UPA and Draconia. Others, however, feel that there may be trouble ahead...’